

Foundational Knowledge

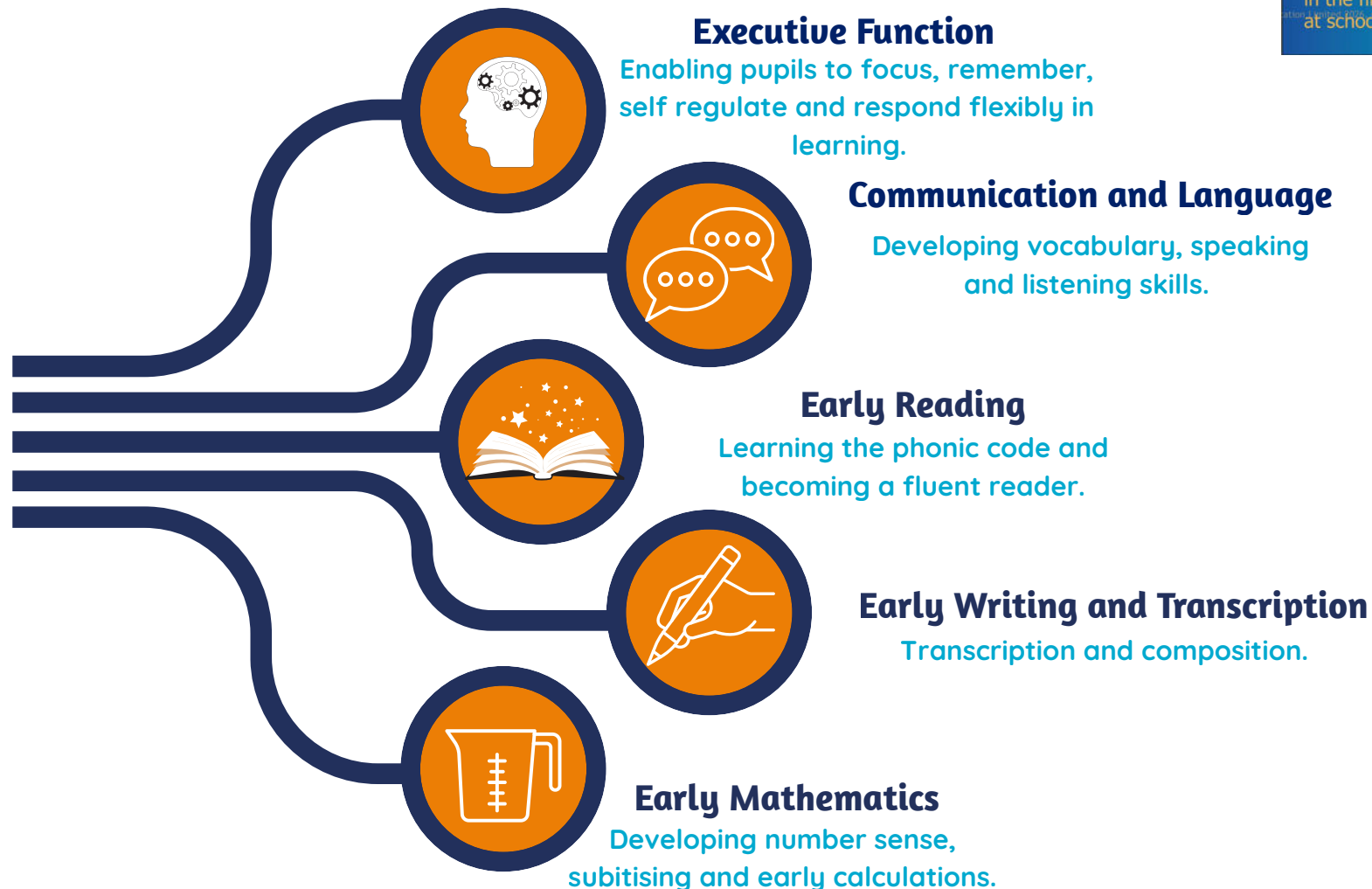
This refers to the knowledge that children need to be able to retrieve accurately and automatically in order to carry out complex tasks.

If we want to ensure that pupils are truly ready for the next stage in their education and lifelong success then we must ensure the foundations of learning are securely in place. We must build from “the bottom up.” HFL.

Research and analysis
Strong foundations in the first years of school
Published 8 October 2024



Foundational Knowledge By the end of Reception and KS1



What are Executive Function Skills?

Executive function is a term used to describe the developmental skills selected by the brain so that we can complete a task. In other words, the brain’s management system.

