

Executive Function Milestone Tracker

Age-based EF milestones for inhibition, working memory, cognitive flexibility, and planning

INHIBITION

Stopping a dominant response. Resisting impulses. Thinking before acting.

WORKING MEMORY

Holding and manipulating information mentally. Following multi-step directions.

COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

Shifting between tasks or perspectives. Adapting when rules change.

Developmental Milestones

AGE	INHIBITION	WORKING MEMORY	COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY	PLANNING
2-3	Waits briefly when told. Begins to resist touching forbidden objects.	Follows 1-2 step directions. Remembers where a toy was hidden.	Limited. Gets upset when routines change.	Minimal. Lives in the present moment.
3-4	Can play simple Simon Says. Waits a short turn. Starts to whisper.	Follows 2-3 step instructions. Holds 2-3 items in mind.	Begins to switch between two simple rules in games.	Can describe what they'll do next (1 step ahead).
4-5	Resists peeking during a surprise. Stops an action on command.	Follows 3-step directions. Retells a short story.	Switches rules in card-sorting games. Handles minor plan changes.	Plans simple sequences (get dressed, then brush teeth).
5-7	Raises hand before speaking (with reminders). Waits in line.	Holds multi-step math problems. Follows classroom routines.	Adjusts strategies in board games. Considers another person's viewpoint.	Plans a simple project with multiple steps. Organizes a backpack.
7-9	Controls emotional outbursts most of the time. Resists distractions during homework.	Takes notes. Remembers assignments across subjects.	Handles unexpected changes without meltdown. Sees multiple solutions.	Breaks projects into steps. Estimates time needed (roughly).

AGE	INHIBITION	WORKING MEMORY	COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY	PLANNING
9-12	Thinks before speaking in social situations. Controls impulses independently.	Juggles multiple homework assignments. Follows complex instructions.	Shifts between subjects smoothly. Revises work based on feedback.	Creates study schedules. Plans multi-day projects. Sets goals.
12+	Manages social media impulses. Controls behavior in high-emotion situations.	Abstract reasoning. Holds hypotheticals. Mental multitasking.	Sees gray areas. Adapts to new social contexts. Perspective-taking.	Long-term goal setting. College/career planning. Self-monitoring.

Parent Assessment: How Is My Child Doing?

Score: ___ / 20

- Can wait their turn without constant reminders (0-2)
- Follows multi-step directions appropriate for their age (0-2)
- Handles changes to plans or routines without major upset (0-2)
- Starts tasks without excessive prompting (0-2)
- Remembers and completes daily routines independently (0-2)
- Stops an activity when asked, within a reasonable time (0-2)
- Can describe what they plan to do before doing it (0-2)
- Shifts between activities without getting stuck (0-2)
- Keeps track of their belongings (0-2)
- Manages frustration and tries a different approach when stuck (0-2)

EF develops from back-to-front in the brain. The prefrontal cortex isn't fully mature until the mid-20s. Expect more support needed at younger ages -- scaffolding is not crutching.