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Executive Functioning:

The Brain's CEO

Presented by:
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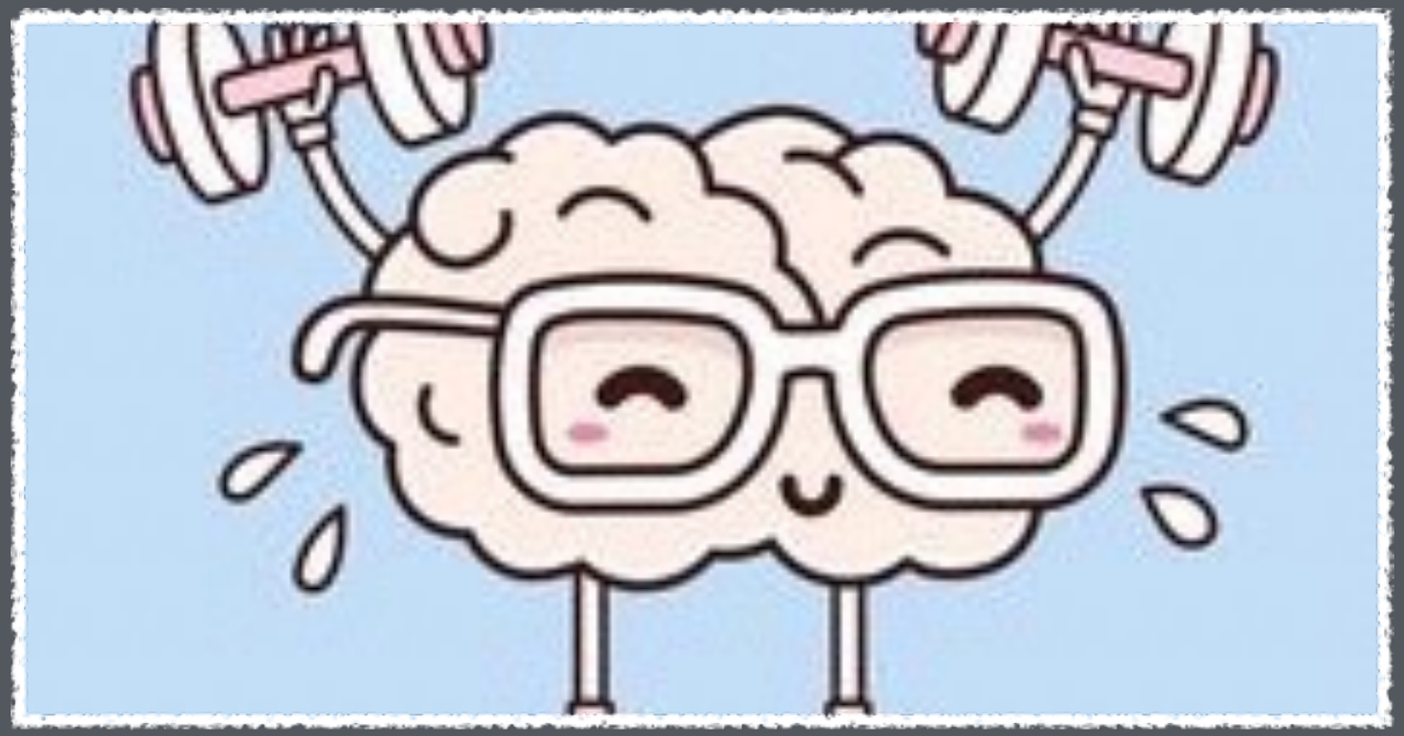
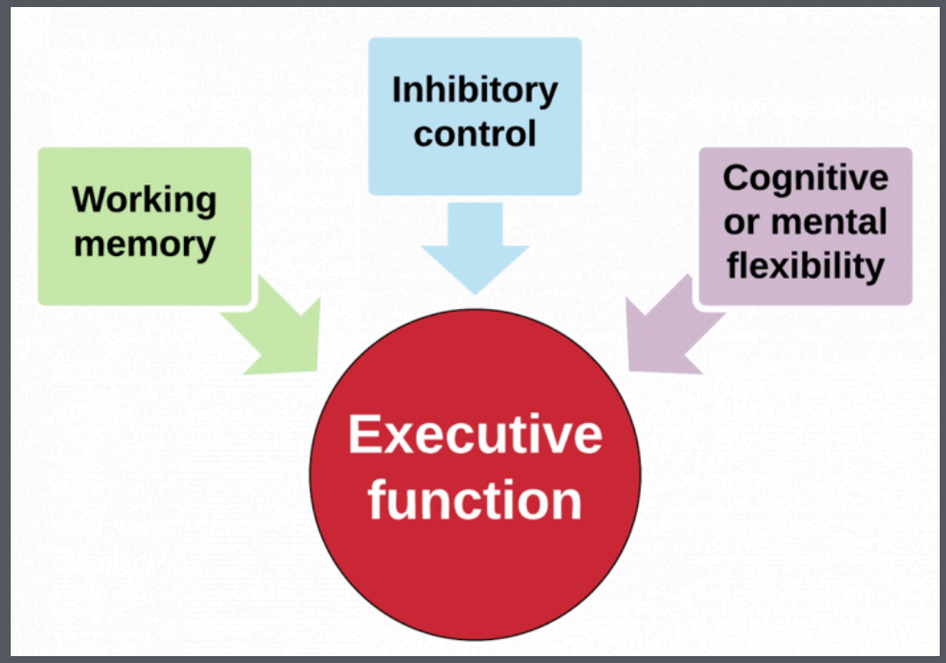


