

Psychology Month, Dufferin-Peel C.D.S.B.

Your Child in Full Day Kindergarten



Children begin the full day kindergarten program with varying levels of readiness, different preschool experiences, a wide range of linguistic abilities, and divergent cultural backgrounds. Physical development also shows wide variation as some children start junior kindergarten prior to the age of four, while others are almost a full year older.

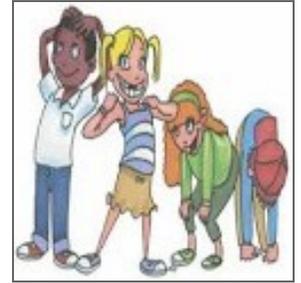
Early school success is influenced by being able to focus one's attention, follow instructions, think flexibly, cooperate with the teacher and other children, as well as control one's impulses or aggressive behaviour. These '**Executive Function**' skills are actually the foundation for early learning and are closely linked to future school success in the later grades. In a young child the brain cortex is constantly re-organizing and new connections are being wired as children learn.

Kindergarten years are the best age window to focus on developing Executive Function for later school success. It's crucial for parents and teachers to intervene with children during these early years.

Simple ways to train Executive Function skills during the Kindergarten years:

- ✓ Executive function skills are best developed in **play-based environments**. During pretend play, children must inhibit acting out of character, remember their own and other's roles, and flexibly adjust as their friends improvise.
- ✓ If children are pretend playing, e.g. house, with their group, encourage them to switch roles. This encourages them to see the play from a different angle, 'step into someone else's shoes,' and stretch beyond their perspective.
- ✓ **Learning to be flexible makes a difference**. Play with the idea of opposites by having children act out an 'Upside-down World' where clothes are put on backwards, you wear pajamas during the day, it is light at night and dark during the day.
- ✓ Games are a natural way to help children develop executive function. Even classic **board games** like Candy Land or Snakes and Ladders require sustained attention, memory, self-control and planning. Such games involve many skills such as learning to take turns, losing or winning graciously, counting, thinking of strategies, etc.

- √ The **Head-Toes-Knees game** can be played in two parts. Children are first told to follow the adult's one/two/three step commands (e.g., touch your head) but then told to "be silly and do the opposite. If I say 'touch your head,' touch your toes instead." The task requires children to pay attention to instructions, remember which body part goes with which rule, and control their automatic tendency to touch the named part and instead touch a different part.



- √ **Simon Says** is a classic children's game that is fun to play and develops the ability to monitor and shift attention, remember information, and self-regulate behaviour.
- √ **Develop concentration** through whole body activities such as walking while holding a bell without letting it ring, or walking along a line taped on the floor.
- √ When children make mistakes, encourage them to talk about it out loud to themselves. One of the best ways to encourage this is to model it by telling them about your *own* executive function errors (such as trying to fit your car key into the lock when you get home). **Self-talk** will help them consciously control their habits over time, and promotes delayed gratification and self-control.
- √ **Adults should model** verbalizing one's feelings and practicing conscious self-control strategies, e.g., waiting before acting or talking through a problem. Also allow **practice** of these skills. When children get upset they should stop, take a deep breath, say what the problem is and how they feel, and construct an action plan.
- √ The ability to concentrate, pay attention and regulate one's behaviour in young children is dependent on their **physical well-being**. The younger the child, the more important it is to make sure he/she rests when tired, has regular snacks and drinks of water throughout the day.

Within any kindergarten classroom it is normal to see a broad range of skills just as it is normal for children to learn various skills at different rates.

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For further information contact the psychology staff member at your school or Dr. Debra Lean, Chief Psychologist. You can access this or other interesting articles at: <http://w3.dpcdsb.org/CEC/Programs/Special+Education/Support+Services/PSY/Resources.htm>