

St. Peter's Preschool Newsletter



April 2021

From the Director's Chair- By Rita Dai Wang

So happy it's finally spring! I love this time of year and getting to see how much the kids enjoy outside time every day.

LaPalapa Night: A HUGE thank you to everyone who came out to support St. Peter's at LaPala's! I know my family enjoyed dinner that night – YUM!

21 Day Read Aloud Challenge: Thank you to everyone who participated in our Read Aloud Challenge! It was so fun to see everyone's pictures on FB. Be on the lookout for a certificate and book coming home this week. Every child will get the chance to choose a book as a prize!

School Pictures: We will be doing school pictures outside this year in our nature space. The pictures will be taken by local photographer Erin Duffy known for capturing joy and beauty in unexpected moments. She is also known as Keller Sothoron's aunt 😊 You can find out more about Erin on social media: Instagram: [erin.duffy.photography](https://www.instagram.com/erin.duffy.photography), Facebook: Erin Duffy Photography. More details about pictures will come home soon.

Nature Area/Outdoor Learning Space: Our Nature Space is continuing to grow and be enjoyed by all. Now that the weather is warming up, we will be starting to plant with the kids. Our goal is to not just plant pretty flowers, although we certainly plan to do that, but to plant things that will stimulate all of our senses – for ex. lambs ear for its soft leaves and mint for its sweet scent. We are also hoping to plant butterfly bushes to attract butterflies and citronella and lemon balm to detract mosquitos. If you have a green thumb and would like to help us, we'd love your help!

Chesapeake Bay Trust Grant: I am happy to announce that St. Peter's is a proud recipient of the Chesapeake Bay Trust Pre-K-12 Environmental Education Mini Grant! We have received \$4750 to help us further develop our outdoor space. We have big plans in the works – further clean-up, mud kitchens, music walls, DIY stepping stones, sun shades... Stay tuned!

Science Camp: We only have a few more openings! Current 3's and 4's are invited, as well as siblings and friends outside of St. Peter's aged 3-5. See me if you need more information.

Dates to Remember

- 3/31 Easter Egg Hunt (3's)
- 4/1 Easter Egg Hunt (2's)
- 4/2 Easter Egg Hunt (4's)
- 4/4 Easter Egg Hunt – St. Peter's Church 12:00 – all ages invited!
- 4/3-4/11 Spring Break
- 4/12 School resumes
- 4/19-4/20 Picture Day
- 5/3-5/7 Teacher Appreciation Wk
- 5/27 Last Day of School (2's)
- 5/28 Last Day of School (3's/4's)
- TBD Graduation (4's)
- TBD End of Year Picnic (all classes)
- 6/7-6/11 Science Camp (Week 1)
- 6/14-6/18 Science Camp (Week 2)



Happy Birthday

4/11 Catherine Walding

4/28 Miles Groomes

4/29 Connor Kahl

Try this at home! Shaving Cream Rain



Ingredients: regular shaving cream (not gel), food coloring, tall see through glass (jar, cylinder, vase, drinking glass, pitcher, glass bowl), water

Fill your glass about 75% full of water. Shake the shaving cream well and spray a layer of shaving cream on top of the water until covered. Drop two drops of each color of food coloring on top of the shaving cream. Watch the food coloring make its way slowly down into the water! Add more food coloring as desired.

You have probably heard of Executive Function and how early childhood is a critical period for its development. Here is a summary from *Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child* of what Executive Function is as well as some ways you can help your kids develop these pivotal skills.

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION? AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

The phrase "executive function" refers to a set of skills. These skills underlie the capacity to plan ahead and meet goals, display self-control, follow multiple-step directions even when interrupted, and stay focused despite distractions, among others.



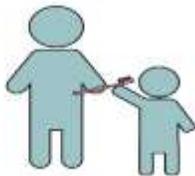
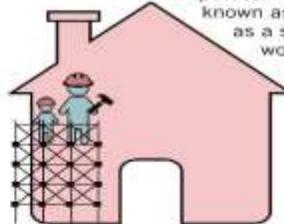
Much like an air traffic control system at an airport helps planes on different runways land and take off safely, executive function skills help our brains prioritize tasks, filter distractions, and control impulses.

