



Margaret Kelly Carroll, Ed.D., Professor
Saint Xavier University, Chicago, IL

ILCCBD Conference February 4, 2023

CAN'T and **WON'T**

How Learning Disabilities Impact Behavior

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) uses the term **serious emotional disability** and defines it as:

... a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance—

- An **inability to learn** that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

What Is the Acronym?



Landmark Year!

- *Illinois Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders*



Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) uses the term **specific learning disability** and defines it as:

- (i) General. Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in **using language**, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the **imperfect ability to listen, think, speak**, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
- (ii) Disorders not included. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

What Is the Acronym?



Landmark Year!

**1963 in
Chicago:
The term
LEARNING
DISABILITY
was
coined.**



How Do These Relate to Behavior?

- Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in **using language**, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the **imperfect ability to listen, think, speak**, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
- **Using language?**
- **Imperfect listening?**
- **Imperfect thinking?**
- **Imperfect speaking?**



1. If a student cannot read or reads well below grade level, the best educational response is to punish the student.
2. If a student cannot read or reads well below grade level, punishment will likely increase reading achievement.
3. If a student cannot read or reads well below grade level, the best educational response is to teach the student to read, beginning where the student is and aiming for grade level achievement over time.





1. If a student cannot do math well or performs well below grade level, the best educational response is to punish the student.
2. If a student cannot do math well or performs well below grade level, punishment will likely increase math achievement.
3. If a student cannot do math or performs well below grade level, the best educational response is to teach the student math, beginning where the student is and aiming for grade level achievement over time.



1. If a student cannot behave, the best educational response is to punish the student.
2. If a student cannot behave, punishment will likely improve behavior.
3. If a student cannot behave, the best educational response is to teach the student the expected behavior, beginning where the student is and aiming for improved behavior over time.

So...Is It CAN'T or WON'T?

- I recommend thinking **CAN'T** *first*
- Why?
- Because then...
 - We will **teach** thinking (executive function)
 - We will **teach** speaking
 - We will **teach** active listening
 - We will **teach** behavior

If We Think WON'T

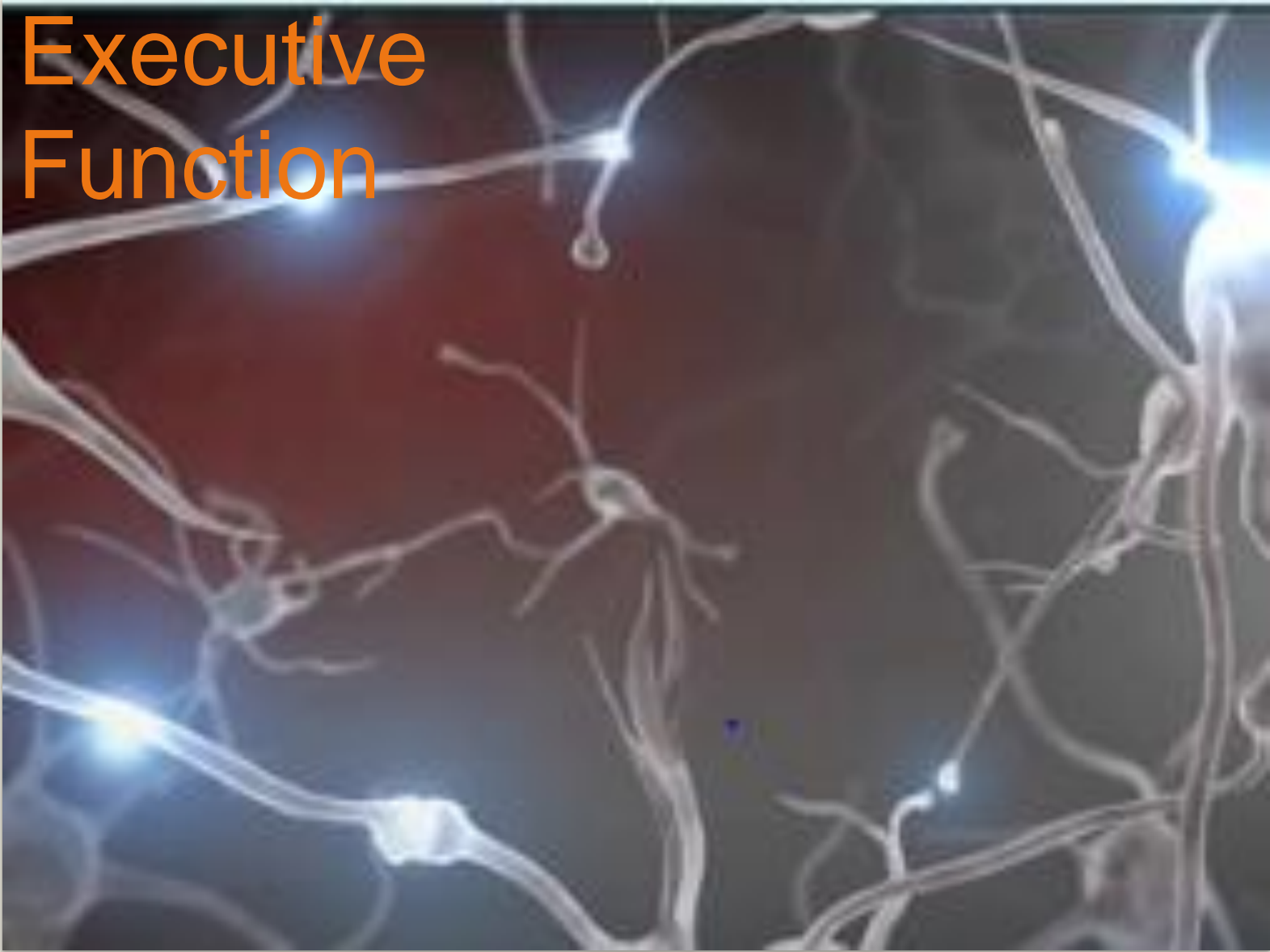
- We are very likely to...
 - Assume ill intent
 - Presume willful decision NOT to behave
 - Scold
 - Nag
 - Punish



