



Executive Function

What is it and how to help children get better at it

Executive Function and Self-Regulation skills help us manage information, make decisions and plan ahead. We are not born with these skills, but we all have the potential to learn them at all stages of our lives.

Common Challenges of Executive Functions



Emotional Regulation



Working Memory



Sustained Attention



Time Management



Planning & Organizing



Flexible Thinking

Activities to Build Skills

For 3 to 5 year olds

- **Imaginary play** - develops rules, roles and self-regulation.
- **Let your children tell you a story** - to practice working memory, planning and organizing thoughts.
- **Songs and movement games** - help with self-control, focusing attention and working memory.

For 5 to 7 year olds

- **Card & board games** - use matching and strategy games to exercise working memory and attention.
- **Physical games & activities** - challenge kids to focus attention, practices rule following and control their actions.
- **Quiet activities** - like puzzle books and guessing games build working memory and flexible thinking.

For 7 to 12 year olds

- **Steadily increase the complexity of games and activities** - helps executive function skills grow.
- **Add more intensive play structure** - like organized sports, learning to play an instrument or joining a dance group, uses many skills at the same time.

For adolescence and beyond

- **Goal setting, planning and monitoring** - allows for self-monitoring and adjusting behavior. Help teens develop a plan and check in periodically to keep them on track.
- **Keep a calendar** - for due dates, deadlines and planned activities, to manage time, self-control and attention.