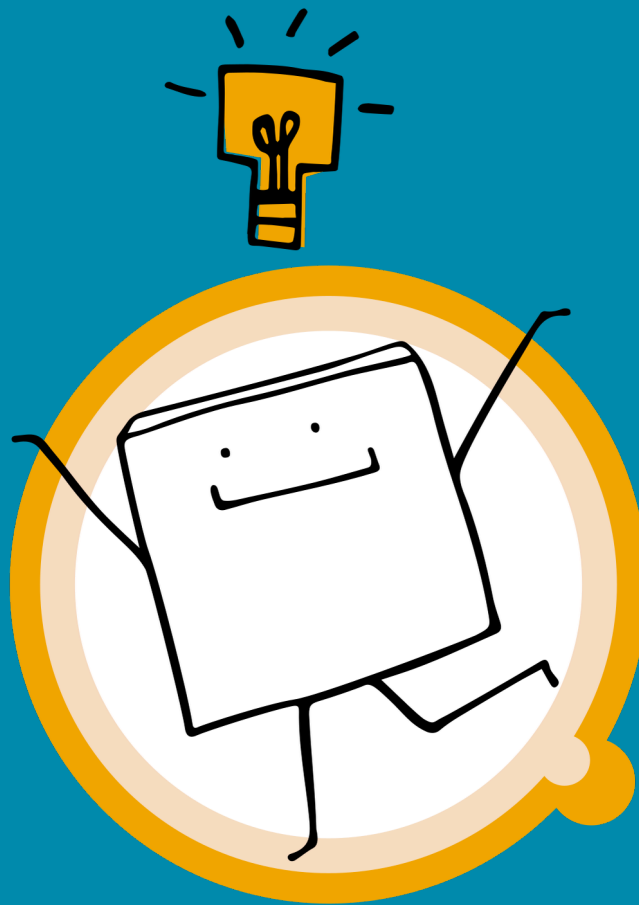


EPIC Understanding Strengths & Difficulties

A Free Guide for Parents/Carers of Early Years Children

This guide can be helpful for all children, but is particularly relevant for children who may have neurodevelopmental difficulties.



**Edinburgh Psychoeducation Intervention
for Children and Young People[®] (EPIC)**



EPIC Guide

There are two types of EPIC Guides:

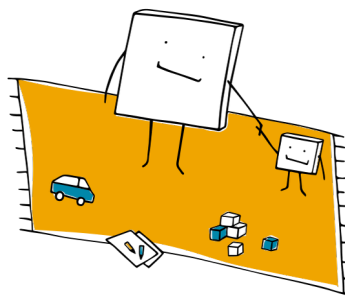
- 1) The EPIC Understanding guide (this one).
- 2) The EPIC Strategy guide.

Please use this guide first

We hope this free guide is useful for identifying your child's strengths & difficulties.

Our parent subscription contains more information, as well as live and pre-recorded sessions to support your everyday family life. See <https://epicthinklearn.com/parents-join-epic/> for more info.

EPIC Website:
www.epicthinklearn.com



There are also additional articles and resources on our:

- **EPIC Blog:** epicthinklearn.com/blog
- **Free Resources section:** <https://epicthinklearn.com/resources-optin/>

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Who is EPIC for?

- The principles of EPIC apply to all children but are particularly relevant to children who have been diagnosed or who are suspected to have neurodevelopmental difficulties and conditions such as, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Autism, Dyspraxia/DCD, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and those born prematurely. They may also help a child who needs extra support but did not receive a diagnosis.
- EPIC strategies can benefit not only neurodivergent children, but also the rest of the family, by maintaining a positive environment and supporting everyone's understanding.
- At the heart of the EPIC approach is understanding your child's individual strengths and difficulties regardless of age, gender, or diagnosis.
- Co-occurrence of neurodevelopmental conditions is common e.g. when a child receives two or more diagnoses such as both ADHD and autism. It is also very common for a child to receive one diagnosis and have traits of another, that might not be diagnosed but still impacts how they learn and interact.
- This booklet is mainly applicable for **3-5 year olds**. We have a different version for primary school children, which can also be adapted for adolescents.
- EPIC strategies can not only help with life at home and the educational setting, but can have transfer effects onto other areas e.g. playing with friends, following routines and exploring new learning experiences through play.

