

## **Play Based Activities to Help Students Develop Executive Functioning Skills**

### **Activities that help students build their ability to ignore distractions:**

Practice slow observations and actions

- Balloon, bean bag or boiled (plastic) egg toss, or balls of different sizes in the pool → anything that must be carefully done or there is a resulting impact (drops, pops, splash)
- Explore the details of objects/environments (slow exploration, examine the “physics” of it → e.g. how does it feel, look, sound etc.)

Copying games/activities where students must think about details/listen carefully:

- Simon says
- Red light/Green light
- Switch sides/stand up if.....
- What time is it Mr. Wolf?
- You do one thing, they do the opposite
- Do simple series of actions and have the child copy the sequence
- Games where they need to think about opposites (winter: summer, night: day, sun: moon)
- Work on projects that take a longer time to complete (over days/weeks) → e.g. mural that you add to at different times during the year, crafts with parts that need to be completed different days, growing seeds
- Another interesting game to target details/listening: ‘I will bring ....to a picnic’. The list of things grows longer and longer and children have to keep track of what items are being brought to the picnic.
- The ‘train game’- can keep kids focused till the very end. They’re required to stand in a line to form a train. You begin the game by saying out a word. The first child adds a word and says it aloud. The second child adds another word to the two words and so on.

### **Activities to help students learn to organize and build receptive language skills:**

- Practice sorting and categorization. A great activity is cleaning up
- What goes with what games, or matching based on function, action, category etc.
- Discuss/practice their pre-existing organizing skills (how do they organize their toys, where do they put their boots/coats?).
- Ask questions about things that are already organized systematically (younger students=by color, size, shape etc.).
- Model and practice putting away one toy before bringing out the next choice for play.

### **Activities to help students learn to prioritize**

Ask questions such as:

- What do you do first, last in routines? Talk about why we do things a certain way (e.g., snow pants must go under coats)
- If you could only take one or two stuffed animals/toys with you on a trip, how do you choose (may be helpful to have them pick among actual toys or pictures of toys to make it more concrete)
- If your two favorite TV shows are coming on at the same time, how do you choose which one you will watch?

### **Activities to help students develop good judgement**

- Games with obvious cause and effect (where their decisions impact their success)
  - Blocks and towers
  - Action response toys
  - Jenga
  - Tic tac toe
- Guess the number of various things (e.g. toy cars, animals, balls... in the jar) then discuss strategies that help them make more successful estimates. Use simpler language than counting – “which one is less or more”.
- Estimate what/how many is needed for a craft/task (pieces of paper, glue, pairs of scissors etc.)

### **Activities to build Cognitive Flexibility**

- Read stories and ask how characters might be feeling, thinking, etc. In one story do different characters feel differently?
- Read stories and then talk about it them from the viewpoints of various characters (some books like the 3 little pigs have versions printed from other perspectives)
- Play an activity one day, then change how it is played another day.....Teaches that it’s “okay” to change the routine.
- Show super zoomed-in versions of pictures and have them guess what it might be→talk about how our first instincts might not always be right. Use flap books that show part of something and they are asked to guess what, who, or where a character is
- Circle Props game→take simple ordinary objects and see how many different things the student can pretend it is (e.g. a funnel can be a party hat, trumpet, unicorn horn).