

# MIND in the Making

## The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

### Life Skill That Promotes Executive Function (EF):

#### Focus and Self Control

Children need this skill in order to achieve their **goals**, especially in a world that is filled with distractions and information overload. It involves **paying attention, remembering the rules, thinking flexibly** and **exercising self control**.

### Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control for Ages 9-12



#### Tip:

Zoe had a dream of playing an elegant piano, of being a prodigy and of performing at Carnegie Hall in New York. But instead, she got a “wood-grained, vinyl-seated, wheeze-bag organ.”

Talk with your child about what Zoe did to focus on her goal of making music even when there were challenges along the way. For example, she kept thinking of quitting, but then she heard the expert player on the piano and learned from this experience.



#### Skill:

The skill of Focus and Self Control is driven by **goals**—and those goals can change over time. It is important to help children understand how goals can affect motivation and actions.



#### Tip:

Learning music involves practice. Ask your child:

- “What kept Zoe practicing?”
- “What kept her father learning to cook new things (from Living Room University)?”
- “Can you remember a time when you had to practice? What helped you stick to the practice and what made it hard?”



#### Skill:

**Practicing** requires both focus (being able to screen out distractions) and self control (sticking with something, even when it’s hard), which call on **Executive Function** skills. Also, this back and forth conversation about practicing 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:

Make a list together of what you and your child do to stay focused when there are distractions. The list can include simple things, like listening to music or putting on head phones or shutting the door to have quiet and think about the goal.



#### Skill:

When you list **strategies to use to achieve goals**, you are promoting the skill of Focus and Self-Control.

### A Crooked Kind of Perfect

By Linda Urban

*A Crooked Kind of Perfect* is the story of a girl called Zoe who dreams of performing on the piano. As she puts it, “My dad was supposed to buy me a piano,” but instead buys a “wood-grained behemoth” organ. Thus begins a series of surprising adventures that lead Zoe to compete in a Performa-O-Rama competition.



High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from *Mind in the Making* by Ellen Galinsky



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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](http://www.mindinthemaking.org).