

Achieving Executive Function Success



ORGANIZATION TOOLS FOR SCHOOL

BY JENNIFER LEIMAN M.S. OTR/L

About Me

Jennifer Leiman

- Occupational Therapist
- I am based at DEO
- My favorite organizational tool is color coding
- The thing that I needed most for organization when I was a student was having a consistent workspace at home

Tonight's Road Map

- Executive Function - Technical Terms and Strategies
- Talking to Your Children about Executive Function
- Implementing These Tools
- How to Setup these Tools at Home
- Drop and Organize - an Organizational Program
- Questions and Answers

Executive Function



Technical Terms and Strategies

What is Executive Function?

Executive function (EF) refers to the brain-based, cognitive processes that help us to:

**Regulate
our behavior**

**Make
decisions**

**Set and
achieve goals**

EF is important because it teaches students to develop intrinsic motivation to be independent and successful.

Source: Dawson, Guare

Presented by Jennifer Leiman M.S. OTR/L

Executive Function Components

Child	Parent	
		Inhibition of impulses - the ability to stop, think, plan, and then act (self control)
		Sustaining attention - the need to keep focus on one task
		Shifting attention - the ability to easily move attention or concentration between tasks
		Emotional control - the ability to self-regulate (during times of stress)
		Initiating activity - the ability to begin a task in a timely fashion without procrastination
		Working memory - temporarily storing and managing information required to carry out complex cognitive tasks such as learning, reasoning, & comprehension
		Planning - the ability to manage current/future tasks by setting goals and developing appropriate steps to complete
		Organization of material - the ability to make and maintain a system for arranging/keeping track of items
		Self-monitoring - the ability to see one's own behavior and learn to respond to situations appropriately
		Time management - the ability to understand how long it takes to to complete a task

Strategies to Help with EF Components

Inhibition of impulses

- Repeat the question out loud
- Count to 5 before answering
- Acknowledge your actions - even if you can't help them

Sustaining attention

- Highlighters help mark important words/phrases
- Crossing out items on the to-do list
- Chew gum
- Natural light
- Reader's guided strip

Shifting attention

- Draw a dark line down the center fold of a folder (a visual cue to prevent papers from folding)

Emotional control

- Ask for a movement break
- Talk about your day (peaks and valleys)
- Breathe
- Change up the position - read lying on the floor
- When you're in shutdown, try written communication (text or journaling)

Strategies to Help with EF Components

Working memory

- A checklist for different tasks and listing the materials needed for each task can help plan ahead (e.g., list of materials needed for homework or project planning)
- If you are better at giving the answer out loud, then:
 - Ask someone at home to write your answer down on a separate piece of paper, then copy it
 - Voice memo their answer and they can replay it to copy it - Auditory learner
 - Talk-to-text so you can see your answer (in a Notes app) - Visual learner

Initiating activity

- Break down large assignments/tasks into smaller steps with attainable goals
- Organize materials (located in a consistent work space)

Planning

- Talk about the day's activities (online classes, upcoming assignments, projects, tests)
- Post a daily schedule (AM, after school, PM)
- Make 'To Do' lists, for daily and weekly tasks/assignments (including practicing instrument, chores, homework)

Strategies to Help with EF Components

Organization of material

- **Write down homework in an agenda or check online**
- Bookmark date in the daily agenda (paper clip, binder clip, sticky note, fold edges)
- Color-code folders, binders, notebooks (check with the teacher)
- Put name and date on all assignments
- Organize folders on Google Drive/Chromebooks
- Nightly organization and readiness for clean room, homework space, book bag
- Have a defined workspace
- Everything has a home/caddy of tools