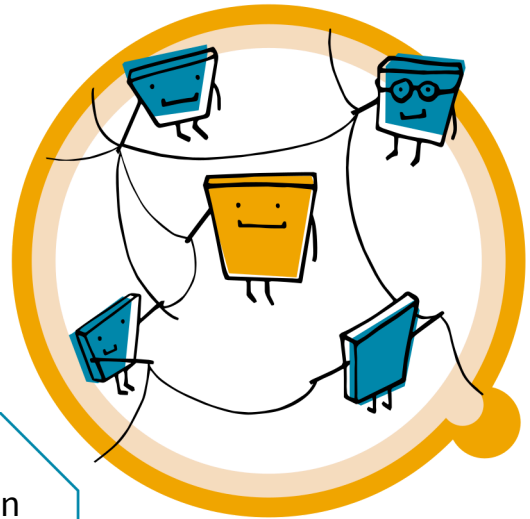
Facts about Neurodivergent Children

Neurodivergent children can have a range of difficulties.

Balance and coordination

Social and sensory difficulties

Attention and impulsivity



Being neurodivergent is not something a child will “outgrow”.

Most people are diagnosed in childhood and difficulties persist into adulthood

But there are things that can help children manage their difficulties

Children who are neurodivergent may have difficulties...

Remembering information

Organising information

Planning

Controlling actions

Using their attention flexibly

Facts about Neurodivergent Children

Children who are neurodivergent often have difficulties in regulating their emotions. They often need help to recognise and monitor...

What they
are thinking

How they
are feeling

How they
are acting



They might have difficulty understanding and controlling their actions. Behaviour is often the first thing we notice. It is important to look past this external behaviour and focus on the thinking difficulties.

They might often show sensory processing differences. They may be sensory avoidant, e.g. leaving a room when noises are too loud for them. Or they may be sensory seeking and seek more sensory stimulation, e.g. using a fidget spinner. A lot of children have a combination of both.

Understanding your child

Children with neurodevelopmental difficulties can have lots of different strengths. It is important to think of your child in relation to areas of strength as well as their areas of difficulty.

Fun to be around

Attention to detail

Enthusiastic

Lots of energy

Strong sense of justice

Sociable

Creative

Helping others

Honest

Taking risks

Sense of humour

Great memory

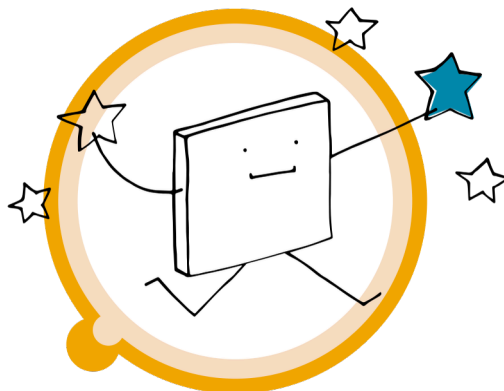
Imaginative

Kind and generous

Coming up with new ideas

Resilient

Sensitive



Understanding your child

All children with neurodevelopmental conditions are different, but they may have a range of difficulties.

Planning ahead

Staying focused

Adapting to sensory changes

Following instructions

Sitting still for a long time

Communicating

Processing emotions

Thinking before they speak

Sleeping

Remembering to use a strategy

Thinking flexibly

Controlling impulses

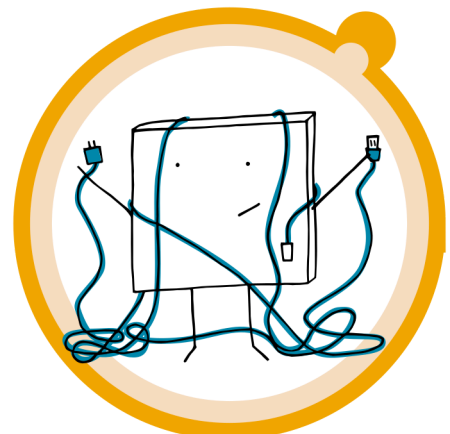
Waiting their turn

Starting or finishing a task

Remembering things

Moving from one task to another

Making friends



Understanding your child

Thinking and Learning

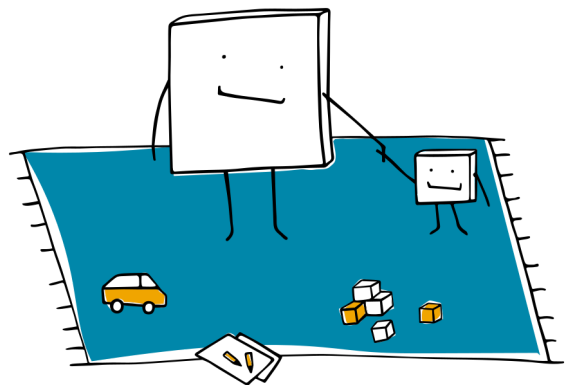
Some of these difficulties are caused by underlying processes in the brain called “executive functions.”

