



MEASURE WHAT MATTERS!

Goldilocks Parenting:

Not too little, not too much, but just right

If your child has ever complained to you about having too little milk in a glass (“But I’m thirsty!”) and then after you added more, complained that it was too much (“I can’t finish it all!”), you know how challenging it can be to find the right balance in parenting. It’s like how Goldilocks wanted her porridge to be in the fairy tale. Not too hot, not too cold, but “just right.”

“Goldilocks” parenting, or finding techniques that are “just right” for a child’s autonomy, affects the child’s executive function development.

Most parents, when helping their child to achieve some goal such as finishing a puzzle or completing homework, display one of a few different parenting styles: **laissez-faire**, or laid-back, sometimes to the point of not being present enough, **controlling**, or **autonomy-supportive**.

As you might have guessed, **autonomy-supportive parenting** works because it’s “just right.” It balances being patient and stepping back (laissez-faire) with being helpful and involved (controlling). When children master challenging tasks with this “just right” level of support from parents, they develop autonomy. This gives them a sense of personal agency (“I did it!”) and self-efficacy (“I’m good at figuring things out even if they are hard at first”).

What does this mean for you as a parent?

First, try to be mindful of how you parent. It’s not always easy to know when you’re helping too much or too little. However, you can always ask yourself “is this something my child could do on his own without help?” If so, you may want to try stepping back.

Simply being mindful of the “just right” level of support can make a big difference. It can help you know when it’s OK to let your child fail at a task.

Second, consider doing things to work on your own executive functioning skills. Doing so can make you a better parent. Start with small things. For instance, try to take time for yourself to recharge, so you don’t get overwhelmed. Learn and practice self-calming techniques, and try out tips for saving time and being efficient.

Most importantly, if you’re in the heat of the moment with your child, and need a reminder, think of Goldilocks. Not too little, not too much, but just right.



Executive Function's Role in ADD & ADHD

Executive functions and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADD and ADHD, often go hand-in-hand. In fact, when a doctor screens a patient for ADD and ADHD, deficiencies in executive functions are some of the most important signs they look for. There are several ways to examine for ADD and ADHD, but they all serve the same purpose: to ensure that a child's cognitive development is progressing normally. When a child has ADD and ADHD, they tend to have issues sitting still, focusing their attention, and staying motivated for an extended period of time. These are measurable skills, and a general executive function screening can serve to identify these signs. Children with ADD and ADHD may not have problems with executive function in all situations, but they are likely to struggle with several at a time. Here are executive function deficiencies that may be warning signs of ADD and ADHD:

Focus

Focus describes the level of attention a person is able to devote to a particular subject. People with ADD and ADHD have a tendency to become distracted by the activities around them and even their own thoughts. The ability to focus often depends on situational factors. If an individual is genuinely interested in a certain hobby or type of entertainment, focusing can be relatively easy for them. On the other hand, if they are less interested in the content, such as a reading assignment, they will have to read the same content over repeatedly just to comprehend the main idea. People with ADD and ADHD may exhibit varying degrees of this behavior, although sometimes it is very obvious.

Frustration

Regulating emotion is an important executive function that typically developing children can – with increasing age – easily control. For individuals with ADD and ADHD, on the other hand, it's a different story. When someone with this disorder experiences high emotion such as anger, frustration, disappointment, surprise, and even joy,

they have trouble controlling their reaction. It is difficult for them to put that emotion into perspective and to calm down once the emotional situation has concluded. It may come off as misconduct to someone who doesn't understand ADD and ADHD, but it might be executive function that is not sufficiently well developed or practiced.



Self-Action

Individuals who live with ADD/ADHD often have trouble controlling their impulses. This manifests as hyperactivity, impatience, difficulty waiting turns, blurting things out, or acting without considering outcomes. Monitoring and regulating actions becomes a real challenge, especially when it comes to adjusting in response to changing circumstances. It can also be hard for individuals with this disorder to recognize the effect their behavior is having on others in their family, school, or work settings, because deficits in executive function also make it difficult to take someone else's perspective.

These are just a few examples of executive functions that are impacted by ADD and ADHD. If you have a child struggling with ADD and ADHD and you're wondering what you can do to address executive function issues, check out our Parent Resources page (<https://reflectionsociences.com/resources/parents/>) for helpful information and ways you can help your child strengthen this skillset.



Social-Emotional Development and Executive Function Skills

Social development in early childhood is an important part of a person's overall health, well-being, and happiness throughout his or her life. Social development is very closely linked to cognitive and emotional development, and together these developmental markers and milestones build the foundation for developing relationships with other people, coping with stressful situations, and many other skills. Healthy social development is especially important as a child enters school.

Social development involves children's ability to interact with others and regulate their own behavior. Identifying these milestones in young children can be difficult if you are unfamiliar with them, so we've laid out some of these markers.

Milestones of Social Development in Early Childhood

Between the age of three and four years, a child's sense of confidence begins to develop as he or she learns to do more activities without assistance.

At this stage, most children typically begin to:

- Share toys and take turns
- Begin engaging in pretend play
- Follow simple rules in games
- Sometimes become bossy and defiant
- Show more independence
- Might show attachment to one friend

Between the age of four and five, children start to gain a greater awareness of their own individuality. A child's sense of self in these early stages can set a pattern for the rest of his or her life.

At this stage, most children typically begin to:

- Develop friendships with other kids
- Compare themselves to other children and adults
- Understand other people's thoughts and feelings
- Initiate or join in play with other children and make up games
- Show an understanding of right and wrong
- Listen while others are speaking

How Executive Function Skills Promote Healthy Social Development

Executive Function is the "controller" for all cognitive skills. EF skills help people do things like regulate their behavior, accomplish tasks, and develop relationships.

Researchers have found emotional and social skills essential for school readiness, and Executive Function skills play an integral role in their development. These skills include the ability to pay attention in class, transition from one activity to the next, and cooperate with other children.