

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

Executive Function Life Skill: Taking on Challenges

Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are willing to **take on challenges** (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges



Tip:

Mrs. Frisby does a number of very scary things to save her family. Talk with your child about who and what helped her, asking:

- “What did Mrs. Frisby do to face her feat and have the courage to go visit Mr. Ages, to fly on the back of a crow, to visit an owl as in the darkness of his tree home, to find the rats of NIMH, and to put sleeping powder into the cat Dragon’s dish?”
- “Think about a time when you tried something that was scary. What helped you do it?”



Skill:

Mrs. Frisby did more than cope with stress—**she proactively took on things that scared her**. This story can inspire your child to think about his or her own strategies for the skill of Taking on Challenges, a skill that calls on **Executive Functions** of the brain.



Tip:

When Mrs. Frisby was upset, she remembered something her husband had once said to her: “All doors are hard to unlock until you have the key.” Ask your child,

- “What do you think that Mr. Frisby meant by this saying? What did Mrs. Frisby have to figure out in order to save her family?”



Skill:

Taking on Challenges involves **problem solving**. This back and forth conversation you have with your child about problem solving 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.

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH

By Robert C. O'Brien

In this prize-winning book, Mrs. Frisby, a widowed mouse, has to move her family or face almost certain death where they live in the winter is plowed but one child is too sick to move. To save her family, she visits a wise mouse with medicinal potions, flies on the back of a crow, and puts sleeping powder in the bowl of a dangerous cat. She is aided in her escape by highly intelligent rats—escapees from experiments at NIMH—and she, in turn, helps them.



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



Find more books and materials on the First Book Marketplace, a resource available exclusively to educators and programs serving children in need. www.fbmarketplace.org.

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.

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Tip:

Mrs. Frisby was able to get help from others because she or her husband had helped them? She freed the crow, who then helped her fly, for example. What other ways did Mrs. or Mr. Frisby help others, who, turn, helped her? On the other hand, the rats—who had been helped by Mr. Frisby—did nothing to help Mrs. Frisby until she came to them.

Skill:

It usually takes the support and help of others to try difficult things. But receiving help often comes from those you have helped. It is important for children to understand the role that **giving and receiving** help can play in taking on challenges.

Tip:

Most of the rats want to leave the comfortable life they have created under the farmer's rosebush because they don't want to live by stealing anymore—a realization they came to when they were at NIMH. Yet, one of the rats Danner asks, "What is stealing: "Is it stealing when farmers take milk from cows, or eggs from chickens?" Ask your child:

- "When you do think the rats were stealing? Where they stealing when they took garbage from the markets, tools from the Toy Tinker's truck, or supplies and food from the farmer and his family?"

Skill:

This book raises complex moral issues, which are important to discuss with your child, especially as you help your child decide what is **morally acceptable** behavior in Taking on Challenges.

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