

Executive Functioning

Executive functioning skills are the set of cognitive processes that help us to plan, stay on task, remember instructions, and work on multiple tasks successfully. Children are not born with these skills, however they are born with the ability to develop them. We can help them to develop these skills by creating routines, modeling acceptable behavior, and by creating supportive relationships with children. The three components skills of executive functioning are cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control (Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2014).

(EI 5.2 Follows Directions; 13.1 Creativity; 25.3 Role-Plays; 27.1 Focus)

COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY	WORKING MEMORY	INHIBITORY CONTROL
<p>What is it? Cognitive flexibility allows you to direct your attention—selecting what is important to attend to and de-selecting what is not, transition between activities and ideas, and to think about an object or idea in a variety of different ways and from different perspectives.</p>	<p>What is it? Working memory allows you to keep information in your mind and use that information to make connections to things you already know or have experienced (e.g., hold a new phone number in mind while you dial).</p>	<p>What is it? Inhibitory control allows you to deliberately regulate your impulses, your first reactions and appropriately respond in a situation.</p>
<p>When children use it. During: Dramatic play and role playing, transitions in the day, and thinking about different consequences to their behavior.</p>	<p>When children use it. During: Singing a familiar song, remembering and following the daily schedule, and predicting what will happen next in a story.</p>	<p>When children use it. During: Waiting for their turn to speak, resisting distractions around them, and rebuilding a tower after it has been knocked down.</p>
<p>Activities to help develop cognitive flexibility in the classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dancing slowly to fast music or fast to slow music • Imaginary play • Reusing familiar objects in new ways • Matching and sorting by different rules 	<p>Activities to help develop working memory in the classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musical chairs • Storytelling • The Hokey Pokey • Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes • Retelling stories 	<p>Activities to help develop inhibitory control in the classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musical chairs • Red Light, Green Light • Simon Says • Follow the Leader • Freeze Dance • Yoga and slow breathing

References:

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2014). *Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

Galinsky, E. (2016). Good Guidance: The 7 Essential Life Skills. *Teaching Young Children*,9(3).

PED. (2019). New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines.