

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Life Skill That Promotes Executive Function (EF):

Taking on Challenges

Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to **take on challenges** (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges for Ages 6-8

Tip:

Jenna turns to four women for help in finding jingles for her dress so she can dance. She doesn't want to take so many jingles that each woman's "voice isn't heard" but just enough to make one row from each. Ask your child:

- "What do you think of Jenna's solution? Why did it work for Jenna and for each of the four women?"
- "What might have happened if Jenna had asked one of the woman for all of the jingles she needed?"

Skill:

One of the most effective ways of problem solving and Taking on Challenges is **finding solutions that work for all involved**. 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:

When Jenna took jingles from each of the women, she told them that she would dance for them. In addition, in Jenna's Muscogee culture, it is common for a family to honor a new dancer by "small giveaways," gifts to others (not to the new dancer) in her honor. The author states in the back of the book that these giveaways are meant to show humility. Ask your child:

- "What do you think of these ideas of giving back?"

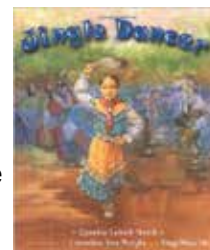
Skill:

Taking on a challenge generally involves the **support of others**. In Jenna's culture, there is a giveaway tradition of **doing things for others in return**. This calls for self control, an **Executive Function** skill.

Jingle Dancer

By Cynthia Leitich Smith

In this prize-winning book, Jenna daydreams of dancing in the upcoming powwow—an important tradition in her family—but she doesn't have jingles on her skirt and there isn't enough time to order them. Jenna has an idea and turns to four women who are important to her to help. A heartwarming story that shares contemporary life and Native American tradition.



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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Tip:

There are many references to the Muscogee culture in the book. Ask your child to pick out some of them. You can note them too, such as the way the times of day and night are described or the importance of the number four: Jenna needed four rows of jingles and went to four women to help. This number is seen as sacred, representing four seasons, four directions, four colors of people, four stages of life.

Ask your child:

- “How were Jenna’s traditions and cultures important to her in solving her problem?”

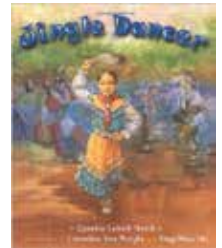
Skill:

Support for Taking on Challenges comes not just from family and friends but from **culture and tradition**.

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