

How to Use Media and Tech to Build Life Skills in Young Kids

Workshop Facilitator's Guide

Thank you for your commitment to helping families nurture early childhood development in the digital age! This interactive Bingo game gives parents and caregivers of kids age 0 to 8 a chance to learn about and reflect on how media and technology can affect their children's development.

Workshop Goals

This workshop will help parents and caregivers:

- Learn about important early childhood skills called executive functioning skills.
- Reflect on the role media and technology play in their young children's development.
- Learn ways to nurture their children's healthy development and learning while using media.

Important Links and Materials

Slides: <https://comsen.se/life-skills-slides>

Video: <https://comsen.se/executive-functioning-video>

Handouts:

- <https://comsen.se/bingo-cards-handout> (participant version)
- <https://comsen.se/bingo-cards-handout-facilitator> (facilitator version)

Take-home resources: <https://comsen.se/managing-media-family-tips>

Workshop participant survey: <https://comsen.se/survey> or <https://comsen.se/survey-pdf> (to print for participants without smartphone access)

Workshop series guide: <https://comsen.se/workshop-series-guide> (with tips and resources for planning your event)

About Common Sense: <https://comsen.se/about>

Other materials needed: Pens/markers, poster paper (optional)

Slides, Talking Points, and Facilitation Notes

Follow along with the slides and read the talking points. Facilitation notes are in italics.

Talking Points and Facilitation Notes

Slide 1



This workshop is brought to you by Common Sense Media, which is part of Common Sense, an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to helping families navigate the world of media and technology with their kids.

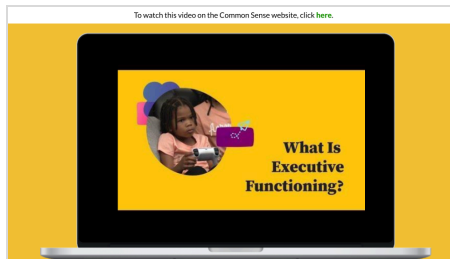
Slide 2



In this workshop, we'll reflect on:

- Important early childhood skills called "executive functioning" skills.
- The role that media and technology play in young children's development.
- How to nurture executive functioning "life skills" in our children while using media.

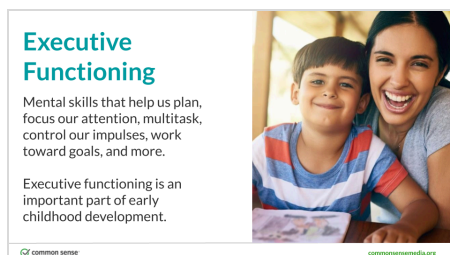
Slide 3



Let's first watch a short video to learn about executive functioning. What are these important skills, and how can we nurture them at home, with and without media?

Show video: **What Is Executive Functioning?**

Slide 4

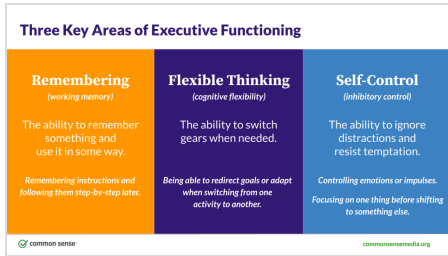


To recap, executive functioning is a set of mental skills that develop throughout childhood.

They help us plan, focus our attention, multitask, control our impulses, work toward goals, and more.

Executive functioning is an important area of brain development when children are young.

Slide 5

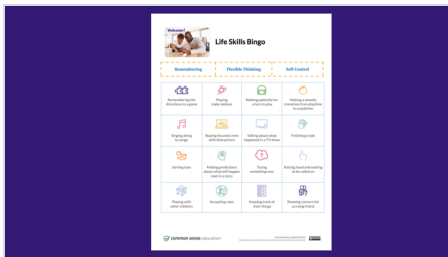


Another way to talk about executive functioning is to look at the "life skills" our executive functions allow us to accomplish. These "life skills" fall into three categories:

1. **Remembering (or "working memory")**. For example, remembering instructions and following them step-by-step later.
2. **Flexible thinking (or "cognitive flexibility")**. For example, shifting goals or adapting when switching from one activity to the next.
3. **Self-control (or "inhibitory control")**. For example, controlling emotions and impulses, or focusing on one thing before shifting to something else.

Pause for a few moments to allow participants to ask questions. It might be helpful to read this slide twice, as the information is complex and could be new to some.

Slide 6



Pass out **Bingo cards handout** and Bingo markers.

Today we're going to play a fun game of Bingo. This is not the traditional game we're used to playing -- it's a cooperative game to get us thinking and talking about important developmental skills for young children.

OK, let's learn how to identify executive functioning "life skills" in our children!

I'm going to call out the activities on the card, one at a time. For each activity, think about which area of executive functioning it falls under: remembering, flexible thinking, or self-control.

Once you've decided which category you think it falls under, write in the square an "R" for remembering, "F" for flexible thinking, or "S" for self-control. Once everyone's done, we'll take some time to share our thoughts.

If you can't decide, and think it falls under more than one area, that's OK, too! Just write the corresponding letters to represent your choices. This isn't a game about winning and losing. It's just a fun way for us to learn about these important milestones in our children's development.

Play the game:

Use **the facilitator's version of the Bingo card** to call out an activity from one of the squares. Give participants time to think. After everyone writes their choice(s) on their Bingo card, ask for volunteers to share their thoughts.

