The 12 Executive Functions: Build Skills for Home & School

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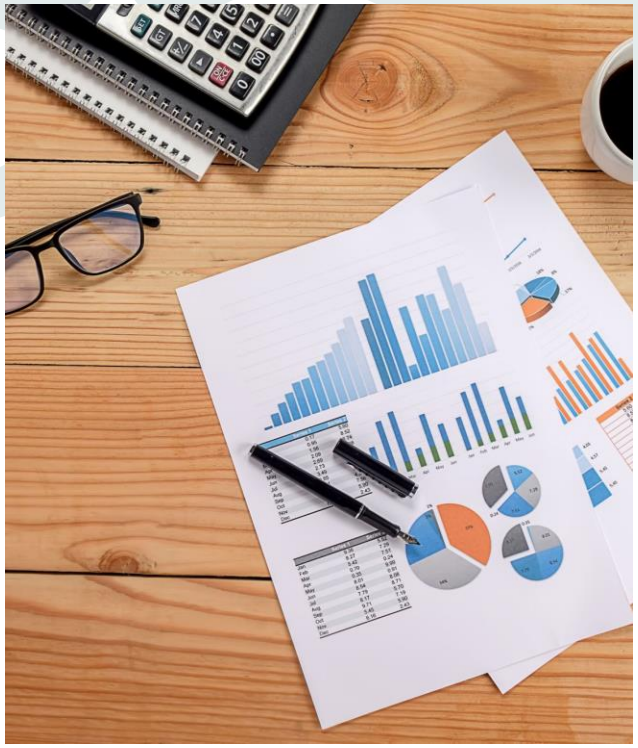
Guiding Principles for today

1. Not all adults are skilled in ALL areas of EF
2. As demands in the environment change, EF skills need to be recalled, further developed, and applied to growing demands
3. What impacts EF long term?
4. What impacts EF short term?
5. No judgement language

The History of Executive Function

- Executive functions are NOT a unitary cognitive process (Denckla, 1996)
- The brain's directive capacities (Goldberg, 2001)
- The CEO of the brain (Saltus, 2003)
- A focus on the development of the frontal lobe
- Think of EF as the orchestra's conductor (Brown, 2005)
- Our working definition of Executive Function "EF's are the directive capacities that are responsible for a person's ability to engage in purposeful, organized, strategic, self-regulated, goal-directed processing of perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and actions" (McClosky, 2009)

The 12 Executive Functions



Self Monitoring/Self Restraint	Working Memory	Emotional Control	Focus & Attention
Task Initiation	Planning & Prioritizing	Organization	Time Management
Setting Achieving Goals	Flexibility	Metacognition	Stress Tolerance

Self Monitoring/Self Regulation:

The ability to monitor self, emotions, and behaviors

At home:

- ✓ Model
- ✓ Practice
- ✓ Rehearse
- ✓ Children's books and social stories for younger children
- ✓ Utilize timers for self-monitoring

At School

- ✓ Utilize literature to identify characters who struggle and overcome issues with self-monitoring & self-regulation
- ✓ Utilize movies, video clips, and you tube examples of self-monitoring & self-regulation
- ✓ Have regular classroom conversations that withhold judgement regarding these difficulties

Working Memory:

Allows us to work with information without losing track of it. Think of it as the brain's "sticky note" (Understood.org)

At Home

- ✓ Build in tools that support working memory such as sticky notes, reminder apps, note taking on HW
- ✓ Create 5-minute check ins in the morning and in the evening to review the day's events and review upcoming activities
- ✓ Utilize resources like notes, audio files
- ✓ Review spelling, vocabulary, learned skills at dinner time

At School

- ✓ Mnemonic Devices
- ✓ Songs, chants, games
- ✓ Rubrics
- ✓ Checklists on board
- ✓ Reminders Apps
- ✓ Active reading strategies
- ✓ Active study strategies

Emotional Control:

How well we manage our emotions. Especially with tolerance, frustration, and reactions appropriate to the situation

At Home

- ✓ Get on the child's level (both physically and emotionally)
- ✓ Use emotion words/phrases frequently in the home such as "you seem frustrated" and "I am sorry this is hard for you. Can I help?" Identify, validate, and respond
- ✓ Use books, movies, and real-world examples to have frequent conversations about emotions such as how we feel them and how we identify them

At School

- ✓ Zones of Regulation (can be adapted for older students)
- ✓ Normalize classroom language and conversations around emotions
- ✓ Seek social work support early
- ✓ Books, movies, and real-world examples work for students of all ages

Focus & Attention:

Attentional control is an executive functioning skill that involves focusing on certain stimuli in the environment while not focusing or "tuning out" other things

At Home

- ✓ Create separate, distraction free study spaces
- ✓ Use routines
- ✓ Limit screen time
- ✓ Chores and tasks should be short and age appropriate
- ✓ Break down tasks

At School

- ✓ Give movement breaks to refocus
- ✓ Keep lessons short
- ✓ Clear directions & expectations
- ✓ Neat & organized classroom
- ✓ Environment should not be overstimulating

