

Looking for a simple way to boost Executive Function skills with your children?

At Reflection Sciences, our goal is to reduce gaps in achievement and opportunity by advancing children's learning capacity through the science of Executive Function.

Executive Function Sets the Foundation for Learning & Adaptation

Executive Function is a set of skills that help the brain organize and act on information. These skills enable us to pay attention, plan, remember things, prioritize, and stay on task. Executive Function has been shown to be one of the best predictors of school and learning readiness, long-term academic success and overall wellbeing.

Although children are not born with Executive Function skills, they possess the ability to develop them. These skills, too, can improve over time! One of the best ways to improve Executive Function in children is to play fun games that are specifically designed to target and boost multiple dimensions of Executive Function. The activities in this guide are played in 15 minutes or less and can be adapted easily into routines at home.

“The EF Way to PLAY” Home-Based Activities

Both practical and PLAY-ful, Reflection Sciences home-based activities guide will be an instant favorite for both you and your children alike!

Based on trusted childhood games and developed by Executive Function researchers, educators, and parents, these fun intervention activities promote social emotional learning, mindfulness, and self-regulation.

Our step-by-step games are appropriate for children ages 2 and above. They target the earliest stages of Executive Function development, ensuring an effortless and enjoyable integration of Executive Function into any family playtime.

Check out the free sample activity below, *Bear and Dragon*, one of our most popular games. It includes five different challenge levels along with reflective questions to help you model Executive Function and ensure that all children benefit.

To purchase our Executive Function Activities at Home, visit reflectionsociences.com or email info@reflectionsociences.com

**Desired Outcome:**

This activity helps children practice how to remember, follow, and switch between different sets of rules.

Activity Description:

Two puppets are presented. Children are asked to follow the Bear puppet but not the Dragon puppet and then switch rules.

Choosing the Starting Game Level:

Your child's age will dictate which game level you will begin at when first introducing the activity to children. These age ranges are a suggested starting point. If an activity seems too difficult or easy for your child, start off at an earlier or later level.

Age Range of Child	Starting Game Level
2-3 years	Game Level 1 – Follow Bear
3-4 years	Game Level 2 – Don't Follow Dragon
4-5 years	Game Level 3 – Alternate Bear and Dragon (modeling)
5+ years	Game Level 4 – Alternate Bear and Dragon (no modeling)



The EF Way to Play!

Bear and Dragon

Parent Planning:

Group Size	Individual or Small Group
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Puppets or Stuffed Animals- Character cut-outs on sticks
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Medium-sized room- Clear space on floor
Time to Complete	10 – 15 Minutes



The EF Way to Play! Bear and Dragon



Executive Function Skills:

- Working memory
- Inhibitory control
- Cognitive flexibility



Observe & Respond:

If a Child...

Has trouble stopping an action...

Has trouble switching from one rule to the next...

Then...

Have them sit on their hands until they hear/see the signal.

Offer ways to make transitions easier, such as visual cues.

Game Level 1 | Sit and Follow Bear:

Have children sit in a group, facing you, with some room to move. Introduce Bear puppet:

“Children, this is my friend Bear! I told Bear you were REALLY good listeners and he came to play a game with us! He’s going to tell us silly things to do and we are going to move our bodies the way Bear tells us to! Sometimes it can be hard to keep our bodies from wiggling and moving around, so for this game we are going to hide our hands under our legs to help us remember to stay still and listen to Bear.”



The EF Way to Play!

Bear and Dragon



Next, have Bear lead the children through eight actions (or more if you choose) and ask them to imitate each action. As you introduce them to each action, model it for them.

"Bear says touch your ears!" Great job! You are remembering to listen to Bear!"
(adult models touching ears)

Repeat: *"cover your eyes; clap your hands; touch your feet; touch your tummy; wave your hand; pat your head, cross your arms; stick out your tongue!"*

Game Level 2 | Sit and NOT Follow Dragon:

Have children sit in a group, facing you, with some room to move. Introduce the dragon puppet:

*"Children, this is Dragon! Dragon and Bear are friends. I told dragon you were REALLY good listeners and he came to play a game with us! But we're going to surprise Dragon. He's going to tell us silly things to do and we are **NOT** going to do them! If Dragon tells us to pat our heads, are we going to do it? NO WAY! Sometimes it can be hard to keep our bodies from wiggling and moving around, so for this game we are going to hide our hands under our legs to help us remember to stay still while we play."*



The EF Way to Play! Bear and Dragon



Next, have Dragon lead the children through eight actions (or more if you choose) and remind the children NOT to imitate each action. As you introduce them to each action, model NOT listening to Dragon.

