

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:

The main character in this book, Joey, had a hard time because he was so impulsive, couldn't pay attention and didn't make good decisions due to ADHD and his family life. He may have struggled more than most of us, but we can learn from his experience.

Ask your child:

- "What do you think of some of the advice Joey was given to manage his behavior, such as: 'Whenever you think of something bad, you have to quickly think of something good.' Or 'You can never, never think of three things bad in a row or else you will feel awful?'"

SKILL:

Strategies are essential to learning the skill of Focus and Self Control. Reframing negative thoughts into positive thoughts is one such strategy.

TIP:

You can talk with your child about how he or she manages when wanting to be impulsive. You can recall positive examples, such as: "I know you were upset the other day, but you stopped yourself before you slammed the door. What helped you from slamming that door?" You can talk about the strategies you use to prevent yourself from going on auto-pilot, such as taking a deep breath or exercising.

SKILL:

In addition to changing the way you think, other strategies to promote Focus and Self Control involve changing your behavior, such as taking deep breaths or exercising before you respond to something. To do so, you need to **pay attention to your own behavior and have plans in place for how to respond if you are tempted to respond negatively.** These strategies call on **Executive Function** skills.

Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key

By Jack Gantos

In this prize-winning book, *Joey Pigza* is the wonderfully compelling roller-coaster story of a child dealing with being hyper-active amid a lot of other difficult circumstances, from "dud meds" to an abusive grandmother and a father who disappears. He keeps making bad choices, like swallowing his house key, and ends up in a special education program. Determined to make better choices and armed with some great teachers, better medical care and a loving mother, he begins to turn things around.



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



Find more books and materials on the First Book Marketplace, a resource available exclusively to educators and programs serving children in need. www.fbmarketplace.org.

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.

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This back and forth conversation you have with your child about the strategies 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:

Joey wanted to be able to go back to his regular classroom, get a dog and have people know he was a good kid. He had goals that were important to him.

Ask your child:

- “How did Joey’s goals contribute to his working on paying better attention and not behaving impulsively?”



SKILL:

Focus and Self Control—and all life skills—are promoted by **working toward a goal**.



TIP:

Joey received a lot of help from the Special Education Department, the medical doctor, and his mom in achieving his goals.

Ask your child:

- “Joey had goals that were important to him. Can you think of goals that are important to you? What help can I or others give to support you in achieving that goal?”



SKILL:

When we are trying to change our behavior, we all need **supportive people** around us. When you involve your child in thinking about an important goal and what help you can provide in achieving that goal, you are being supportive!

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