Some children with developmental differences can find certain thinking skills tricky.

For example, your child might find it hard to pay attention, remember things or plan what to do next.

These thinking skills, called executive functions, help children learn new things like reading, writing, and maths as they grow.

Before we can choose the best ways to help your child learn, we first need to understand which of these skills are most difficult for them.

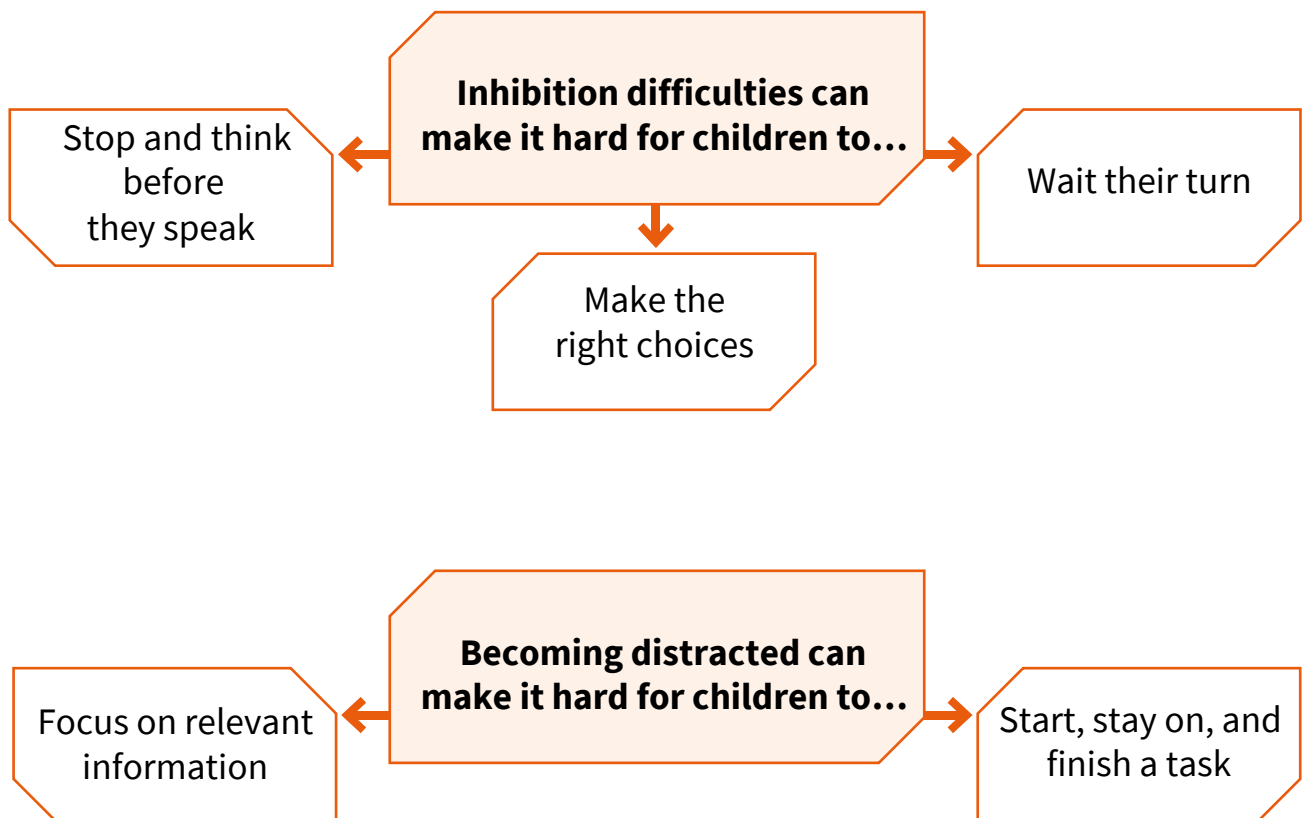


Remember children aged 3–5 develop at different rates and may be at very different stages of learning. With this in mind, we’ve included a variety of descriptions and activities, some of which may not be developmentally suitable for your child, as children within this age range can vary significantly in their skills and abilities.