Let's Choose...



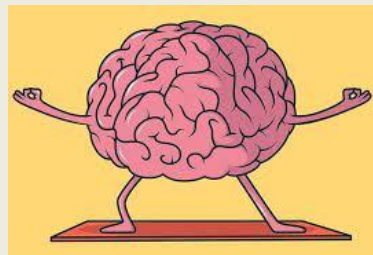
Executive Function



<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

Executive Functioning Skills

- Working memory
- Inhibitory control
- Mental flexibility

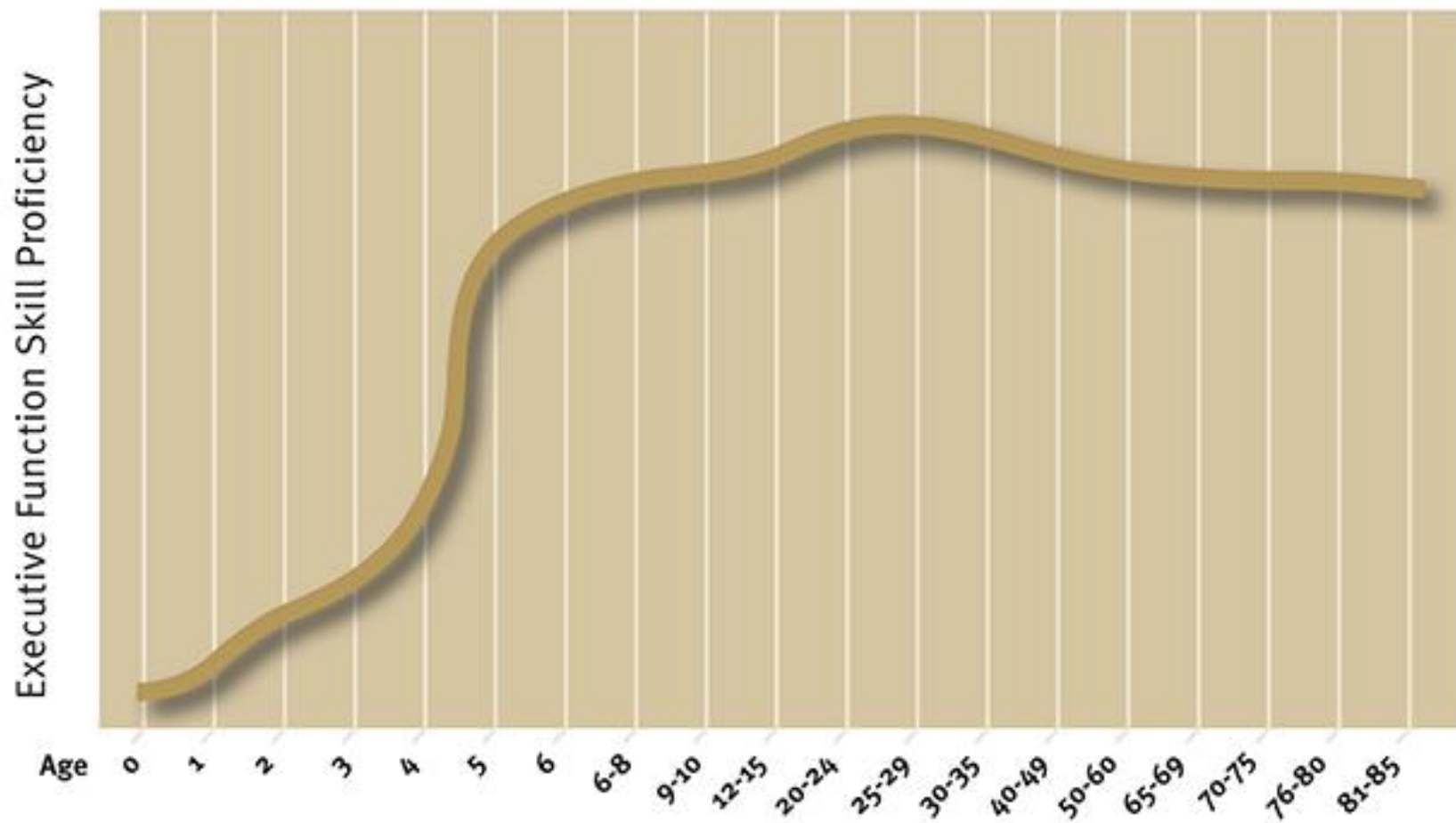


- Planning
- Emotional control
- Attention:
 - Inhibition
 - Sustained
 - Shift
- Self-monitoring
- Organization
- Working memory

Why Address Executive Functioning Skills

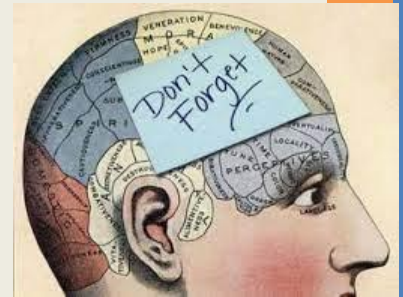
- Metacognitive skill has been linked to better test performance, independent of intelligence (Veenman & Spaans, 2005).
- Executive functioning is a strong predictor of classifying students with or at risk of LD (Sideridis, 2006).
- Proficient executive functioning skill has been associated with giftedness (Hannah & Shore, 1995).

Executive Function Skills Build Into the Early Adult Years



Capacity Issues/Working Memory

- If working memory is limited, instructional methods should pare away extraneous information to leave mental resources available for novel learning.
- If I have background knowledge, I can use schema to plan how to organize new information.
- If I DON'T have background knowledge, I am taxing my working memory to figure out what each piece means with no left-over mental capacity to strategize how to memorize the information.



Inhibitory Control

- Importance of sleep
- Recognition and identification of feelings without judgment
- Soothing techniques with agreed upon limitations
- Verbal mediation as strategy to counter emotional momentum
- Teaching flexibility
- Fostering motivation



Strategies for Acquiring Inhibitory Control

- Use minimal change.
- Find what calms this particular student.
- Watch for signs of anxiety, then:
 - Talk softly
 - Music
 - Allow movement to special space
 - Schedule breaks
 - Provide extended time
 - Allow sensory input

To What Are They Paying Attention?

