

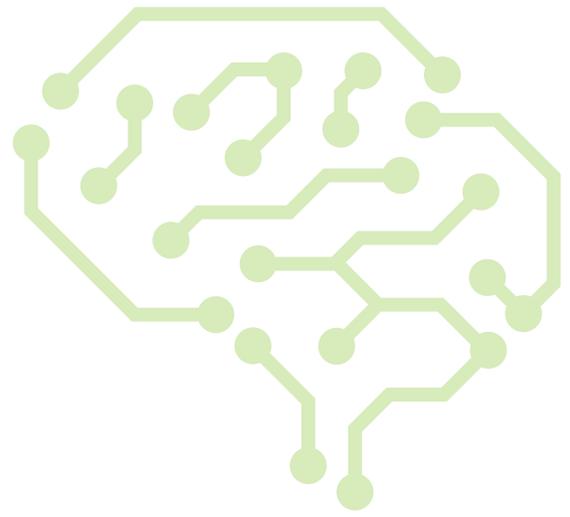
EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

HOW TO BOLSTER
10 ESSENTIAL SKILLS
STUDENTS USE FOR A LIFETIME



THE
RUMSON
COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL

Truly Great N-8



WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Executive Functioning (EF) is a set of skills the human brain needs to accomplish goals. It's the ability to plan, organize, self-manage, and a host of other abilities that are the key to student success. EF is a learning process, which is why RCDS has a dedicated program to teach it.



Director of Student Services and The Jayne S. Carmody School at RCDS, Natalie Diehl earned her B.A. in Special Education, Elementary Education and Psychology from the College of St. Elizabeth. She has her M.S.Ed. degree from Monmouth University as a Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant (LDTC). She is Wilson Reading System Certified and an active member of International Dyslexia Association. Mrs. Diehl has seen The Carmody School grow from only seven students to the full-fledged program it is today.

“Executive Functioning is not fully developed until a person is about 25 years old. We introduce these skills in Nursery and consistently emphasize Executive Functioning through eighth grade. When children start and practice really good habits young, they become ingrained. It provides a really strong foundation that students carry for a lifetime.”

**– Natalie Diehl,
Director of Student Services and
The Jayne S. Carmody School at RCDS**



FUNDAMENTALS OF EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING



1. **Planning** is the ability to put together a strategy to accomplish a goal. Students need to be able to determine what they need, and the steps they are going to take to complete a task, assignment or project.



2. **Organization** skills can be twofold. There's the practical skill of developing and maintaining a system that helps students complete assignments, tasks, and goals. On a cognitive level, strengthening students' ability to analyze and categorize information goes a long way toward building a strong EF foundation.



3. **Time Management** is a skill that's developed when students begin to understand how long it will take to complete a task or assignment, and then use their time efficiently and effectively.



4. **Task Initiation** is the ability to ignore distractions, overcome procrastination, and start a task. Developing this skill means you develop the inner motivation that tells your brain, 'I need to get started.'



5. **Working Memory** plays an important role in how we process, remember, and use information on a daily basis. It's the ability to hold information in your mind and then use it to take notes, ask questions about a classroom lesson, comprehend reading, solve math problems, and more.



6. **Meta Cognition** is how people are able to analyze progress on a task or project, as well as recognize if there's a need to change course. Children as young as second grade can start to build meta cognition. For instance, if a student is stuck working on a longer term project, they can assess where they are, and what they need to change in order to move forward.



7. **Self-Control** is regulating one's thoughts, emotions, and actions which is central to the EF skillset. It's the ability to set priorities and resist impulsive actions whether it's learning to not to interrupt classmates during circle time in younger grades, or intentionally avoiding distractions like Instagram when studying for a test in older grades.



8. **Sustained Attention** is being able to focus on an activity or task for an extended period of time, even with distractions or interruptions. When a student has developed sustained attention they are able to return to a task easily after an interruption.



9. **Flexibility** is a competency that benefits students their entire lives, because they are able to adapt to different, changing or challenging circumstances. For example, RCDS students have a regularly scheduled Conference Period in Upper School to get started on homework and assignments. If an assembly is called during the Conference Period, students have the tools to pivot and move forward.



10. **Perseverance** Perseverance is sticking to the plan to achieve your goals, and not giving up, even when it becomes challenging. Perseverance is strongly encouraged at RCDS. The emphasis on Executive Functioning is widely shared among faculty. Teachers participate in professional development which reinforces the integration of the 10 lifelong skills into the daily life of the School.

"These 10 fundamentals are all connected," says Ms. Diehl. "They are never developed in isolation. In order for a student to be able to plan, they have to have self-control. Perseverance depends on meta cognition, self-control, and sustained attention. That's why the Executive Functioning Program at RCDS is intentionally designed to develop all these skills in our students."





