

# Inhibitory control

## More about ... Executive Functions

### What is inhibitory control and what do inhibitory control problems look like?

Inhibitory control is the executive function that helps you keep from doing things in the same old way all the time and/or jumping at the first interesting thing you see or think of. This means you can keep from saying how odd someone is or buying that pair of shoes when you don't really need them.

Inhibitory control involves considering the needs of the situation and the obligations that go with it. You may have work that needs to be



completed but your friends are having a good fun doing something else. Your inhibitory control helps you stick with your task and get it done.

When a person has difficulty with inhibitory control, things you might notice include:

- difficulty sticking with a task or activity or train of thought
- using the same approach to tasks and activities again and again even though it may not be the most effective thing to do
- speeding through a task or activity without concern for accuracy
- blurting out words that may not be appropriate to the setting or person

### How to improve inhibitory control

There have been some successes in improving inhibitory control using specially-designed computer programs. But our focus is how to improve inhibitory control within spark\* and in day-to-day settings. This means teaching the

child strategies to help him use his strengths to support and improve his inhibitory control.

Perhaps the **most important thing to do is NOT tell the child to stop** doing what he's doing. We need the child to learn how to put on his

own brakes and not rely on others. In fact, having someone constantly telling him to stop doing or saying things can have a lasting negative effect on the child. We always want to preserve the child's belief in himself and his ability to

## How to improve inhibitory control (cont'd)

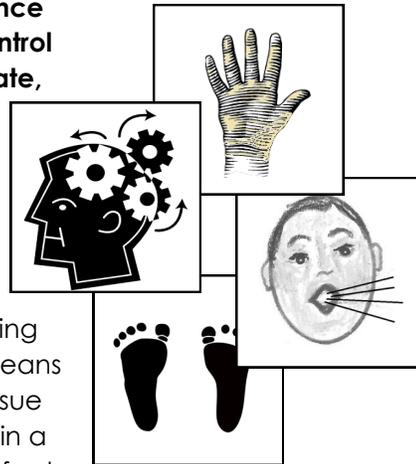
think, act and self-regulate.

Four major steps for improving inhibitory control include:

**1. Point out an instance of poor inhibitory control to the child in a private, calm situation** — when you discuss 'slippage' in inhibitory control, make sure you do it in ways that don't leave the child thinking less of himself. This means you talk about the issue alone with the child in a calm and matter-of-fact way.

**2. Associate the loss of inhibitory control with a body part and NOT with the child**—this means that you comment to the child how you noticed that sometimes his brain, hands, feet, or voice forget. For example, say that you noticed sometimes things slip out of his brain or his voice forgets to be

quiet. The main point is that you're placing the child in a position of commander or controller of his brain, hands, feet, voice, etc. and not



blaming him for anything. Our goal is to remind him of his ability to control his body and brain and increase his awareness of need to do so.

**3. Give meaning and purpose to the problem**—explain why the behavior is a problem. For example, if his hands grab things from other people, the

other person won't want to play with him or be near him. If yells slip out of his mouth, other people might be frightened of him. If swears slip out of his brain, other people aren't going to want to be his friend and/or little children might say the swears and their parents will be angry they learned these words. If his feet run at the swimming pool, he might slip and hurt himself.

**4. Ask the child for ideas about how to help himself** - you identified a problem, now help the child figure out how to help himself. If the child is preverbal, you can show him some illustrated options to choose from. Choices could be simply for him to remind his brain, hands, etc. Other options could be to make a reminder sign with him to put on the wall or to write a social story with him.



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