These skills help us to perform functions such as staying focused and being organised. They also help us to regulate or adapt our emotions and behaviours. These skills are extremely important in order to learn.

Executive function skills begin developing in early childhood and continue to mature into adulthood, playing an important role in academic achievement, social relationships and workplace success. Although we are not born with executive function skills, everyone has the potential to develop these, however, these are largely shaped by our experiences. Therefore, it is imperative that as children enter our schools, we plan purposeful activities for them to engage in and interact with them regularly to allow them to develop these important skills. As a Trust, we have identified 11 key executive function skills we feel are a priority to develop. We believe if these are equally well developed, then the pupils will be very well equipped for their learning and future life pathways.



What is self-regulation and executive functioning?

Self-regulation helps children to:

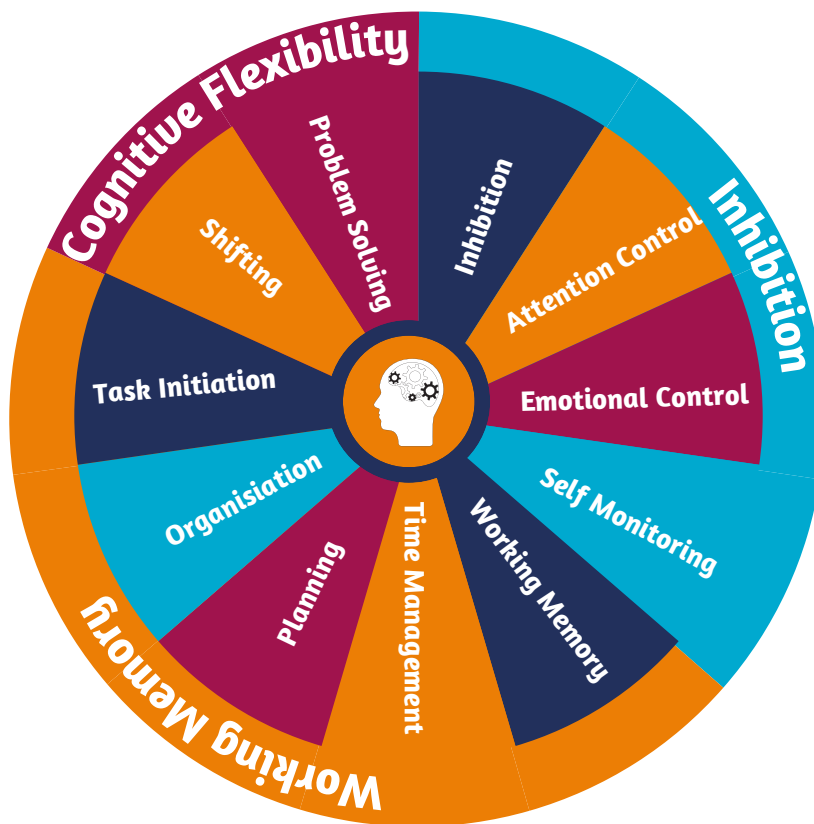
- monitor their thoughts, emotions and actions
- manage their emotions
- choose how to adapt their thoughts and actions in different circumstances.

It is closely related to executive function, which supports children’s:

- attention
- memory
- flexible thinking.
- They play an important role in children’s wellbeing and learning across the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework.

At Waddington All Saints, the executive functioning wheel has been created and expands the EEF core functions into everyday skills that our practitioners and teachers commonly observe and support in children.

Executive Function



Inhibition	Controlling impulses and thinking before acting.
Attention Control	Maintaining focus and avoiding distractions.
Emotional Control	Recognise emotions. Managing feelings appropriately during stressful situations.
Self Monitoring	Evaluating behaviour and performance.
Working memory	Remembering and using information when completing tasks.
Time management	Following routines, understanding of time, planning ahead and completing tasks on time.
Planning	Following plans. Thinking ahead and deciding the steps needed to reach a goal.
Organisation	Keeping materials, information and ideas in order.
Task Initiation	Ability to begin tasks without unnecessary delay.
Shifting	Able to adapt to new situations and switch between tasks when needed.
Problem Solving	Helps individuals identify solutions to challenges.

Research shows executive functioning leads to:

Better educational attainment and academic outcomes.

Healthier life.

The Executive Skills Matrix

The following matrix is designed to support staff in:

- identifying what effective executive function skills look like
- recognising behaviours that may indicate these skills are not yet secure
- providing strategies to support their development.



