🌟 Helping Your Child with Inhibitory Control & Regulation

Executive function is like the brain's "air traffic control system"—it helps children manage their thoughts, emotions, and actions so they can succeed in daily life.

🔒 **Inhibitory control** is one part of this system. It's the ability to *pause before acting*, *resist distractions*, and *think before reacting*. For example, when a child wants to grab a toy from someone but stops and asks politely instead—that's inhibitory control at work.

🌡️ **Regulation**, or more specifically **self-regulation**, is the ability to *manage emotions, behaviour, and attention*. It helps children stay calm when they're upset, wait their turn, or shift gears when plans change. It's what allows them to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

Together, these skills are the foundation for learning, social success, and emotional well-being. And just like muscles, they grow stronger with practice, support, and patience.

Activities to Try at Home

🎵 Movement & Music Games

- **Peekaboo & Pat-a-Cake**: These predictable games help babies practice waiting and anticipating, which builds basic self-control.
- **Freeze Dance**: Play music and have children dance—when the music stops, they freeze. Great for practicing self-control, anticipation and attention.
- **Simon Says**: Children must listen carefully and only act when the command starts with "Simon says." Builds impulse control and focus.

🧩 Sorting & Matching Games

- Use objects like buttons or toy animals and ask your child to sort them by colour, then switch the rule ordering by size or shape. This strengthens **cognitive flexibility** and **inhibitory control** as they resist old sorting rules.

🏗️ Building Challenges

- Using blocks or LEGO and ask them to build something specific (like a bridge or tower). Planning and problem-solving are key executive function skills here.

🚦 Red Light, Green Light

- One child calls out “green light” to move and “red light” to stop. Players must control their impulses and respond quickly to changing cues.

🎭 Role-Play & Pretend Play

- Pretend scenarios like playing shop, cooking, or being a teacher help children practice memory, attention, and emotional regulation while following social rules.

🖍️ Play Plans

- Play Plans: Children draw or describe what they’ll do before starting play, encouraging planning and impulse control.

🎲 🧩 Turn-Taking Games

- Board Games and card games require children to follow rules, wait their turn, and inhibit impulsive moves, start with shorter games and build up as the child’s skill grows.

🎵 Emotion Check-in’s and Feelings Songs

- Children are invited to share how they feel using words, visuals, or gestures.
- Singing songs about emotions helps children name and understand their feelings which supports emotional literacy and expression.

🧘 Calming Techniques

- Practice deep breathing, yoga, mindfulness, counting to ten, or using a “calm corner” when emotions run high. These routines help build **self-regulation** over time.

💡 *Many of these activities include movement because calming the body—like slowing breathing or relaxing muscles—also calms the nervous system. When children feel physically settled, it's easier for them to manage big emotions, think clearly, and make better choices in tough moments.*

👫 Parent Tips to Support Inhibitory Control & Regulation

❤️‍🩹 Understanding children and those with neurodevelopmental differences need support to regulate this is called Co-regulation, this is when a parent helps their child manage big emotions by staying calm, connected, and supportive—showing them how to feel safe and regulate through shared moments of comfort and guidance

1. Create calm, predictable routines Children feel more secure and in control when they know what to expect. Consistent routines for meals, play, and bedtime help reduce emotional overwhelm and support self-regulation.

2. Practice "stop and think" moments Use gentle reminders like "Let's take a breath before we decide" or "What could we do instead?" to encourage your child to pause and reflect before reacting.

3. Model emotional regulation Show your child how you manage frustration or disappointment. Saying things like "I feel upset, so I'm going to take a deep breath" teaches by example.

4. Offer choices and control Let your child make small decisions (e.g., choosing between two snacks or outfits). This builds confidence and helps them practice thoughtful decision-making.

5. Praise effort and progress Celebrate when your child tries to wait, calms down, or makes a good choice—even if it's not perfect. Encouragement builds motivation and resilience.

6. Be patient and consistent These skills take time to develop. Stay calm, repeat strategies, and offer loving support—even when progress feels slow.

🤝 These tips work best when paired with empathy and connection. Every child develops at their own pace, and your support makes all the difference.

These activities are just a few examples of activities children often enjoy and they can play a valuable role in supporting the development of your child's executive function and specifically with inhibitory control and regulation.

Every child is different, and their needs will vary depending on their age and individual profile. You'll find more age-related activity ideas and detailed information in the links below to help you choose what's right for your child.

Want More? You can read more in-depth information and find more activity ideas here:

Enhancing-and-Practicing-Executive-Function-Skills-with-Children-from-Infancy-to-Adolescence-1.pdf