5

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO AT HOME

These easy-to-do suggestions are used by RCDS teachers and The Carmody School specialists to develop the Executive Functioning abilities of our students.



1

REPLICATE STRUCTURES

Ages 2-9

Develops these Executive Functioning Skills:

Organization, Sustained Attention, Task Initiation, Planning

What you'll need:

- ✦ Play-Doh, blocks
- ✦ Tinkertoys or LEGOs®

Instructions:

- ✦ Build a figurine or structure using your choice of suggested materials from above.
- ✦ Have your child construct an exact replica in size, shape, and color.
- ✦ Ask your child to explain the process they used to build the replicate structure. Articulating their process bolsters their ability to plan.

This activity also engages children in sequencing and the breaking down of tasks, which is how we learn to organize.



Helpful tip: If the adult is unable to build a figurine or structure for the child to replicate, ask an older child who may be at home. Or try having the child replicate an image of a structure that accompanies construction materials.



2 BARRIER GAMES

Ages 4-12

Develops these Executive Functioning Skills:

Sustained Attention, Planning, Working Memory, and Flexibility

What you'll need:

- ✦ Divider or screen that you can put on a table to block your child's view of a structure you'll build behind the "barrier".
- ✦ Building materials like Blocks and LEGO® bricks; use larger blocks or LEGO® bricks for younger children, smaller blocks or LEGO® bricks for older children.

Instructions:

- ✦ Sit at a table across from your child with the divider or screen between you.
- ✦ You and your child should have the exact same materials on either side of the divider or screen.
- ✦ The adult will build a structure first; the divider should act as a barrier, so the child can't see what you are building.
- ✦ The adult provides instructions to the child on how to build the replicate structure. For example, "Lay a blue 2x4 LEGO on top of the green 2x4 LEGO®."
- ✦ When you are done giving instructions and the replicate structure is complete, remove the barrier and compare the two structures. Reflecting on this activity will help both of you recognize areas for improvement in giving and following directions.
- ✦ Try switching roles. Have your child build a structure behind the barrier and give step-by-step direction to you.



Helpful tip: Start with a simple structure and work to more complex ones to build your child's confidence. You can also make adjustments, based on your child's age and attention span. For example with younger children, allow them to ask questions if they don't understand the instructions or become frustrated. Older children may have the capacity to follow the instructions without asking questions, which will make the activity more of a challenge.



3 MAKE A WISH LIST

Ages 3-12

Develops these Executive Functioning Skills:
Organization, Sustained Attention, Task Initiation, Working Memory, Flexibility

What you'll need:

- ✦ Print magazines and catalogs

Instructions:

- ✦ Have your child go through a magazine or catalog and make a list of all the toys or other items for a Wish List.
- ✦ Choose how you want to organize the list. It can be by most wanted, alphabetical, price or something else.
- ✦ Depending on your child's focus and engagement with this activity, try extending it and choose an alternative way to organize the Wish List.
- ✦ For added challenge, have younger children circle their top 3 items, which reinforces prioritizing. This is something RCDS' youngest students practice with the Tools of the Mind curriculum.
- ✦ Older students can write or type up a description of each item on their Wish List, cut the pictures out, and create a mini-catalog. This can also be turned into an oral or PowerPoint presentation .
- ✦ For all ages, you can use the Wish List to do some goal setting. How can your child earn an item on the Wish List by doing chores or earning money?



PLAY A BOARD GAME

Many board games target Executive Functioning skill development. Some easy and fun options for home use include:

- **Rush Hour** is a traffic jam logic game that involves problem-solving and sequencing.
Amazon link to purchase
- **Mastermind** is a code breaking game for two players. Players take turns setting and solving codes using the process of elimination which is great for building Working Memory, Sustained Attention, and Flexibility.
Amazon link to purchase

- **Connect 4 Stackers** is also a two player game that takes the traditional Connect 4 to a different dimension. The object is still the same — four discs in a row, but instead of the vertical wall, discs can be stacked anywhere on the board. The options for multiple placement helps with Planning, Organization, and Sustained Attention.
Amazon link to purchase

- **Battleship** is an excellent game to build Executive Functioning skills such as attention, strategizing, self-control, and patience.
Amazon link to purchase



4 SHARE A SKILL

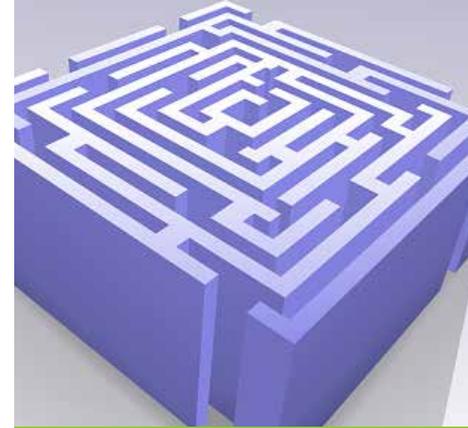
All Ages

Develops these Executive Functioning Skills:
Planning, Organization, Sustained Attention, and Flexibility

Kids are used to having their parents show them how to tie their shoes or ride a bike. Try reversing roles and have your child teach you a skill. It's a great confidence booster!