Task Initiation:

The ability to start a task without procrastination

At Home

- ✓ Modeling prior to start
- ✓ Fidget toys in the environment
- ✓ Utilize timers & checklists
- ✓ Set the child up for success
- ✓ Reduce clutter in study space, in the home, and especially in the spaces where the task is required
- ✓ Don’t overwhelm

At School

- ✓ Have predictable classroom routines and guidelines. Students need to know what to expect.
- ✓ Teacher models and examples
- ✓ Rubrics
- ✓ Give one task at a time. Scaffold support

Planning & Prioritizing

An important executive functioning skill is time management–the ability to accurately estimate time required, how much time one has, and allocate time effectively to meet deadlines. It also includes an awareness that time matters

At Home

- ✓ Utilize family calendars
- ✓ The reminders app for families
- ✓ Children & teens require more time, more organization, and more support than adults in this area
- ✓ If adults in home struggle with this EF, there may need to be intentional strategies in place, and professional support

At School

- ✓ Rubrics
- ✓ Syllabi
- ✓ Written assignment sheets with directions
- ✓ Frequent reminders
- ✓ Planning & Prioritizing meetings, small group or 1:1

Organization:

A term that refers to the organization of not only personal materials & schedules but also considers the organization of thoughts

At Home

- ✓ Break task into small parts
- ✓ Checklists & to-do lists
- ✓ Predictable Daily routines
- ✓ Model successful AND unsuccessful attempts at organization
- ✓ View organization as a process that consists of steps rather than simply organized v. unorganized

At School

- ✓ Student involvement in organizational strategies
- ✓ Rubrics, checklists, and clear expectations for assignments
- ✓ Teachers use Venn diagrams, mind mapping, KWL charts, other visual organization tools prior to writing or academic tasks

Time Management:

An important executive functioning skill is time management–the ability to accurately estimate time required, how much time one has, and allocate time effectively to meet deadlines. It also includes an awareness that time matters (www.smartkidswithld.com)

Home

- ✓ Practice estimating time for tasks and testing theory with a timer (worksheet)
- ✓ Demonstrate increased work speed and how it may/may not affect quality of outcomes
- ✓ Arrive on time for activities
- ✓ Family modeling
- ✓ Family calendars & reminders

School

- ✓ Utilize timers, clocks, apps
- ✓ Create predictable schedules within the classroom
- ✓ Individualize student needs and offer more support to students who struggle with time management (Not only Sped students)

Setting & Achieving Goals

At Home

- ✓ Utilize both personal goal setting and family goal setting
- ✓ Break down chores into manageable parts
- ✓ Create a success-based climate, increasing difficulty and goals slowly
- ✓ Use family calendars, checklists, visual reminders, charts
- ✓ Share personal examples of successful and unsuccessful

Goals you have set in the past.

At School

- ✓ Utilize both individualized goal setting and group goal setting
- ✓ Break down goals into manageable parts
- ✓ Teacher and peer conferencing
- ✓ Daily check-ins
- ✓ When students struggle, create more structure and support

Flexibility:

"Being mentally flexible is the ability to shift our thoughts, emotions, plans, and actions based on new data" (Chaikind McNulty, 2020)

Home

- ✓ How Flexible is Your Teen? (Guare, Dawson, & Guare, 2013). This checklist guides parents through identifying areas of strength and areas of need when considering cognitive and emotional flexibility.
- ✓ Use phrases such as "Thank you for being flexible" as children don't often KNOW when they are being inflexible
- ✓ Practice mindfulness (calm the nervous system)

School

- ✓ Games & group activities that support flexibility
- ✓ Speak to flexibility as a superpower (Michelle Garcia Winner has a superhero names Super Flex)
- ✓ Practice deep breathing, use short guided meditations

Metacognition:

Thinking about your thinking

At Home

- ✓ Parent modeling of their own thinking process
- ✓ Use positive self-talk & encourage positive self-talk
- ✓ Ask questions such as how did you come to that answer/decision
- ✓ Tell me what you are thinking (I've learned that we can often assume what our kids are thinking and we are often wrong

In School

- ✓ Summon and support the retrieval of prior knowledge
- ✓ Think alouds (Pre K- HS)
- ✓ Use learning style language with students
- ✓ Use Gardner's multiple intelligence language

Stress Tolerance:

The ability to thrive in stressful situations, cope with change, manage uncertainty

At Home

- ✓ Limit or adjust news coverage in your home to consider age and maturity
- ✓ Limit adult conversations about adult topics such as family finances
- ✓ Teach stress reducing acts of self-care in the home. Even toddlers can learn to use self- care to manage stress
- ✓ Model self-care when feeling stressed

At School

- ✓ Teachers can set up spaces within the classroom for breaks due to stress
- ✓ Teachers can begin to see behaviors as stress and offer support
- ✓ Classroom books that identify stressful situations and how to choose a break
- ✓ Fidgets, drawing, listening to music when appropriate

It's Time for Q + A

If you have questions, please put them in the chat.

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Learn more about Westport Day School:
www.westportdayschool.org