



SEL KERNELS

Strategy Guide for Sports Settings





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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An initiative of the Sports and Society Program, Project Play develops, applies and shares knowledge that helps stakeholders build healthy communities through sports.

www.aspenprojectplay.org





BACKGROUND

What are SEL Kernels?

SEL Kernels are strategies used by effective prevention programs that have been shown to effect specific behavior changes. These SEL Kernels, or kernels of practice, represent a smaller scale, personalized approach to SEL, and ultimately aim to provide educators and other adults with a menu of needs and preference-based strategies that are quick, low lift, and easily integrated into team practice.

Where did these SEL Kernels come from?

Drawing from a content analysis of 25 leading SEL curricula, we pulled strategies and practices commonly existing across programs and developed these further to fit the Kernels model. While comprehensive, packaged curricula/programs are currently the most common approach to building social and emotional skills, this type of high burden approach is not always feasible for all schools or organizations. Our team is looking to test a new approach to building SEL, breaking down programs into individual activities and strategies that are feasible for educators and other adults to implement given common constraints of time, resources, and energy.





SKILL AREAS



PEOPLE POWER

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

WHAT IS IT?

The ability to interpret others' behavior, effectively navigate social situations, and interact positively with peers and adults. Interpersonal skills include the ability to **understand social cues, resolve conflicts with peers, and promote and carry out prosocial actions and behaviors.**

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Interpersonal skills help youth work cooperatively on a team, solve social problems, and coexist peacefully with others. This is especially important on teams where youth are learning and working with others, as well as for children's ability to sustain positive relationships with others.



BRAIN POWER

COGNITIVE SKILLS

WHAT IS IT?

The ability to direct thoughts and actions toward achieving goals. Cognitive skills include the ability to **control impulses, keep track of changing information over short periods of time, sustain attention and ignore distractions, and switch attention between tasks when needed.**

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Cognitive skills help children when they are faced with everyday tasks that require self-control, concentration, planning, problem solving, coordination, or conscious choices between different options.





FEELINGS POWER

EMOTIONAL SKILLS

WHAT IS IT?

The ability to identify, express, and regulate emotions, as well as understand the emotions of others. Emotional skills include **emotion knowledge and expression, emotion and behavior regulation, and perspective-taking.**

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Emotional skills are critical to positive social interactions and building relationships with peers and adults. It is difficult for youth to have positive relationships with others without the ability to recognize and regulate emotions and to understand others' perspectives, needs, or feelings.



ATTITUDE POWER

MINDSET

WHAT IS IT?

A set of attitudes and beliefs about oneself and others. Mindset skills include **expressing confidence in oneself and one's ability to improve, identifying positive traits in oneself and others, and approaching challenging situations with optimism and positivity.**

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Mindset skills support youth's abilities to learn, grow, and overcome obstacles. These skills allow youth to believe in their own ability to improve, and to persevere through challenging situations.





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CITIZEN POWER

CHARACTER

WHAT IS IT?

A set of skills, values, and habits that help guide one's actions. Character and citizenship skills include **making ethical judgements, being tolerant and accepting of differences, following through on responsibilities, civic engagement, and community appreciation**, among others.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Character skills guide the choices youth make, directly impacting their team and home communities. These skills are essential to functioning in a democratic society.





TIPS FOR SUCCESS

**Note: These are general tips for high quality instruction for all Kernels and can be applied when relevant.*

INSTRUCTION...

Model behaviors, procedures, strategies, and language. Demonstrate thought processes and appropriate responses in a variety of situations and settings.

Use clear, simple language to explain the purpose for rules and expectations.

Incorporate youth interests into activities and examples.

Include information in instructions that answers the following questions:

- How much do I need to do?
- What exactly do I need to do?
- When do I need to do it?
- What is the reason for doing it?

Contextualize activities by explicitly connecting new concepts to previous learnings and activities in children's daily lives:

- Ask youth to brainstorm what they already know about a topic.
- Use activities that are relevant to children's cultural experiences.

SETTING...

Establish a positive team culture characterized by support, safety, belonging and respect where all participants are valued as decisionmakers:

- Engage all youth athletes in co-creating and setting positive norms, rules and routines for practices and games and work with them to consistently reinforce the structure.
- Ensure all youth are included, with equitable access to activities, being sensitive to different learning styles.

