



Oregon Head Start Association 2016 Specialist Conference

Title: “Executive Function and Social Emotional Development: Understanding the Relationship”

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Background Information

- Executive functioning (EF) refers to a wide range of central control processes in the brain that link and categorize information that is discernible in the cognitive, motor, and behavioral responses of young children (Diamond, 2006). EF includes cognitive processes that motivate goal-directed behavior (Best & Miller, 2010).
- The beginnings of EF skills are evident within the first year of life (Diamond).
- Retrospective research studies have shown that a young child’s developmental trajectory will be impacted when EF skills are not strengthened and deficits are not addressed.
- To date, there is no multidimensional measure of EF for children ages 6 months to three.
- Improving outcomes by targeting EF skills in the infant, toddler and preschool years has the potential of buffering or ameliorating EF deficits before school-age. Professionals and families would benefit from an understanding of EF strategies for all children of diverse abilities.
- It is hoped that with early practice and experience EF skills can be improved in young children as these abilities are an essential component of school readiness.

Activities

- Interactions with adults and peers help toddlers focus attention, build working memory, and plan and organize while responding to everyday experiences.
- These age-appropriate activities can be implemented during the child’s daily routine.
- It should be noted that there is no evidence-based studies that prove the effectiveness of these activities, however, a group of experts reviewed the activities and recommended using them to support EF skills.

Age group	Activities
Infants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peek-a-boo: Hide your face behind your hands and then move your hands away while you say, “Peek-A-Boo!”Tip: Pause to see if the baby will remove the washcloth from his own face and smile. Use containers and hide small toys to make it more challenging. • See & Do: Follow the child’s lead. For example, if baby is vocalizing with “coos”, imitate baby’s sounds or when baby smiles, smile back. • Where is your Nose? Say, “Where is your nose?” and gently touch your baby’s nose as you say, “There is your nose.”Tip: Repeat with other body parts and favorite toys. Fun to do during diaper change or bath time routines. • Sing Songs: Regularly sing songs, nursery rhymes, finger plays, and children songs. Repeat several times. Sing in your native language. Sing slow, sing fast. Sing in the bath, when you are snuggling or riding in the car, or walking through the neighborhood. • Shifting: Engage the child with a rattle and then shift his attention to another toy. • Talk to Your Baby: Talk to your baby while doing daily routines such as diapering by saying, “It’s time to change your diaper.”
Toddlers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop-up Toys: These toys introduce infants and toddlers to cause-and-effect play. You can extend it by asking them to remember the hidden toy. Say, “Where is the tiger?” and pause to see if they reach for the correct button. • Active Games: Toddlers enjoy simple imitation games, such as “Simon Says.”Tip: Play games such as stop-go-slow, musical statues, or red light-green light. • Story Time: Reading stories is an amazing way to build attention, working memory, and self-control, as well as to support listening and turn-taking skills. Tip: Encourage your toddler to point at pictures and find favorite characters/items. Repeating a favorite story will help your toddler to remember sequences. • Feelings: Encourage your toddler to label his feelings across time, setting, events. Tip: Use pictures and charts about feelings and ask, “How do you feel today?” or help them identify their feelings. • Puzzles: Enjoy age appropriate puzzles together! Ask your toddler “Where do you think the yellow circle goes?” • Matching & Sorting Games: Have fun with stacking cubes, blocks, nesting measuring cups, and socks. Sort by shape (square, circle, star), size (big, small), color (green, yellow, blue), and feature (farm animals, pets, sea creatures).Tip: Increase challenge by asking putting small shapes in a big container and big shapes in a small container.