

St. Peter's Preschool Newsletter



April 2025

From the Director's Chair- By Rita Dai Wang

Ernesto's Restaurant Night - Tuesday 4/1 btw 11am-9pm: I hope you will join us at Ernesto's! (10040 Baltimore National Pk, Ellicott City, located in the Enchanted Forest Shopping Center). Be on the lookout for an envelope coming home to put your receipt into. The box collecting receipts will be by the register. A portion of your check goes to supporting St. Peter's so feel free to share this event with friends and family. Thanks in advance for your support!

21 Day Read Aloud Challenge: Thank you to everyone who participated in our Read Aloud Challenge! It was so fun to see all the Mystery Readers, especially when the kids tried to guess who they were. Research shows that reading aloud is the single most important thing you can do to help a child prepare for reading and learning. Thank you for helping in this most important of endeavors!

Toys from Home: A reminder that all toys should stay at home unless it is your child's turn for Show and Tell. When kids bring home toys to school, it can be hard to share them, and the toys run the risk of getting lost or broken. Thank you for your help with this.

Mary's Go Round Petting Zoo Visit - Monday 4/7 from 10-11: There will be lots of animals for petting (ducks, chicks, rabbits, sheep, etc.) and a pony for rides around the parking lot. All classes are invited, so if you are a 2 year old student, feel free to stop by school anytime between 10-11! Check them out at <https://www.marysgoroundponyrides.com/index.html>

Executive Function: You have probably heard of Executive Function and how early childhood is a critical period for its development. Below is a summary from *Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child* of what Executive Function is as well as some ways you can help your kids develop these pivotal skills.

Dates to Remember

- 4/1 Ernesto's Restaurant Night
- 4/3 Jump Bunch – 4's
- 4/7 Petting Zoo – in school field trip (all classes invited)
- 4/10 Easter Egg Hunt – 2's
- 4/11 Easter Egg Hunt – 3's/4's
- 4/12-4/21 Spring Break
- 4/22 School resumes
- 4/25 Mary's Land Farm field trip (all classes invited)
- 4/25 Parents' Night Out
- 4/28-29 School Pictures



Happy Birthday

- 4/7 ZaChary
- 4/8 Theo
- 4/17 Everlie
- 4/20 Hudson Pa.
- 4/21 Aiden S.
- 4/27 Anton



Try this at home! Shaving Cream Rain

Ingredients: regular shaving cream (not gel), food coloring, tall easy to see through glass (jar, cylinder, vase, drinking glass, pitcher, glass bowl), water

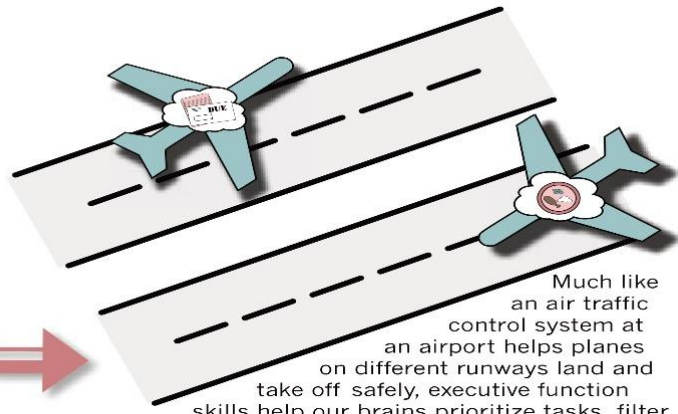
Directions: Fill your glass 75% full of water. Spray a layer of shaving cream on top of the water until covered. Drop two drops of each color of food coloring on top of the shaving cream. Watch the food coloring make its way slowly down into the water! Add more food coloring as desired.



WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION?

AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

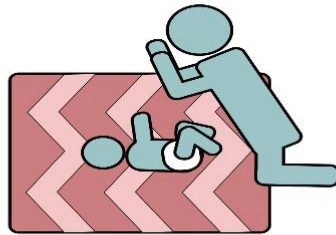
The phrase “executive function” refers to a set of skills. These skills underlie the capacity to plan ahead and meet goals, display self-control, follow multiple-step directions even when interrupted, and stay focused despite distractions, among others.



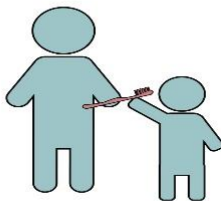
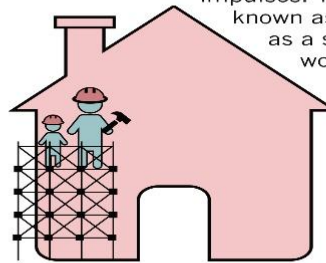
Much like an air traffic control system at an airport helps planes on different runways land and take off safely, executive function skills help our brains prioritize tasks, filter distractions, and control impulses.