What is Executive Functioning?

Executive Functioning skills are the basis for planning, organizing, initiating, and following through with tasks, assignments, and problems inside and outside of school. Many students with weak executive functioning skills forget assignments, can't complete long terms projects, have trouble focusing, and experience difficulty with change.

These are the students who need to be taught explicit skills in order to become successful in school and in life after school. Simply put, executive functioning skills are necessary life skills.



The Three Main Domains of Executive Functioning

1. Working Memory: The skill that helps hold information in your mind while completing a task. It is important during note-taking, math problems, and multi-step directions.

2. Inhibitory Control: Involves being able to control one's attention, behavior, thoughts, or emotions to override external distraction. Inhibitory control (self control) of attention enables us to focus on what we choose, need to suppress and external distracting stimuli.

3. Mental Flexibility: Also known as shifting or being able to switch between your perspective and another's while changing your mind or course of action based on new information.

Here's a video to further explain...

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

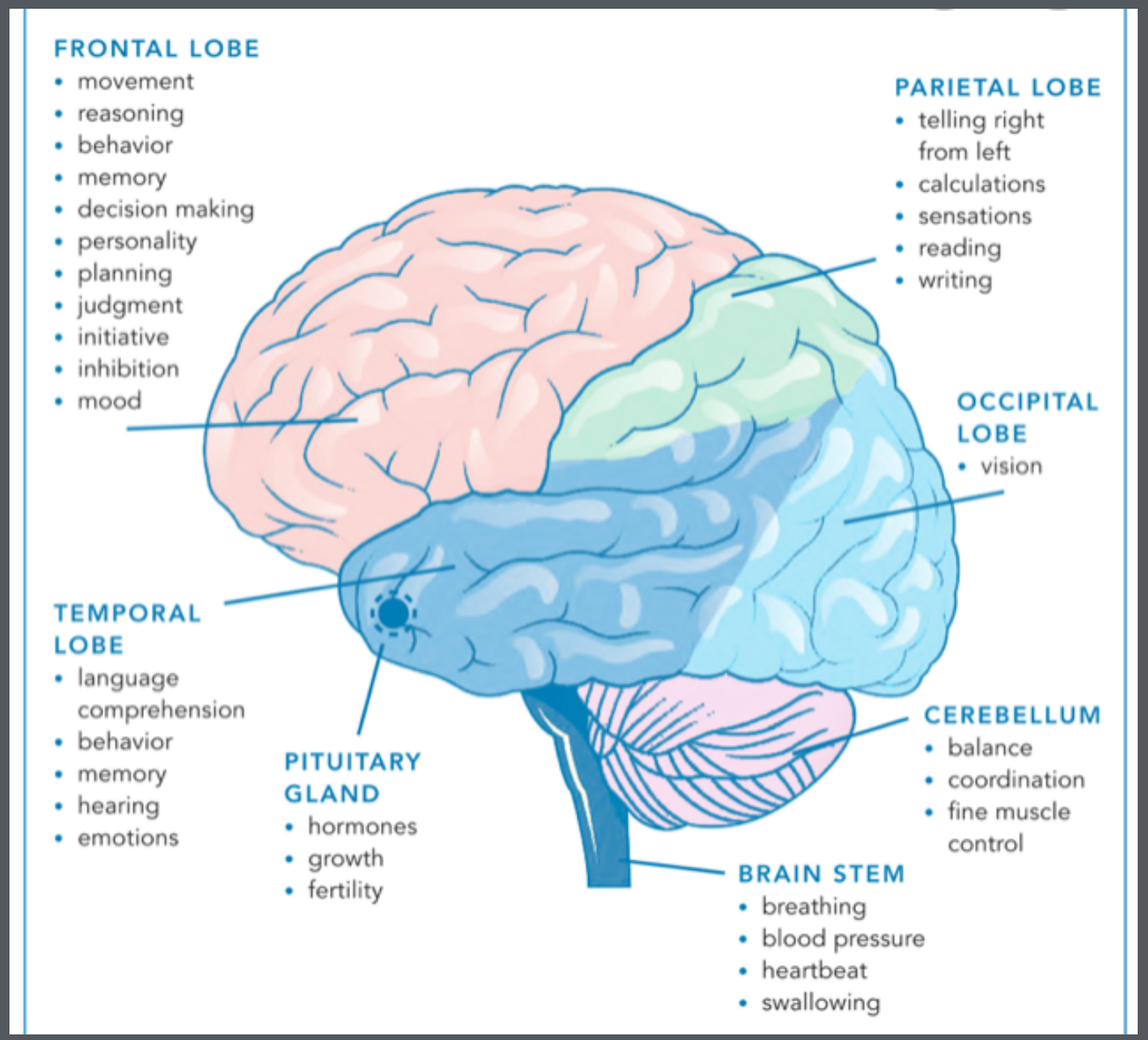
The following 3 types of brain function:

1. Working Memory
2. Mental Flexibility
3. Inhibitory Control

influence what scientists refer to as the subcategories of executive function.

*Students are NOT born with these skills, BUT have the POTENTIAL to develop them. To ensure that children develop these subcategories, we as educators/ parents need to help strengthen these emerging skills over the course of their education.

Your child/adolescent may understand the value of executive functioning, but may not have the slightest idea how to implement these skills. This is where you become their "frontal lobe"



The Story of Josh ...

A Day in the Life of a Child with Executive Functioning Challenges

Executive Function Processes

- Organizing
- Prioritizing
- Shifting / Thinking Flexibly
- Accessing Working Memory
- Self-Monitoring / Self-Checking

Meet Josh, a 6th grader with executive functioning issues. This does not mean he isn't intelligent. It means his brain's self-management system has trouble getting organized and getting things done. Executive functions are an important set of mental skills. To see how challenges with these EF skills impacts students in and outside of school, let's take a look at a typical day in Josh's life.

What Executive Functioning Challenge is Josh presenting at...

7 am:

Josh knows he is forgetting something. Ahh, that's it, his cleats for today's game. He runs back inside to get them, but he ends up leaving his backpack at home as he races to catch the bus. He sprints past the checklist his mom made to help him remember what he needs for school. But it's too late. The bus is about to pull away. He's going to miss it again!

