

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Life Skill That Promotes Executive Function (EF):

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live—as long as we learn.

Principles of Self-Directed, Engaged Learning

- Establish a trustworthy relationship with your child.
- Help children set and work toward their own goals.
- Involve children socially, emotionally and intellectually.
- Elaborate and extend children's learning.
- Help children practice, synthesize and generalize.
- Help children become increasingly accountable.
- Create a community of learners.

Suggestions for Self-Directed, Engaged Learning for Ages 3-5



Tip:

You can have a conversation with your child about Peter's experiences and how he had fun on his own playing in the snow.

Then elaborate and extend this discussion to your child's life, asking: "What are some things you enjoy doing alone?"



Skill:

Truly engaged learning is **self-directed!** We don't always have to interact with others or be entertained by technology. *The Snowy Day* is a great example. This back and forth conversation you and your child have about this book is what researchers call "**serve and return.**" Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.



Tip:

Peter's goal is exploring the snow.

Ask your child:

- "What are the many ways that Peter learns about the snow?"

You can ask your child about something he or she would like to explore. You can also share an experience when you learned something through exploring.



Skill:

One of the principles of promoting Self-Directed Engaged, Learning is **helping children set and then work toward goals.** **Executive Function** skills are driven by goals.



Tip:

Peter brings some snow into the house and then it disappears.

Ask your child:

- "What happened to the snow in Peter's pocket?"

You can set up an experiment to show your child what happens when we leave something icy in a warm house by putting an ice cube onto a washcloth and seeing what happens to it over time.



Skill:

By doing so, you are **elaborating and extending** what your child has learned from the book, and thus strengthening your child's learning.

The Snowy Day

By Ezra Jack Keats

In this endearing classic, a boy named Peter awakens to find his world transformed by snow. With sled in hand, he sets out on his own to explore a winter wonderland. Children readily relate to Peter's curiosity and desire for independence.



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You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: **Serve and Return** and **Executive Function** skills.

Serve and Return, like a game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

Executive Function skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your feelings, your thoughts and your behavior to reach your goals.

They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self control.

Find more about *Mind in the Making* at www.mindinthemaking.org.