Incorporate teamwork into activities to provide opportunities for peer modeling and use of comprehension clues:

- Prepare young athletes for teamwork by role-playing appropriate behaviors.
- Assign partners with specific tasks, and pair youth who struggle with partners who can model positive prosocial and communication skills.





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YOUNG ATHLETE RESPONSE...

Provide children with options to demonstrate their learning. Offer a variety of methods for youth to receive and express information:

- Allow flexible scheduling for youth who need more time to complete tasks, practice, etc.
- Ensure all youth are included in activities, being sensitive to different learning styles.
- Allow additional opportunities for questions.
- Encourage and celebrate effort.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CONNECTION...

Engage with families, schools, and community members whenever possible. Seek opportunities to share what you are working on with parents and other community members:

- Encourage participants to practice skills at home, school, and in the community, and to share with their families and teachers what they are learning and working on.
- Connect with parents, teachers, or other coaches to collaborate and connect learning, or to share ideas, resources, and activities.





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BELLY BREATHING

WHAT IS IT? A calming breathing technique.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Practicing emotion/behavior regulation.

THE BIG IDEA

Deep breathing helps us to calm our minds and bodies down. Practicing this helps us build our self-regulation skills, which allow us to play and connect with others.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE practice deep breathing...

THEN WE will build our self-regulation skills...

SO WE can regulate and use our emotions to learn and play with others.

MATERIALS:

- None required.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Start by saying **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Have youth put their hands on their bellies.
3. Have youth take a deep breath through their noses and notice their bellies expand outwards. Remind them that they are aiming to fill their bellies all the way up. (e.g., like a balloon).
4. Have youth exhale slowly through their mouths, feeling their belly muscles fall inward as they let air out.
5. Repeat 3-5 times.
6. You may choose to have youth complete this while standing, sitting, or lying down.

MUST DO: Guide child's breathing.

CAN ADAPT: Change the name of the technique or the metaphor used to help youth visualize their breath.





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AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- What did your body feel like before you took some breaths? (e.g., tense, heart beating fast, etc.) What about after? Did you notice a change?
- When are some other times during practice or during the day that you could use Belly Breathing to help with your self-regulation?
- What do babies look like when they are dysregulated? How do they act? What helps them with their regulation? What are they like when they are regulated?
- How does being self-regulated help us in our everyday lives? In sports? At home? At school?

ADAPTATIONS:

- Have youth lie down with a ball or cone on their belly, and watch it go up and down as they breathe in and out.
- Count aloud and on your fingers to give youth a visual to slow their breathing. For example, *“Breathe in through your nose and fill your belly with air for 1-2-3. Breathe out and let the air leave your belly for 1-2-3.”*
- Use Flower/Feather Breathing. Tell youth to breathe in through their noses slowly, as though they are smelling a flower. Then, tell youth to breathe out through their mouths while imagining that they are slowly blowing on a feather.
- Challenge youth to use Belly Breathing independently throughout the day. Ask them to explain how the technique helped them calm down or focus.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- For those who might need extra time, share the technique 1:1 ahead of time.
- Allow youth to share or pass on their turn depending on their level of comfort.





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TEAM SUPERSTAR

WHAT IS IT? A routine to celebrate each participant in the team.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Giving compliments and effective praise to each person.

THE BIG IDEA

Everyone gets a chance to be the Team Superstar. When you are the Team Superstar, we will all look for things you do well and gather compliments to share at the end of the day/week. When we notice and share each other's' positive actions and attributes, then we build each other up and create a stronger team community.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE notice and call out each other's' positive actions and attributes...

THEN WE will know our strengths and use them often...

SO WE can have a strong and cooperative team community for all.

MATERIALS:

- Team Superstar Certificate or other item such as a special ball, team flag, etc.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Randomly select a Team Superstar at the start of each practice (e.g., pull names from a bag). Once everyone has had a chance to be Team Superstar, select a Team Superstar, start over.
2. Let the team know who the Team Superstar is for the day/week and say **THE BIG IDEA**. Have a way to identify who the Team Superstar is (e.g., hat, jersey, etc.). You may choose special jobs or privileges for the Team Superstar (e.g., team captain, practice leader).
3. Explain that all day/throughout the week, everyone will look for compliments to give the Team Superstar (e.g., following directions, showing good sportsmanship, showing effort). Even minor things are worth noticing and calling out.
4. At the end of the day/week, ask youth to share compliments out loud. Then, send the certificate or special item home with the Team Superstar.