What Executive Functioning Challenge is Josh presenting at...
11 am:

Josh's English teacher stands at the board and asks, "Tell me how last night's reading relates to the board?" Every hand in the class goes up except for Josh's. His heart sinks thinking about all the steps answering this question takes.

What Executive Functioning Challenge is Josh presenting at...

1 pm:

It's the best part of the day: lunch! At a table with his friends, Josh shouts at a mile a minute and jumps in and out of his seat. He doesn't even notice that the lunch monitor is glaring at him and that his friends look annoyed.

What Executive Functioning Challenge is Josh presenting at...

3 pm:

In soccer, Josh is so focused on getting the ball, that he doesn't keep in mind he's supposed to run once he gets it. He quickly runs for the nearest goal and kicks the ball- right into his own team's net.

What Executive Functioning Challenge is Josh presenting at...
6 pm:

It's time for dinner, but first Josh has to set the table. "Hmm," Josh scratches his head and tries to remember exactly what goes at each place setting. He thinks he has got it right this time, but his little sister reminds him that he does. "How dare she!" He blows up screaming at her.

What Executive Functioning Challenge is Josh presenting at...

8 pm:

After lots of prodding from his mom, Josh sits down to do his homework. But he doesn't know where to start. He knows he has several projects and papers that need attention, but what's due when? What needs to be done for tomorrow?

Overwhelmed, he puts his head down.

What Executive Functioning Challenge is Josh presenting at...

12 pm:

Delays and procrastination mean that Josh is burning the midnight oil. He is exhausted, but his history paper is due tomorrow. But he just can't figure out a structure for his paper and the steps he needs to take to get it done.

What Executive Functioning Challenge is Josh presenting at...
3 am:

Finally, the paper is done and Josh can catch a few hours of z's. But he can't seem to fall asleep- he's worried that he didn't do the paper right. And then there's the problem he'll discover tomorrow morning: His disorganization has gotten the best of him, and he forgot to put the finished paper in his backpack.

Let's help our "Josh's" understand their EF strengths and challenges...

Executive Functioning Self-Assessment

Directions: Answer the following questions about yourself by rating yourself:
0 = never 1 = some of the time 2 = most of the time 3 = always
Be honest!

PART A	
I use a homework planner to record assignments.	
Before starting an assignment, I make a road map for how I'll complete it.	
I use a calendar or planner to schedule my time and important dates.	
I can easily pace myself when working on long-term assignments.	
Part A Score	

PART B	
I have the materials I need for classes.	
I bring what I need home every night to complete homework assignments.	
I have a system for staying organized at home.	
My binder is well-organized and it is easy to find what I need at a moment's notice.	
Part B Score	

Part C	
I can accurately estimate how much time I'll need to complete something.	
When I have many assignments or tasks, I prioritize what needs to be completed first.	
I can meet deadlines, even when I have a lot going on.	
I can pace myself when working on assignments over a longer period of time.	
Part C Score	

Part D	
I can start a task right away, even when it's something I don't want to do.	
If I feel like procrastinating, I can overcome it.	
If I get stuck on a challenging assignment, I know what I can do to move along.	
I feel motivated to complete an assignment and keep going once I start.	
Part D Score	

Part E	
If I hear directions out loud in class, I will remember what to do.	
I can complete math problems step by step in my head.	
I use strategies to help me remember important information for studying.	
I can easily remember information and have a strong memory.	
Part E Score	

