Executive Functioning:

What is it?
How can I help?

What is EF and why is it important?

★ Includes decision making, planning and managing information in order to carry out a task.

★ Understanding your child's strengths and weaknesses can help you capitalize on his or her strengths to aid in developing his or her weaknesses.

- **Response Inhibition***
- **Working Memory***
- **Emotional Control***
- Flexibility
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation

- Planning/Prioritization
- Organization
- Time Management
- Goal-directed persistence
- Metacognition

*thought to be the first skills to emerge between 6-12 months of life (Dawson, 2017)

What do EF challenges look like in...

Lower School

- Trouble remembering verbal instructions
- Difficulty dealing with "unfairness"
- Needs help following 2-3 step routines
- Misplaces belongings
- Can't complete short tasks within time limits
- Gives up easily on challenging tasks
- Trouble adjusting to change in plans

Middle School

- Difficulty keeping track of assignments from multiple teachers
- Difficulty spending more than 60 minutes on homework
- Trouble "reading" reactions and changing behaviors
- Unable to make and follow homework routines/plans
- Unorganized binders, notebooks
- Can't make good decisions about priorities when time is limited

High School

- Says things without thinking
- Forgets homework and needed materials
- Easily frustrated with challenging tasks
- Trouble with open-ended assignments
- Puts of homework until last minute
- Trouble planning for big or multistep assignments
- Has a hard time estimating how long it will take to accomplish a task
- Doesn't check for mistakes or evaluate performance

So,
what can I do at home?

Strategies to support at home

Getting Ready in the Morning (initiation, sustained attention, working memory)

- Create a checklist
- Pack bag/belongings the night before

Completing Chores (initiation, working memory, attention, organization)

- Create a checklist of items that need to be completed
- Decide when a chore will be done
- Divide bedroom into quadrants to simplify task (bedroom organization)
- Provide "After" pictures for cue about how bedroom should look

Strategies to support at home

Homework (initiation, attention, planning, time management, metacognition)

- Write down all assignments and estimate how much time is needed to complete each
- Use a timer (ex. Time Timer) to monitor time
- Provide breaks- child should work for 20-25 minutes before taking a break

Long-term Projects (initiation, attention, planning, time management, metacognition)

- Use a planning sheet to break project into smaller steps
- Create deadlines or timelines for each step of project

Strategies to support at home

Studying for Tests (initiation, attention, planning, time management, metacognition)

- Keep a planner or calendar with upcoming tests
- Start a study plan about 5 days prior to test
- Help child organize study materials
- With child, decide which study methods are most effective (quizzing self, highlighting notes, flash cards, etc)
- Mark notes as Red (don't know), Yellow (iffy), Green (know)

Organizing Notebooks/Homework (organization, initiation)

- Designate a place for incomplete and complete homework
- Color code folders
- Use dividers to separate sections in one binder
- Label everything
- Make a time (1-2x/week) to organize notebooks

Strategies to support at home

Learning to Manage Emotions and Anxiety (emotional control, response inhibition, flexibility)

- Talk about triggers- what causes anxiety or temper
- Create a list of replacement behaviors- what can your child do instead
- Practice stress management techniques at home- mindfulness, moments of silence, deep breathing
- For younger students- zones of regulation

References