



## Executive Functioning Across Generations (HF1815)

*Executive Functioning Across Generations builds school readiness in 3-5 year olds, buffering kids against toxic stress while building brainpower.*

### OVERVIEW

The Family Partnership designed Executive Functioning Across Generations to build executive function and self-regulation skills in preschool children ages 3-5. Executive function (EF) skills help young children: learn how to learn, do well in school, make friends and keep friends, build healthy relationships, make healthy choices as they get older, get a job, keep a job, and eventually parent well. EF skills include working memory (keeping a goal or idea in mind in spite of distractions), impulse control, and persistence. These skills develop most readily in children ages 3-5, and these skills buffer children against the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and toxic stress.

The design of Executive Functioning Across Generations is centered on equity, and the curriculum has been piloted and evaluated from the start with African American, American Indian, and Latino/a children and families with low incomes in five states. Harvard Center on the Developing Child helped ensure a rigorous evaluation design to measure impact, and over the past 5 years, the program has shown a strong impact on the building blocks for EF skills.

Executive Functioning Across Generations focuses on three building blocks of EF skills including:

1. Learning and using internal state language: words for emotional and mental states
2. Creating personal narratives about emotionally significant events; storytelling helps children put positive and negative experiences into a context so that they can think about what to do next time
3. Building mindfulness skills as a tool to “re-set” and focus during stressful situations.

Evaluation conducted by the Center for Early Education and Development at the University of Minnesota has consistently shown that our intervention increases EF skills. In a pre/post evaluation in a Texas Head Start in 2022, children demonstrated statistically significant increases in three measures of EF skills:

1. Use of internal state language, or words describing thoughts, feelings and emotions (with some children who were nonvocal also becoming more expressive over the course of the intervention!)
2. Personal narratives: children’s ability to make sense and tell stories about emotionally significant experiences, including thinking about what they might do next time (ask an adult for help, for example).
3. Children demonstrated significant improvements in EF-related classroom behaviors including the ability to focus, impulse control, and persistence with tasks!