Inhibition

Definition: avoiding distractions, resisting temptation and generally controlling your responses.

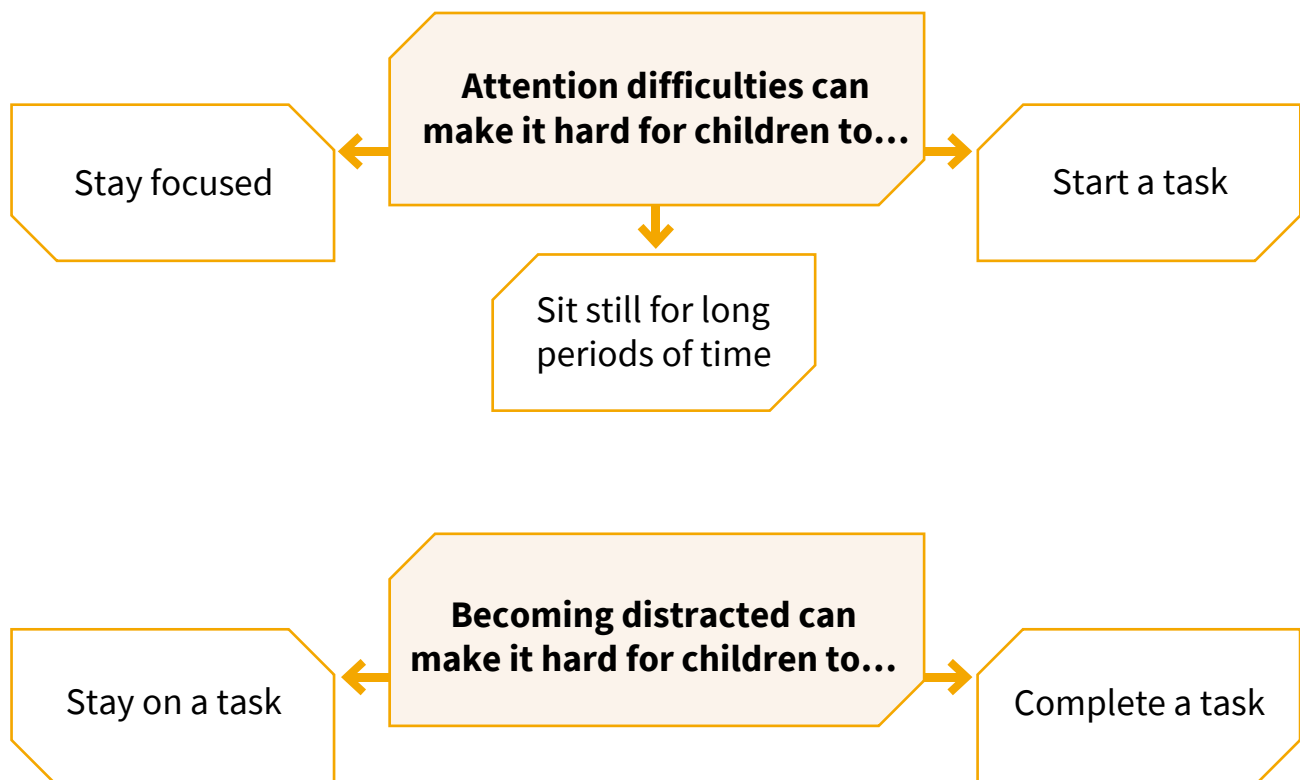
Difficulty: a child may find it hard to ignore distractions, wait their turn, or stop themselves from doing something once they've started.



Attention

Definition: can involve sustaining, focusing and dividing attention or being flexible in your thinking.

Difficulty: some children find things around them very distracting. This can make it difficult to concentrate on a task. This could be things they see, noises they hear or a feeling that they need to move their body. These distractions can become intense and make it difficult to stay on a task. Some children's attention difficulty can lie in shifting their attention from one part of a task to another.



Important Note:

Not all children with neurodevelopmental conditions have an 'attention' problem. Other executive function difficulties can look like poor attention e.g. a child may seem like they are not paying attention but actually the issue is working memory or sensory triggers.

Memory

Definition: working memory (sometimes called short-term memory) is the mental workspace where you hold and organise information for a brief time.

Difficulty: some children find it difficult to remember lots of things at once, or they forget things easily. This can make learning and tasks difficult if the child can't remember what they need to do next or forget what came before.

