

Executive Function & Scaffolding

An excerpt from *Shared Discoveries: positive parent-child relationships and child development*

The development of executive function (EF) has recently received substantial attention from researchers and the popular press because of the links between EF and young children's school readiness and achievement and social understanding.

A new and growing body of research explores the relation between parental scaffolding of children's play in everyday activities and children's executive function. Successful scaffolding is a delicate balance between providing hints and not giving children the answer or solution, and may require heavy involvement by the parent at times, and at other times backing away and observing.

Susan Landry and her colleagues investigated the role of language input in the form of maternal scaffolding at ages 3 and 4 years, a time when children are rapidly learning language, to children's EF at age 6. The researchers found that young children had increased verbal ability and better executive function skills when their mothers provided more sensitive scaffolding of their children's play.

Executive Functions include:

- working memory
- inhibitory control
- attentional flexibility

Ways to foster executive function skills:

Play games with your children that foster planning, self-control, and sustained attention. For the younger ages, Simon Says and Red Light Green Light are great games that encourage children to exercise self-control by NOT touching your toes or running fast. For older children, classic games like checkers, chess, and Monopoly require sustained attention, planning, and memory skills.

Engage in fun activities with your children that involve planning skills. For example, cooking is a great family activity, and your child can help with planning what to cook, creating a shopping list, and executing each step of the recipe. When you are working on a task or project that requires several steps and planning ahead (e.g., baking cookies), let your child participate as much as possible and talk through the steps you are taking ("I'm turning on the oven now so it is ready when we have made the cookie dough.") so children start to understand your reasoning and logic.

To read *Shared Discoveries*, please visit:
CenterforChildhoodCreativity.org/research/

Landry, S. H., Miller-Loncar, C. L., Smith, K. E., & Swank, P. R. (2002). *The role of early parenting in children's development of executive processes. Developmental Neuropsychology, 21(1), 15-41.*

