

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:

The book says that Wilma began running and jumping as soon as she learned to walk. Moving was a strength of hers from early on. Ask your child to think about his or her unique strengths and interests. Then ask your child to think about how he or she can use these strengths to achieve a goal, even if challenges arise along the way.

SKILL:

Focus and Self Control is promoted when **we build upon our strengths and have meaningful goals**. **Executive Function** skills are driven by goals.

This back and forth conversation you have about your child's unique strengths, interests and goals 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:

Ask your child what helped Wilma become the fastest runner in the Olympics. For example, after she was stricken with polio, she wanted to be able to go school with everyone else. So, she worked hard and practiced walking even though nobody ever thought she would be able to move around without a brace. When she took off her brace and walked into church, she "took her mind off her knees by concentrating on taking another breath, and then another."

SKILL:

When you ask your child to reflect on Wilma's experiences, you are helping him or her see how empowering it can be to **set goals and concentrate on achieving them**.

Wilma Unlimited

By Kathleen Krull

Wilma Unlimited tells the inspiring true story of how Wilma Rudolph overcame many odds—from being the "sickliest child" in her hometown with a variety of illnesses, including polio, to becoming the world's fastest runner and winning three Olympic Gold Medals.



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

TIP:

Make a list of strategies your child can use to work toward a goal he or she cares about. These strategies could include setting up practice time, getting help from others, positive self talk, taking your mind off problems, using the “power of concentration,” and remembering the goal.

SKILL:

Achieving goals depends on using specific **strategies**, especially if there are challenges. When you make a list of strategies with your child, you are promoting the skill of Focus and Self Control.

This back and forth conversation about 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.

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