

UNDERSTANDING MY OWN MIND

What is this developmental skill?

Understanding my own mind is the ability to recognize that thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires influence behavior. Children begin to notice that what they think and feel affects the choices they make.

How does this normally develop?

This skill develops through relationships with caregivers who talk about emotions, thoughts, and experiences. When adults wonder aloud, "I think you're disappointed because your toy broke," children begin connecting their internal experiences to their behavior. Over time, they learn to reflect on what is happening inside themselves rather than simply reacting.

How can neglect interfere?

Children who experience neglect often have fewer conversations about emotions and thoughts. Caregivers may focus only on behavior or survival needs, leaving children with little opportunity to understand their inner world. As a result, they may act on emotions without recognizing what they are feeling or why.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Have difficulty explaining why they behaved a certain way.
- Act impulsively without recognizing emotional triggers.
- Say, "I don't know," when asked about feelings.
- Become overwhelmed by emotions they cannot identify.
- Have limited awareness of their own thoughts and motivations.

Parenting Implications

Instead of asking only about behavior, invite reflection. Questions such as, "What do you think was happening inside when that happened?" or "I wonder what you were feeling?" encourage children to think about their internal experiences. Avoid expecting immediate answers—reflection develops gradually.

From Understanding to Attunement

When children understand what is happening inside themselves, behavior becomes easier to manage. Your curiosity helps your child build self-awareness, one conversation at a time.