Executive Function Skill	2-Year-Olds	3-Year-Olds	4-Year-Olds
Inhibition	Can start to control impulses e.g. learning to stop actions when told.	Can display more consistency when asked to stop actions when told. May struggle with patience but can wait for short periods.	Can show better control over impulsive actions e.g. can wait for their turn and resist distractions for short periods.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Frequently interrupting others, becoming upset when unable to act immediately.	Struggling with waiting for their turn and experiences difficulties following instructions due to impulse control issues.	Interrupting conversations and acting without thinking about the consequences. Has low tolerance for waiting.
Possible ideas	Play a stop and go game to help improve stopping and starting on command.	Play games that require taking turns like pairs, musical statues. Encourage taking turns during a playtime game and waiting for their turn.	Play games that involve waiting for something, like 'Simon Says' with a longer time between commands. Play board games involving taking turns, e.g. games like 'Snakes and Ladders'.
Time Management	Can sometimes show a limited understanding of time and may struggle with transitions. Can start following very basic routines.	Can begin to understand routines and time sequences, e.g. knows it is time to clean up before snack. Can manage short waiting periods, e.g. waits for 5 minutes.	Can show an improved understanding of time, e.g. understands 'after lunch, we play outside'. Can wait for longer periods and handle short delays.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Difficulty transitioning from one activity to another. Shows frustration with waiting or ending activities.	Trouble finishing tasks on time. Shows resistance to transitions between activities.	Difficulty transitioning between several activities. Shows reluctance to stop activities that are enjoyed.
Possible ideas	Use routine displays such as a visual timetable with pictures to show activities in order, e.g. "First we play, then we tidy." Use a sand timer or visual timer to show the duration of an activity.	Give simple statements like, "First we put away the toys, then we can have snack." Practise waiting for short periods of time, e.g. wait 5 minutes to start the next activity.	Use a timer for transition times, e.g. "We'll play for 10 more minutes, then it's time for lunch." Establish a consistent routine for activities like getting changed for PE or eating lunch.
Organising	Can begin to sort simple objects, e.g. putting blocks in a container by colour.	Can start organising activities, e.g. cleans up toys with guidance. Begins to organise toys by categories, e.g. blocks vs. cuddly toys.	Can independently organise toys and activities, e.g. knows where to put items. More capable of following simple structures and routines.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Toys left all over the room, so it becomes very cluttered. Finding favourite toys proves difficult.	Play is disorganised because toys or objects are mixed up. Frequent frustration is shown due to lost or missing items.	Trouble keeping play area tidy; difficulty completing tasks because of poor organisation skills.
Possible ideas	Encourage sorting toys by colour, e.g. "Can you put the red blocks together?" Sing a clean-up song to signal the end of playtime.	Help sort toys into categories e.g. "Can you put all the cars in the blue box and the animals in the red one?" After reading, help organise books onto a shelf or in a box.	Use shape sorters to create structures or patterns e.g. "Can you build a tower with these blocks?" Set up specific areas for different activities such as an art area or construction area.



Executive Function Skill	2-Year-Olds	3-Year-Olds	4-Year-Olds
Planning	Can start to follow a simple routine, e.g. putting shoes on before going outside.	Can begin to understand sequences of events, e.g. first play, then clean up, then snack. Can complete simple tasks with a basic order.	Can plan simple activities and transitions, e.g. knows steps to complete a puzzle or can set up for playtime. Can begin to organise roles before acting.
<i>What you might see if this skill is not secure</i>	Difficulty following routines such as becoming upset when routines change.	Difficulty making decisions such as becoming upset with changes in plans or has trouble understanding sequences.	Difficulty organising tasks or routines such as getting overwhelmed by multiple steps. Shows confusion when plans change.
<i>Possible ideas</i>	Set up an activity where the child follows a sequence, like "First, we put on shoes, then we go outside." Use picture books to discuss the sequence of events, e.g. "What happens first in this story?"	Work with puzzles that require putting things in a sequence, e.g. completing a getting dressed puzzle. Ask questions like, "What do we need to do first to get ready for bed?"	Have children list out steps for tasks, e.g. "First, we gather all the toys, then, we clean up. After that, we get a snack." Encourage planning in pretend play, like creating a make-believe restaurant or store and organising the sequence of activities.
Self-Monitoring	Can begin to understand when something is wrong, e.g. noticing if they have made a mess.	Can start to check their actions with guidance, e.g. looks to see if they have followed instructions correctly.	Can show more awareness of their behaviour and outcomes, e.g. realises when they have done something wrong and can correct themselves.
<i>What you might see if this skill is not secure</i>	Not noticing when something is out of place or not recognising when they make a mistake or need help.	Not recognising mistakes or not realising when they have completed or missed steps in a task.	Not noticing incomplete tasks. Shows frustration when they realise things have not been completed correctly.
<i>Possible ideas</i>	After playing, ask reflective questions like, "Did you put the toys back where they belong?" Gently guide the child to fix mistakes, e.g. "Can you pick up the block you dropped?"	Use picture reminders to help them check if they have completed a task, e.g. "Did you put all the toys in the basket?" Praise them for noticing their actions, e.g. "You noticed the blocks were out of place and you put them away – well done!"	Encourage simple self-monitoring by asking, "What do we need to do next?" or "How did that go?" "Did it work?" "Why/why not?" Model and reinforce self-correction, e.g. "I see you left some toys on the floor. What can we do to fix
Task Initiation	Can follow guidance to start tasks, e.g. needs prompting to start cleaning up or playing.	Can start simple tasks with verbal cues, e.g. "Let's start putting the toys away".	Can begin tasks independently, e.g. starts playing with the blocks without needing a prompt. Can initiate play and other activities with minimal guidance.
<i>What you might see if this skill is not secure</i>	Delays in starting tasks and always needing assistance to begin activities.	Procrastination or needing constant reminders to start activities.	Some hesitation to begin tasks or needing a reminder to begin activities.
<i>Possible ideas</i>	Help the child start daily tasks by saying, "Let's start putting your toys in the box." Use pictures to remind them of steps, e.g. "Let's look at our visual timetable and see what we do next."	Use simple charts with pictures to show steps for tasks e.g. "First we clean, then we play." Encourage starting activities by asking for ideas for starting play.	Give two options to start an activity, e.g. "Do you want to play with the blocks or the puzzles first?" Use prompts such as, "If I do this what is wrong?" "I want to see you busy in 3,2,1." Encourage the child to initiate tasks, like setting the



