

# 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 Ages 9-12

#### Tip:

Lowji convinces the exhausted Landlady Crisp to get a cat because a cat will keep mice out of the apartment house, to get goats because goats will eat the grass that needs mowing, and to get a dog because a dog will keep burglars away. How did this happen—since Landlady Crisp was very opposed to pets? Lowji made connections between pets and helping get work done from his experiences in Bombay.

Talk with your child about other animals that can help us rather than create more work for us. Ask your child.

- “If you had been Landlady Crisp, do you think you would have been convinced by Lowji’s arguments for getting animals to help her? What other reasons might she have wanted animals?”

#### Skill:

When you ask your child to analyze a character’s motivations and actions, you are helping your child **see connections between feelings and behavior.** For example, you might point out that the landlady was lonely since the death of her husband. This back and forth conversation about Lowji’s arguments and Landlady Crisp’s motivations 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:

Even though Lowji has learned English in his Bombay school, he makes new connections to slang expressions as he discovers America, such as “lemony fresh” for smelling clean, “on the house” for not costing anything, and “on the fritz” for being broken. These expressions may or may not be familiar to your child. Ask your child:

- “What are some other slang expressions we use that someone coming to America might not understand?”
- “What else does Lowji learn that is different? For example, the school schedule is different, as is shopping (no stalls, no one is haggling over prices at All-Mart)?”

### Lowji Discovers America

#### By Candace Fleming

When Lowji discovers that he and his family are moving to America from India, the one silver lining is his dream of becoming a pet owner. But his new apartment has a rule: “No Pets”—that is, until Lowji convinces his overworked landlady that pets could help her get her work done.



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](http://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 Making Connections for Ages 9-12

#### Skill:

When you help your child think about others’ experiences with American everyday life, you are helping your child think about **others’ perspectives and helping your child make new connections in how we express ourselves and live.**

#### Tip:

Lowji misses his best friend in India, Jamshed, and it is hard at first, especially during the long summer vacation. Talk with your child about Lowji’s efforts to make friends, including the fact that some of them are adults (Ironman), some are kids who make fun of him, and one is a mysterious person in the park. Ask your child:

- “What are the most effective things that Lowji does in making new friends?”

#### Skill:

Many of the strategies Lowji uses to make friends call on **Executive Function** skills—such as being **patient**, trying to put himself **in the shoes of the boys** who tease him to see what might impress them, and **focusing on clues** in the park to see who is leaving handprints and footprints.

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