



Executive Functioning

What is Executive Functioning?

“Teaching kids to count is fine, but teaching them what counts is best.”

— Bob Talbert

Executive Functioning Skills are skills developed throughout childhood and adolescence, and even early adulthood. They include behaviors used to manage our everyday lives. Signs children have challenges with executive functioning skills may include difficulty keeping track of their belongings and assignments, having messy or disorganized rooms, or impulsive behavior. These children may also have difficulties solving problems, understanding the size of problems, “getting stuck” or being inflexible when things are not going the way they expected. Executive Functioning skills include self-awareness and inhibition, attention to task, organization, problem solving, time management, and emotional self-regulation.

Self-awareness and inhibition are the ability to understand your thoughts, emotions, judge how your behavior affects others, and control impulses.

Attention is the ability to start and keep focus on the task at hand.



Organization involves keeping items orderly, having materials needed before starting a task, and following schedules and routines.

Problem Solving requires identifying the problem, possible solutions, and possible outcomes, choosing a solution and trying it, and seeing how it worked, returning to the drawing board if needed.

Time management is estimating how long something will take to finish, completing tasks on time, and using time wisely.

Emotional Self-Regulation is understanding and managing emotions in a healthy way.

Executive Functioning Tips at Home

There are many ways we can help children improve their executive functioning skills.

- ◆ Model executive functioning strategies/skills
- ◆ Be consistent-mean what you say and say what you mean.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for practice
- ◆ Notice when your child uses good executive functioning skills and give specific praise for their use
- ◆ Post a daily schedule with each day’s activities to be completed, and have your child help create it if they are able!
- ◆ Develop routines for the morning, work times, and evening
- ◆ Stay organized with specific places for materials (“A place for everything and everything in its place”)
- ◆ Use a timer so your child knows when activities begin and will end
- ◆ Teach and practice calming strategies proactively
- ◆ Provide choices for your child about the order to complete activities
- ◆ Use visuals for the steps needed to complete certain tasks, labels for where items belong, or pictures of what completed tasks look like such as a clean room, desk or closet
- ◆ Provide verbal reminders to use executive functioning skills

Additional Resources

- <https://www.bcps.org/system/coronavirus/>
- https://scs.bcps.org/departments/social_emotional_support
- <https://childmind.org/article/helping-kids-who-struggle-with-executive-functions/>
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/activities-guide-enhancing-and-practicing-executive-function-skills-with-children-from-infancy-to-adolescence/>
- <https://www.carrollschool.org/dyslexia-news-blog/blog-detail-page/~board/dyslexia-news/post/tips-for-helping-kids-with-executive-functioning-challenges>
- <https://heartmindonline.org/resources/5-step-problem-solving-for-young-children>
- Najdowski, A.C. (2017). *Flexible and Focused: Teaching Executive Function Skills to Individuals with Autism and Attention Disorders*. Academic Press