Executive Function Skill	2-Year-Olds	3-Year-Olds	4-Year-Olds
Working Memory	Can remember and act on one instruction, e.g. "Put the ball in the box."	Can hold and follow two-step instructions, e.g. "Pick up the toys, then wash your hands."	Can follow multi-step instructions, e.g. "Pick up the toys, then put them in the basket and then wash your hands."
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Difficulty recalling where items are and forgetting simple instructions.	Forgetting simple instructions and needing multiple reminders. Displays difficulty completing tasks with multiple steps.	Forgetting sequences or previous steps in a task. Displays difficulty completing tasks involving multiple steps over time.
Possible ideas	Ask children to complete one step tasks, e.g. "Put the toy in the box." Play simple memory games, such as pairs, or singing rhymes such as 'heads, shoulders, knees and toes'.	Encourage following two-step tasks, e.g. "Put the book on the shelf, then wash your hands." Play matching games that require remembering where objects are. Sing back rhymes.	Give multi-step directions, such as "First we need to clean up, then we'll have a snack and then we can go outside." Take a message to someone else. After reading a book, ask them to remember what happened first, second, and last.
Problem Solving	Can solve simple problems through trial and error, e.g. figuring out how to stack blocks.	Can solve simple problems with some guidance e.g. finding a solution when something is not working.	Can independently problem-solve simple problems with minimal help, e.g. figuring out how to finish a puzzle or fix a broken toy.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Crying or getting upset instead of trying to fix a problem. Avoiding tasks that seem challenging.	Stubbornness or reluctance to try different solutions or feeling stuck and upset without trying other ways.	Feeling defeated when problems arise and avoiding situations where they may need to think creatively.
Possible ideas	Give them a set of blocks and ask them to figure out how to make something, e.g. "Can you make a tower with these blocks?" Let children experiment with simple toys that require problem-solving, e.g. figuring out how to open a box.	Use toys that require trial and error to solve problems, e.g. toys that pop up when a button is pushed. Ask questions such as, "Why does that work?" Work together to solve simple puzzles, guiding them as needed.	Offer more complex puzzles or activities that involve multiple steps to complete. Ask questions like, "How can we fix this if it breaks?" or "What should we do if the tower falls down?"
Emotional Control	Can sometimes experience emotional outbursts but they may calm down with comfort.	Can begin to understand and express emotions verbally. Uses coping strategies with help, e.g. "I'm mad, I need a break."	Can show an understanding of their emotions, e.g. can name feelings and express frustration or disappointment in more controlled ways.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Overreacting to minor frustrations and having frequent tantrums. Has difficulty calming down after being upset.	Struggling to handle frustration or disappointment. Acts out when things do not go their way.	Explosive reactions to frustrations and has difficulty expressing emotions verbally.
Possible ideas	Help children identify their feelings by saying things like, "You seem angry. What can we do when we feel angry?" Teach calming techniques, such as deep breaths or offering a comfort object when upset.	Encourage children to talk about their feelings. Model deep breathing or other calming strategies during moments of frustration.	Help children label emotions, "You're feeling frustrated because the toy isn't working." Encourage them to use calming techniques when upset e.g. counting to five or using a stress ball.



