

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Life Skill That Promotes Executive Function (EF): Making Connections

Making Connections is at the heart of learning—**figuring out what's the same and what's different, and sorting these things into categories. Making unusual connections is at the core of creativity.** In a world where people can Google for information, it is the people who can see connections who are able to go beyond knowing information to **using this information well.**

Suggestions for Promoting Making Connections for Infants and Toddlers

Tip:

As you read *It Looked Like Spilt Milk*, point to the pictures and ask your child to name the picture:

- “What’s that? Is it a squirrel?”

Skill:

When you ask your child to think about what he or she sees, you are helping **build connections between words and objects.** These connections are important in understanding what the world looks like—a foundation for learning in school and in life.

Tip:

Ask your child:

- “What else could this picture be? I think it could also be a piece of a puzzle. What else do you think it could be?”

Skill:

When you and your child imagine what else the white images could be, you are helping your child learn to **make unusual connections, which is the basis of creativity.** This back and forth conversation you have with your child 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 talk about what other shapes around you look like. This can include shadows, clouds or anything else.

Skill

When you offer your child the chance to see things in different ways, you are helping your child **sort and classify information as well as think flexibly, both important aspects of Executive Functions.**

It Looked Like Spilt Milk

By Charles G. Shaw

It Looked Like Split Milk is a book full of white images against a royal blue background that look like spilt milk, a bird or a tree, but aren't any of these objects. This book will keep children guessing and then coming up with their own creative games.



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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.