



### WHAT ARE EXECUTIVE FUNCTION (EF) SKILLS?

After the opportunity to witness our children learning in the remote environment, we may be left thinking that they have some catching up to do. Rather than focusing on academics, I encourage you to consider structuring your summer to target **executive function (EF) skills**.

EF skills are the things the brain does to plan, organize, and execute a task... without being overwhelmed and frustrated in the process. More importantly, *one's EF skills are more predictive of academic success than IQ.*

Here are some **tips and ideas for all ages** to engage your child's EF skills.

#### 1. PREDICTABILITY

While we all long for the unstructured time that summer offers, our brains need to know the "what is next?" to go with the flow and regulate our emotions. **Here are some tips:**

- **Make it visual.** Create a calendar that lists the days of the week on top in columns and has rows for time. *You can find an example [here](#).* Record days and times when Mom or Dad is at work. Designate blocks of time for screentime. Record play dates, lessons, and snack times. Post the calendar in places that are easy to spot. A calendar is a great model of how your child can structure their time as they become more independent.
- **Give choices.** Let them pick between two or three choices. When given a choice between two non-preferred activities, a person is much more likely to pick one than if told what they must do.
- **Car talks.** Before the activity, discuss:
  - Who will be there?
  - What is the expected behavior?
  - How long do we have to stay?
  - What will the environment be like?

These questions help children know what to expect.

#### 2. INTEREST

Our kids learn the best when participating in something they find interesting. Not only that, people make friends by finding others who share common interests. So let them do what they find interesting! **Here are some things to wake up and interest the brain:**

- **Competition.** Ask "Who will be first to make their bed?"
- **Urgency.** Do toys need to be picked up? See how many you can pick up in 4 minutes. Ready? Go!
- **Novelty.** Try introducing vegetables with some new toppings: crushed crackers, nuts, or shredded cheese. Is there a new way to put laundry away? Wash your hair?
- **Incentives.** The key to making this work is disclosing the reward before the desired behavior, then giving the reward immediately and consistently after that desired behavior is witnessed.

#### 3. SUMMER PROJECT

A summer project is a great way to work on all kinds of EF skills. **Here's how:**

- **Picture the finished product.** The first step to planning is knowing, in detail, what you are planning to achieve. So, find a picture. Or, draw what the final product will look like!
- **Steps.** Break the project into smaller steps that you spread out over time.
- **Time management.** Put each step on your calendar.
- **Supplies.** Now that you know what the end product is, identify what supplies you need to complete it. Then, plan a trip to the hardware or craft store with a list of the required supplies. This is another way to work together to develop planning skills.



## EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING RESOURCES

<https://www.beyondbooksmart.com/executive-functioning-strategies-blog/activating-teens-with-a-summer-project-to-build-executive-functioning>

<http://brocksacademy.com/50-fun-summer-activities-to-build-executive-functioning-skills/>

<https://galileo-camps.com/why-galileo/blog/helping-kids-develop-their-executive-function-skills/>

<http://www.peakacademics.org/blog/2018/summer-fun-to-boost-executive-functioning-skills>

## EVIDENCE BASE (SELECTED)

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[go.illinois.edu/buildingblocks](http://go.illinois.edu/buildingblocks)

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