Executive Function Skill	2-Year-Olds	3-Year-Olds	4-Year-Olds
Shifting	Can struggle when shifting between activities and may struggle with transitions, e.g. resisting tidy-up time.	Can begin to shift between activities with some support, e.g. transitioning from playtime to tidy-up time.	Can shift between activities with minimal guidance, such as moving from one activity to another with fewer tantrums or delays.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Difficulty transitioning from one activity to another and shows frustration when asked to stop one activity and start another.	Becomes upset or resistant when it is time to stop an activity and start a new one. Has difficulty shifting focus from one task to another.	Difficulty transitioning between some tasks or activities and shows reluctance to stop one task to begin another.
Possible ideas	Use songs to signal transitions, like a tidy-up song. Show a visual timetable to help anticipate transitions between activities.	Give a heads-up before transitioning to a new activity, e.g. "In 5 minutes, we'll clean up and get ready for lunch." Praise children when they transition successfully from one activity to the next.	Encourage a variety of play experiences and praise them when they transition easily. Provide verbal cues and timers to help them prepare for changes, e.g. "In 10 minutes, we'll be cleaning up for lunch."
Attention Control	Can have a limited attention span and may get distracted easily but can focus on one task for short periods.	Can focus on a task for a longer time with fewer distractions, e.g. 5-10 minutes of play.	Can focus on activities for longer periods and ignore distractions, especially in structured environments, e.g. follows a simple activity for 10-15 minutes.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Difficulty focusing on a single task with constant distraction.	Easily distracted during tasks and struggles to complete one task before moving on to something else.	Jumping between several tasks or activities without finishing. Has difficulty maintaining attention on one activity for an extended period.
Possible ideas	Play simple activities like stacking blocks or colouring for short durations. Read a short story and ask them to focus on the pictures and simple details.	Engage in puzzles or matching games that require more focus. Play listening games that require sustained attention, e.g., "Can you find the blue circle in the picture?" Play musical bumps. Follow "do this then that..."	Encourage activities that require sustained focus like building a large puzzle or playing with toys that require careful manipulation, e.g. Lego. Read longer stories and ask questions about details to promote attentiveness. Ask children to follow longer routines in P.E.

Executive Function Skill	5-Year-Olds	6-Year-Olds	7-Year-Olds
Inhibition	Can control impulses in simple situations, e.g. waiting for a turn in a game. Can struggle with acting impulsively in group situations. Can follow simple rules in structured games.	Can delay gratification with some practise. Can stop doing something inappropriate when reminded. Can begin to follow rules in more complex group activities.	Can wait patiently for longer periods, with fewer reminders, e.g. waiting for a turn in a group game, waiting to speak. Can independently control impulses and think before acting. Can follow complex rules with minimal reminders and encourage peers to do the same.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Impulsive behaviour, such as interrupting others frequently or grabbing toys. Difficulty waiting for turns in games or conversations.	Difficulty waiting patiently for a desired object or activity. Frequent interruptions or acting without thinking.	Regularly struggles to control impulses, such as blurting out answers or acting out in group settings. May have difficulty respecting others or personal space.
Possible ideas	Play turn-taking games. Play games that require waiting, like 'Pass the Parcel' or 'Punchinella'.	Play board games with waiting and turn-taking. Engage in 'waiting' activities.	Play structured team games, like soccer or basketball. Play time-limited games that require waiting for turns, e.g. musical chairs.
Time Management	Can follow simple routines with support, e.g. morning routine: brush your teeth, get dressed, eat breakfast. Can need frequent reminders for transitions between activities. Cannot yet understand the concept of 'time' in a	Can follow routines more independently and recognise the need for transitions, e.g. "We need to clean up now because it's time for lunch." Can begin to understand time concepts, e.g. "We have 10 minutes until we leave." Can start to use clocks or timers to understand time.	Can organise time for different activities, e.g. finishing homework then having free time. Can begin to self-monitor time for tasks. Can estimate how long tasks will take and plan accordingly.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Struggles with completing tasks in a timely manner, e.g. may forget important steps in a routine. Needs frequent adult intervention for transitions or staying on track.	Finds it hard to transition between tasks and may forget what comes next in a routine. May feel frustrated by the need to complete tasks within a certain time.	Difficulty understanding or managing how long tasks take, leading to procrastination or frustration when time runs out. Often forgets or mis-manages time for tasks or commitments.
Possible ideas	Create a daily planner with pictures to show different times of day e.g. "After snack, we do homework." Timer-based activities like 'how fast can you clean up your toys?'	Use timers to count jumps, or hops in a minute.	Set timers for activities like reading or homework.
Organising	Can clean up one area of the room or activity at a time. May need prompting.	Can organise personal belongings with some help Can categorise and organise objects by type or size (grouping books or toys). Can clean up and put toys away after completing an activity without reminders.	Can organise personal space and belongings independently, including preparing for school or activities. Can organise schoolwork, toys and personal items with minimal guidance.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Has difficulty maintaining a tidy space or remembering where items go. Often misplaces toys or belongings.	Needs reminders to clean up or organise personal space. Can get overwhelmed by a cluttered space and may need support to clean up.	Frequently loses or misplaces school supplies, toys, or personal items. May struggle with organising homework or preparing for school independently.
Possible ideas	Sorting activities by colour, size, or type. Simple clean-up routines.	Organise toys or books into categories. Set up simple spaces, e.g. set up a homework or play area.	Help organise school supplies or prepare for the school day. Sort and categorise items in the classroom.