Continue playing the game until you have called out all the activities listed on the Bingo card.

Slide 7

When kids develop strong executive functioning skills, they are more successful in school and in life.

These skills include:

- Focus and resisting distractions.
- Working toward goals.
- Patience and taking turns.
- Switching gears during transitions.
- Taking on challenges.
- Perspective-taking.
- Remembering information.
- Making connections.
- Critical thinking.

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The game we just played highlights several life skills that we help our kids learn every day.

As we discussed earlier, executive functions are the brain skills that allow us to complete daily tasks. Tasks like planning, organizing, and managing everything we do and say. Studies show that when kids develop strong executive functioning skills, they are more successful in school and in life.

Read through each of the life skills below. Give examples, as needed, to help clarify.

These skills include:

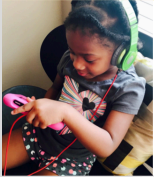
- Focus and resisting distractions.
 - For example, being able to complete a task or continuing to stay focused, even with loud noises in the background.
- Working toward goals.
 - For example, trying to win a game, or planning and building a fort out of blankets and chairs.
- Patience and taking turns.
 - For example, keeping their emotions under control while they wait for their turn.
- Switching gears during transitions.
 - For example, when it's time to turn off the TV or stop playing and come to dinner.
- Taking on challenges.
 - For example, trying something even though it seems hard.
- Perspective-taking.
 - For example, noticing when a friend is hurt and

checking on them or offering help.

- Remembering info.
 - For example, recalling the events from a story they heard or TV show they watched.
- Making connections.
 - For example, talking about a recent visit to the zoo when they see a picture of an elephant in a book.
- Critical thinking.
 - For example, asking questions when they don't understand something.

Slide 8

90% of brain growth happens before kindergarten



Why does it matter what content our children are exposed to?

How might using multiple devices at the same time affect children's executive functioning skills?

How can we, as parents and caregivers, model media and tech use that promotes these important skills?

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When babies are born, their brains are about a quarter the size of an average adult's brain. In the first year of life, a baby's brain doubles in size, and by age 5, it reaches 90% of its full size!

Source:

<https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/early-childhood-matters/brain-development/>

This is why the early years of a child's life are so important. Children's brains are developing so quickly that nearly everything they do is an opportunity to grow and learn.

And this for sure includes the media and technology that kids are exposed to.

Let's take a few minutes to think about the connection between media and tech and our children's development.

Choose from these discussion strategies for the reflection questions based on the size and dynamic of the group (or come up with your own):

- Everyone shares together as a group.
- Participants talk in small groups or turn and talk to their neighbors in pairs. Then a few volunteers share with the whole group.

For each of the questions, use the conversation prompts if participants need some help getting started:

- Why does it matter what content our children are exposed to?

Listen for, or prompt: If everything kids do at this age helps their

brains develop, we'd want to make sure those skills are supported by the shows they watch, the games they play, etc.

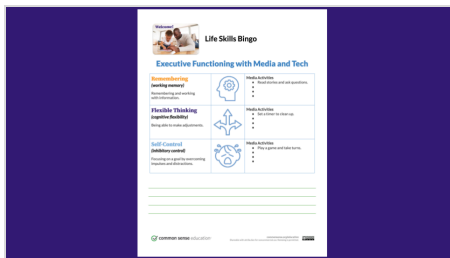
- How might using multiple devices at the same time (for the child or the parent/caregiver) affect children's executive functioning skills?

Listen for, or prompt: It could be really distracting for kids who are still learning to focus their attention. Also, if the adult is distracted, they won't be as present with their child.

- How can we as parents and caregivers model media and technology use that can promote these important skills?

Listen for, or prompt: We can help by asking questions when kids are using media. This will help them practice remembering, making connections, and thinking critically.

Slide 9



Now turn over your Bingo cards. Let's talk about some activities we can do to nurture executive functioning skills in our kids when using media and technology.



You'll see an example for each area of executive functioning on the right side. For remembering, we might read stories and ask questions. For flexible thinking, we might set a timer to clean up. And for self-control, we might play a game and practice taking turns.

What are some other ways we might use media and tech to help our kids develop executive functioning (or life) skills?
What can you do to nurture these skills?

Choose from these discussion strategies for this activity based on the size and dynamic of the group (or come up with your own):

- Everyone shares together as a group. You can prompt the group by using the additional examples from the facilitator's guide.
- Participants talk in small groups or turn and talk to their neighbors in pairs. Then a few volunteers share with the whole group.

If you want to extend this activity, you can have groups create posters with ideas. One person from each group can present, or

	<p><i>you can hang up their posters and allow participants to walk around the room and read everyone's ideas.</i></p>
<p>Slide 10</p> 	<p>For our final few minutes, I'd like you to reflect on how you can use what you learned today with your children.</p> <p>Think about your child (or children) in relation to these three key areas of executive functioning: remembering, flexible thinking, and self-control. Is there one area they struggle with more than others?</p> <p>How will you support and nurture their development in this area? Are there media activities you want to try? Turn to your neighbor and share what you hope to try at home. <i>Give participants a few minutes to reflect and share. Ask for volunteers to share their goal with the group.</i></p>
<p>Slide 11</p> 	<p>Thanks so much for attending this workshop. We hope it was helpful!</p> <p>Please take a short survey about this workshop by going to https://comsen.se/survey.</p> <p>Distribute <i>surveys on paper</i> if needed. Distribute <i>take-home resources</i>.</p>