

# MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

## Executive Function Life Skill: Focus and Self Control

Children need this skill in order to achieve their **goals**, especially in a world that is filled with distractions and information overload. It involves **paying attention**, **remembering the rules**, **thinking flexibly** and exercising self control.

## Suggestions for Promoting Focus and Self Control

### Tip:

Sam was tired of waiting to be the Hamster Helper. Talk with your child about a time he or she was tired of waiting for something. Try to recall what he or she did to make the waiting easier.

### Skill:

Focus and Self Control includes **being able to wait to do something, even when it is hard**. This is learning to exercise self control, an **Executive Function** skill. Helping your child remember what he or she did to make the waiting easier promotes this skill. The back and forth conversation you have with your child about waiting is what researchers call **“serve and return.”** Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

### Tip:

Share what you do when you need to stay focused even when it is hard or when you can't go on automatic. For example, sitting in traffic or waiting for the bus, you may sing or think about happy things.

### Skill:

Focus and Self Control is promoted when you have **strategies** to use when you are challenged or distracted. When you share your story and strategies, you are teaching your child new ways to develop self control.

### Tip:

Sam took the hamster on the field trip because he couldn't resist sharing the experience with him. You can talk with your child about how Sam didn't think ahead about the consequences, especially the risk of losing the hamster. Ask your child what Sam might have handled the situation differently. You can also share a time that you didn't think ahead and how that affected you or others—for example, saying something that hurt someone else's feelings. Share what you do now to stop and think ahead.

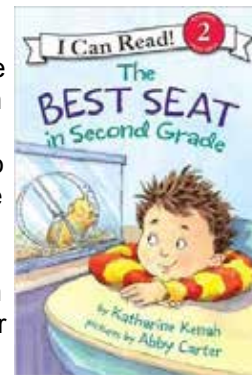
### Skill:

Finding ways to stop and think ahead require **reflecting and resisting the temptation to go on auto-pilot**. Your child will learn from your experience.

## The Best Seat in Second Grade

By Katharine Kenah

In this classic bedtime story, a Sam feels he has the best seat in his classroom because he sits next to the class hamster. He yearns to show the hamster the world outside his cage, so he sneaks him along on a class trip to the science museum and then loses him in the Hamster Habitat!



High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from *Mind in the Making* by Ellen Galinsky



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You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: **Serve and Return** and **Executive Function** skills.

**Serve and Return**, like game of ball, involves a back and forth conversation between you and your child where you listen, then build on and extend what your child says or does to promote learning.

**Executive Function** skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your feelings, your thoughts and your behavior to reach your goals.

They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self control.

Find more about Families and Work Institute's *Mind in the Making* at [www.mindinthemaking.org](http://www.mindinthemaking.org).