



Welcome to 'Harbucks' Virtual Coffee House

**What is Executive Functioning and
How Does it Relate to Child
Development? Part I**

March 27, 2021



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Ask the Experts...



- **Center on the Developing Child**
- **Harvard University**
 - **What is Executive Functioning?**
 - **How Does it Relate to Child Development?**
 - **Why is it important?**



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What is Executive Functioning?



Executive Functioning is like being an air traffic controller...



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What is Executive Functioning?



- Learned skill
- Making dinner, helping kids with HW, making notes about tomorrow, thinking about schedules...
- Helps us all manage a lot of information and avoid distractions
- Helps us work effectively with others

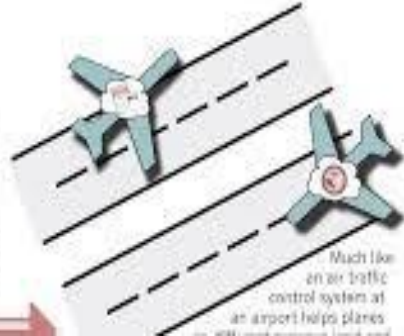




What is Executive Functioning?

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION? AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

The phrase "executive function" refers to a set of skills. These skills underlie the capacity to plan ahead and meet goals, display self-control, follow multiple step directions even when interrupted, and stay focused despite distractions, among others.



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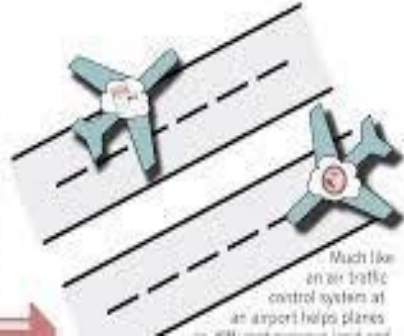




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Much like an air traffic control system at an airport helps planes

- Helps us plan, focus attention, switch gears, juggle multiple tasks

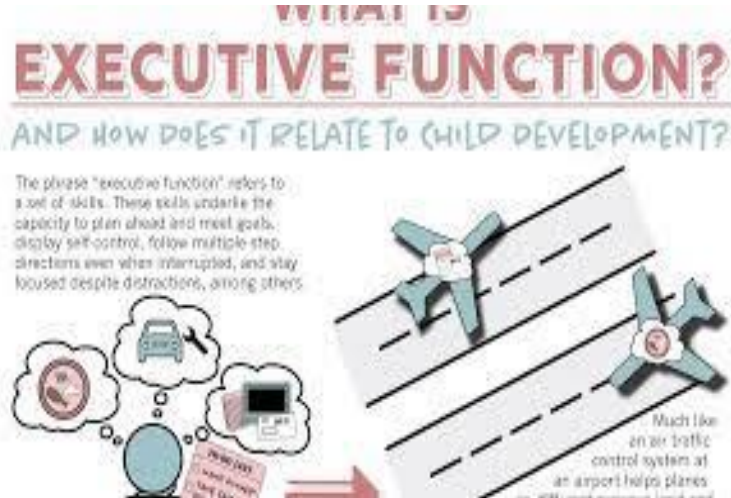


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What is Executive Functioning?

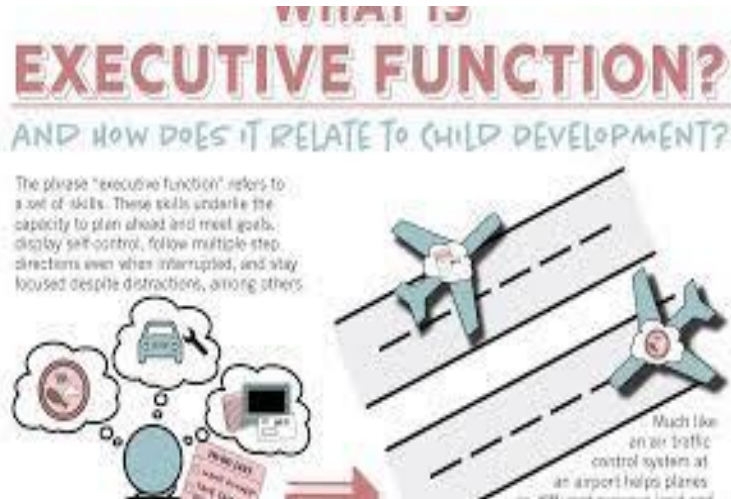


- A group of skills
- One of the most important and challenging tasks of early childhood
- Critical to healthy development into adulthood





What is Executive Functioning?

