



7 Metacognition Games for Preschoolers

A Parent's Guide to Developing Independent, Confident Thinkers

Designed for parents and caregivers of children ages 3 to 6.

Introduction

Welcome to your guide on developing one of the most crucial life skills in your child:

metacognition. In simple terms, metacognition means "thinking about thinking." It is a child's ability to be aware of their own thoughts, understand how they learn, evaluate their progress, and recognize when they need to ask for help or try a new strategy.

For children ages 3 to 6, developing metacognitive skills is transformative. During these crucial early years, introducing metacognition builds essential executive functioning skills, encourages resilience when facing difficult tasks, and fosters a lifelong love for problem-solving. Rather than simply memorizing facts or following directions blindly, children learn *how* to learn and become active participants in their own cognitive development.

At **EMC2 Kids Academy**, our motto is "*Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow.*" We believe that true school readiness goes far beyond knowing the alphabet and numbers. All of our teachers are highly trained and **G.L.A.D. certified (Guided Language Acquisition Design)**. This powerful, research-based approach allows us to intentionally design classroom activities that support language development, expand academic vocabulary, and actively nurture these essential thinking skills every single day. The games in this guide are directly inspired by the very same strategies our educators use to help children articulate their thoughts and grow into confident leaders.

Quick Reference: The 7 Games

Game Name	Targeted Skill	Best Time to Play
1. Plan-Do-Review Block Build	Planning & Reflection	Free Playtime
2. The Mistake Detective	Error Monitoring	Daily Routines
3. Storytime Pause and Predict	Forward-thinking & Logic	Bedtime or Reading Time
4. "How Did You Do That?" Puzzles	Process Articulation	Quiet Indoor Play
5. The Feelings Thermometer	Emotional Regulation	Transitions or Emotional Moments
6. The "I Notice" Nature Walk	Focused Attention	Outdoors / Park Visits
7. The Memory Tray	Working Memory & Strategy	Afternoon Activity

The 7 Metacognition Games

1. Plan-Do-Review Block Build

Skill it develops: Planning, Execution, and Reflection

Instructions:

1. **Plan:** Before touching any blocks or Legos, ask your child what they want to build today. Have them describe it, name the colors they will use, or even draw a quick sketch.
2. **Do:** Let them build their creation independently. Try not to intervene, even if the tower is leaning or looks different from the plan!

3. **Review:** After building, sit down together and review the process. Ask questions like, "Did it turn out how you planned?" or "What was the hardest part to build?"

Why it helps: It teaches children to purposefully connect their initial ideas with their physical actions, and to critically evaluate the outcome of their efforts rather than just moving on to the next toy.

Helpful tip for parents: Resist the urge to jump in and fix falling blocks. Instead, ask, "*Oh no, it fell! What could we try differently this time to make the base stronger?*"

2. The Mistake Detective

Skill it develops: Error Monitoring and Self-Correction

Instructions:

1. Tell your child that you need their help to be a "Mistake Detective."
2. Throughout the day, make a few silly, intentional mistakes. For example, try putting their socks on their hands, attempt to open a door with a spoon, or call the dog by the cat's name.
3. Wait for them to catch the error. When they do, act surprised and ask them to explain exactly why it was a mistake and how to fix it.

Why it helps: Metacognition requires the brain to continuously scan for errors. By making mistakes funny and highly visible, children learn that mistakes are normal, detectable, and fixable.

Helpful tip for parents: Celebrate enthusiastically when they catch your mistake! "*Wow, excellent detective work! You realized that spoons don't have keys. How did you know that?*"

3. Storytime Pause and Predict

Skill it develops: Forward-thinking, Comprehension, and Logic

Instructions:

1. Choose a new book that your child hasn't read before.
2. Stop reading at a critical point in the story (e.g., right before a character opens a mysterious box).
3. Ask your child: "*What do you think will happen next?*" followed closely by, "*What makes you think that?*"
4. Finish the story and review their prediction.

Why it helps: It forces the child to pull from their prior knowledge, analyze current clues, and build predictive models in their brain—a core component of advanced reading comprehension.

Helpful tip for parents: Remind them that there are no "wrong" predictions! The goal is simply to practice explaining their reasoning.

