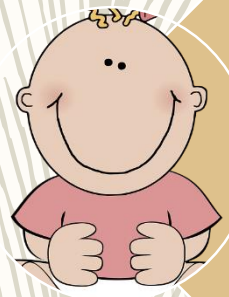


Enhancing Executive Function from Infancy to Adolescence

Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. These skills are crucial for learning and development. Executive function and self-regulation skills depend on three types of brain function: working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control. There are a variety of activities and games that represent age-appropriate ways for adults to support and strengthen components of executive functioning and self-regulation skills in children.



6 – 18 months old

- Peekaboo for younger infants
- Hiding games (e.g. hide a toy under a cloth)
- Imitation or copying games using actions or objects
- Simple role play (e.g. cleaning, vacuuming, feeding doll)
- Songs with simple hand motions
- Conversations: mapping words to objects and actions



18 – 36 months old

- Active games with simple rules (e.g. turn-taking, run to finish line, 'hokey pokey' dance, 'head, shoulders, knees and toes')
- Conversations and storytelling (e.g. adults can describe their actions/ add questions about the child's play, talk about shared events, feelings)
- Matching and sorting games (e.g. based on shapes, colours, size)
- Imaginary play (e.g. "cooking", use familiar household items)



3-5 years old

- Read books, use props, go on field trips and use videos to support high-level imaginary play
- Storytelling: Act out story, encourage child to tell you stories
- Music and movement through songs and games
- Physical games (e.g. obstacle course)
- Matching and sorting activities; increasingly complicated puzzles
- Imaginary/ pretend play



5 – 7 years old

- Card games and board games
- Physical activities (e.g. musical chairs, 'what is the time, Mr. Wolf, fast moving games, 'Simon says', yoga, taekwondo)
- Simple mazes and word search
- Games/ activities requiring strategy and reflection
- Social play involving rules



7 – 12 years old

- Card games and board games
- Strategy games
- Organised sports (e.g. soccer, captain's ball)
- Jump rope games
- Learning a musical instrument/ dance
- Brain teasers (e.g. sudoku, crossword puzzles, spatial puzzles)



Adolescents

- Goal setting, planning and monitoring
- Self-monitoring (e.g. journaling, self-talk, reflections, mindfulness)
- Sports
- Yoga and meditation
- Music/ theatre
- Strategy games and logic puzzles

Adults can facilitate the development of a child's executive functioning skills by establishing routines, modeling social behaviour, and creating and maintaining supportive, reliable relationships. It is also important for children to exercise their developing skills through these activities that foster creative play and social connection.

Adapted from: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2014). *Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.