


# MIND in the Making


The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs


## Executive Function Life Skill: Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions.

### Suggestions for Promoting Critical Thinking

 *The Runaway Bunny* can be read on many different levels. With a young child, you can tell the story in your own words, pointing out how the Mother Rabbit has to keep problem solving—figuring out ways to find her runaway bunny. **We use Critical Thinking in problem solving**, which is an **Executive Function** skill.

 With older children, Critical Thinking can be promoted by **encouraging your child to be curious and think about what they think and believe**. You can ask questions that promote Critical Thinking about the rabbit's decisions and actions. For example: You can ask questions about:  
How much the Mother Rabbit cares: "Why do you think the Mother Rabbit will do anything to find her bunny?"  
Imagination: "Can rabbits really fly? How do you know?"  
This back and forth interaction is what researchers call "**serve and return**." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

 Critical thinking involves being **observant**. Ask your child to find the bunny in all of the color pictures, such as in the flowers. For those children who know the author Margaret Wise Brown's book, *Goodnight Moon*, ask if they recognize the cow jumping over the moon drawing in the room with the fireplace.

You will notice that this tip promotes two brain development principles: **Serve and Return** and **Executive Function** skills.

**Serve and Return** involves a back and forth interaction between you and your child. Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something (serves) and the other responds (returns). It is important to listen and then to build on and extend what your child says or does and to keep this going for as long as your child is interested.

**Executive Function** skills are skills you use to manage your attention, your emotions, your intellect and your behavior to reach your goals. They are at the core of the Seven Essential Life Skills. They include focus, working memory, cognitive flexibility and self control. When children are older, these skills include reflecting, analyzing, reasoning, planning, problem solving and evaluating.



Illustration by Devon Meyer

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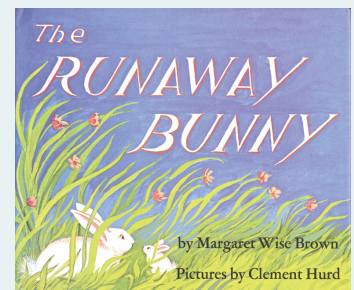


## The Runaway Bunny

By Margaret Wise Brown

In this reassuring classic, a loving mother tells her little bunny that no matter where he goes, she will always find him again.

Children relate to the little bunny's desire for independence and enjoy the story's pattern of cause and effect.



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