“Dragon says touch your ears!” Hee hee hee. Great job! You are remembering that we are surprising Dragon and NOT listening to what he tells us to do! Hee hee hee!” (Adult does not touch ears)

Repeat: “cover your eyes; clap your hands; touch your feet; touch your tummy; wave your hand; pat your head, cross your arms; stick out your tongue!”

Game Level 3 | Alternating Bear and Dragon (with modeling)

Repeat the instructions for Level 1, but this time have the children stand in a group, facing you, with some room to move. Bring out both puppets, one on each hand. Tell them:

*“Okay children, today Bear and Dragon are here together to play a game with us! Here is Bear- we are very good listeners for Bear. And here is Dragon! We like to surprise Dragon, so we don’t listen to him. We do **not** do what he tells us to do. No way!”*





The EF Way to Play!

Bear and Dragon

Ensure they understand what to do when the **Bear** or **Dragon** talks. Ask them:

“Which one is the **Bear**?” (Group points to bear)

“Which one is the **Dragon**?” (Group points to dragon)

“When the **Bear** talks, do we do what he says?” (Yes!)

“When the **Dragon** talks, do we do what he says?” (No way!)

If the group answers incorrectly, restate the rules and questions. Conduct three or more rounds with the **Bear** and **Dragon**, alternating commands from each. Adult plays along and models correct responses. If children have difficulty, stay on this level.



Game Level 4 | Alternating Bear and Dragon (no modeling)

Repeat Level 3 but adult does not model (only says commands from each puppet). This is more challenging for children to inhibit their impulses on the Dragon turn.

Game Level 5 | Follow Dragon NOT Bear

Repeat Level 4, but instead of instructing children to do what the **Bear** says and not what the **Dragon** says, instruct them listen to what the **Dragon** says but not the **Bear**.



The EF Way to Play! Bear and Dragon



Tell them:

*“Now we’re going to be silly and surprise Bear! When the **Bear** talks, we are not going to do what he tells us to do. And when the **Dragon** talks, we will do what he tells us to do!”*

Ensure they understand what to do when each puppet talks. Ask them:

*“When the **Dragon** talks, do we do what he says?” (Yes!)*

*“When the **Bear** talks, do we do what he says?” (No way!)*

If the group answers incorrectly, restate the rule and question. Once they understand, conduct three or more rounds. Continue at this level until they have demonstrated mastery.

Reminder | Game at a Glance:

Game Level 1: Follow Bear

Game Level 2: Don't Follow Dragon

Game Level 3: Alternate Bear and Dragon (modeling)

Game Level 4: Alternate Bear and Dragon (no modeling)

Game Level 5: Follow Dragon Not bear





The EF Way to Play!

Bear and Dragon

Talk & Reflect:

At the end of each activity, talk with children about what they noticed. Use language that acknowledges the difficulty of the game.

Ask children:

“What was the hardest part about playing this game?”

“What did you do that helped make it easier?”

Model reflection by restating some of the children’s responses:

“It can be hard not to do what the dragon says!”

“It was easier to follow the rules when someone showed us what to do!”






Give Children time to think. Encourage them to come up with movements of their own when they play later.



The EF Way to Play! Bear and Dragon



Additional Ideas & Resources:

-  Try the activity at different times of the day (morning, midday, afternoon) and in different settings. If outdoors, make one of the actions more active. For example, run to a certain structure outside, do jumping jacks, balance on one foot.
-  For older children and siblings, have them lead the game.
-  Prior to playing the game, children make a Bear and Dragon sock or stick puppet during craft time (see images in Appendix).
-  Use different sock characters each time. Make the socks familiar people or animals, with the sock telling facts about who/what they are before the game begins. For example, “I am a frog. I eat flies, make the sound ‘ribbit,’ and used to be a tad pole. Sometimes I can be poisonous, but only if I’m very colorful.”
-  **Vocabulary:** Use keywords from a category as the actions (animals, vehicles, colors): “Flap your arms like an Eagle.” “Be a choo-choo train.” “Point to something yellow.”



Playing Tip



Additional Resource



Curricular Integration

Grumpy Dragon



Designed by Freepik.com

Happy Bear



Designed by Freepik.com