MUST DO: Has to be random and all children must be Team Superstar the same number of times. Should not be contingent on behavior, athletic performance, or anything else. Some kids don't receive much positive affirmation, and this is about affirming the value or worth of every child.

CAN ADAPT: How you gather, post, and celebrate compliments. When and how you celebrate.





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AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- **Team Superstar** – How did it feel to receive compliments? What did you notice? What did your peers notice that you might not have realized about yourself?
- **Everyone else** – How did it feel to give compliments to the Team Superstar? What did you pay attention to in order to compliment the Team Superstar? When are some other times we can say encouraging words to each other? During games? At home? At school? Can you think of a specific compliment someone gave to you that made you feel especially good? Why did it make you feel this way?

OVER THE SEASON...

Grades K-3: This is a time to build awareness of others – to see positive things in others and their behavior. It is also a time to build a positive self-concept – an awareness of one's strengths. As children get older, this is also a time to expand compliment vocabulary and begin to explore how complimenting and affirming others can impact feelings and behavior – for the compliment giver as well as the receiver.

Grades 4-6: This is a time to continue exploring how affirming one another leads to improved behavior, relationships, and can help in conflict resolution. As children get older, this is a time to connect compliments to other activities, such as giving constructive feedback on others' participation or performance.

Start by modeling giving compliments to athletes on the team. Notice and call out when children are showing positive behavior, as a way to affirm all teammates and to show what compliments look, sound, and feel like. *Give each child at least one specific compliment per day.*



As athletes become familiar with the process of compliment giving, challenge them to give more meaningful and informational compliments to each other (e.g., "I like how passed the ball to me during that drill" vs. "I like how you followed coach's directions during that play"). Explain that Team Superstar is about celebrating *who you are*, not what you have.

Depending on team preferences, create a Team Superstar jersey or hat instead of awarding a certificate so that the child can wear this throughout the day/week).

Over the year, challenge youth to give more meaningful compliments to each other (e.g., "I notice that you always put 110% into everything you do" vs. "I like your shoes"). Create a space where teammates can share compliments and praise for each other. For example, a bulletin board, stack of post-its, a white board, or a compliment box.

Lastly, have children share the compliments they remember being given from the year.





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TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- Allow or encourage responses in home languages.
- For those who might need extra time, give them more time to think of compliments and support them in noticing compliments as needed.
- Allow youth to be celebrated as a team or in private depending on their level of comfort.