NO ONE IS BORN WITH EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS, BUT NEARLY EVERYONE CAN LEARN THEM.

Our genes provide the blueprint for learning these skills, but they develop through experiences and practice. The foundation is laid in infancy, when babies first learn to pay attention. Relationships with responsive caregivers are particularly important at this stage. Something as simple as playing a game of peekaboo can help build the early foundations of working memory and self-control as a baby anticipates the surprise.

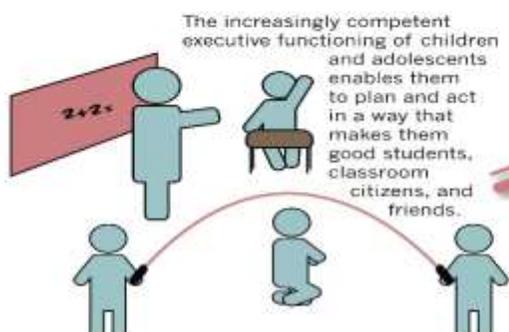


Adults set up the framework for children to learn and practice these skills over time by establishing routines, breaking big tasks into smaller chunks, and encouraging games that promote imagination, role-playing, following rules, and controlling impulses. These techniques are known as "scaffolding." Just as a scaffold supports workers while a building is being constructed, adults can use these activities to support the emergence of children's executive function skills until they can perform them on their own.



These skills typically develop most rapidly between ages 3-5, followed by another spike in development during the adolescent and early adult years. It takes a long time and a lot of practice to develop them, but, as children's executive function skills grow, adults can gradually allow children to manage more and more aspects of their environment.

BUILDING CHILDREN'S EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS BENEFITS EVERYONE.



The increasingly competent executive functioning of children and adolescents enables them to plan and act in a way that makes them good students, classroom citizens, and friends.



In turn, this helps them grow into adults capable of juggling a multitude of commitments, such as parenting, employment, continuing education, and civic involvement. Even health is affected, as strong executive function helps people stick to healthy habits and reduce stress. The more a society invests in building the executive functioning of its children, the greater dividends it will see in the future.

Executive Function Activities for 3- to 5-year-olds

Children’s executive function and self-regulation skills grow at a fast pace during this period, so it is important to adapt activities to match the skills of each child. Younger children need a lot of support in learning rules and structures, while older children can be more independent. Ultimately, the goal is to shift children away from relying on adult regulation, so when the child seems ready, try to reduce the support you provide.



Imaginary play

During intentional imaginary play, children develop rules to guide their actions in playing roles. They also hold complex ideas in mind and shape their actions to follow these rules, inhibiting impulses or actions that don’t fit the “role.” Players often take ideas from their own lives, such as going to the doctor’s office. They might act “sick,” be examined by the doctor, and receive a shot. The “doctor” talks and acts like a doctor (calm and reassuring), the “sick child” talks and acts like a sick child (sad and scared), and the child in the role of “parent” talks and acts like a concerned parent (worried and caring). While younger children tend to play alone or in parallel, children in this age range are learning to play cooperatively and often regulate each other’s behavior—an important step in developing self-regulation.

Ways to support high-level imaginary play:

- **Read books, go on field trips, and use videos** to make sure that children know enough about the scenario and roles to support pretend play.
- **Provide a varied set of props and toys** to encourage this type of play. Younger preschoolers may need more realistic props to get the play started (e.g., toy medical kits), while

older children can re-purpose other things to turn them into play props (e.g., paper towel tube that is used as a cast for a “broken arm”). Reusing familiar objects in a new way also practices cognitive flexibility.

■ **Allow children to make their own play props.** Children must determine what is needed, hold this information in mind, and then follow through without getting distracted. They also exercise selective attention, working memory, and planning. If the original plans don’t work out, children need to adjust their ideas and try again, challenging their cognitive flexibility.