Executive Function Skill	5-Year-Olds	6-Year-Olds	7-Year-Olds
Planning	Can follow simple plans for structured activities. Can break large tasks into smaller ones with a little bit of assistance.	Can help create simple plans for the day with guidance. Can think about what needs to be done next independently. Can break simple tasks into smaller parts independently.	Can create and follow more complex plans, such as for a day at school or completing multiple tasks. Can independently create plans for multi-step activities. Can break down more complex tasks and sequences, e.g. getting ready for school, brushing teeth, packing lunch, or putting on shoes.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Struggles to finish tasks because they cannot plan ahead or break them into steps. Needs constant adult support to follow through on activities.	Becomes overwhelmed by tasks and struggles to decide what to do next. Needs constant guidance to plan even simple tasks.	Frequently forgets steps in tasks or becomes overwhelmed by complex tasks. Relies on adults for planning and often resists taking initiative in planning.
Possible ideas	Use picture schedules to help with daily routines. Simple building projects with clear steps, e.g. follow steps to design a toy.	Create a visual checklist for the day's activities. Plan a simple event or play session.	Use a planner or checklist to plan activities, e.g. planning a trip to the park. Plan a short chore list and complete the steps in order.
Self-Monitoring	Can recognise when they are following instructions or making progress in simple activities. Can sometimes notice when they have made a mistake or need to adjust their behaviour.	Can occasionally notice if they have missed a step with adult prompts. Can check their own work with guidance. Can ask for help when they notice they have made a mistake.	Can identify mistakes and take steps to correct them independently. Can self-monitor and check their work before moving on to another task. Can independently recognise mistakes, ask for help when necessary and adjust behaviour or actions
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Does not notice when things are wrong or incomplete. Needs frequent reminders and guidance to check their work.	Struggles to notice or correct mistakes without adult intervention. Frequently makes the same mistakes and may not notice them until reminded.	Misses mistakes even when they should be easily spotted. Does not take the initiative to correct errors or check work, relying on adults for oversight.
Possible ideas	Play games where they need to check their actions. Use a "checklist" to see if they completed all of the steps.	Have them check their own work, e.g. counting toys, checking for completeness. Encourage them to self-correct mistakes in drawing, puzzles, or games.	Have them use a checklist to review their homework or tasks.
Task Initiation	Can begin more complex tasks with adult prompts.	Can begin complex tasks with less prompting but still needs reminders. Can start tasks like playing a game or doing homework, but sometimes needs help with the initial step.	Can begin tasks independently, without needing much prompting. Can organise and begin larger tasks, such as schoolwork or organising their room, without adult assistance. Can begin tasks promptly, even if they are less
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Frequently procrastinates or resists starting tasks, needing adult intervention. Struggles with understanding when and how to begin a task.	Needs repeated reminders to start tasks, even when they know what needs to be done. May delay or avoid starting tasks, leading to frustration.	Often procrastinates, especially with less exciting or difficult tasks. Requires some prompts to start tasks or complete work.
Possible ideas	Use a visual cue to start a task. Encourage a game or routine to begin tasks.	Set a timer for specific tasks to encourage timely starts. Use a routine for starting activities.	Use a morning routine chart that includes several steps. Set goals for starting a task on their own.