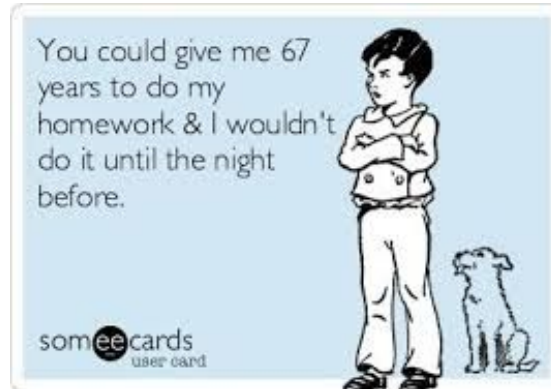
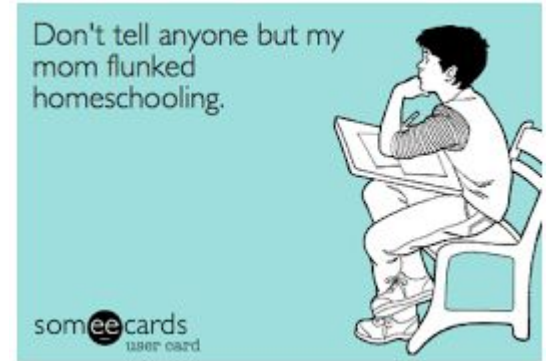
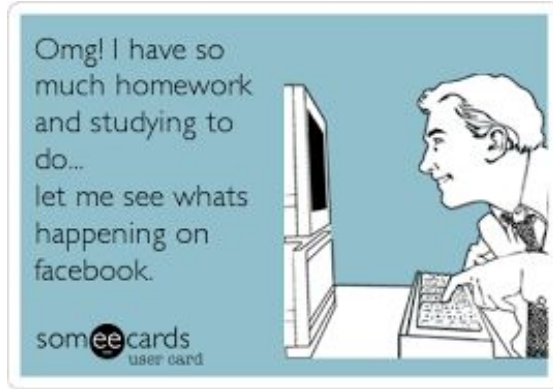
Self-monitoring

- Utilize pre-established tools
- Know what your stopping point is, or when you need a break
- Learning contract

Time management

- Use a timer (phone, microwave, etc.)
- Set alarms
- Wear a watch

Laughing Through the EF pain



How To Talk to Your Children about EF

Student Breakdown of Executive Function Skills

Do You Feel Bad When You:

1. Forget to hand in homework
2. Think Remote is just so so boring
3. Notebook is a mess
4. Cry/ get angry during homework
5. Feel too busy
6. Lose your pens and pencils often
7. Lose track of time
8. Forget to study for tests and quizzes
9. Are missing assignments
10. Can't remember what the teacher says
11. Don't have a designated work space at home
12. Have wrinkled papers
13. Desk isn't work-ready
14. Forget what to do or don't have a plan of "attack"

If you answered yes to at least two of these, we have solutions for you!

The Good News Is...

- This has nothing to do with how smart you are
- This is a skill called **Executive Function** and is not a problem. It is something to be learned (like Math or Social Studies)
- You don't get good at this skill if you don't practice: just like playing a sport or an instrument

Solutions for You



How can I make these tools work for me?

How Do I Get My Child's Buy In?

What kind of help do you need?

- a. I don't want to use these tools and feel "stuck"
- b. I don't understand what needs to happen
- c. I like using the tools but I keep forgetting to use them
- d. I'm interested in the tools but I need help
- e. I want to use EF tools and can use them by myself

Solutions to Being a Better Student

- Know yourself and when it's time to get help
- Different EF areas could be in different states of change
- Routines (**Change out of your Pajamas!**)
- Devices: Multiple windows open (not just a lot of tabs)
- Planners: Write down the day's assignments before starting your work

Where Should I Work?

Set up a **designated location**



What Should I Sit On?

- Chair/backwards
- Seat cushions
- Yoga ball
- (Kore) Stools
- Standing at the table/
kitchen island
- Vertical work surfaces wall
- Laying on the floor

SEATING TIPS FOR DISTANT LEARNING



Getting Your Work Space Right

Picture your workspace at this moment

- Are there loose papers?
- Are there loose pencils, pens, markers etc.?
- Are there plates and cups that need to be cleared?
- Are there extra materials you don't need?
- Do you have a plug and charger?

