Executive Functions:
Teaching the Skills to Get Things Done

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Objectives

- What are executive functioning skills are and how are they needed for daily activities?

- How do our individual, unique strengths help us manage day-to-day executive function challenges?

- What are some strategies for planning, prioritization, time management, self-regulation, and getting things done.
TIME
CHECK
What are Executive Functions?
The single greatest executive functioning challenge...
Sound familiar?

- Can’t pay attention
- Scatterbrained
- Procrastinator
- Think before you speak!
- Always late
- Irresponsible
- Never finishes anything
Definition

“The executive functions are a set of processes that all have to do with managing oneself and one’s resources in order to achieve a goal.”

(Cooper-Kahn & Dietzel, 2008.)
Executive Functions are the skills it takes to get things done.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Skills</th>
<th>Emotional Skills</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Planning</td>
<td>• Impulse control</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Organization</td>
<td>• Emotional control</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Time management</td>
<td>• Flexibility</td>
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<td>• Task initiation</td>
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<td>• Sustained Attention</td>
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<td>• Goal-directed persistence</td>
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<td>• Working memory</td>
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<td>• Metacognition</td>
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</table>
The Amazing Brain

**Pre-Frontal Cortex**
- Orchestra Conductor
- Allows us to control our thinking, behavior and emotions

**Amygdala**
- Switching Station
- Determines if incoming information will go to PFC or lower reactive brain for “fight/flight/freeze”
Emotional Control Skills

Self-Regulation is a balance between behavioral and cognitive INHIBITION and INITIATION

Barkley, 2000
Focus & Attention Skills

Activate & Initiate Attention
- Arouse the effort and motivation to attend
- Select WHAT needs attention

Sustain Attention & Filter
- Maintain alertness
- Filter out extra stimuli
- Resist distractions

Shift Attention
- Shift too quickly - “distractible”
- Shift too slowly – “inattentive”
- Can’t Shift – “perseverative-rigid”

Jill Kuzma (2012)
Organization Skills

**Materials**
- Clothes, household or work items
- Homework materials
- Tracking paperwork

**Ideas**
- Verbalizing thoughts
- Brainstorming
- Problem Solving

**Schedule**
- Calendar checking
- Breaking down and completing tasks
- Using a planner

**Time**
- Feel the passing of time
- Prioritizing
- Understanding time as a volume

Jill Kuzma (2012)
Input from our world is received

SHORT TERM MEMORY

Do we need this information?

Auditory

WORKING MEMORY

Visual

LEARNING (Long-Term Memory)

RETRIEVAL

Jill Kuzma (2012)
Planning Skills

Begin with the END!

End Result

• Visualize the end product

Steps

• Which steps are required to get to create the end product, in what sequence, and in how much time?

Prep

• What resources needed to carry out steps?
TIME
CHECK
Tools for Focus and Attention
A Model from Sports

- **Cook’s Model of Concentration**: a four-step routine that promotes systematic and thorough concentration
- Minimizes extraneous mental interference
- Helps athletes focus their concentration to improve performance
Focusing with Funnel Vision

See it

NOTICE EVERYTHING in your funnel: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and all sensations.

Think it

THINK ABOUT the ONE THING that is important and requires your focus. Think of the strategies or steps to help you do it.

Feel it

FEEL what it is like to be successful doing this one important thing you are focused on.

Hold it

HOLD on to your picture of the end. Find a way to keep it in your mind so you can remember what you are doing.

Do it!

DO this ONE THING. DO IT NOW. Keep doing it until it is finished.
Tools for Planning
Plan backwards
“Reverse Planning” or “Backward Design”

- Start with the end in mind.
  - What will it look like when I’m finished? Picture/draw it!

- Break down steps and estimate time.
  - What steps do I need to take to reach my end picture?
  - In what order do I need to take the steps?
  - How long will each step take?

- Prepare to take action.
  - Who or what do I need to complete the steps?
### Planning
Get Ready, Do, Done!

