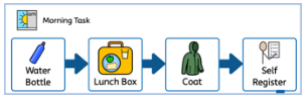
# Executive Function

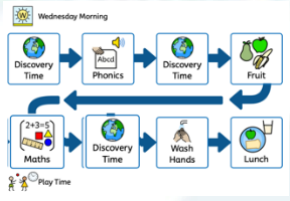
## Enabling pupils to focus, remember, self-regulate and respond flexibly in learning.

**Executive function describes the developing mental skills children use to hold information in mind, manage attention and impulses, and adapt their thinking. These skills grow through warm relationships, practice and well-designed routines.**

## What you will see in our EYFS Setting

- Predictable routines supported by a visual timetable,
- now/next cues and clear transitions.




- Resources stored consistently, labelled with pictures or words, and accessible so children can plan and complete tasks.





- Short, clear instructions paired with gestures, demonstrations or visual prompts.
- Play that asks children to remember rules, wait, plan, sequence steps, solve problems and change approach.
- Calm spaces and supportive adults who help children return to learning when they feel overwhelmed.




- Visual timetables, first/then boards, routine cards and simple task sequences.
- Jigsaws, construction challenges, matching and sorting games, memory games and simple rule-based games.




- Timers where useful, planning sheets or picture plans, and tidy, clearly organised resources.
- Props for pretend play, obstacle courses and activities with a simple goal or sequence.
- ‘Give me 5’ behaviour chart. Consistent with Key Stage 1.
- 3 , 2, 1 finger countdown when transitioning.

**Working Memory**

- **Sequencing Stories & Rhymes:** Story spoons, puppets, story maps.
- **Memory & Guessing Games:** Play classic games like *Kim’s Game* or multi-step action songs (*Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes*)
- **Multi-Step Treasure Hunts:** Give children two- or three-step instructions (e.g., "Put the blue brick in the box, then touch the door").

**Inhibitory Control & Self-Regulation**

- **Movement Control Games:** Play *Freeze Dance*, *Statues*, or musical bumps to practice stopping and starting on a cue.
- **Rule-Based Games:** Use games that require waiting or inhibiting a first impulse, such as *Red Light, Green Light* or opposite games
- **Cooperative Role Play:** Set up themed pretend-play areas (like a doctor's office, cafe, or vet clinic) where children have to stick to the "rules" of the scenario and take turns.

**Cognitive Flexibility**

- **Open-Ended & Adaptable Areas:** Regularly rotate or slightly change classroom props and layouts to encourage children to adapt when routines or environments shift.
- **Rule-Switching & Sorting:** Use sorting games where children switch the sorting rule halfway through (e.g., sort by colour first, then switch to sorting by shape or size).
- **Divergent Storytelling:** Ask "What if?" questions during stories (e.g., "What if the character built a boat instead of a bridge?") to spark flexible problem-solving.

**Adult Scaffolding & Environment**

- **Visual Timetables:** Display a clear visual daily routine so children can anticipate changes and manage transitions smoothly.
- **Metacognitive Self-Talk:** Model thinking aloud when things go wrong (e.g., "Oh, my tower fell down. I will take a deep breath and try a wider base").

**Early Learning Goals (ELGs)**

**Self- Regulation**

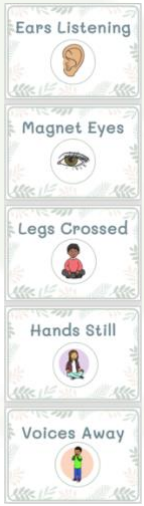
Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others, and begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly.
Set and work towards simple goals, being able to wait for what they want and control their immediate impulses when appropriate.
Give focused attention to what the teacher says, responding appropriately even when engaged in activity, and show an ability to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.

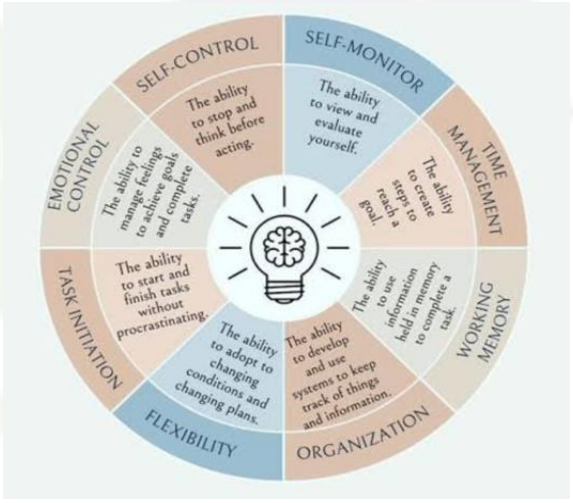
**Managing Self**

Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge.
Explain the reasons for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly.

Education Endowment Foundation

**The EEF identifies three core executive functions: Working Memory, Inhibitory Control and Cognitive Flexibility.**




## THE ADULT'S ROLE

- Give one or two manageable instructions at a time; add steps as children become ready.
- Model planning aloud: “First we need the blocks, then we can build the bridge.”
- Help children pause, remember the goal and consider a different strategy rather than stepping in immediately.
- Use consistent language for routines and self-regulation; praise useful strategies and persistence.
- Co-regulate with children and adapt demands, noise, time and visual support to individual needs.
- Children increasingly follow familiar routines with suitable prompts.
- Children sustain attention for growing periods when the activity is meaningful and accessible.
- Children begin to remember rules or steps, wait for a turn, plan an approach and adjust when something does not work.
- Adults can identify the support that helps a child succeed, rather than expecting independent self-control at all times.