

Play-Up Your Child or Teen's Executive Functioning Skills

Using Card and/or Board Games

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Many parents of children or teens with Learning Disabilities and/or ADHD know that enhancing their child's executive functioning (EF) skills are essential to their child's academic and social success, as well as their child's emotional control. One way to potentially play-up (enhance) your child's EF skills is to use card and/or board games. This is because such games provide an easy, quick, fun, and interactive way to play-up your child or teen's EF skills. An important reason why card and board games are useful in playing-up children or teens's EF skills is that **all** games involve using the following executive functioning skills in some way to win the game: planning, problem solving, attentional control, task initiation, and self monitoring. Some card and board games specifically target impulse control, organization, working memory, and/or cognitive flexibility.

There are many definitions and models of executive functioning. However, most of the definitions and models include the following skills and abilities:

- **Planning** : This skill involves thinking about what the goal is and taking well-thought-out steps to carry-out and achieve the goal. Good planning skills are essential for success in school, work, and life. **Prioritizing** is connected to planning, as it is one's ability to think about what steps need to be taken first before doing other steps.
- **Task Initiation (starting a task)**: This refers to the ability to begin tasks and see them through to completion regardless of being interested or not in the assigned task.
- **Organization**: This refers to our ability to gather and appropriately use materials and resources to complete tasks. Organizational skills are connected to our ability to plan and prioritize.
- **Problem-Solving**: This refers to our ability to recognize and describe a problem and then develop solutions to fix it.
- **Cognitive Flexibility**: Is our ability to think about things in a new or different way rather than only seeing one possible schedule or solution.
- **Working Memory**: Is like "a temporary sticky note in the brain." It is someone's ability to hold new information in their brain and use that information in some way.
- **Emotional Control (also called Emotional Regulation)**: This skill involves being able to appropriately manage emotions to help someone with achieving their goals, completing tasks, and controlling and directing their behavior accordingly.

- **Impulse Control (also called Inhibitory control, and includes self-control)** : This skill involves the ability to ignore distractions and resist the automatic urges to do something that you know you shouldn't do by stopping oneself, and then using attention and reasoning to respond appropriately to the situation.
- **Attentional Control**: This refers to our ability to concentrate (or focus) on preferred and non-preferred tasks.
- **Self-Monitoring**: This skill involves being able to monitor and evaluate one's own behavior based on demands of the situation.

Research shows that card and board games that directly or indirectly involve utilizing EF skills are equally effective in enhancing EF skills. When board games are used as an intervention in comparison to students attending and participating in usual academic classes, research shows that board games are significantly more effective at enhancing EF skills.

Are you starting to wonder what card and/or board games could potentially play-up your child's EF skills? Well, below is a list of some games that you could try with your child, based on their interests:

1. Card Games

- Rummy** – used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: working memory and organizing. Click [Rummy](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- Hearts** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: working memory and flexible thinking. Click [Hearts](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- Memory** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: working memory. Click [Memory](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- Uno** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: cognitive flexibility and impulse control. Click [Uno](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- Go Fish** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: organization and working memory. Click [Fish](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.

2. Board games

- a. **Distraction** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: working memory and flexible thinking. Click [Distraction](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- b. **Mindtrap** - used with children 12 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: flexible thinking. Click [Mindtrap](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- c. **Quiddler** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: organization and flexible thinking. Click [Quiddler](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- d. **Chess (for teens) OR No Stress Chess (for children)** - This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: organization, impulse control, working memory, and flexible thinking. Click [Chess](#) and [No Stress Chess](#) to watch and learn how to play these games.
- e. **Go** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: flexible thinking and working memory. Click [Go](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- f. **Checkers** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: impulse control and working memory. Click [Checkers](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- g. **Monopoly** - used with children 10 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: impulse control, organization, and working memory. Click [Monopoly](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- h. **Clue** - used with children 10 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: impulse control and working memory. Click [Clue](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- i. **Game of Life** - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: working memory and organization. Click [Life](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- j. **Unlock! Escape Game** - used with children 12 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: cognitive flexibility. Click [Unlock](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.

3. Other games

- a. **Jenga** – used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: flexible thinking and impulse control. Click [Jenga](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- b. **Snake Oil** - used with children 10 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: flexible thinking and organization. Click [Snake](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.
- c. **Crokinole** - - used with children 8 years and up. This game involves using the following executive functioning skills: impulse control and organization. Click [Crokinole](#) to watch and learn how to play the game.

Key Takeaways

1. Games provide an enjoyable, interactive, and hands-on way to enhance EF skills for all ages and all abilities.
2. Game-based learning indirectly enhances social skills, such as communication, cooperation, turn taking, winning and losing graciously, perspective taking, and empathy.
3. Game-based learning indirectly increases many students' motivation and task initiation to work on skills, such as executive functioning skills.

Resources for Parents

From Understood.org: [8 Fun Games That Can Improve Your Child's Executive Functioning Skills](#)

From Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University: [Activities Guide: Enhancing and Practicing Executive Functioning Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence](#)

From Additude Magazine:

[Your Child's 7 Executive Functions and How to Support Them](#)
[The Best Board Games for Tweens and Teens with ADHD](#)
[The Best Board Games for Kids with ADHD](#)

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