Instructions:

- ✦ Have your child teach yourself or another adult a skill that they enjoy or are particularly good at.
- ✦ The skill doesn't need to be overly complex: ideas could include a wide range of how-to's, e.g., how to make a sandwich, pack a snack, kick a soccer ball, do a Tik-Tok dance or make a friendship bracelet.
- ✦ Once you settle on a skill, have your child walk you through all the steps. This reinforces planning and organization.
- ✦ Ask questions at opportune moments. For example, if your child is teaching you how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and step 1 is spreading the peanut butter, ask what would happen if we spread the jelly first? This can help your child think more flexibly.



SOLVE A LOGIC PUZZLE

Logic puzzles and brain teasers are a great way to stimulate the mind while challenging children to think nimbly to solve a problem. Try these websites for activities that can be downloaded for free:

www.Kidsmathgamesonline.com/logic

www.mathisfun.com/puzzles

www.mathgametime.com/subject/logic

Activities come in many different levels of difficulty. Start with a level that's appropriate for you child so they are not overwhelmed and can build to more challenges. Also look for puzzles that involve the giving and taking of clues; it will engage your child in making inferences from the clues to solve a problem. Often charts accompany these puzzle that require attention, organization, and sequencing.



5 COOK A RECIPE

Ages 4 and up

Develops these Executive Functioning Skills:

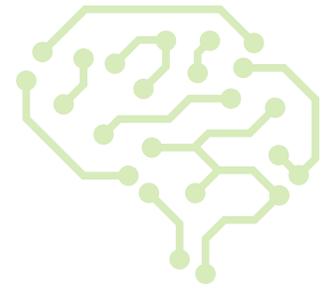
Planning, Organization, Sustained Attention, Task Initiation, Time Management, Perseverance

What you'll need:

✦ Recipe, ingredients, cooking supplies

Instructions:

- ✦ Have your child choose a recipe from a website, magazine or cookbook, and verify that it is a realistic recipe that can be made in your home.
- ✦ Have your child write a grocery list containing everything needed to prepare that dish.
- ✦ Have your child create a list of the necessary cooking supplies. Older kids can be tasked with looking up the price of each item at the store, and creating an estimated budget.
- ✦ Include your children in the entire process if possible – have them accompany you to the grocery store. Older children can be responsible for pushing the cart and finding the items.
- ✦ Follow the recipe instructions. Again, you can put kids in charge. If there are safety concerns, younger children can be assigned specific and appropriate tasks in the cooking process. Older kids can be “head chef” and responsible for completing most of the cooking.
- ✦ Take time for reflection when the recipe is done. Our Executive Functioning gets stronger when we understand where we went wrong or find ways to improve. How does the dish taste? Is there an ingredient that would make the recipe even better? What would you do differently next time?



“The study skills you learn at RCDS are really significant. You learn how to take all of this accumulated information, organize it, figure out the best way to study it, and then practice and apply it with the help and guidance of teachers. Now that I’m at this point in college, I don’t stress about big exams or projects, because I know how I learn best, and I know how to do it.”

*— Hannah Reynolds '15
Valedictorian and
Class of 2019
Trinity Hall, currently
attending The
University of
Notre Dame*

THE TRAJECTORY FOR EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Executive Functioning doesn’t just happen. RCDS graduates arrive to high school and college confident, prepared, and able to advocate for themselves because Executive Functioning is developed, practiced, and reinforced over time. Here are some highlights of the progression:



THE TRAJECTORY FOR EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING



TOOLS OF THE MIND

This early childhood curriculum is designed to foster executive functioning, beginning in Nursery. Children are introduced to play-based learning activities and make a commitment to taking on a role in an area. This is how they begin to set goals and plan around what they want to accomplish.



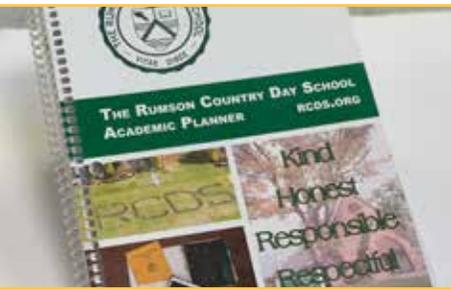
GUIDED ROTATION AND MORNING MEETINGS

In first grade, RCDS students begin learning how to rotate between working with a teacher, in small groups, and independently. More is expected of first graders during Morning Meeting as they develop their ability to focus, listen to others, and wait for their turn to speak.



