



Executive Function Abilities are a set of cognitive skills that develop across childhood into adulthood. These important abilities guide us throughout our lives to: make a plan and execute it; set a goal and take steps toward it; organize our conversations, thoughts and ideas; weigh our choices for good decision-making; inhibit our impulsive words, thoughts and actions; and balance our positive and negative emotions. EF skills allow us to imagine our future and then take steps to achieve it.



Save The Date! Kids should have a school calendar for assignments and events and a second home calendar for chores and social activities. Keeping separate calendars avoids confusion and aids with clarity and time management. For older kids with technology, an online calendar set with reminders is invaluable.



Color Your World: The brain loves color. Color coding activities, schedules and materials helps the brain to focus, make connections and remember important details. Brain stress is reduced as the brain easily connects the color and the code.



Get Lucky Doubles: Avoid the “*but I can’t find my...*” chaos by having doubles of important items. Keep extra pens, pencils and other *easy to lose items* on hand. Don’t stop there! If you can, consider an extra pair of shoes, jacket and doubles of other critical items to avoid frantic last minute searches.

THE QUIETER YOU BECOME, THE MORE YOU CAN HEAR

Are You Listening? Reducing distraction means kids are more likely to be productive. Earphones can help block out the dreaded “*focus fighters*”. Listening to music can actually activate the brain for energy and focus. Check out free white noise apps like Simplynoise.com



BIGGER IS BETTER: Sometimes it seems as if important items like keys, school passes or ID’s are almost trying to get lost. Make these tiny escape artists harder to miss by bulking them up. Large keychains are easier to locate. Try using thick, colorful lanyards and holders. Consider attaching them to a daily item such as a backpack or lunchbox where they are always visible. Out of site is out of mind.



Food For Focus: When it comes to getting through the day, healthy food equals focus. Provide kids with an arsenal for healthy easy to eats snacks and protein rich nibbles to maintain blood sugar levels throughout the day. Avoid high sugar snacks and drinks except when having fun or for a special treat.



Put Your Game Face On! Board games provide practice for EF skills related to: **PLANNING** as we anticipate our opponent’s next move; **WORKING MEMORY** as we recall our past moves; **FLEXIBILITY** as we change strategies; **SELF-CONTROL** when we lose and **ORGANIZATION** of our game materials & pieces. Playing as a family promotes trust, builds relationships and makes memories.



Practice Makes Perfect: Whatever the brain does the most of is what it will become proficient at doing. Practicing routines builds body memory and strengthens neuro-pathways for automaticity. Make sure the practice is motivating and positive.



In my Own Little Corner of the World: Each home should have a separate place for homework that is organized for structured study. Include bins with labels for materials, a timer to motivate and set study goals and a chalk or white board to write down thoughts or reminders. *It doesn’t have to be a quiet or an isolated place.* Sticky notes are amazing memory prompts for kids.

	<p>Give Me A Break! Sustaining cognitive focus is hard work for the brain. Thinking uses up our energy reserves and we become foggy. Set work time-frames for 15-20 minutes (5-10 minutes for younger kids) interspersed with short movement or talking breaks (not TV or videos). A tired brain will remember nothing, will take longer to complete the task and with less quality.</p>
	<p>Re-Think the Drink! While kids may crave sugary drinks, processed sugar is not helpful to the brain. Our brains needs water for hydration to think smoothly and process quickly. Water the brain garden for quick and creative thinking!</p>
	<p>Make-A-Plan of Attack! Draw a plan of what to do first, what materials are needed & estimate how long it will take. Then check back with the plan frequently to ensure that you are on track. Mark off “done steps” to show progress for motivation. Remember to give small natural rewards when benchmark goals have been attained.</p>
	<p>How Long Will This Take? Estimate a time-frame goal for completion. This is a very motivating strategy for short tasks. For big projects, breaking tasks into chunks of successful completion is crucial. Remember, time management is an EF skill that is not fully operational in children and adolescents. They need external structure and guidelines to teach them to manage their time.</p>
	<p>Living in a MATERIAL WORLD! Each child should have their own set of materials organized in their own study space. The last item their “done” check-list is to “put all materials back in place” and ready for the next day.</p>
	<p>Tears and Fears: Emotional Regulation is an EF skill that does not become fully self-regulated until adulthood. Children will vacillate across the emotional thermometer. When they are in a “state of emotion” their ability to think, listen and choose options is greatly reduced. Support and WAIT for a return to calm regulation before trying to problem solve, discipline or offer solutions.</p>
	<p>The Older I Get, The Smarter My Parents Become! Never forget that your children’s brains are growing and changing constantly. (<i>Your brains are too</i>). Full maturation of EF occurs after age 20. A bell-curve of maturation is normal so your children may reach milestones at very different times from other kids. Your guidance, patient support and frequent positive acknowledgements of their efforts are the keys to supporting EF development and independence. Soon your children will grow up to be “anything they want to be.” Stay the course parents.</p>

HERE IS WHAT TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE STARTING A NEW TASK:

1. **STOP**  • Stop what I am doing.
2. **THINK**  • What do I need to do?
• Do I have a checklist that I can use?
3. **PLAN**  • Plan the steps needed to finish the task.
• Fill out the checklist that I can use.
4. **DO**  • Sit down and start working!