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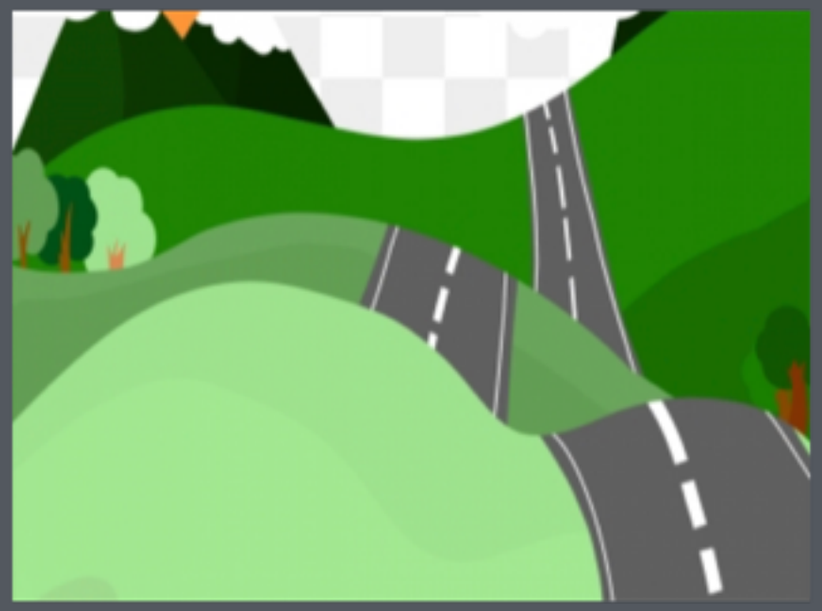
We will now explain some of Josh's challenges as they relate to executive functioning and his need for support:

Planning:



Creating a roadmap to completing a task or goal. It is the ability to figure out how to accomplish our goals. It includes analyzing what you need and what steps you need to complete a task

I can plan by...
using a calendar, writing homework down, making lists before I start, and writing goals for myself

Our children/adolescents must understand how planning impacts their ability to be academically successful

Name: _____ Date: _____

All About Planning

What is Planning?

Planning is the ability to figure out what you need and what steps you will take to complete a task. Think of it as making a "road map" to your goal. Planning does take a little bit of time at the start but it pays off in the end.

How Planning Can Help You

Being a good planner can help you in many ways.

- Reduces anxiety and stress - When you plan ahead, you don't have to work at the last minute. Your anxiety and stress levels can be greatly reduced by having a plan from the start.
- Helps increase productivity - Once you have a plan, it's easier to get started right away (and go in the right direction). This can allow you to be more productive in whatever you are working on.
- Reduces poor work habits - You will be less likely to cram for a test or stay up until 2am finishing that history report if you learn to plan ahead. Reducing those poor work habits is good for you now and in the future.
- Gives you time for other activities - If you plan ahead, you'll be able to finish your tasks on schedule, giving you time for other preferable activities, like sports or spending time with friends.
- Provides practice for positive life skills - Planning isn't something you'll just do for school. It's a life skill that you will use your entire life for your personal life and at your job.

Your Planning Skills

From 0 - 10 (with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), rate your own planning skills. Why did you score yourself that way? What are some ways you might be able to improve your planning skills?

