



The Executive Skill Lending Library

To scaffold children’s development, adults must lend their executive skills. Once adults see misbehavior as a call for help, they can begin the integrative process of coaching children in the executive skills needed for academic and social-emotional success.

Executive skills are crucial building blocks for school readiness, academic and social success, even more so than early literacy or math. These skills begin developing shortly after birth, and require nearly two decades of caring, attuned relationships and prefrontal lobe lending from adults.

Contrary to popular belief, executive functions like controlling impulses, paying attention and retaining information do not unfold automatically as children mature. We are born with a potential for these skills, and we develop them (or not) depending on our experiences during infancy and childhood. Conscious Discipline utilizes findings from neuroscience and developmental research by creating learning environments based on safety, connection and problem solving to foster children’s executive skill development.

Children’s challenging behavior communicates to adults that the child does not feel safe, does not feel connected, and/or needs help with a missing or emerging executive skill: attention, time management, organization, prioritization, working memory, impulse control/emotional regulation, flexibility, empathy, metacognition, goal persistence/achievement and task initiation.

The Executive Skill Lending Library provides examples of specific ways to help children with each executive skill. It can be used to create intervention plans for children with chronic academic and behavioral issues. To use the Executive Skill Library effectively, adults must follow the **ABC** process:

Access your executive state through active calming.

Be willing to perceive children’s misbehavior as communication or a call for help.

Coach new skills as necessary.

The Executive Skill Lending Library will help you determine which interventions are most likely to be helpful in scaffolding the development of skills most needed by an individual child.

Attention

- Notice not judge
- Attention signals
- Visual depiction of time
- Use music movement and rhythm
- Make tasks fun and interesting
- Fidget toys
- **Teens:** Identify personal, societal or global relevance

Time Management

- Predictable routine
- Discuss how long it takes to do things
- Picture calendars and schedules
- Picture routine books
- Role-play and practice transitions
- Create patterns
- Auditory signals
- **Teens:** Daily agenda or calendar

Organization

- Play matching games
- Adults model thinking aloud
- Guide and prompt children
- Visual reminders
- Picture books
- Checklist
- **Teens:** Make planning and reflection notes

Prioritization

- Give directions in steps
- Visuals with steps involved
- First/then books
- Give simple one or two step commands
- Role-play and add contrast
- **Teens:** Break projects down into smaller parts

Working Memory

- Make eye contact before giving instructions
- Play memory games
- Minimize distractions
- Visual reminders of what to do
- Have child repeat back instructions
- Daily agenda
- Sing or chant information
- **Teens:** Refer to daily agenda or calendar

Impulse Control / Emotional Regulation

- Teach routines
- Teach stress reduction strategies
- Teach script for problem-solving
- Regulate the environment
- Download calm often
- Start and stop games
- Face-to-face games (I Love You Rituals)
- Composure lap
- **Teens:** Teach the Conscious Discipline Brain State Model

Flexibility

- Give visual cues before transitions
- Give script for handling anxiety
- Break down tasks
- Give choices
- Create social stories
- Role-play anxiety situations
- Reduce novelty
- **Teens:** Same as above

Empathy

- Notice, describe and label instead of judge
- Notice body, reflect feelings and reflect desires (DNA Process)
- Implement games to identify facial expressions and feelings
- Discuss feelings of characters in literature
- Learn to help Feeling Buddies
- **Teens:** Same as above

Metacognition

- Ask child how he/she feels about their effort and accomplishments
- Ask children to reflect on their work/play
- Have pictures of what clean, finished, etc., look like
- Teach children questions to ask themselves "Do I have space?" "What will help me pay attention better?"
- **Teens:** Provide class time for reflections

Goal Persistence / Achievement

- Make class commitments
- Encourage steps toward a goal
- Provide positive feedback
- Start with small goals and move to bigger goals
- Make visual charts to show progress
- Celebrate goals
- **Teens:** Same as above

Task Initiation

- Help child choose options
- Verbalize the beginning of a project to build awareness
- Prompt the child if needed or offer choices
- Use phrases like "You did it" and "Good for you" following a successful start
- **Teens:** Ask, "What might be your first step?"