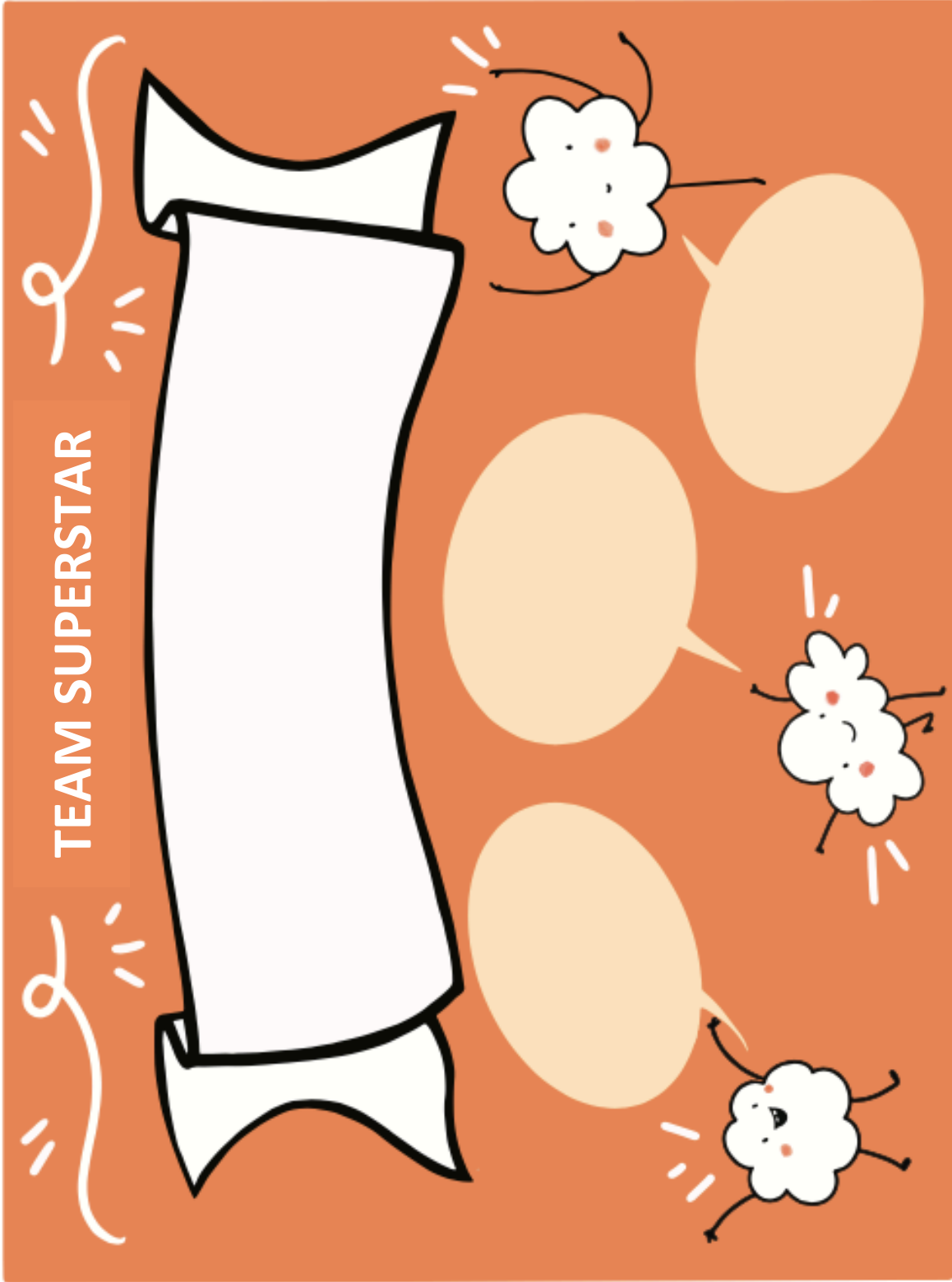




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TEAM SUPERSTAR



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TEAM CELEBRATION

WHAT IS IT? A team goal-setting system.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Building teamwork and cooperation skills.

THE BIG IDEA

Learning how to work together in order to reach goals is important in building our People Powers. If we work together to reach goals, we can celebrate successes together and build a stronger and more cooperative community for all of us.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE understand the actions and behaviors that help us connect with one another...

THEN WE can use these actions effectively...

SO WE will have a strong and cooperative community for all.

MATERIALS:

- Poster Paper (optional).

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Start by saying THE BIG IDEA.
2. Depending on the age of the youth, time or year, and overall tenor of your team, set team goals that allow everyone to contribute and celebrate. Set short-term goals for mini-celebrations and longer-term goals for bigger celebrations. Examples include following directions, learning a new skill, demonstrating effort, winning a game, completing the season, etc.
3. Short-term goals can be set in a way that will allow youth to celebrate as much as once per day to once a week, while the time period for longer-term goals can be anywhere from once a month to the end of the season.
4. Use any system that works for you to keep track of positive behaviors – points, stars, marbles in a jar, etc. Let athletes know that once they have earned the points, the points will not be taken away.
5. Celebrations should be non-material and fun! Brainstorm ideas with your kids and let the team vote on what they want to do for these. Giving youth a choice will increase their motivation and excitement! Examples include pizza party, having a team picnic, etc.

MUST DO: Give children tangible tools to work through conflict.

CAN ADAPT: Celebrations.





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AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- Are you excited to reach our team goals?
- When are some other times you need to work with a team to reach a goal?
- Do professional athletes work together to reach goals? Do you think it takes teamwork for them to win games? Do they celebrate together?
- Is it easy to work together as a team? Why or why not?

ADAPTATIONS:

- Youth might forget the goal they're working towards. Remind them during practice as needed.
- Use the team's favorite Kernels as celebration activities!
- Use this strategy for individual athletes who may be struggling to achieve certain goals—set a list of potential individual celebrations that can be used to celebrate reaching personal goals.
- Brainstorm a reward that doesn't go to the team but serves others instead!
- Get creative with what you celebrate: being inclusive, considering diverse perspectives, helping each other learn new skills.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- For those who might need extra time, give them more time prior to the activity to think of potential team goals.





LINEUP CHALLENGE

WHAT IS IT? A nonverbal group game requiring participants to line up in a certain order.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Building teamwork and cooperation skills.