What does poor working memory look like?

Often we have to hold multiple items in our mind at a time. For some children there is limited space to hold all of the information. They may only remember the first or last part of an instruction if it has multiple parts.

Information may disappear more quickly from their memory, unless rehearsed or aided with another strategy. Many children have difficulties with organising information in their memory or if asked to reverse the order e.g. count down from 10, instead of up to 10.

These difficulties can make it hard to:

- Follow instructions
- Counting
- Follow a story

Having poor working memory can therefore impact on lots of different aspects of life.

It is particularly important strategies are in place to support children with poor working memory when doing learning activities.

Planning and being organised

Definition: Planning is about thinking ahead and working out what needs to happen next. For young children, this might mean getting ready to play a game, tidying up toys, or preparing to go outside.

Difficulty: Many young children naturally live in the moment and focus on what's happening right now. This is an expected part of early development. Some children, especially those who are impulsive or have neurodevelopmental differences, may find it harder to pause and think ahead about what they need or what comes next.

Learning to plan and be organised helps children to:

- Start and finish activities
- Learn to wait and take turns
- Understand simple routines (like getting dressed or packing a bag)
- Understanding time

Children who act quickly or impulsively can find it hard to stop and think before doing something or saying something. This can make it tricky to begin or finish a task because they haven't yet worked out the steps involved.

By gently supporting your child to think about what comes next, and using visual aids or routines, you can help them start developing early planning skills in a fun, positive way.

Self-regulation

Definition: Self-regulation is about helping your child manage their feelings, energy, and attention so they can take part in different activities. It also means learning to pause, think, and adjust what they are doing to match the situation.

Difficulties: Some young children find it hard to get their body and mind ready for a task. They may need help to slow down or speed up depending on what's happening, for example, moving quickly to tidy up or calming their body for a quiet activity like listening to a story.

Self-regulation requires:

- Stopping and thinking
- Planning your response
- Monitoring of progress

When self-regulation is difficult, children might rush through an activity and make mistakes or take a long time to finish because they are unsure how to move on.

You can help by practising strategies that match your child's needs and the setting they're in, for example, calming activities (like deep breathing, squeezing a soft toy or gentle stretching) before quiet time or movement breaks before sitting down for a story.

These experiences help your child learn how to tune in to their body and feelings, giving them the tools to manage different situations more confidently over time.

Emotions

Emotional well-being

Emotional regulation is about helping your child notice and understand their feelings, thoughts, and actions.

Young children, especially those with neurodevelopmental differences, may find it hard to ‘**Stop and Think**’ about how they feel before they respond. They might **get upset quickly, react strongly, or find it tricky to calm down on their own.**

Supporting your child to **recognise their feelings** and practise simple **calming strategies** helps them feel more in control and confident in different situations.

To help your child develop emotional regulation, you can encourage them to:

- Notice how they feel in different situations
- Check how they are reacting to what is happening around them
- Think about what to do next or how to respond
- Monitor their responses
- Self-reflect

Young children may not always recognise their thoughts or feelings yet. When this happens, it can affect their behaviour and sometimes lead to frustration, because they don't fully understand why they acted the way they did.

By gently guiding your child to pause, notice, and reflect, you help them gradually build the skills to manage their emotions, feel more in control, and respond positively in everyday situations.

Your child may benefit from sensory or movement breaks to give them time to regulate.

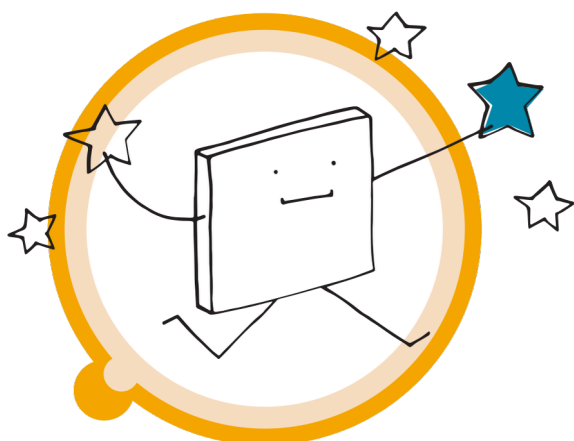
Understanding your child

Thinking About Strengths

Think about your child's strengths. You could also ask them "what do you think you are good at?" There are extra spaces at the bottom for you to add your own ideas.

If you find it hard to identify lots of strengths, you can use the other activities as a prompt.