Executive Function Skill	5-Year-Olds	6-Year-Olds	7-Year-Olds
Working Memory	Can recall recent events or stories with help. Can keep track of one task at a time.	Can recall key details from stories or experiences with minimal prompts. Can juggle two tasks at once, e.g. doing a chore whilst listening to a story.	Can remember and execute multi-step tasks independently, e.g. making the bed, gathering school supplies, then putting shoes on. Can retell stories or events, remembering details accurately and independently. Can manage multiple tasks and switch between them as needed, e.g. homework, then free time.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Difficulty following multi-step directions. Frequently forgets instructions or tasks. Gets overwhelmed with too much information at once.	Forgets important details of tasks. Inconsistent ability to follow routines. Difficulty recalling recently learned information or instructions.	Difficulty completing tasks independently. Loses track of details or steps in activities. Struggles to remember instructions or schoolwork details.
Possible ideas	Memory card games e.g. concentration. Simple board games like, 'Guess Who?'	Simple planning tasks, e.g. organising school supplies. Word games or memory games, e.g. 'I Spy' Recalling daily routines and stories.	Follow instructions with 3 or more steps, e.g. "First, clean your room, then set the table, then get your shoes." Reading stories and recalling key points. Using planners to organise school or home activities.
Problem Solving	Can create simple solutions to everyday problems, e.g. "What should we do if the toy breaks?" Can sometimes ask for help when faced with some challenges. Can sometimes develop a very simple understanding of consequences.	Can work with others to find solutions to problems. Can start to recognise simple cause and effect relationships.	Can come up with multiple solutions to problems and evaluate which is best. Can take initiative in problem-solving and can work independently or in a group. Can understand consequences of actions and can plan to avoid negative outcomes.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Struggles to come up with solutions to challenges. May give up easily on tasks. Difficulty figuring out how to fix mistakes.	Difficulty thinking of alternatives when a plan does not work. Tendency to give up when faced with obstacles. Frequently requires help from adults to find solutions.	Struggles to break tasks into smaller steps. Becomes frustrated quickly without trying alternatives. Relies on others to solve problems instead of developing independent solutions.
Possible ideas	Puzzles and matching games. "What if?" questions to stimulate thinking, e.g. "What would you do if you lost your favourite toy?" Asking them to find different ways to build something.	Discussing potential solutions to everyday problems, e.g. "What could we do if we run out of paint?" Open-ended activities, e.g. building with Lego in multiple ways. Encouraging them to try different approaches to a task.	Offer challenges that require planning and adjustment, e.g. "How could you fix this tower if it keeps falling?" Support with identifying a problem and brainstorming possible solutions. Encourage conflict resolution with peers.
Emotional Control	Can recognise basic emotions in self and others. Can need reminders to take deep breaths or calm down. Can slowly start to recognise change can be necessary.	Can use strategies to calm down, e.g. deep breathing or asking for help when upset. Can start to use calming strategies independently when upset. Can start to cope with the demand for change with support.	Can use a range of strategies to cope with strong emotions, e.g. deep breaths, counting to 10. Can cope with change to routines in class.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Overreacts to minor frustrations. May have frequent tantrums or meltdowns. Finds it hard to wait for turns in games.	Difficulty handling frustration or disappointment. Impulsive reactions to emotional situations. May struggle with transitioning from one activity to another.	Trouble recognising or naming their emotions. Reacting impulsively without considering consequences. May struggle with peer interactions or group activities.
Possible ideas	Practise deep breathing exercises. Use a calm-down corner for moments of frustration. Simple role-play activities to understand emotions.	Use a "feelings chart" to express emotions. Take breaks during transitions to practise staying calm. Model self-regulation in challenging situations.	Practise mindfulness exercises. Recognise and label emotions in self and others. Encourage self-reflection on emotional responses.