- **Potential Distractions**

- Auditory
- Visual
- Psychological
- Sensory



- **What can help kids with SLD pay attention?**

- 1:1
- Novel
- Interesting
- Intimidating

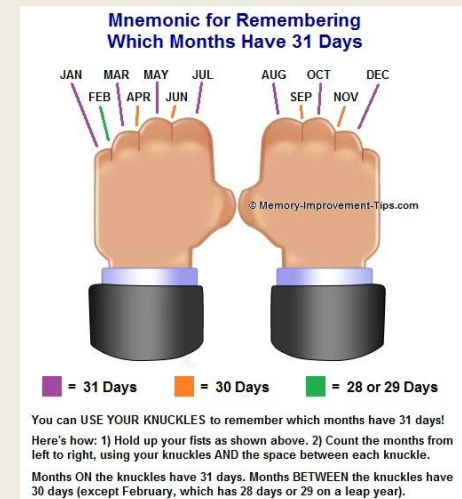


Attention: Inhibition

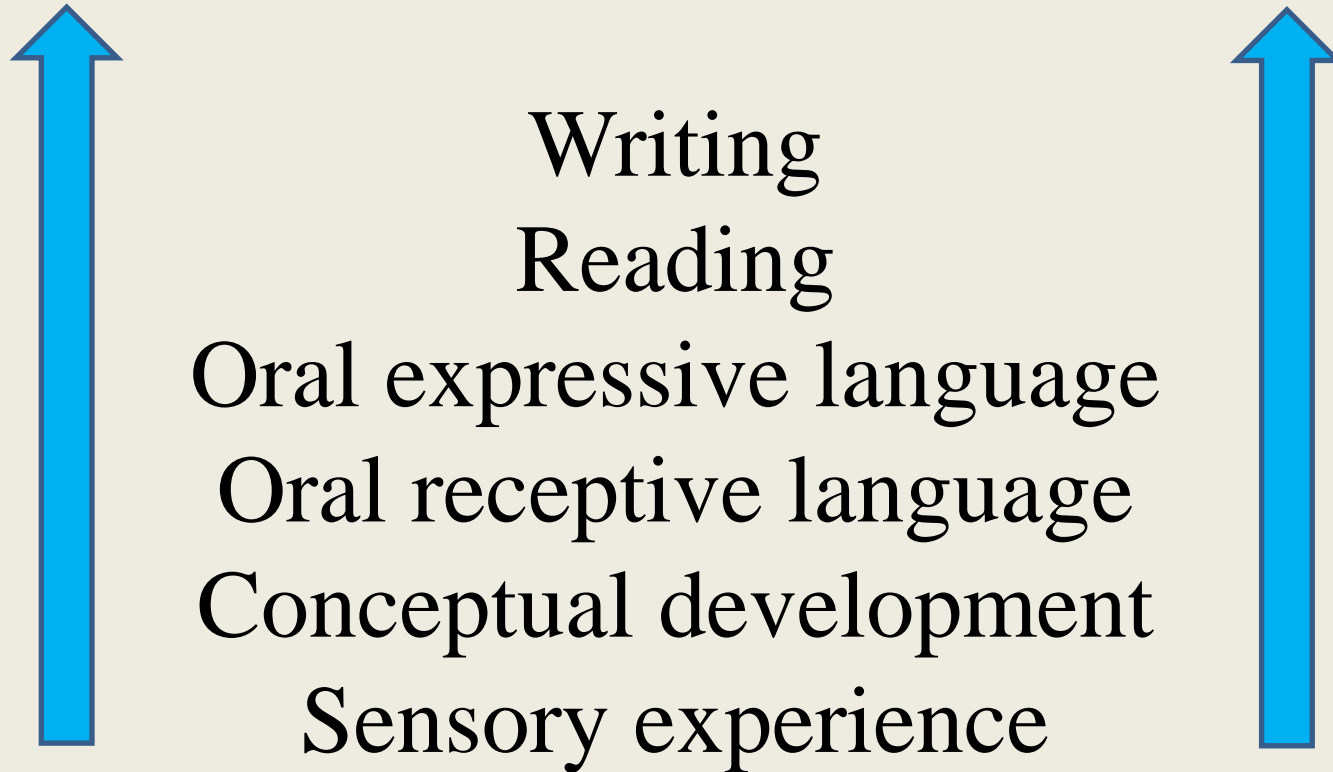
- **SLANT**: **S**it up, **L**ean Forward, **A**sk or **A**nswer a Question, **N**od to show the teacher you are listening, **T**ell what you know.
- Teacher helps to monitor (cue words, secret signal)
- Small rewards throughout the task
- Alert kids ahead of time as to what they need to attend to
- Self-monitoring assessments

Flexible Thinking

- Use picture support.
- Use high-low materials.
- Encourage reading aloud (to delay speed enough to result in comprehension).
- Teach in multiple modes concurrently.
- Use manipulatives (access?) (index cards, pinto beans, paper ruler, fruit loops, etc.)
- Use mnemonic devices.
- Use illustration.



