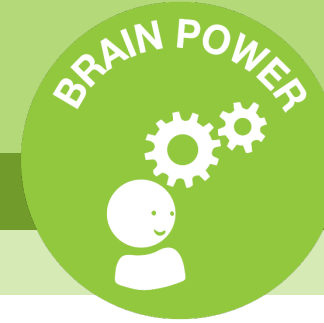


BRAIN GAMES (general info)



ALL GRADES


WHAT ARE THEY? Whole-group or whole-class games.

WHAT ARE THEY ABOUT? Practicing and building executive function (EF) skills.

WHY DO THESE?



MATERIALS

 Brain Games pack

THE BIG IDEA

Playing Brain Games helps us to build our “brain powers,” or EF skills.

THREE “BRAIN POWERS”:



FOCUS - The ability to sustain attention and ignore distractions when needed.



REMEMBER - The ability to keep track of, update, and use information over short periods of time.



STOP & THINK - The ability to control impulses and to “think before you act”.

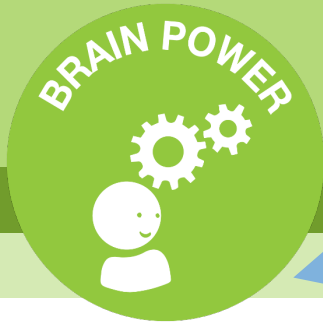
Executive function (EF) skills are the mental processes required to focus, plan, and control behavioral responses in order to reach a goal.

They’re important because...

They help students to listen carefully, follow directions, use self-control, and think flexibly. These basic skills are foundational for academic achievement, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and critical thinking.

WHERE CAN I FIND THE BRAIN GAMES?

Brain Games instructions can be found in the Brain Games pack and/or Strategy Guide, pages 107-142. **The following three cards introduce each “brain power” and an accompanying hand signal** that you can use as a nonverbal cue/reminder to your students to use their Focus, Remember, and Stop & Think powers throughout the school day, without interrupting instruction.



AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

(more specific questions on each game card)

- What was hard or easy about this game?
- What skills did you use to play this game?
- Did you use any strategies to play this game?
- When are other times during the day that we need to use these skills and strategies? At home? At school? On the playground?

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- ★ Before playing, take time to introduce the three powers and discuss why they're important. Practice the hand signals together, and brainstorm when they can be used at school/home.
- ★ Model with a small group first. Try out the game with a group of 2-3 students while the rest watch.
- ★ During and after the game, talk about feelings that arise. Help students recognize feelings are a normal part of school and life.
- ★ Celebrate Brain Powers all day. Talk about them and how they're used throughout the day, and notice and celebrate when students use them!

OVER THE YEAR...

- Ask deeper and more meaningful follow up questions in your debrief. Ask students to share why it might be hard or easy to focus, remember, or stop and think in the context of real life situations.
- Have students volunteer to lead the games.
- Ask students to create their own adaptations and share them with the class.
- Break students into teams to play games and develop cooperation skills where possible.
- Incorporate more academic content into game play.
- Adapt the hand signals to fit the interests and age group of your students (e.g., turn fist next to temple as if switching on a part of the brain = Focus Power for older students).

FOCUS POWER GAMES:

- I Spy
- Catch That Sound
- My Hat Has Three Corners
- Who Stole the Honey Pot?
- Zip, Zap, Zop
- Hocus, Pocus, Everybody Focus

REMEMBER POWER GAMES:

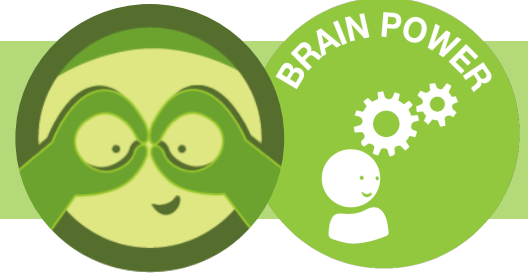
- Name Game
- What is Missing?
- Wiggle Cool Down
- Hot Potato
- Shipwreck

STOP & THINK GAMES:

- Simon Says
- Silly Stories
- Singing with Style
- Freeze Feelings
- Wait For It



FOCUS POWER



WHAT IS FOCUS?

The ability to sustain attention and ignore distractions when needed.

WHY FOCUS IS IMPORTANT:

It helps students to listen and follow instructions, stay engaged in classroom activities, and persist even when interrupted or when facing challenges. Students also use focus power to pay attention to others and have engaging conversations with peers.

THINGS THAT HELP US FOCUS:

- **Covering my ears** to keep out distracting noises.
- **Putting on my Focus Binoculars** and pointing them in the direction of what I'm supposed to be learning or doing.
- **Noticing when I am distracted** and reminding myself to focus.
- **Going to a quiet spot** to finish my work.
- **Using my active listening skills** to sit still and keep my eyes on the speaker so I can listen carefully to what is being said.

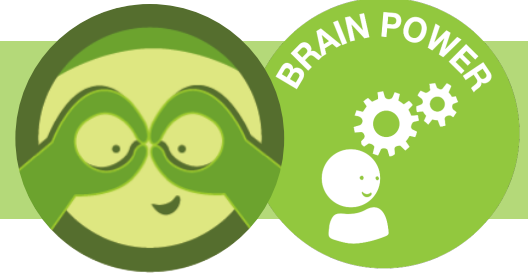
INTRODUCE THE HAND SIGNAL

Use **Focus Binoculars** (make circles around your eyes with your hands) when you want students to pay careful attention to something new or important.

