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Games to Improve Executive Functioning Skills



October 1, 2017 by pathway2success — 13 Comments



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Kids and young adults need extensive practice in strengthening their **executive functioning skills**. Executive functions are the processes in our brains that help us accomplish all tasks from beginning to end. We use them when we plan our day, organize our materials, begin a chore, focus on important information, use our time wisely, and work through challenges until we accomplish a goal. The specific skills include: planning, organization, time management, task initiation, working memory, self-control, metacognition, attention, flexibility, and perseverance. While all kids could use extra practice with executive functioning skills, the ones who need it the most are often disorganized, struggle to finish assignments, lose items, have difficulty paying attention over periods of time, and give up on tasks that are difficult. These are the kids who could benefit the most from executive functioning skills instruction and practice.

If you're looking for an **executive functioning review game** you can download and use right away, check out this [Executive Functioning Challenge](#)! It can be played as a board game with partners and small groups, or as a whole-class challenge. The game includes over 200 executive functioning cards so you can play again and again!



Simply put, **executive functions are often critical to the success of kids and young adults.** So, it makes sense to make practicing them fun and engaging! Games are a great way to weave executive functioning practice into your routine. You can choose to play a game on a Friday afternoon, after a big test, or as a class reward.

Here are ten games for practicing executive functioning skills:

#1 - BLURT

Skills: self-control, metacognition

How to Play: In this game, the teacher reads a definition of a word and kids have to figure out the word itself. For example, a question might be, "What is a partially dried grape?" When the student answers "raisin", they win that turn. I like to play "around the world" style. All students will sit at desks or chairs around the room. Select two kids to play against each other and have them stand next to one another. Read the card and whoever **Scroll TO TOP** answer first, wins and gets to move on to the next person. The idea is that only the kids playing can blurt out, and everyone else must have self-control, even if they know the answer. This game can also be played with your own content area questions too, which is great for a review before a test!

#2 - SCRABBLE

Skills: planning, organization

How to Play: In scrabble, kids use random letters to build words and keep score as they go. You can have students play in small groups and even partner kids together who may need extra support with spelling or language. Planning and organization is required because kids need to build off of each others' words as the game progresses. As an extension, have kids look up definitions to the words they create or use the word in a sentence before points are scored.

#3 - Pictionary

Skills: flexibility, time management

How to Play: This game has students drawing phrases on paper or a whiteboard that others must guess correctly. Kids need to use time management to best draw their phrase before the time is up. This is such a fun game! I even love taking pictures of some of the drawings that are both hilarious and amazing.



#4 - DISTRACTION

Skills: working memory, attention

How to Play: In this card game, kids work on remembering numbers given to them while encountering distractions, including questions they have to answer. It is a great activity to teach about distractions that can throw us off!



#5 - 5 SECOND RULE

Skills: time management, task initiation

How to Play: Kids must name 3 things that fit a given topic. For example, kids might need to name 3 professional basketball teams or 3 pieces of jewelry. The categories differ greatly so kids have to be on their toes. As an accommodation, I sometimes play as a "10 second rule" to give kids enough time to process the question.

#6 - FREEZE

Skills: self-control, attention

How to Play: Freeze is a game where you play music and allow kids to be silly and dance. Then, at any moment, say "Freeze!" and kids need to stand completely still. It takes a lot of

self-control to stop dancing to a song you're into! This can be fun to let kids take the role to freeze the class, too.

#7 - JENGA

Skills: self-control, flexibility, planning

How to Play: In this game, kids pull blocks from a tower carefully. They must plan and be careful so they are not the one who causes the tower to fall over. This is a fun game because everyone likes to see towers get knocked down sometimes!

Let kids play Jenga to practice **PLANNING**, *flexibility*, and **SELF-CONTROL**!



#8 - BRAINTEASERS

Skills: perseverance, flexibility

How to Play: Brainteasers are drawings and words that have a special meaning that kids must figure out. For example, when "man" is written on top of "board", it means "man overboard". These type of brainteasers are a great feat in perseverance and flexibility to figure out. They are great for a morning meeting or "do now" when kids walk in the door to start their brains off strong.