_____

_____

_____

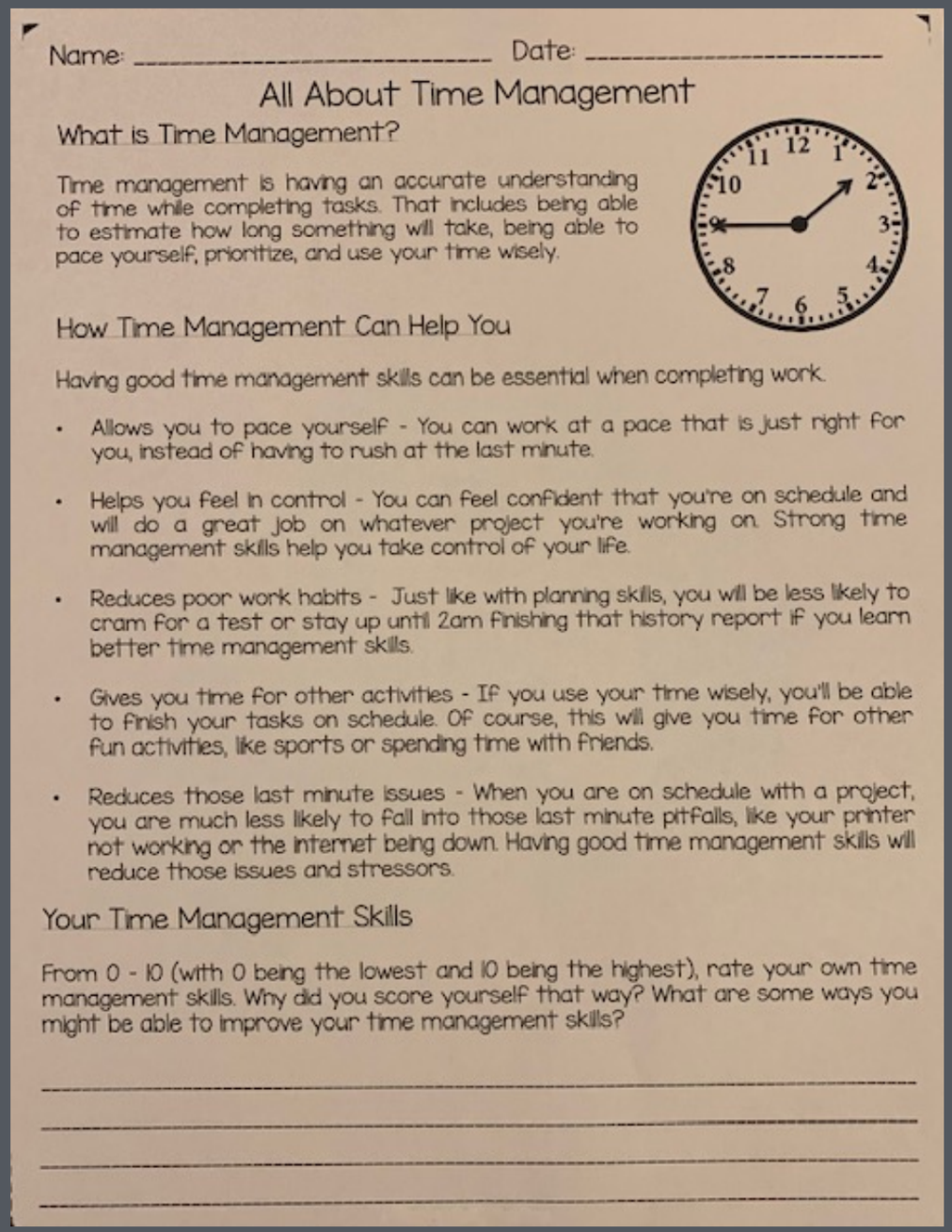
_____

Time Management:

Having an accurate understanding of how long tasks will take and using time wisely and effectively to accomplish tasks. It includes pacing yourself and meeting deadlines

I can manage my time by...
estimating the time it will take to complete a task, prioritizing the most important work first, and pacing myself as I work

Our children/adolescents must understand how time management impacts their ability to be academically successful



Name: _____ Date: _____

All About Time Management

What is Time Management?

Time management is having an accurate understanding of time while completing tasks. That includes being able to estimate how long something will take, being able to pace yourself, prioritize, and use your time wisely.

How Time Management Can Help You

Having good time management skills can be essential when completing work.

- Allows you to pace yourself - You can work at a pace that is just right for you, instead of having to rush at the last minute.
- Helps you feel in control - You can feel confident that you're on schedule and will do a great job on whatever project you're working on. Strong time management skills help you take control of your life.
- Reduces poor work habits - Just like with planning skills, you will be less likely to cram for a test or stay up until 2am finishing that history report if you learn better time management skills.
- Gives you time for other activities - If you use your time wisely, you'll be able to finish your tasks on schedule. Of course, this will give you time for other fun activities, like sports or spending time with friends.
- Reduces those last minute issues - When you are on schedule with a project, you are much less likely to fall into those last minute pitfalls, like your printer not working or the internet being down. Having good time management skills will reduce those issues and stressors.

