

## Ideas for Developing Self-Regulation in Preschool (leading to Later Executive Functions)

Self-regulation is a component of development that can predict school readiness and academic success. Self-regulation in young children leads to executive functions later in life. Executive functions describe a set of mental processes that help us connect past experience with present actions. People with executive function weaknesses have difficulty planning, paying attention to and remembering details, organizing, strategizing, and managing time and space. They show weakness with 'working memory' (*seeing in the mind's eye*) – an important tool in guiding actions.

### To help preschoolers with impulse control, planning and flexibility:

- Withhold a desired object or food for the count of 10 (increasing time to one-minute) before presenting.
- Practice talking about the sequence of events. Ex. "first we'll go to the bank, then the grocery store, then we'll come home."
- Play a game where one child directs others in an activity. Switch roles. (regulating others, helps to regulate yourself – inhibiting impulsive behavior)
- Take turns!

### To help preschoolers attend to details have your child:

- Focus on a particular object while you move something else in their field of vision. Do they remember the first object without looking?
- Listen to music while focusing on an unrelated activity.
- Find small objects within larger pictures (ex. find the mouse throughout "Goodnight Moon").
- Find target letters within words on a page of print.

### To develop recall of details have your preschooler:

- Repeat random numbers or words, such as "3-1-4" or "dog-wood-orange". Increase the number of items with successes.
- Recite rhymes, lists of objects, or members of the family.
- After looking at an object or picture, describe the item after it is hidden.
- Recite members of categories. Ex. Tell me vehicles you can think of.

### To begin to develop a sense of managing time and space:

- Talk about routines. Ex. After eating dinner, go to the couch to read a book. Occasionally ask 'what will happen next?'
- While in a dramatic play situation, have children describe what their role is and the rules of that role. Practice playing different roles. Talk about all the equipment, clothing, and activities.
- Describe actions and scenarios for different role models. Ex. The postal carrier walks around town, going to each person's house dropping off mail. She wears shorts in the summer and a big bag of mail over her shoulder.
- Practice putting toys away. Help by assigning particular places for specific items. Ex. Put the blocks in the green box and the cars on the shelf.