Think about asking your family for

- One dedicated space to work
- A desk
- A light
- A trifold board to block out distractions
- Blue light glasses
- A foot rest if your feet don't touch the floor
- Cork boards or white board for important information

Learning Tools

Have these ready to use in your workspace:

- Pencils
- Pencil Sharpener
- Eraser
- Pens
- Rulers
- Extra paper
- Computer Charger
- Scissors
- Color pencils/ markers



Keeping My Focus

Keeping your body busy

- Fidget (cubes, bubbles, spinner)
- Gum chewing
- A small massager (shoulders to fingers) or a laundry ball to wake up the hands

Sounds

- Yoga music
- Metronome
- Headphones
- White Noise Machine

What My Day Looks Like

I am stuck and don't know where to begin...

The Setup

- Go to the bathroom
- Brush teeth
- Get dressed
- Eat breakfast
- Take vitamins

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- Write down the day's assignments
- Write down and set alarms for the day's remote classes*

*This all happens **BEFORE** school begins and may take 30 minutes or longer

Alarms and Alerts

You can set alarms and alerts with your:

- Phones
- Kitchen Timers
- On your computers
- Through Google Calendar

You need alarms and alerts for:

- When to log onto Google Meet
- When assignments are due
- Appointments made to speak to teachers during their office hours

Engaging in Non-Preferred Tasks

How to Start

- Plug in your computer or charge it
- Open the computer
- Look at the assignment or rubric
- Print Materials (like math)
- Hands out of pockets and on the keyboard
- Check in with the teacher, friend or someone at home

A Checklist to Check Your Work

Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All parts of the question are answered <input type="checkbox"/> Include evidence when needed <input type="checkbox"/> Include page numbers <input type="checkbox"/> Explain your thinking (answer the how/why)
C.O.P.S.	<p>For every complete sentence, check your</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Capitalization of first words, pronouns <input type="checkbox"/> Organization - Orders of words (Does it make sense?). Follow graphic organizer. <input type="checkbox"/> Punctuation <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling

Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Check operations (add, subtract, multiply, divide) <input type="checkbox"/> Check and recheck math facts <input type="checkbox"/> Label all word problems <input type="checkbox"/> Underline important details in word problems
Papers	<p>Are all papers in a 'Home'?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Homework and notes in home <input type="checkbox"/> Binder - notes 3 hole punch <input type="checkbox"/> Recycle/Garbage - do not keep papers that aren't needed (check w/ your teacher if you aren't sure)
Read 2x	<p>Read out loud at least once, looking for correct order of words and thoughts make sense</p>

The Wrap Up

- Complete leftover homework
- Ensure all assignments are handed in
- Email teachers with questions
- Place papers in proper folder
- Set up work space for tomorrow

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- Eat Dinner
- Bath/Shower
- Put on Pajamas
- Brush teeth
- Pick out clothes for tomorrow

The Secret



Take a Deep Breath - You Got This!

Battling the Resistance: How to Implement These Tools

- Change up **one** small element (making a list or set an alarm)
- When trying to make a plan, **draw** a **map/point** to where you need to go
- The first step is **always** read the instructions from the teacher
- Your job is to connect what **you know** to what the **teacher wants**
- Read **out loud** when you are reviewing your work

Other Important Tips

- Acknowledge what frustrates you and **use tools before** getting to that point
- It's a marathon not a sprint - Don't lock horns over things you are trying to control (like a teacher's assignment). You will waste your time and energy and deplete your reserves for the rest of the day
- Don't skip necessary moments of recharging BUT don't spend hours gaming/avoiding (**Go Outside and Move Your Body**)

Quick Work Breaks

- Moving
 - Carrying their own backpack
 - Going for a walk
 - Running around the outside of the house
 - Snake pulls
 - Spinning in an office chair
 - Taking a bath/shower with clothes on
 - Gum chewing
 - Wall push-ups/Jumping jacks
 - Yoga stretches
 - Getting a snack/drink (seltzer)
- Around the house
 - Mopping the floor
 - Collecting the laundry
 - Unload and load the dishwasher
- Activities
 - Scribbling with crayons on construction paper
 - Legos
 - Play-Dough

This is Overwhelming (And that's ok)

1. This is a “new normal” - keep your mantra on hand when you have to dig in deep
 - The more you fight, the more time you take away from starting with the first step
2. Your family and/or teachers are trying to guide you based on what the assignment is
 - You may think it is unfair or a “dumb assignment” but you still have to do it
3. The goal is to decrease the “Jack-in-the-box” feeling of being surprised of how did I get so lost? Why don't I know what is happening?