Your Time Management Skills

From 0 - 10 (with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), rate your own time management skills. Why did you score yourself that way? What are some ways you might be able to improve your time management skills?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Organization:

The ability to develop and maintain a system that keeps materials and plans orderly

I can organize by...

*Identifying a regular time during the week for clearing out and organizing my backpack/study area.

* Keeping reference materials, including calculators, dictionaries, and pens/pencils, graphic organizers, etc. near my homework workspace.

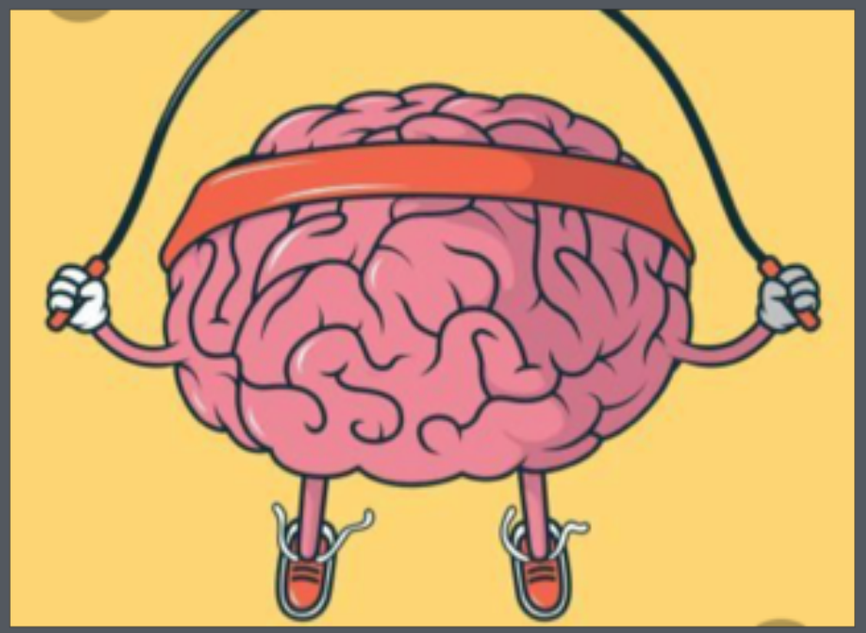
* Using brightly colored folders (identified for each subject), to bring important papers (like homework and permission slips) to and from schools, so those items don't get lost.

Task Initiation:

The ability to independently start tasks when needed. It is the process that allows you to just begin something even when you dont really want to

I can initiate tasks by...
making a plan to complete a task, starting right away (even when I dont want to), using strategies when I get stuck, and chunking big tasks into smaller ones

Working Memory:



The ability to keep information in your head in order to complete a task. It's important for remembering information, following directions, and completing academic problems.

I can use my working memory by learning to paraphrase information (saying back information in a different way), and concentrating on the task at hand.

Metacognition:

Being aware of what you know and what you dont know. It is being able to understand what you need in order to improve your learning.

I can use metacognition by...
identifying how I learn best, understanding what I am supposed to learn, checking in on my own progress as I complete a task, and evaluating how I did once a task is done.

Flexibility:

The ability to adapt to a new situation and deal with change. It also includes perspective-taking, and making decisions to fix a problem.

I can be flexible by...
seeing different perspectives, using problem- solving skills to handle challenges that come up and being open-minded to new solutions when a change happens that I was not expecting

Perseverance

The ability to stick with a task and not give up, even when it becomes challenging. It includes using strategies to overcome roadblocks and problems that come up along the way.

I can persevere by...
staying goal-oriented, even when road blocks pop up, using strategies to work through challenges, and remembering that my hard work will pay off in the end.

Let's set our children up for success!

The following video explains why executive functioning is so important to life-long achievement

We as educators, parents, and support professionals have the potential to significantly impact academic, social, and emotional success through explicit executive functioning instruction

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R0GKqGZ8g4

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