THE BIG IDEA

Learning how to work together is important in building our People Powers. If we learn how to cooperate and work as a team, we can do this frequently and build a strong team community for all of us.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE practice cooperating with one another...

THEN WE will build our teamwork skills...

SO WE can have a strong and cooperative team community for all.

MATERIALS:

- None required.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Start by saying **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Let athletes know where the line should start and end (e.g., "starting with January and ending with December, line up by the door!")
3. When they have finished, start from the beginning and ask athletes to share their [birthday, first letter of first name, number of siblings, etc.] to see if the team succeeded at the challenge.
4. If there are mistakes, have athletes work together to figure out where their mis-ordered teammates should go.
5. Congratulate athletes on their nonverbal communication and cooperation skills.
6. Repeat with a different order.

MUST DO: Give everyone the chance to participate / pick a category that all youth know and can participate in (e.g., t-shirt colors in rainbow order, shortest to longest hair, etc.).

CAN ADAPT: What category/order children should line up in.





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AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- What made this game easy or hard to play?
- How did you communicate without your words? What nonverbal signals did you use with each other?
- What are some other times we have to use nonverbal communication?
- Imagine if you were a new athlete on the team. Do you think it would be hard to play Lineup Challenge without knowing anything about your teammates? What are the benefits of getting to know each other and building relationships on your team?
- Did you learn anything new about your teammates while playing this game?

ADAPTATIONS:

- Have children line up by shirt color in order of the rainbow.
- Have children line up by height.
- Have children line up by length of hair.
- Have children line up by ABC order of last name.
- Have children choose the order category!

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- For those who might need extra time, share the game instructions ahead of time 1:1.
- Allow youth with trauma to skip or stay silent during the activity, if they prefer.





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BRAIN GAMES (general info)

WHAT IS IT? Whole-group or whole-team games.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Practicing and building executive function (EF)

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”.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE practice and build EF skills...

THEN WE can organize thinking and behavior to meet goals...

SO WE are able to engage deeply in learning and playing with each other.

MATERIALS:

- Brain Games instructions

WHERE CAN I FIND THE BRAIN GAMES?

Brain Games instructions can be found in the following pages. **The following pages introduce each “brain power” and an accompanying hand signal** that you can use as a nonverbal cue/reminder to your a to use their Focus, Remember, and Stop & Think powers throughout practice and games.

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 youth 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.





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AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF (more specific questions on each game one-pager):

- 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? On the field/court? At home? At school?

OVER THE YEAR...

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

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 on the field/court/at home/at school.
- Model with a small group first. Try out the game with a group of 2-3 youth while the rest watch.
- During and after the game, talk about feelings that arise. Help youth recognize feelings are a normal part life.
- Celebrate Brain Powers all day. Talk about them and how they're used throughout the day and notice and celebrate when youth use them!





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HOCUS POCUS, EVERYBODY FOCUS

WHAT IS IT? A game to build executive function skills.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Practicing self-control.

THE BIG IDEA

This game is about listening carefully as we count and remembering the right motion for a key number.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE practice focus and attention...

THEN WE can organize thinking and behavior to meet goals...

SO WE can engage deeply in learning and playing with each other.

MATERIALS:

- None required.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Gather youth in a circle. For the first round, go around the circle and count to 10 (have each person count one number). After the tenth person has said "10," the next person should say "Hocus Pocus, Everybody Focus."
3. Practice. Repeat the "1-10 + Hocus Pocus, Everybody Focus" sequence until every child has had a turn.
4. Say, "Great! Now, we're going to add a challenge. Every time we get to the number five, the person with that number will clap instead of saying the number five. Remember to just clap without saying the number. Pay careful attention to when it's your turn and whether you need to say a number, do a motion, or say 'Hocus, Pocus, Everybody Focus.' Let's practice."
5. Go around until every athlete has had a turn.
6. As your team becomes more comfortable with this game, feel free to add additional challenges for different numbers.

MUST DO: Must require children to listen carefully for a specific number.

CAN ADAPT: Change the motions and number of motions in the series.





AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- During this game, we had to pay careful attention to when it was our turn and what to say or what to do. What other times of the day do you need to pay careful attention to what to say and do?
- What strategies did you use to be successful in this game?

