

FLEXIBILITY

What is this developmental skill?

Flexibility is the ability to adjust when plans change, expectations shift, or situations are different than anticipated. It allows children to adapt without becoming overwhelmed.

How does this normally develop?

As executive functioning and emotional regulation improve, children become increasingly able to tolerate changes in routines, consider different solutions, and recover from unexpected events.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Neglect often creates unpredictable environments where change signals danger rather than opportunity. Children may become rigid because predictability feels safe, making even minor changes feel threatening.

What might this look like?

A child with limited flexibility may:

- Become upset by changes in routine.
- Insist on doing things one specific way.
- Have difficulty accepting "Plan B."
- Argue when expectations change.
- Become anxious in unfamiliar situations.

These behaviors often represent efforts to regain a sense of control.

Parenting Implications

Prepare children for upcoming changes whenever possible. Use visual schedules, countdowns, and simple explanations. Introduce small, manageable changes while providing reassurance that the child is safe.

From Understanding to Attunement

Instead of asking, "Why is my child so rigid?" ask, "Does change feel unsafe to my child?" Consistent reassurance helps flexibility grow.