■ **Play plans can be a good way to organize play,** as shown by one early education program designed to build self-regulation, Tools of the Mind. Children decide who they are going to be and what they are going to do before they start playing, and then draw their plan on paper. Planning means that children think first and then act, thus practicing inhibitory control. Planning play in a group also encourages children to plan together, hold these plans in mind, and apply them during the activity. It encourages social problem solving, as well as oral language.

Storytelling

Children love to tell stories. Their early stories tend to be a series of events, each one related to the one before, but lacking any larger structure. With practice, children develop more complex and organized plots. As the complexity of the storytelling grows, children practice holding and manipulating information in working memory.

Ways to support children’s storytelling:

- **Encourage children to tell you stories,** and write them down to read with the child. Children can also make pictures and create their own books. Revisiting the story, either by reviewing pictures or words, supports more intentional organization and greater elaboration.

continued

■ **Tell group stories.** One child starts the story, and each person in the group adds something to it. Children need to pay attention to each other, reflect on possible plot twists, and tailor their additions to fit the plot, thereby challenging their attention, working memory, and self-control.

■ **Have children act out stories** they have written. The story provides a structure that guides

children's actions and requires them to attend to the story and follow it, while inhibiting their impulse to create a new plot.

■ **Bilingual families can tell stories in their home language.** Research indicates that bilingualism can benefit a variety of executive function skills in children of all ages, so fostering fluency in a second language is valuable.

Movement challenges: songs and games

The demands of songs and movement games support executive function because children have to move to a specific rhythm and synchronize words to actions and the music. All of these tasks contribute to inhibitory control and working memory. It is important that these songs and games become increasingly complex to interest and challenge children as they develop more self-regulation skills.

■ **Provide many opportunities** for children to test themselves physically through access to materials such as climbing structures, balance beams, seesaws, etc. Setting challenges for children—such as obstacle courses and games that encourage complex motions (skipping, balancing, etc.)—can also be fun. When children are trying new and difficult activities, they need to focus attention, monitor and adjust their actions, and persist to achieve a goal.

■ **Encourage attention control through quieter activities** that require children to reduce stimu-

lation and focus attention—such as using a balance beam or yoga poses that include slow breathing.

■ **Play some music** and have children dance really fast, then really slowly. *Freeze dance* is also fun, and it can be made more difficult by asking children to freeze in particular positions. (Tools of the Mind uses stick-figure pictures to direct children.) When the music stops, children must inhibit action and shift their attention to the picture to imitate the shape depicted.

■ **Songs that repeat and add on** to earlier sections (either through words or motions) are a great challenge to working memory, such as the motions to *She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain*, the words to *Bought Me a Cat*, and backward-counting songs, such as *Five Green and Speckled Frogs* and songs repeating a long list (the *Alphabet Song*).

■ **Traditional song games**, like *Circle 'Round the Zero* are also fun. Complex actions, including finding partners, must be accomplished without becoming distracted.

Quiet games and other activities

■ **Matching and sorting activities** are still fun, but now children can be asked to sort by different rules, promoting cognitive flexibility. Children can first sort or match by one rule (such as by color), and then immediately switch to a new rule (such as by shape). For a more challenging version, play a matching game, but change the rule for each pair. *Quirkle* and *S'Match* are commercially available games that challenge cognitive flexibility in this way. Or play a bingo or lotto game, in which children have to mark a card with the opposite of what is called out

by the leader (e.g., for "day," putting a chip on a nighttime picture). Children have to inhibit the tendency to mark the picture that matches, while also remembering the game's rule.

■ **Increasingly complicated puzzles** can engage children this age, exercising their visual working memory and planning skills.

■ **Cooking is also a lot of fun** for young children. They practice inhibition when waiting for instructions, working memory while holding complicated directions in mind, and focused attention when measuring and counting.

Resources

Pretend play suggestions

■ www.mindinthemaking.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PFL-4-year-old-independent-play.pdf

Montessori activities –

Walking on the line

■ www.infomontessori.com/practical-life/control-of-movement-walking-on-the-line.htm

Songs

■ kids.niehs.nih.gov/games/songs/childrens/index.htm