ADAPTATIONS:

- To make the game easier for younger children, try shortening the phrase to just “Hocus Pocus.” Or, only ask them to count to 5.
- Create additional challenges that have an academic focus. For example, every time you get to a certain number, name something related to the sport your playing, such as:
 - Different skills
 - Game rules
 - Famous athletes
 - Historical facts
- Encourage the last child (i.e., the child who says “Hocus Pocus, Everybody Focus”) to make up the next challenge.

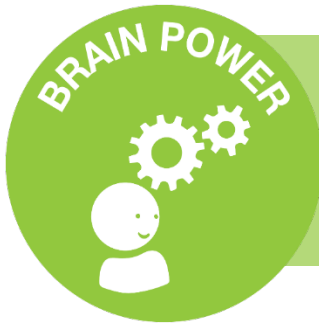
TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- Ask emergent bilingual learners to say “Hocus Pocus, Everybody Focus” or a similar phrase in their native language when it’s their turn to say it.
- This game can be tricky when children are first learning! The first time you play, intentionally make a mistake, and have a follow-up discussion about how mistakes are normal and to be expected in this game. Model how to move on quickly after making a mistake and how to keep playing with a good attitude.





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SHIPWRECK

WHAT IS IT? A game to build executive function skills.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Practicing memory and attention.

THE BIG IDEA

This game is about remembering what motions accompany each phrase, and doing them correctly and quickly.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE practice memory and attention...

THEN WE will keep track of and use important information...

SO WE can engage deeply in learning and playing with each other.

MATERIALS:

- None required.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Introduce the game, and review directions with youth
3. before getting started (see back of card for direction list).
4. As you call out directions, athletes will be out of the game if they don't follow them or do them quickly enough.
5. For some directions (**marked with an asterisk*), athletes will have to form a group and work with others. If they don't form a group, they will also be out of the game.
6. The game is played until two people are left standing.
7. Coaches or youth can lead the game.

MUST DO: Must require youth to remember specific movements associated with specific phrases.

CAN ADAPT: Change the commands and/or the accompanying motions.

AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- Was Shipwreck easy or hard to play? Were some directions easier/harder to follow than others (e.g., group tasks)?
- What skills did you use to play Shipwreck? Did you use any tricks to help you remember your actions? Did you use any strategies to form a group and work together?





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LEADER SHOUTS OUT:	ACTION OF PARTICIPANTS:
"Swab the deck"	Pretend you are sweeping with a broom (Sweep up into the air)
"Port"	Run to the left (Run to the right)
"Starboard"	Run to the right (Run to the left)
"Bow"	Run forward (Run backward)
"Stern"	Run backward (Run forward)
"Jellyfish"	Lay down on the floor on your back, jiggle your arms and legs (Hands and knees and shake)
"First mate"	Pretend to steer a wheel by holding hands out front
"Seasick"	Pretend to get sick to your stomach (Walk around smiling and giving thumbs up)
"Stormy weather"	Rock from side to side standing (Squat up and down)
"Life jacket"	2 people link arms back to back
"Captain's ball"	2 people link one arm and dance around in a circle
"Mealtime"	1 person makes a table by getting on their hands and knees, and 2 other people sit across from each other and pretend to scoop food into their mouths
"Rowboat"	4 people sit in a line with their knees up and pretend to row
"Starfish"	5 people link arms and form a circle, with each person bending one leg at the knee so their five legs spread out like a starfish

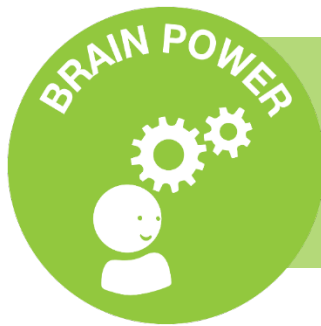
TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- For youth who may need additional support, start with three directions only. Provide visuals for each direction, if possible.
- Incorporate sports themes into this game by creating different themes from your lessons, such as the different soccer skills (e.g., when you call out "dribble down the field," youth have to make the motion of dribbling a soccer ball; when you call out "pass up field," two athletes team up and one pretend to pass to the other)





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WAIT FOR IT

WHAT IS IT? A game to build executive function skills.
WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Practicing self-control.

THE BIG IDEA

This game is about exercising self-control to wait before doing a series of motions.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE practice slowing down and thinking before we act...

THEN WE will be in charge of what we say and do...

SO WE can engage deeply in learning and playing with each other.

