

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 6-8

TIP:

Ask your child:

- “How do you think the Little Red Hen feels when the duck, the cat and the dog are too busy to help? How do you think the Little Red Hen feels getting the pizza pan, the flour, the mozzarella and the toppings all by herself? Why do you think she kept working?”
- “How would you have felt, and what would you have done?”

SKILL:

Executive Function skills are driven by goals and include Focus and Self Control. This entails being **persistent** and **continuing to try to reach goals**, even if others are too busy or don't want to help.

TIP:

Ask your child:

- “What were the duck, the cat and the dog doing each time they were asked to help?”

Wait for the child's response and respond to that, perhaps by asking:

- “Why were each of these activities important to them?”

SKILL:

If you look closely, each animal is pursuing an interest, such as the cat practicing music. A back and forth conversation between you and your child about what is happening in the book is what researchers call “**serve and return**.” The importance of this everyday interaction to brain building is a key finding on this topic from child development research.

The Little Red Hen

Retold by
Philemon Sturges

This delightful spin on a classic folktale is filled with humorous details! The Little Red Hen goes through each step of making a pizza, but do her friends help her? No. In this version though, she finds a creative new way for them to contribute.



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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Life Skill That Promotes Executive Function (EF):

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Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control for Ages 6-8

TIP:

The objects in the Little Red Hen's shopping wagon, cupboard and fridge provide many opportunities for asking children to remember and identify different objects. You can point to them and say: "What's that?"

SKILL:

When you invite your child to find the objects in the shopping wagon, you are helping your child learn to **pay close attention to details** in the pictures.

TIP:

Ask your child:

- "Why do you think that the Little Red Hen was willing to share her pizza with the others, even when they were unwilling to help?"

SKILL:

This question promotes **self control**—children have to put aside what they might have done and take the perspective of the Hen.

TIP:

Ask your child:

- "What might the Hen have done to prevent going back to the store over and over again?"

SKILL:

Focus and Self Control includes **thinking flexibly**. This is exemplified when the Little Red Hen has to adapt to not having certain items like the pizza pan, then flour, then mozzarella and, finally, pizza toppings. When you talk about how the Little Red Hen and her friends used Focus and Self Control, your child is learning strategies to do the same.

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