

In EYFS, we understand the importance of fostering executive functions in young children. These skills include working memory, inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and task initiation and completion. Our approach is designed to promote the development of these critical skills through everyday activities, planned learning experiences, and intentional teaching strategies.



We believe that in order for children to successfully develop their executive function skills, they need to build secure attachments and positive relationships. This is at the heart of our ethos and key to our Early Years environment. We work closely with the children and their families to ensure each child is able to grow and work towards long-term positive outcomes.

This document outlines how our curriculum and environment support our children's executive function development.

1. Working Memory Development

Working memory is the ability to hold, manipulate and retrieve information over short periods of time. Some examples of opportunities to enhance this skill are:

- **Storytelling and Sequencing:** Encouraging children to recall and retell stories or sequence events from a familiar narrative. We encourage children to use actions and resources to help them when retelling familiar stories.
- **Songs and Rhymes:** Engaging with a mixture of well-known and new poems, rhymes and songs, alongside learning actions, support the children in sequencing and anticipating what comes next.
- **Memory Games:** Playing games such as "Simon Says" or "Memory Matching" where children need to remember sequences, patterns, or instructions.
- **Following Multi-Step Instructions:** Providing activities where children need to follow more than one instruction (e.g., "First, find a red block, then place it next to the blue one").
- **Adult-led Modelling and Scaffolding:** Supporting children by narrating play and talking through the steps of a problem they are facing. This is developed through both adult-led tasks (Drawing club) and during the children's access to continuous provision resources.



2. Self-Regulation

Self-regulation supports each child to focus their thinking, regulate their emotions, learn to adapt, learn patience and overcome difficulties. Some examples of how we support this development are:

- **Turn-taking Games:** Activities like board games, group songs, and cooperative play where children practice waiting for their turn and controlling impulses.



- **Mindfulness and Breathing Exercises:** Simple breathing exercises or mindful activities to help children calm themselves and manage their emotions.
- **Behavioural Guidance:** Using gentle reminders to help children recognise when they need to pause, reflect, and choose appropriate behaviours. Providing and

supporting children to use a calm, quiet space in the classroom and strategies to self-regulate.

- **Focussed learning input:** Through our PSED learning throughout the year, we discuss emotions (what emotions look and feel like and strategies to support us when we feel that way).
- **Play-based learning:** Providing children the opportunities to play and explore while discussing what they are doing, and reviewing what they have done.



3. Cognitive Flexibility

Cognitive flexibility allows children to shift their attention or behaviour in response to changes.



Examples of how we foster this are through:

- **Adaptable Classroom Areas:** Providing a variety of areas throughout the provision that encourage children to move between different activities and explore various materials, fostering flexibility. We enhance our continuous

provision areas with natural resources where possible, in order to encourage adaptive and imaginative play.

- **Adapting to Changes in Routines:** Gently introducing changes to routines, such as unexpected transitions, to help children adapt to new situations. We prepare our children for the possibilities of changes to routine, discussing how this might make them feel and what strategies they can use to support them through these changes.
- **Problem-Solving Activities:** Giving children open-ended challenges or puzzles that require them to change strategies if their first attempt doesn't work.
- **Focus ideas and stories:** Each week we have a new focus story (Drawing Club), through this story we provide engaging opportunities for the children to think divergently and change their perspective of how areas in the classroom and resources might be used.



4. Task Initiation and organisation

Task initiation and completion are crucial skills that help children manage their time and efforts. Some examples of what we do to develop this skill are:



- **Independent Play:** Offering 'free choice' during continuous provision time, where children can choose their activities and engage in them independently, promoting self-motivation and challenge.
- **Project-Based Learning Opportunities:** Introducing longer-term activities or projects (e.g. building something with blocks or building an obstacle course) that require children to start a task and see it through to completion. Through creative projects, children are able to return to prior work and learning to add to and review what they have done.
- **Visual Cues:** Using visual reminders, such as charts and pictures, to help children understand what tasks are expected and how to finish them. Adults model what is expected during whole class sessions to promote a sense of confidence and pride in their learning.

5. Attention and Focus

Examples of how we help children to develop their attention and focus are through:

- **Focused Activities:** Setting aside daily time for quiet activities that require concentration, such as puzzles, drawing, writing and reading.

- **Group Attention:** Engaging children in group activities where they need to focus and listen attentively. This is developed throughout the year, gradually extending the length of time the children are focussing for.
- **Interactive Storytelling:** Using interactive books and storytelling to engage children's attention while encouraging participation. Opportunities such as 'The Secret Reader', to develop attention and focus towards a range of adults and situations.



In our EYFS, we integrate executive function development into all aspects of our curriculum. Through purposeful play, structured activities, and supportive guidance, we help children build the essential skills they need for success both in school and beyond.