

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Life Skill That Promotes Executive Function (EF): Perspective Taking

Perspective Taking goes far beyond empathy. It involves **figuring out what others think and feel** and forms the basis for children's understanding of the intentions of their parents, teachers and friends. Children who can take the perspectives of others are also much less likely to get involved in conflicts.

Suggestions for Promoting Perspective Taking for Ages 9-12

Tip:

A child, Jack, who befriends August, says that a "kid like August doesn't stand a chance in middle school." Ask your child to talk about his or her responses to how the children in the story treat August.

Skill:

Discussing children's various responses to August—from those who are openly rejecting like Julian, to August's sister, Via, who loves August but doesn't want him to come to a play at her new school—helps children **understand their own reactions to people who seem different**. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about this book 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:

In the book, August describes the progression of his own feelings when others stare at him. When he was younger, we wore a helmet to cover his face, but now that he is older, he compares his reaction to living in drizzling rain—he has become used to the fact that he freaks some people out.

Ask your child:

- "How do you think it would feel to be stared at in this way? Do you think that August's words reflect his real feelings?"

Skill:

August knows that he is "weird looking," commenting that if someone different looking—a "Wookiee started going to the school all of a sudden, I'd be curious. I'd probably stare a bit!" By helping your child **articulate how August copes**, you are helping your child learn coping skills.

Tip:

The story of August's first year in school is told by him and by five other children. One of the storytellers, Miranda, describes August's situation like a giant lottery where you get a good ticket or a bad ticket, but concludes that, in the end, the universe takes care of even its most fragile creations. Ask your child if this statement rings true in this story. Is it just luck that August not only survives, but also thrives? What do others do and what does he do to make this happen?

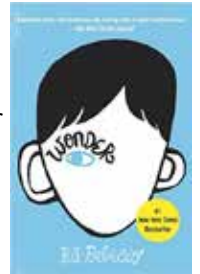
Skill:

By prompting **reflections about the perspectives and actions of the characters in the book**—from the school principal to the teachers, from August's parents to the other children, and to August himself—you are helping your child think about how we can help each other thrive. Reflecting in this way calls on **Executive Function** skills.

Wonder

By R. J. Palacio

Wonder is the wondrous story of a child, August Pullman, who was born with rare and serious facial deformities. Because he endured 27 surgeries, he was home schooled until fifth grade when he enrolls in school for the first time. Although he feels like an ordinary ten year old, he knows that ordinary kids don't cause other ordinary children to run away screaming when they see them.



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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.

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