Language Hierarchy



**This is the development of language:
first language **and** later languages**

TEACHING Listening

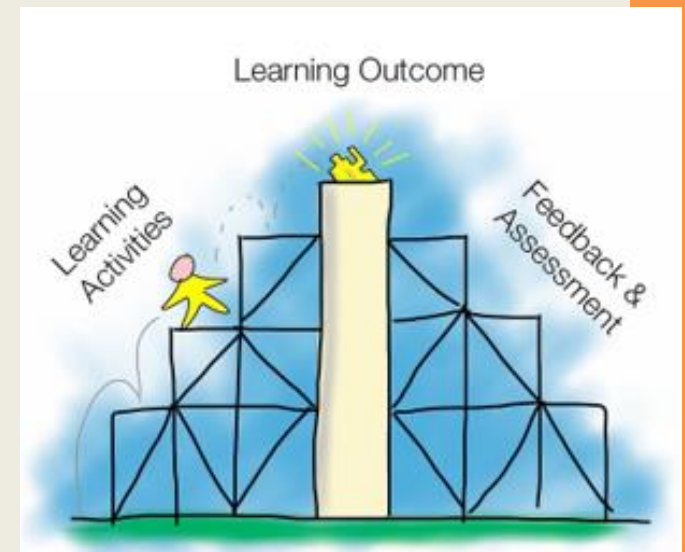
- Listening is a skill that can be improved through teaching and practice
- Model good listening strategies.
- Teach whole body listening.
 - Their eyes are watching, ears are listening,
 - Brain is focused on the speaker's information
 - Mouth is closed
 - Shoulders are squared toward the speaker
 - Heart is caring about the message
 - Hands are folded or in lap
 - Feet are still on the floor.
- “Language shapes the way we think and determines what we can think about.”
- “Language is the means of getting an idea from my brain into yours without surgery”

Listening Practice

- Create and play with riddle games. "I rhyme with look. You read me. What am I?"
- Rehearse the names of objects.
 - Parallel talk
 - Self-talk.
- Employ pictures extensively, even of verbs.
- Practice with oral directions.
- Don't forget function words, prepositions of space (to, from). Signs may help clarify.
- Read aloud, even to children old enough to read for themselves.
- Play games: missing words, rapid naming, 20 Q's, radio, TV, telephone, tell me how...

Teaching Listening Steps

- Set a goal. According to Funk and Funk (1989), it's important to have a goal or purpose for every listening activity.
- Build background.
- Prepare the environment.
- Introduce listening strategies.
- Scaffold note-taking.



Speaking Practice

- Use role play.
- Have students give oral presentations.
- Have class discussions.
- Tell stories from pictures.
- Practice memorizing poems.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRj_3aKzl3c

TEACHING Behavior

- Behavior can be improved through teaching and practice
- Model good behavior.
 - Waiting for a turn.
 - Using “please” and “thank you.”
- Practice each new behavior in isolation to the point of overlearning..
- Chain isolated behaviors together and practice to the point of overlearning.
- When humans are uncomfortable, we are more likely to act out.
- Use role play.
- Predict what will happen where and when and practice possible responses.
- Genuinely appreciate new behaviors.

Educators Can...

- Avoid escalating prompts such as shouting, touching, nagging, or cornering the student.
- Try to monitor your impressions, keep them as neutral as possible, communicate a positive regard for the children, and give them the benefit of the doubt whenever possible.
- Consider the use of technology.





Q and A

Q and A

- Emphasize discipline?
- **NO**
- Use punishment?
- **NO**
- Provide reinforcement?
- **YES**
- Teach expected behavior?
- **YES**
- Practice expected behavior?
- **YES**
- Make assumptions that students know expectations?
- **NO**
- Make assumptions that students know how to meet expectations?
- **NO**
- Post expectations?
- **YES**
- **Model appropriate behavior?**
- **YES**