

# MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

## Executive Function Life Skill: Taking on Challenges

Life is full of stresses and challenges. Children who are **willing to take on challenges** (instead of avoiding them or simply coping with them) do better in school and in life.

### Suggestions for Promoting Taking on Challenges

 Taking on Challenges involves **finding ways to deal with challenging times** or problem solving, an **Executive Function** skill. Children can learn from the characters in this book. For example, ask your child about all the things that Baby Llama does to try to wait for his Llama Mama. You can point out that Baby Llama has a **comfort toy**, a little llama.

 Taking on Challenges **elicits many different emotions and the need to cope with them**. Baby Llama goes from being lonely to fretting, to being sad, to being angry and, finally, to being scared. Ask your child to recall times when he or she experienced any of these feeling. You can ask your child: “What do you do when you are scared or doing something difficult?” 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.

 At the end of the book, the Mama gives Baby Llama a message: “Mama Llama’s always near, even if she’s not right here.” This is a message you can use with your child at naptime or at bedtime. **Knowing that others are there for us** is very important in our skill of Taking on Challenges.

 When your child uses the skill of Taking on Challenges, point this out to him or her, reminding your child about the book: “You were scared just like Baby Llama, but you managed it!”



Illustration by Devon Meyer

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.

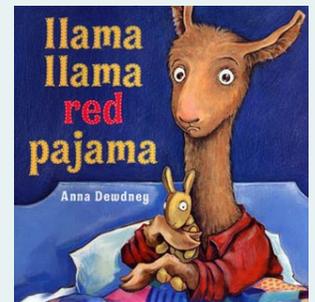
High-quality books and educational resources from First Book supporting research-based Life Skills from *Mind in the Making* by Ellen Galinsky



## Llama Llama Red Pajama

By Anna Dewdney

Anna Dewdney’s adorable llama toddler and mother face bedtime worries and separation anxiety in this well-loved picture book. Told in rhyme, this story offers the reassurance that a loved one is “always near... even when she’s not right here.”



Find more books and materials supporting Mind in the Making’s Life Skills on the First

Book Marketplace, a resource available exclusively to educators and programs serving children in need. [www.fbmarketplace.org](http://www.fbmarketplace.org). Find more about Families and Work Institute’s Mind in the Making at [www.mindinthemaking.org](http://www.mindinthemaking.org).