

# 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 9-12

#### Tip:

Talk with your child about Willy's goals in entering the race. You can point out how important it is to him to save his grandfather's life and keep their farm. His grandfather has always said, "*Where there's a will there is a way.*" Talk about what Willy's will was and how it helped him persevere.

#### Skill:

Life is full of stresses and challenges, but Willy has unusual responsibilities for a 10-year-old. Yet rather than give up or cope, he **proactively tries something risky**—entering the race and competing against Stone Fox, an adult champion racer—because so much depends on his winning.

#### Tip:

Everyone told Willy, "Sell the farm. That is the only answer." He felt discouraged, but still told Searchlight, "We'll do it, girl. You and me. We'll find a way." He kept looking for solutions. Finally, the people who told him to sell the farm begin to support him, saying "win that race tomorrow." Ask your child:

- "How much did having the support of others matter to Willy?"

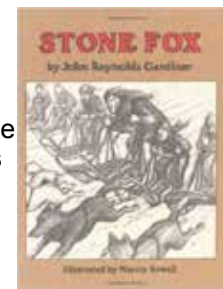
#### Skill:

**Relationships and support are important** in Taking on Challenges. This back and forth conversation you have about support 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.

## Stone Fox

By John Reynolds Gardiner

*Stone Fox* retells the legend of 10-year old Willy who wants to save the family farm because his elderly grandfather is ill but owes \$500 in back taxes. Willy decides to take a risk and use his college savings to enter a dog sled race, with his beloved dog Searchlight, to win the money he needs, but he has to compete against Stone Fox who has never lost a race.



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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#### Tip:

Willy felt like a winner before the race even though the odds were against him, especially since his opponent Stone Fox had never lost a race. Ask your child how Willy's feelings of being a winner—as well as his knowledge and experience with the route and skill in racing—helped him during the race.

#### Skill:

Taking on Challenges includes **knowledge, skill and practice but mindsets matter too, including believing in yourself**. As Willy tells Stone Fox, even after he has slapped him for trespassing into his barn, "I gotta win. If I don't, they're gonna take away our farm. So I will. I will win." These all call on **Executive Functions**, which are driven by hard work toward goals.

#### Tip:

Right before the finish line, with Stone Fox right behind Willy and Searchlight, Searchlight suddenly dies. Stone Fox stops the other racers and waits for Willy to carry Searchlight over the finish line so they win. Yet Stone Fox was also racing for a noble cause—to buy back the land that was stolen from Native Americans. Ask your child:

- "How did you feel when Searchlight died?"
- "Some say that both Willy and Stone Fox were winners because they each did the right thing. What do you think of this idea? What would you have done if you were Stone Fox?"

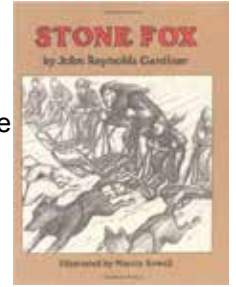
#### Skill:

When you talk with children about their feelings and about how the situation felt to different characters in the story, you are helping them to **see others' points of view** and to think of how **they might face their own challenges in the future**.

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