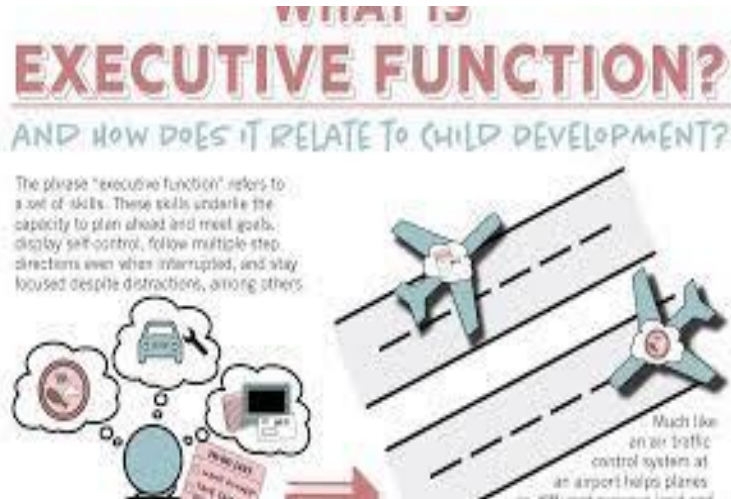


- Research on the developing brain shows that early childhood experiences build the foundation for
 - A skilled workforce
 - A responsible community
 - A thriving economy





What is Executive Functioning?



- **A set of skills:**
 - **Focused thinking**
 - **Holding onto and working with information**
 - **Filtering distractions**
 - **Switching gears**





Executive Functioning in Young Children



- **Characterized this way when young**
- **Not simply multitasking**
- **It is a combination of:**
 - **Working memory**
 - **Inhibitory control**
 - **Mental flexibility**





Executive Functioning in Young Children



Working cooperatively with others... (not multitasking)



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Executive Functioning in Young Children



Paying attention to what is supposed to be happening right now and modifying your behavior to match that...



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Executive Functioning in Older Children



- In older children this is one way to picture it...



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Executive Functioning in Older Children



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Executive Functioning In Older Children



- We have a sense that it
 - Relates to greater success in life
- We have a feeling that you
 - Born with it or learned?





Executive Functioning In Older Children



- **Question:**
 - **How have children been able to practice this during lockdown or COVID-19 restrictions?**





How Can I Help My Child Do this Well?



- As parents, we want to provide growth experiences that prepare our children for the future
- This is how we work on building executive functioning skills
- Happy
- Successful



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Executive Functioning



- **Teachers ask:**
- **“How do I help my students grow in this way?”**
- **Harbor teachers work on this every day with students**
- **More important than ever**



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Executive Functioning Skills

A video from Harvard's Center on the Developing Child

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-executive-function-skills-for-life-and-learning/>



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A Recap: Executive Functioning

- **Executive Functioning:**
 - **Working memory**
 - **Inhibitory control**
 - **Mental flexibility**



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Working Memory



- **Helps you concentrate and focus**
- **Helps you remember what you are supposed to be doing**
- **Prioritize tasks**



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Inhibitory Controls



- When a child is able to stop what she is doing to let the other person have a turn
- Useful when making new friends, sharing thoughts, building trust in peers
- Control impulses



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Mental Flexibility



- If the other children change what they are doing and you must too - that requires mental flexibility
- Adaptability...



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How to Support this growth?



- **When we are little**
 - **Working memory and peek-a-boo**
- **Builds early foundations of working memory and self-control**



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How to Support this growth?



- **3-5 year olds**
 - **Role playing, breaking down tasks into small chunks encouraging imagination, following rules for impulse control**





How to Support this growth?



- **5-7 year olds / Games with rules constant challenge, with a wide variety of skill levels**
 - **Working memory: Concentration, Go Fish, Old Maid, I Doubt It**
 - **Cognitive flexibility: Uno, Crazy Eights, Blink, Spoons**
 - **Inhibition: Snap, Perfection, Battleship**





How to Support this growth?



- **5-7 year olds /Physical Activities/Games**
 - **Attention/inhibition: freeze dance, red light/green light, Duck Duck Goose,**
 - **Monitoring: Foursquare**
 - **Cognitive Flexibility: Simon Says, yoga, Tae Kwon Do**
 - **Movements and Songs clapping games**
 - **Logic puzzles**





How to Support this growth?



- **7-12 year olds / Physical Activities/Games**
 - **Mental flexibility: Hearts, Spades, Bridge**
 - **Cognitive flexibility: gin rummy, poker, mahjong**
 - **Working memory: any game with steps to plan: chess, Go, Minecraft**
 - **Sports and games**
 - **Jump rope, double dutch**





How to Support this growth?



- 7-12 year olds / Physical Activities/Games
 - Music, singing, dancing
 - Working memory: playing an instrument, singing in a chorus, dance
 - Brainteasers: crossword puzzles, Sudoku, Rubik's cube



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Resources

- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-executive-function-skills-for-life-and-learning/>
- <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-5-to-7-year-olds.pdf>
- <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-5-to-7-year-olds.pdf>
- <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-7-to-12-year-olds.pdf>





Resources

- <https://www.edutopia.org/article/8-ways-bolster-executive-function-teens-and-tweens>
- <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-7-to-12-year-olds.pdf>
- <https://childmind.org/article/helping-kids-who-struggle-with-executive-functions/>



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Questions & Discussion**



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**THANK YOU
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