Making It Work for You

1. Ask follow up questions
2. Sometimes you have to “fake it to make it”!
 - Make the EF tools part of your daily routine
3. If you feel unheard, move onto the next thing on your todo list. Come back later. You may feel different about your point or what is being asked of you
4. Modify these tools so they work for you

Go-To Statements For Learning

1. Tools are not toys (e.g., fidget spinners and grips)
2. How do you feel about it? (When successful or independent with a new or difficult task or if a tool or new method fails)
3. I need a tool
4. Ensure Items are in their “home”
5. Keep your focus - What is your thesis this moment? What are you trying to accomplish?
6. Let's be a problem solver together

Go-To Statements For Learning

7. Pause and shift

8. Set up your area for success - sharp pencil, papers printed, computer, chargers, binders with notes available

9. I can only control my own thoughts, actions and reactions (no one else's)

10. Everyone has strengths, struggles and strategies

11. How have you participated? (during conflict)

HELP!!!



I feel like I'm a MESS and I don't know what I don't know

Practice This Everyday

Think

Identify the problem

Prep

What are some tools that can be used?

Work

Take action! Use the tool and complete the task

Consistency is key

DROP and ORGANIZE - Prep

1. Gather all papers in one pile - from your binders, desks and other piles
2. Make three (3) piles of your paper
 - a. **File in binder**
 - b. Recycle
 - c. File in a long term area/ take home (when we are in school)
3. On separate sticky notes, write the name of each subject and spread them out in a large area (e.g. Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Specials)

DROP and ORGANIZE - Work

4. Then **Sort** and **Place** the pile of **File in a binder** papers in the correct piles

5. Arrange each pile by date (most recent paper on top)

6. Make sure all papers are hole punched

7. Put the papers back in the correct part of the binder, in chronological order



8. Recycle the papers not needed

9. Place other papers in a “home” that can be referenced later in the semester

DROP and ORGANIZE - Agendas

- Use the school calendar to mark all the vacation days
- Use the classroom syllabus fill out important dates of projects, quizzes, tests, midterms and finals
- Highlight important items like upcoming tests
- Keep your place in your agenda by placing a binder clip on the week
- Fold the paper of the week already completed (see picture to the right)

Organizing the Home

Children helping with chores can have a healthy and positive impact on the home:

- Decrease the workload from the adults, thereby decreasing family stress
- Promote responsibility and builds confidence in our children
- Add a sense of control and routine during a dynamic time in our lives
- Provide family togetherness
- Builds non-media time into the day
- Keeps the house in working order while everyone is living in close quarters
- Helps children feel like they are an important component to the family
- Build life skills (like Home-Economics) including cooking, cleaning, laundry, organize the home
- Improve motor planning, bilateral coordination, fine motor skills, visual motor skills, visual perceptual skills, sensory processing skills (especially adding heavy work into the day)

Key Takeaways

- **Know thyself**
 - Be aware of your strengths and struggles
- **Consistency is the key**
 - Practice EF tools everyday
 - Repetition of foundational tools
 - Create predictable routines
- **You are building new skills**
 - This is hard - you are changing how you are wired
 - Ensure workspace is clearly defined and tools are easily accessible

Our Wrap Up

Are there any questions or comments?