NO ONE IS BORN WITH EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS, BUT NEARLY EVERYONE CAN LEARN THEM.

Our genes provide the blueprint for learning these skills, but they develop through experiences and practice. The foundation is laid in infancy, when babies first learn to pay attention. Relationships with responsive caregivers are particularly important at this stage. Something as simple as playing a game of peekaboo can help build the early foundations of working memory and self-control as a baby anticipates the surprise.

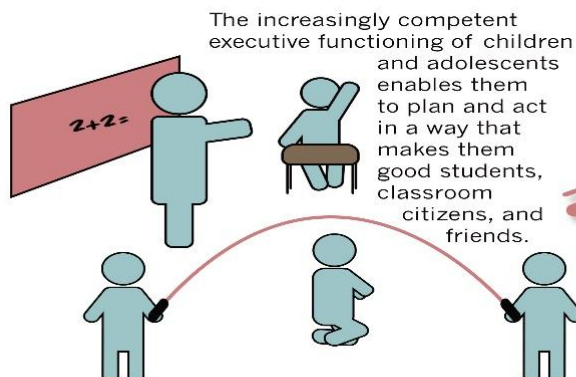


Adults set up the framework for children to learn and practice these skills over time by establishing routines, breaking big tasks into smaller chunks, and encouraging games that promote imagination, role-playing, following rules, and controlling impulses. These techniques are known as “scaffolding.” Just as a scaffold supports workers while a building is being constructed, adults can use these activities to support the emergence of children’s executive function skills until they can perform them on their own.

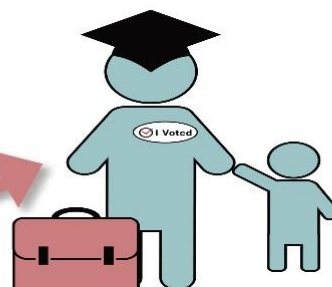


These skills typically develop most rapidly between ages 3-5, followed by another spike in development during the adolescent and early adult years. It takes a long time and a lot of practice to develop them, but, as children’s executive function skills grow, adults can gradually allow children to manage more and more aspects of their environment.

BUILDING CHILDREN’S EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS BENEFITS EVERYONE.



The increasingly competent executive functioning of children and adolescents enables them to plan and act in a way that makes them good students, classroom citizens, and friends.



In turn, this helps them grow into adults capable of juggling a multitude of commitments, such as parenting, employment, continuing education, and civic involvement. Even health is affected, as strong executive function helps people stick to healthy habits and reduce stress. The more a society invests in building the executive functioning of its children, the greater dividends it will see in the future.

Executive Function Activities for 3- to 5-year-olds

Children’s executive function and self-regulation skills grow at a fast pace during this period, so it is important to adapt activities to match the skills of each child. Younger children need a lot of support in learning rules and structures, while older children can be more independent. Ultimately, the goal is to shift children away from relying on adult regulation, so when the child seems ready, try to reduce the support you provide.



Imaginary play

During intentional imaginary play, children develop rules to guide their actions in playing roles. They also hold complex ideas in mind and shape their actions to follow these rules, inhibiting impulses or actions that don’t fit the “role.” Players often take ideas from their own lives, such as going to the doctor’s office. They might act “sick,” be examined by the doctor, and receive a shot. The “doctor” talks and acts like a doctor (calm and reassuring), the “sick child” talks and acts like a sick child (sad and scared), and the child in the role of “parent” talks and acts like a concerned parent (worried and caring). While younger children tend to play alone or in parallel, children in this age range are learning to play cooperatively and often regulate each other’s behavior—an important step in developing self-regulation.

Ways to support high-level imaginary play:

- **Read books, go on field trips, and use videos** to make sure that children know enough about the scenario and roles to support pretend play.

- **Provide a varied set of props and toys**

to encourage this type of play. Younger pre-schoolers may need more realistic props to get the play started (e.g., toy medical kits), while

older children can re-purpose other things to turn them into play props (e.g., paper towel tube that is used as a cast for a “broken arm”). Reusing familiar objects in a new way also practices cognitive flexibility.

- **Allow children to make their own play props.** Children must determine what is needed, hold this information in mind, and then follow through without getting distracted. They also exercise selective attention, working memory, and planning. If the original plans don’t work out, children need to adjust their ideas and try again, challenging their cognitive flexibility.

- **Play plans can be a good way to organize play,** as shown by one early education program designed to build self-regulation, Tools of the Mind. Children decide who they are going to be and what they are going to do before they start playing, and then draw their plan on paper. Planning means that children think first and then act, thus practicing inhibitory control. Planning play in a group also encourages children to plan together, hold these plans in mind, and apply them during the activity. It encourages social problem solving, as well as oral language.