4. "How Did You Do That?" Puzzles

Skill it develops: Process Articulation and Sequencing

Instructions:

1. Give your child an age-appropriate jigsaw puzzle or shape-sorter.
2. Watch as they successfully place a tricky piece.
3. Immediately ask them to teach you their strategy: *"Whoa, how did you know that piece went there?"*
4. Encourage them to explain their thought process (e.g., "I saw the blue sky," or "It had a flat edge").

Why it helps: Verbalizing a thought process after completing an action solidifies the learning. It moves the child from accidental success to conscious competence.

Helpful tip for parents: If they say "I don't know," offer two choices to prompt their thinking: *"Did you look at the shape of the piece, or did you look at the colors in the picture?"*

5. The Feelings Thermometer

Skill it develops: Emotional Regulation and Self-Awareness

Instructions:

1. Together with your child, draw a large thermometer on a piece of paper.
2. Color the bottom green (calm, happy), the middle yellow (frustrated, silly, wiggly), and the top red (angry, overwhelmed).
3. Throughout the day, periodically ask your child to point to where they are on the thermometer.
4. Discuss strategies to get back to "green" if they are in yellow or red (e.g., taking deep breaths, getting a drink of water).

Why it helps: Metacognition isn't just about academics; it's about emotional intelligence. Recognizing one's own emotional state is the foundational first step in self-regulation.

Helpful tip for parents: Model this yourself to normalize it! Say out loud, *"I'm feeling a little yellow right now because I can't find my car keys. I'm going to take a deep breath to calm down."*

6. The "I Notice" Nature Walk

Skill it develops: Focused Attention and Mindfulness

Instructions:

1. Take a walk outside around your neighborhood or a local park.

2. Take turns with your child saying out loud, "I notice..." followed by an observation.
3. For example: "I notice the wind is blowing the leaves," or "I notice a shiny rock."
4. Challenge them to notice things with different senses (what they hear, smell, or feel).

Why it helps: It anchors a child's busy, wandering mind into the present moment, teaching them how to consciously direct and hold their own attention.

Helpful tip for parents: Keep it brief. 5 to 10 minutes of hyper-focused noticing is a perfect brain workout for a preschooler.

7. The Memory Tray

Skill it develops: Working Memory and Recall Strategy

Instructions:

1. Place 3 to 5 familiar household objects on a tray (e.g., an apple, a toy car, a key, a spoon).
2. Let your child study the tray for 10 seconds.
3. Cover the tray with a towel and secretly remove one item.
4. Remove the towel and ask your child to identify what is missing.
5. Most importantly, ask them: *"How did you remember what was there?"*

Why it helps: They have to actively think about the strategies they use to remember things—such as repeating the names in their head, looking at colors, or creating a story.

Helpful tip for parents: If they struggle, teach them a memory strategy, like making up a silly song about the items before you cover them up!

Tips for Using These Games at Home

Parent Mindset Mantra: "I am a guide, not a fixer. My job is to ask the questions that spark their thinking, not to provide all the answers."

- **Embrace the Pause:** When you ask your child a question like "Why do you think that?", wait at least 5 to 7 seconds before saying anything else. Children need longer processing times to formulate complex thoughts.
- **Focus on the Process, Not Perfection:** Praise the effort and the strategy rather than the final result. Say, "I love how hard you tried to figure that out," instead of "You are so smart."
- **Keep it Playful:** If an activity starts to feel like a chore or a test, take a break. Metacognition develops best when children feel relaxed and engaged.
- **Use Open-Ended Prompts:** Avoid yes/no questions. Swap out "Did you like building

that?" with "What was your favorite part of building that?"

About EMC2 Kids Academy

At **EMC2 Kids Academy** in Santa Clara, California, we know that the early years are the most critical time for brain development. As parents, you are your child's first and most important teacher, and playing these metacognition games at home is a phenomenal way to support their cognitive growth.

In our classrooms, these concepts are woven seamlessly into our daily routines. Because our educators are **G.L.A.D. certified**, they are experts at creating an environment rich in academic language, critical thinking, and intentional learning. Whether children are engaging in multilingual lessons, exploring STEM concepts, or navigating social relationships, our teachers continuously guide them to think deeply about *how* they learn.

We believe in partnering with parents to ensure every child is not just ready for kindergarten, but ready to lead tomorrow.

Ready to see these strategies in action?

- We invite you to visit our website to learn more about our curriculum and educational philosophy.
- Schedule a personalized tour of our Santa Clara campus to meet our passionate, G.L.A.D.-certified educators and see the EMC2 difference for yourself!

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