

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 3-5

TIP:

You can ask your child:

- “What did Peter do to learn how to whistle?”

SKILL:

When your child retells parts of the story, he or she is developing Focus and Self Control by **paying attention and remembering**. Focus and Self Control also includes **being able to practice in order to work toward a goal**. **Executive Function** skills are driven by goals.

TIP:

We all do better at achieving our goals if they are important to us.

You can ask:

- “Why did Peter want to learn to whistle?”

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

- “Did Willie notice Peter when he couldn’t whistle?”

SKILL:

This back and forth conversation 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:

You can share a story with the child about a time that you had to exercise **self control** to work toward a goal that was important to you. Or you can remind your child of a time that he or she worked toward a goal, such as throwing a ball, saying a hard word or going to a new place. By telling inspiring stories about your child’s past, you are helping your child build a “can-do” self image.

SKILL:

It is important for children to be aware that working toward a goal **takes time, practice and effort, and takes believing you can achieve the goal.**

Whistle for Willie

By Ezra Jack Keats

Many children will recognize the star of this beloved book—it’s Peter from *The Snowy Day!* Here, he models both patience and practice as he teaches himself to whistle so that he can summon his dog.



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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.