MATERIALS:

- None required.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Say: "First, I will say or do a series of movements. Then we will stand very still and count to five."
3. Then, say: "When we are done counting and I say 'GO,' I want you to repeat the same movements, in the same order."
4. Example 1: Point to two body parts, count to five, then say 'GO,' and have youth do the movements in the same sequence.
5. Example 2: List a series of movement instructions (e.g., "touch your head, stand on one foot, squat down"), then wait, and have youth carry out those movements in that order.

MUST DO: Must require athletes to remember a series of movements and wait for a specific word before carrying out the movements.

CAN ADAPT: Change the movements and the number of movements in the series.





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AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- Was it easy or hard to wait when playing this game? Why?
- What strategies or skills did you use to help you wait to begin?
- What skills or strategies did you use to remember the movements/instructions?
- Are there other times during the day that you have to wait? To listen/remember directions? What about at home or at school?

ADAPTATIONS:

- To make things more challenging: increase the number of instructions in each sequence, increase the wait time, or add intentional distractions (e.g., other athletes singing a song or doing jumping jacks in view of the youth trying to remember the sequence).
- To make the game more challenging, incorporate “rules” associated with each movement. In the “opposites” game, children must remember the rule and complete the opposite movement when they see it (e.g., “Look tall” and children squat down). “Rules” can also be specific to each game, such as “When I touch my elbow in the sequence, you have to touch your head when you replicate the same sequence.” For added challenges, add multiple rules per sequence.
- Another advanced option with a “rule”: Youth assign a movement to numbers (touching your head is 1, fist in the air is 2, smiling is 3). The leader carries out a series of those movements in front of the team, and teammates must then report out (or write down) which number sequence matches the movement sequence they observed (e.g., “You did a 3, 2, 3, 3, 1.”).

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- For children who may need more support, start with two movements. As they become comfortable with two movements, gradually increase the number of movements.
- Play background music with a beat as you play to help everyone do the moves at the same time.





THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
PROJECT PLAY



SELF-TALK SUPERHERO

WHAT IS IT? A tool to remember using positive self-talk.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT? Practicing positive self-talk to help us face

THE BIG IDEA

Positive self-talk will improve our mental, emotional, and physical health, and will also set us up to better reach our goals.

WHY DO THIS?

IF WE practice using positive self-talk...

THEN WE will build positive identity and mindsets...

SO WE can appreciate our strengths and be able to harness them in pursuit of goals.

MATERIALS:

- None required.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Say **THE BIG IDEA**.
2. Start this activity by having a discussion with athletes about what self-talk is (e.g., the way we speak to ourselves in our own mind).
3. Have youth share times when their self-talk helped them to do something hard (e.g., I was nervous before going for the goal and then I told myself I could do it.). You can prompt this discussion by asking "What was something challenging or hard that you did recently? When you knew you had to do ____ (challenge), what did you tell yourself to be successful?"
4. Praise youth for using positive self-talk and explain that they are already listening to their own self-talk superheroes. Then have youth either close their eyes and imagine their own tiny little hero or sports superstar on their shoulder, always ready to encourage them.
5. Have youth go around the circle and share what their Self-Talk Superhero's favorite words or phrases are!

MUST DO: Give youth the option of sharing publicly or privately.

CAN ADAPT: What the self-talk superhero looks like.





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AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF:

- When is it helpful to use Self-Talk Superhero throughout the day?
- Do adults need to use positive self-talk? Have you ever seen them forget to use it?
- What words are most helpful for you to hear? (e.g., “You can do it!” “I believe in you!” “You got this!” “You’re so close!” etc.).
- What does your Self-Talk Superhero look like?

ADAPTATIONS

- **When challenges arise on the team or throughout the day** (e.g., hard games, difficult skills, strong emotions such as fear, anxiety, etc.), remind youth to conjure up their self-talk superhero and ask them to say aloud what the superhero can tell them to help them be successful!
- **Remind youth** that we each need our self-talk superhero for different things. Somethings are hard or scary for one person and not for another. That’s why each of our self-talk superheroes is different– we each need encouragement at different times, in different languages, and in different situations. Each self-talk superhero is unique and special just like each person on the team.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

- If possible, have the phrases into the native languages of emergent bilingual learners.
- Give youth extra time to prepare for this activity by having a short 1:1 discussion about their own self-talk superhero 10-15 minutes prior to the activity.

