



## 5 Things You Can Do To Help Children Improve Their Executive Function Skills

**1. Talk with your child about the fact that the brain has cognitive skills that help you plan, think through and execute daily tasks.** Everything from brushing your teeth to completing a homework assignment requires cognitive skills such as sequencing. Simply taking the mystery out of cognitive function is a good beginning. Executive functions are cognitive skills and cognitive skills can be learned.

**2. Make cognitive skills more transparent and better understood by children.** When children see EFs as cognitive skills that can be developed through practice, children are both more motivated and masterful. For many children, planning, attention, inhibition, working memory, and sequential processing are most challenging. So name those skills, describe what they are, how they work and how your brain uses them to manage tasks of daily living. You can find how we define the executive functions for children in the 70 Play Activities book.

**3. Improve your child's awareness of their need to practice specific cognitive skills by describing, empathizing and offering a simple solution.** "Sometimes your body wants to rush, so your brain needs to say, take a moment to plan where you are walking to next."

**4. Encourage children to be their brain's "coaches" by learning what tasks require which cognitive skills.** "When it's time to move from one center to the other, what cognitive skill is your brain needing?" "That's right, inhibition." "That's a big word that means your brain needs to stop, think and make a plan before your body can move forward."

**5. Practice one cognitive skill at a time.** "After you decide where you will be going next, help your brain by choosing the path you will take. Will you walk around the jungle gym or right through the kids playing with trucks in the courtyard?"

Be playful, curious and exploratory, you are building cognitive skills by talking them out and helping your child think about them.



## 3 Things You Can Do To Each Day To Help Your Children Improve Their Planning and Sequencing

**1. Talk with your children about the fact that much of what we do throughout the day is a sequence of tasks.** We call this the "1-2-3." "When we brush our teeth we walk into the bathroom, get our toothbrush and wet it. That's 1-2-3. Then we put the toothpaste on the brush, brush our teeth and clean our brush. Then we put the cap on the toothpaste, put the toothpaste in the drawer and close the drawer. etc" When we separate larger actions into small tasks, we sequence those tasks. This helps us to plan, organize and execute our actions with better awareness and greater efficiency.

**2. Talk about the 1-2-3.** Now, as you go about your day, when your child or student appears to need help planning out his actions, you can ask, "What's the 1-2-3 of this?" "We are heading out to the playground, what's the 1-2-3 of how we will go outside? That's right, we will line up, tuck our hands in our pockets and slowly walk outside. That's 1-2-3. When we get outside, we will look around and consider the BIG picture of what we see. We will plan what we will do first and decide, what path we will take in order to get to our activity while respecting the body space of our friends."

**3. Let the child lead.** We all know that children get tired of being told what to do. So engage them as "Cognitive Scientists." You likely have told them a bit about their brain and how it works. Now you have introduced planning and sequencing to them. You have raised their awareness that when we take action we need a plan. So help them think things out and tell you what the plan is as you move throughout the day. "We are going shopping now, what's our plan going to be?"