<table>
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<tr>
<th>3. GET READY</th>
<th>2. DO</th>
<th>1. DONE</th>
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<tr>
<td>What and who do I need to do the task?</td>
<td>What steps do I need to take to be done? How long will each step take?</td>
<td>Do a “Future Sketch.” What will it look like when I am DONE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Steps:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Time:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<th>6.</th>
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<td>Prepare your space. Gather needed materials and supplies. Consult with people who may help.</td>
<td>Set up “Working Clock.” Start steps and adjust time if needed. Finish all the steps.</td>
<td>Know when to STOP. Close out the task: ALL DONE Review: What worked? Worked didn’t work?</td>
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Concept created by Sarah Ward and Kristen Jacobsen of Cognitive Connections: Executive Functions Practice.
### 3. GET READY
What and who do I need to do the task?
- all ingredients
- measuring cup & spoons
- knife
- rolling pin
- cookie sheet
- oven
- bowl
- DOG!

### 2. DO
What steps do I need to take to be done? How long will each step take?
- Steps:
  - get ingredients
  - measure
  - mix it up
  - roll dough flat
  - cut the treats
  - bake
  - put in ziplock

- Time:
  - set up "Working Clock."
  - start steps and adjust time if needed.
  - finish all the steps.

### 1. DONE
Do a "Future Sketch." What will it look like when I am DONE?
- Know when to STOP.
- Close out the task: ALL DONE.
- Review: What worked? Worked didn’t work?

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**Plan Backwards:**

**Work forwards:**

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Adapted from material by Sarah Ward and Kristen Jacobsen.
Practice imagining the future

- What the setting looks like
- What I look like in that setting
- How I move through a task in that setting
- Predict emotional state in the future setting
Foresight, Rehearsal, Self-Talk

• **Make Concrete**
  - Use photos of setting, items, and student
  - Draw movements needed in setting
Foresight, Rehearsal, Self-Talk

- **Make Concrete**
  - Use photos or visuals for steps in a task
Using Planners

• What works BEST for YOU?
  • Size?
  • Purpose?
  • Electronic or hard copy?
The Creativity Planner
The PURPLE O!
www.etsy.com/shop/ThePurpleO

The Academic Planner: A Tool for Time Management
Order out of Chaos
www.orderoochaos.com

The Passion Planner
www.passionplanner.com
Free printable pages!!
Tools for Time Management
Clocks and Timers

- Use to help develop accuracy in estimation.

- Use for “time experiments.” No stress or pressure!

- Avoid digital clocks/timers if accurate time estimation is difficult; instead use ones that show time as a quantity or volume (analog clocks, egg timers, Time-Timers, etc.)
“Working Clock”

- Glass front (for dry erase)
- Metal frame (for magnets)
- IKEA “PUGG” clock $12.99

Concept created by Sarah Ward and Kristen Jacobsen of Cognitive Connections: Executive Functions Practice.
Timers

online-stopwatch.com

www.timetimer.com

www.watchminder3.com
TIME CHECK
Tools for Self-Regulation
The Zones of Regulation

**BLUE ZONE**
- Sad
- Sick
- Tired
- Bored
- Moving Slowly

**GREEN ZONE**
- Happy
- Calm
- Feeling Okay
- Focused
- Ready to Learn

**YELLOW ZONE**
- Frustrated
- Worried
- Silly/Wiggly
- Excited
- Loss of Some Control

**RED ZONE**
- Mad/Angry
- Mean
- Terrified
- Yelling/Hitting
- Out of Control
TIME CHECK
Q & A

WHERE
WHAT
WHEN
HOW
WHY
WHO
Final thoughts...

“...it is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.”

~Anne Landers
Resources for Executive Functions

- The CEO of Self: An Executive Functioning Workbook (2014) by Jan Johnston-Tyler MA
- FLIPP the Switch: Strengthen Executive Function Skills (2015) by Sheri Wilkins and Carol Burmeister
- Learning Outside the Lines. (2000) by Johathan Mooney and David Cole
- The Organized Student: Teaching Children the Skills for Success in School And Beyond. (2005) by Donna Goldberg
- The Smart but Scattered Guide to Success: How to Use Your Brain's Executive Skills to Keep Up, Stay Calm, and Get Organized at Work and at Home (2016) by Peg Dawson EdD and Richard Guare PhD
References

- Jacobsen, Kristen. & Ward, Sarah. (2014). Cutting Edge Strategies to Improve Executive Function Skills; Presentation, St. Louis, Missouri [www.efpractice.com](http://www.efpractice.com)