Contact Information

Follow me on Twitter

@JenniferPedOT

You can email anytime with questions

Jleiman@nmpsds.org

Useful Resources

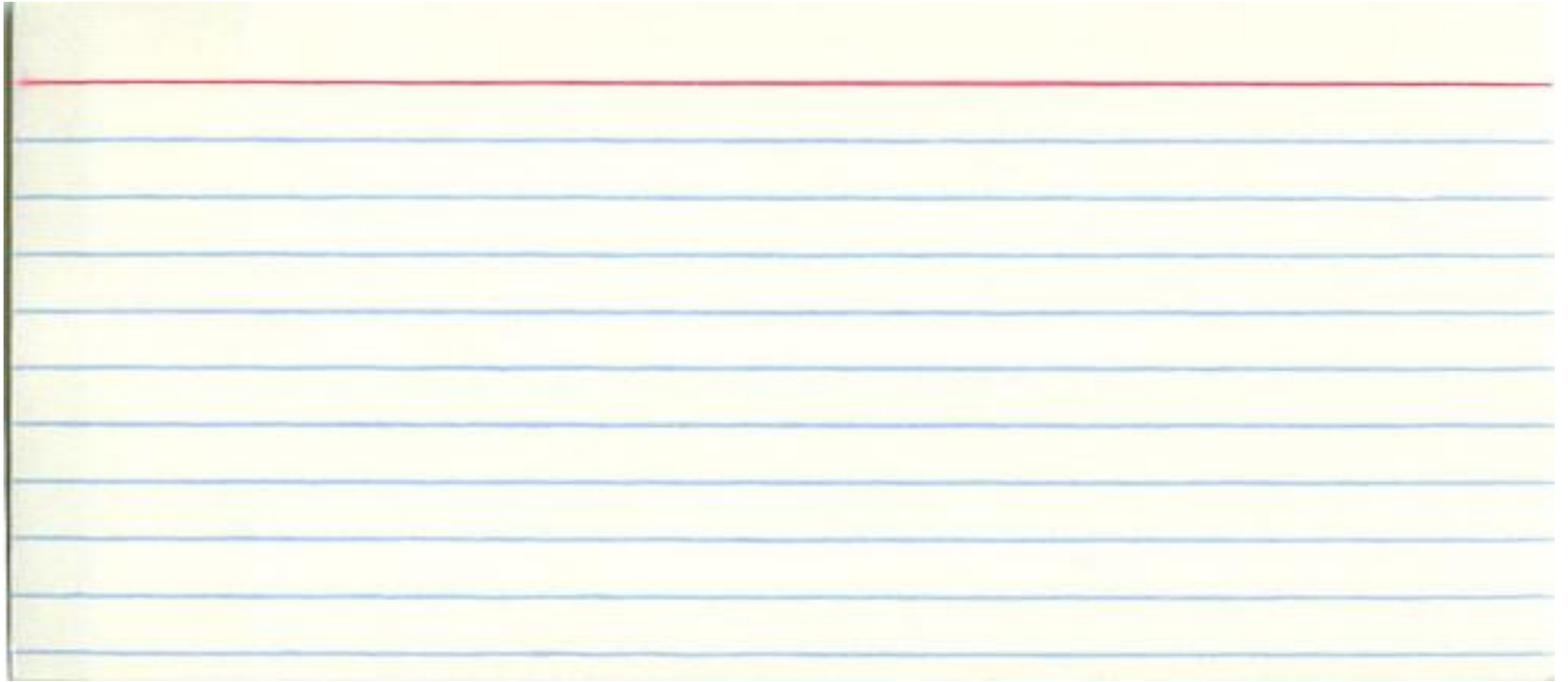
BOOKS

1. Self Reg by Stuart Shankar
2. Raising a Sensory Smart Child by Lindsey Biel
3. Smart but Scattered by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare
4. Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare
5. See It. Say It. Do It. by Dr. Lynn Hellerstein

ONLINE

1. Sugar Aunts -
<http://www.sugaraunts.com/2016/09/handwriting-executive-function-skill-problems.html>
2. OT Tool Box
https://www.theottoolbox.com/handwriting-executive-function-skill-problems/?fbclid=IwAR3UmLlhXw8UPOnt-yo_L7hP1_MR8aK58f1MDrjUIYwsBbBShnGa1PngMII
3. Facebook Groups
 - Executive Functioning Tool Box
 - Beyond Book Smart

Thank You



Notes To Self