Executive Function Skill	5-Year-Olds	6-Year-Olds	7-Year-Olds
Shifting	Can switch between three simple tasks or activities with minimal guidance. Can sometimes struggle with abrupt or unexpected changes in routine or plans.	Can switch between more tasks more independently. Can be more flexible with routines but may struggle with unexpected changes or distractions.	Can easily shift between tasks or activities, even when the change is unexpected. Can transition between activities independently and adjust to changes in routine. Can handle changes in routine or unexpected events with little stress or difficulty.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Difficulty moving from one task to another or getting upset when routines change. Struggles with managing transitions between activities, needing constant reminders.	Becomes upset or resistant when transitioning between activities. Struggles with unexpected changes or interruptions to routine.	Frequent frustration when routines change unexpectedly. May have trouble with multi-step tasks or get stuck on one activity without moving on to the next.
Possible ideas	Set up activities where the child must change actions quickly.	Play 'Follow the Leader' where the leader changes movements frequently.	Engage in multi-step tasks that require transitioning between different activities. Use a timer for switching between many activities to help practise shifting.
Attention Control	Can focus on activities for longer periods and ignore distractions, especially in structured environments, e.g. follows a simple activity for 15-20 minutes.	Can start to use strategies to stay on task for lengthier periods, like taking short breaks or using reminders.	Can focus on tasks for longer periods and ignore distractions, even in busy environments. Can focus on complex tasks for longer periods of time and ignore distractions. Can independently use strategies to maintain focus, such as using a timer or quiet space.
What you might see if this skill is not secure	Frequently distracted, unable to complete tasks, or unable to focus on one thing for a short period. Needs constant reminders or guidance to stay focused.	Easily distracted, often needing redirection or reminders to stay on task. May be prone to procrastination and may avoid longer tasks.	Difficulty staying focused for more extended periods, often moving between tasks without completing them. May struggle with reading, homework, or complex tasks due to frequent distractions
Possible ideas	Play games that require focus, like 'Corners'. Use puzzles or simple tasks that require sustained focus.	Practise short tasks with time limits, e.g. "You have 15 minutes to complete this puzzle." Engage in focused art or building projects.	Encourage reading or writing for longer periods. Play games where the child needs to focus for longer, e.g. 'Jenga' or 'Connect Four'.

Executive Function Skills Audit

Child Name: _____ Age: _____ Date: _____

Observer: _____

Scoring Rubric (Use for All Age Groups)

Score Description

0 – Concern Skill rarely observed, even with support

1 – Emerging Skill present inconsistently, requires frequent adult support

2 – Developing Skill evident with occasional reminders or scaffolding

3 – Secure Skill consistently demonstrated independently

Age Band: 2–3 Years

Executive Function	Observable Indicators	0	1	2	3
Inhibition	Briefly stops action when adult intervenes	☐	☐	☐	☐
Time Management	Responds to simple routines	☐	☐	☐	☐
Planning	Attempts simple cause-and-effect actions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organising	Puts toys into containers with support	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self-Monitoring	Notices when something goes wrong	☐	☐	☐	☐
Task Initiation	Starts preferred activities independently	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working Memory	Follows one-step instructions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Problem Solving	Uses trial and error	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shifting	Transitions with adult support	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emotional Control	Accepts comfort and co-regulation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attention Control	Attends for 2–5 minutes	☐	☐	☐	☐

Executive Function Skills Audit

Child Name: _____ Age: _____ Date: _____

Observer: _____

Scoring Rubric (Use for All Age Groups)

Score Description

0 – Concern Skill rarely observed, even with support

1 – Emerging Skill present inconsistently, requires frequent adult support

2 – Developing Skill evident with occasional reminders or scaffolding

3 – Secure Skill consistently demonstrated independently

Age Band: 4–5 Years

Executive Function	Observable Indicators	0	1	2	3
Inhibition	Stops and thinks with reminders	☐	☐	☐	☐
Time Management	Understands “soon/later”	☐	☐	☐	☐
Planning	Plans simple play sequences	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organising	Sorts items by category	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self-Monitoring	Corrects mistakes when pointed out	☐	☐	☐	☐
Task Initiation	Starts familiar routines	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working Memory	Follows two-step instructions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Problem Solving	Uses known strategies	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shifting	Transitions with warning	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emotional Control	Labels basic emotions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attention Control	Focuses 5–10 minutes	☐	☐	☐	☐

Executive Function Skills Audit

Child Name: _____ Age: _____ Date: _____

Observer: _____

Scoring Rubric (Use for All Age Groups)

Score Description

0 – Concern Skill rarely observed, even with support

1 – Emerging Skill present inconsistently, requires frequent adult support

2 – Developing Skill evident with occasional reminders or scaffolding

3 – Secure Skill consistently demonstrated independently

Age Band: 6–8 Years

Executive Function	Observable Indicators	0	1	2	3
Inhibition	Resists impulses in structured tasks	☐	☐	☐	☐
Time Management	Works within time limits	☐	☐	☐	☐
Planning	Plans short tasks with guidance	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organising	Manages belongings with reminders	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self-Monitoring	Checks work when prompted	☐	☐	☐	☐
Task Initiation	Begins tasks after instructions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working Memory	Holds multiple instructions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Problem Solving	Tries multiple strategies	☐	☐	☐	☐
Shifting	Adjusts to rule or task changes	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emotional Control	Uses basic coping strategies	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attention Control	Sustains attention 10–20 minutes	☐	☐	☐	☐