Binoculars point your eyes at something you want to see more clearly, and they can block out distractions.



FOCUS POWER



WHEN DO WE USE FOCUS?

- When I want to listen carefully to a story or learn the words of a new song.
- When I am tying my shoes and I must focus carefully in order to do each step in the right way.
- When I am finishing an activity or project, and I need to ignore other sounds or distractions.
- When I am feeling tired or frustrated, and I have to work extra hard to pay attention to what I am doing in order to finish my task.

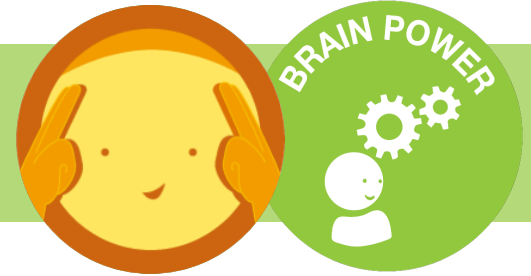
FOCUS POWER GAMES:

- I Spy
- Catch That Sound
- My Hat Has Three Corners
- Who Stole the Honey Pot?
- Zip, Zap, Zop





REMEMBER POWER



WHAT IS WORKING MEMORY?

The ability to keep track of, update, and use information over short periods of time.

WHY REMEMBER IS IMPORTANT:

It helps students to remember directions, follow steps in the correct order, and keep track of multiple things at the same time. It helps students to plan and work towards goals over time. Remember power also helps students (and adults) to multi-task and keep track of multiple goals, tasks, or items at once.

THINGS THAT HELP US REMEMBER:

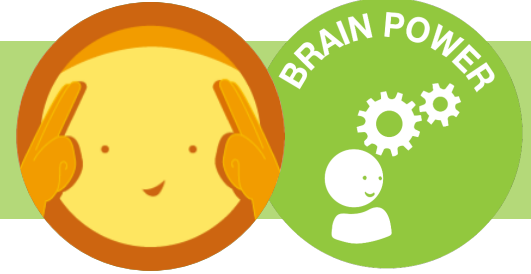
- **Repeating the information aloud** after I hear it.
- **Picturing something in my mind** (e.g., imagine the things I need to bring to school, imagine what I need to do when I first get to my classroom in the morning, imagine the steps to accomplish a goal).
- **Making up a song** about what I need to remember and singing it many times (aloud or silently in my mind).
- **Drawing a picture or making a list** of things I need to do.

INTRODUCE THE HAND SIGNAL

Rub your temples (sides of forehead) to let students know when you want them to remember something important.



REMEMBER POWER



WHEN DO WE USE REMEMBER POWER?

- When I am getting ready for school and I need to remember a list of things to bring with me.
- When I take a break from reading, or get interrupted from something, and I want to remember my place (in a song, or recipe.)
- When I need to remember a set of instructions from the teacher, like during clean up or getting ready for the next activity.

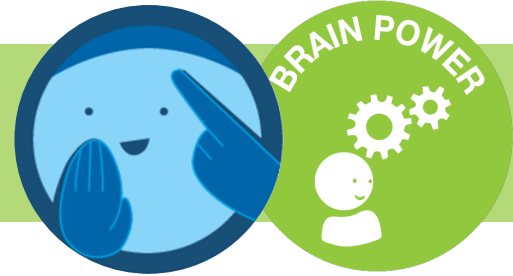
REMEMBER POWER GAMES:

- Name Game
- What is Missing?
- Wiggle Cool Down
- Hot Potato
- Shipwreck





STOP & THINK POWER



WHAT IS STOP & THINK?

The ability to control impulses and to “think before you act.”

WHY STOP & THINK IS IMPORTANT:

It helps students to wait patiently, to resist temptations, and to think carefully before making important decisions. Students also use stop and think to self-monitor and to reflect.

THINGS THAT HELP US STOP & THINK:

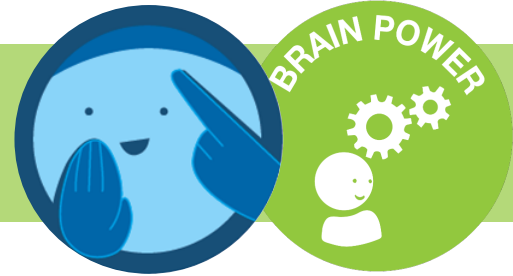
- **Taking deep slow breaths** can help you focus even when you feel angry, frustrated, overwhelmed, or confused.
- **Counting quietly or singing to myself** when I need to wait.
- **Thinking aloud to notice and describe how I am thinking or feeling** – this helps me to consider what I should do next.
- **Telling myself to “stop and think”** – first I pause and give myself time to think, then I decide what to do.

INTRODUCE THE HAND SIGNAL

Hold one hand with palm facing out, and with the other hand point to your head, when you want students to think before they act.



STOP & THINK POWER



WHEN DO WE USE STOP & THINK POWER?

- When I have an idea to share, instead of shouting I can raise my hand and wait until the tutor calls on me.
- When I need to wait my turn, I can tell myself to be patient: in line at the doctor's clinic, at the grocery store, or when playing a game.
- When I want to do something difficult, I can tell myself to move slowly and carefully.
- When my ball rolls into the street, I can tell myself to "stop" before running after it.
- When my friend is upset, I can stop and think about whether I need to apologize or ask how I can help.

STOP & THINK GAMES:

- Simon Says
- Silly Stories
- Singing with Style
- Freeze Feelings
- Wait For It