Storytelling

Children love to tell stories. Their early stories tend to be a series of events, each one related to the one before, but lacking any larger structure. With practice, children develop more complex and organized plots. As the complexity of the storytelling grows, children practice holding and manipulating information in working memory.

Ways to support children’s storytelling:

- **Encourage children to tell you stories,** and write them down to read with the child. Children can also make pictures and create their own books. Revisiting the story, either by reviewing pictures or words, supports more intentional organization and greater elaboration.

continued

■ **Tell group stories.** One child starts the story, and each person in the group adds something to it. Children need to pay attention to each other, reflect on possible plot twists, and tailor their additions to fit the plot, thereby challenging their attention, working memory, and self-control.

■ **Have children act out stories** they have written. The story provides a structure that guides

children's actions and requires them to attend to the story and follow it, while inhibiting their impulse to create a new plot.

■ **Bilingual families can tell stories in their home language.** Research indicates that bilingualism can benefit a variety of executive function skills in children of all ages, so fostering fluency in a second language is valuable.

Movement challenges: songs and games

The demands of songs and movement games support executive function because children have to move to a specific rhythm and synchronize words to actions and the music. All of these tasks contribute to inhibitory control and working memory. It is important that these songs and games become increasingly complex to interest and challenge children as they develop more self-regulation skills.

■ **Provide many opportunities** for children to test themselves physically through access to materials such as climbing structures, balance beams, seesaws, etc. Setting challenges for children—such as obstacle courses and games that encourage complex motions (skipping, balancing, etc.)—can also be fun. When children are trying new and difficult activities, they need to focus attention, monitor and adjust their actions, and persist to achieve a goal.

■ **Encourage attention control through quieter activities** that require children to reduce stimu-

lation and focus attention—such as using a balance beam or yoga poses that include slow breathing.

■ **Play some music** and have children dance really fast, then really slowly. *Freeze dance* is also fun, and it can be made more difficult by asking children to freeze in particular positions. (Tools of the Mind uses stick-figure pictures to direct children.) When the music stops, children must inhibit action and shift their attention to the picture to imitate the shape depicted.

■ **Songs that repeat and add on** to earlier sections (either through words or motions) are a great challenge to working memory, such as the motions to *She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain*, the words to *Bought Me a Cat*, and backward-counting songs, such as *Five Green and Speckled Frogs* and songs repeating a long list (the *Alphabet Song*).

■ **Traditional song games**, like *Circle 'Round the Zero* are also fun. Complex actions, including finding partners, must be accomplished without becoming distracted.

Quiet games and other activities

■ **Matching and sorting activities** are still fun, but now children can be asked to sort by different rules, promoting cognitive flexibility. Children can first sort or match by one rule (such as by color), and then immediately switch to a new rule (such as by shape). For a more challenging version, play a matching game, but change the rule for each pair. *Quirkle* and *S'Match* are commercially available games that challenge cognitive flexibility in this way. Or play a bingo or lotto game, in which children have to mark a card with the opposite of what is called out

by the leader (e.g., for “day,” putting a chip on a nighttime picture). Children have to inhibit the tendency to mark the picture that matches, while also remembering the game's rule.

■ **Increasingly complicated puzzles** can engage children this age, exercising their visual working memory and planning skills.

■ **Cooking is also a lot of fun** for young children. They practice inhibition when waiting for instructions, working memory while holding complicated directions in mind, and focused attention when measuring and counting.

Resources

Pretend play suggestions

■ www.mindinthemaking.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PFL-4-year-old-independent-play.pdf

Montessori activities –

Walking on the line

■ www.infomontessori.com/practical-life/control-of-movement-walking-on-the-line.htm

Songs

■ kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/childrens/index.htm

SATURDAY, APRIL 5

10 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

EAST COLUMBIA 50+ CENTER

 **Howard County**
Office of Children and Families

WIGGLE, LEARN & GROW!

CHILDREN'S DISCOVERY FAIR 2025

6610 CRADLEROCK WAY,
COLUMBIA, MD 21045



AGES 3 TO 5 WITH
AN ADULT

Children's Discovery Fair

Saturday 4/5 10-1pm, East Columbia 50+ Center

**Celebrate Howard County's Month of the Young Child at the
2025 Children's Discovery Fair.**

Bring your child(ren) ages 3 to 5 on the path to kindergarten readiness to explore the wonders of learning while engaging in free hands-on, education-themed activities, interactive games, crafts, stories and movement exercises together.

Admission and parking are free.