Remember, children aged 3–5 develop at different rates and may be at very different stages of learning. With this in mind, we've included a variety of suggestions and activities, some of which may not be developmentally suitable for your child, as children within this age range can vary significantly in their skills and abilities.



Strengths	Does this seem relevant?
Fun to be around	
Lots of energy	
Creative	
Problem solving	
Resilient	
Being fair	
Encouraging	
Fast choices	
Adaptable to new situations	
Kind and generous	
Enthusiastic	
Sociable	
Honest	
Excels at... (e.g. hobbies)	
Good at... (e.g. sports)	
Taking risks	
Gentle	
Attention to detail	
Good memory	

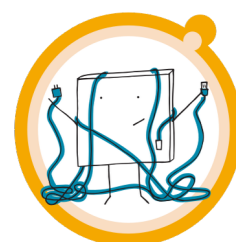
Understanding your child

Thinking About Difficulties

Think about which difficulties seem most relevant for your child. Chat to them about it - do they agree? Can they think of anything else they struggle with?

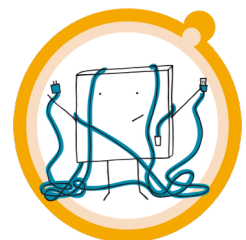
Add these into the spaces at the bottom.

Difficulties	Does this seem relevant?	Area of EPIC to consider
Stop and think before speaking or acting		Inhibition Planning Self-regulation
Make the right choices		Inhibition
Wait your turn		Inhibition
Focusing on the most relevant information		Inhibition*
Getting started on a task		Attention* Planning
Staying focused on a task		Attention* Self-regulation
Complete/finish a task		Attention* Planning Self-regulation
Thinking Flexibly (e.g. try a different way of doing the task).		Attention Self-regulation
Finding it hard to sit still		Attention
Finding it challenging to move from one task or activity to another		Attention Self-regulation
Following instructions, especially those with multiple parts		Memory
Following a story		Memory
Making a plan to follow		Planning



Understanding your child

Difficulties	Does this seem relevant?	Area of EPIC to consider
Completing tasks much too fast or too slowly		Planning Inhibition Self-regulation
Remembering all the relevant information or the next step		Planning Memory
Planning/thinking through responses before acting		Inhibition Self-regulation
Difficulty knowing if I'm doing well at this or not		Self-regulation



*Distraction is a key feature of sensory overload and can play a role in many different behaviours including difficulties with inhibition and attention.

Understanding your child

Using Games

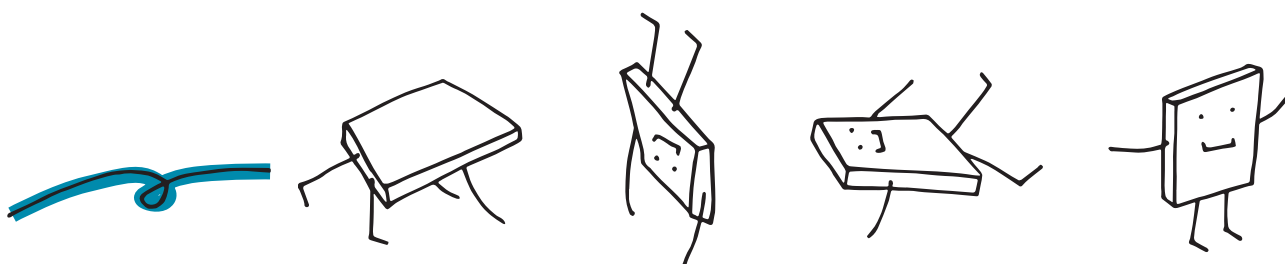
Within EPIC we often use a combination of discussion (conversation) and games to help your child practice using strategies (See EPIC Strategy guides for more details). However, these games can also be used as a form of assessment.

You may decide to play the games now or to simply discuss how your child responded when you have played these (or similar games) in the past.

Remember to keep the conversation going – why is your child doing it that way?

Try talking with them about what they are doing as they play. You can ask simple questions like “What are you trying next?” or “How does that make you feel?” if something does not go as they expected.

For children with limited language, communication can still happen in many ways. They might use PECS, a choice board, gestures to share their needs, preferences and feelings.



Understanding your child

Edinburgh Psychoeducation Intervention for Children and Young People[©] (EPIC)

A guide for parents and carers of early years children.

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We very much welcome feedback on our resources: please contact:
hello@epicthinklearn.com with any comments.

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