INDEPENDENT WORK

As RCDS students move into second and third grade, certain responsibilities start to shift to them. Students have matured. For example, while a teacher is working with a small reading group, we find students are able to do independent activities. This independence is reinforced as students move into the upper elementary grades.



THE RCDS PLANNER

This specially designed planner is a core teaching tool of executive functioning at RCDS. Introduced in fourth grade, the planner instills good habits like writing down assignments the day they are given, time management, and more. The habits students practice prepare them well for the challenges and demands of middle school.



CONFERENCE PERIODS BEGIN

Dedicated time is built into the day for Conference Period beginning in Upper School (Grades 5-8). This is a block of time for students to seek help from teachers, work on long-term assignments, study, or start homework. It's all self-driven, so students are utilizing EF skills already honed and strengthening new ones.



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING COURSE

All RCDS sixth graders take a year-long course on EF that addresses fundamentals and skills students have been building since early childhood. Students come to a deeper understanding of how the different skills work together and develop strategies that work best with their learning style.



SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACEMENT

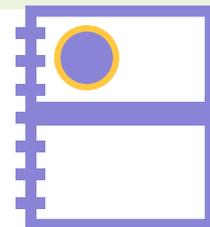
Applying to high schools and preparing for the next step after RCDS is when executive functioning comes to full fruition for our students. Students utilize all of the EF skills they've developed and, supported by the RCDS Advisory Program which emphasizes accountability, moral courage, and goal setting, are accepted to an impressive array of independent day, boarding, magnet, and public schools.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING HACKS



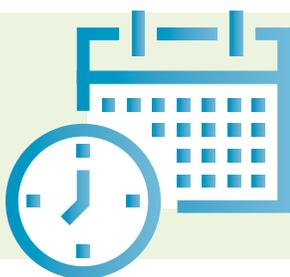
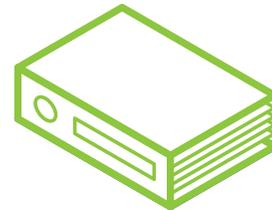
Write homework and assignments down, the day they are assigned in a planner. Continue to write down the assignments, every day until they are due.

Choose a planner that's organized by day and week, and has a month-at-a-glance. It's super helpful in helping students look ahead and stay on top of work.



Using Google Classroom? Even if you keep assignments online, write them in your planner as well; it reinforces time management. At RCDS, keeping track of assignments in Google Classroom is part of our students' back up plan. A hard copy planner, and the act of writing things down, is a more effective method to stay on top of schoolwork.

Adopt a one binder system. RCDS students use one binder for all subjects to reduce disorganization, streamline the amount of materials they need to manage, and ease the transition into middle school to different classes.



Schedule time for organization. At RCDS' Upper School, the first Tuesday of the month is **Executive Functioning Day**. Students organize binders, file completed work, meet with advisors to set up their planners for upcoming tests, assignments and more.

Offer positive support. Adjusting to the "new normal" whether it's virtual, hybrid or in-person learning is challenging for students and parents. Try not to overreact if your child misses a homework assignment or Zoom class. Asking questions like, "**What do you need?**" and "**How can I help?**" lets children know they are supported while encouraging them to take responsibility for their learning.





"The extra attention and individualized learning techniques that I was taught in The Carmody School helped to not only improve my grades but also the confidence I had in myself when it came to completing school work. By finding out how I learned and the most effective way for me to study, I was able to continue using the skills at both The Peddie School and Villanova University."

- Katie Donald, Class of 2011

"If Elon Musk could invent a time machine I would go back, and tell my 12-year-old self that [RCDS] will save me from a world of trouble in high school with planning and organization."

- Hunter Lord, RCDS Class of 2015



"Thanks to the solid educational base that [RCDS] provided, I am constantly trying to push myself outside of my comfort zone and learn new things."

- Charlotte Eisenstadt, RCDS Class of 2009

TRULY GREAT EDUCATION BEGINS AT RCDS

Academic excellence, the emphasis on critical life skills, character and community, lay the groundwork for truly great, N-8 independent education at The Rumson Country Day School. Many schools' focus is getting students to the next grade. Ours is preparing children for life, with average class sizes of 12-15 that set a higher standard of learning, robust arts, extracurriculars, and community building traditions you won't find at other schools. For 90+ years, The Four Pillars—

Kind, Honest, Responsible, Respectful—the core values of RCDS, inform everything we do.

Discover how RCDS can nurture, challenge, and equip your child with capabilities and skills they will use for a lifetime.

**Contact Director of Admissions
Tracey Wetmore at twetmore@rcds.org
or call 732-842-0527.**