#9 - CHESS

Skills: planning, flexibility, working memory

How to Play: Chess requires kids to learn specific rules for different pieces and then use those skills to take out their opponent. This game requires a tremendous amount of planning, flexibility, and working memory to think through your moves ahead of time. It is also a great option when you need a quiet game.

#10 - SUDOKU

Skills: perseverance, working memory

How to Play: Sudoku is a math puzzle game that allows kids to use critical thinking skills. Each grid has the numbers 1-9. Each row and column must add up to 9 separately, so the numbers need to be arranged correctly. Incorporate this activity for kids to work on in small groups or just for a fun challenge.



I have always loved using games to teach and support critical skills in the classroom, so I put together some [games for social emotional learning skills](#)! This set consists of five games focusing on executive functioning skills, social problem solving skills, empathy, social language, and more. You can really maximize learning time in your classroom by making "break time" skill-focused, too!

Scroll TO TOP



If you find yourself needing lessons and materials for direct instruction of executive functioning skills, consider this [Executive Functioning Bundle](#). It teaches all ten executive

functioning skills, study strategies, and SMART goals with enough materials for the entire year. You really cannot teach or practice EF skills enough!

10 GAMES

TO IMPROVE
EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING
SKILLS

1	BLURT (self-control, metacognition)
2	SCRABBLE (planning, organization)
3	PICTIONARY (flexibility, time management)
4	DISTRACTION (working memory, attention)
5	5 SECOND RULE (time management, task initiation)
6	FREEZE (self-control, attention)
7	JENGA (self-control, flexibility, planning)
8	BRAINTEASERS (perseverance, flexibility)
9	CHESS (planning, flexibility, working memory)
10	SODUKU (perseverance, working memory)

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Comments



Dwetha says

October 11, 2017 at 6:27 am

♥ These!

Reply



Pamlea says

October 22, 2017 at 10:40 pm

This is AMAZING! Kudos to you and thanks for sharing!!!

Reply



gk questions says

January 17, 2018 at 5:19 pm

Thank you for sharing such valuable info.

Reply



Thia says

January 28, 2018 at 8:52 pm

Thanks for the great therapy ideas for my older clients!

Reply



Debbie says

February 19, 2018 at 11:18 am

Thanks just what I'm looking for

Reply



Nagamma says

February 22, 2018 at 7:10 am

Super games

Reply



Bernadette says

May 31, 2018 at 8:02 pm

Awesome ideas! Thank you.

Reply



nancy parris says

September 16, 2018 at 10:12 am

Thanks for breaking down the the how and why of executive functioning skills. I found this inforamitonvery helpful to use with my son.

Reply



Anne says

February 26, 2019 at 1:07 pm

Love the ideas!!!!

Reply



Jackie says

November 7, 2019 at 10:15 am



Thank you for sharing these great ideas! Could you share more about the card game 'distraction' and what that looks like?

Reply



pathway2success says

November 7, 2019 at 11:08 am

Hi Jackie! It's actually a game you can grab on Amazon or at the store. It consists of cards with questions kids have to answer while remembering numbers. Really challenging but fun way to work on some skills!

Reply



Subhaa says

December 25, 2019 at 4:19 am

This is just awesome. It would be nice if you can provide a list of activities that can be given to develop metacognition. Thank you.

Reply



Carrie says

September 28, 2020 at 9:50 pm

I am just discovering this. I just read your intro, saw your picture, and checked this out and I just love you already. Thank you for posting these ideas.

Reply

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Welcome!

I'm Kris, a *special educator* turned curriculum specialist with a *passion* for everything SEL and executive functioning. Together, let's help all learners find their *pathway 2 SUCCESS!*

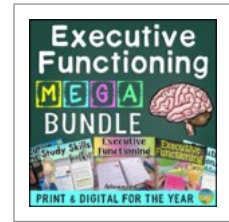
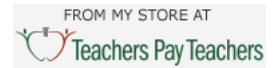
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