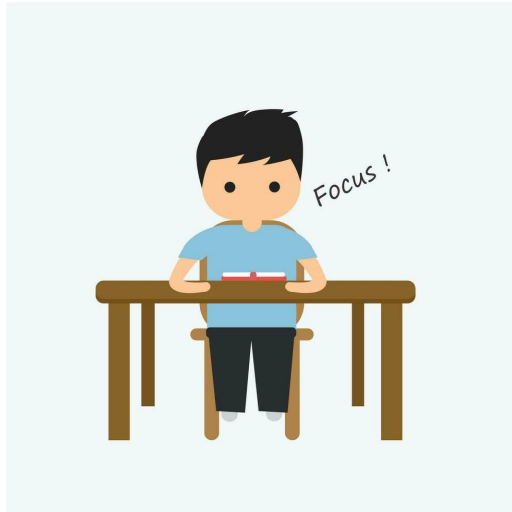


Developing Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents

**A Framework for Understanding and
Supporting All Children (and Students)**





CAMERON

Objectives

- Define executive functioning
- Share a framework of executive skills
- Developmental Considerations & Individual Differences
- Two General Approaches to Support Executive Skill Development
- A Few Practical Examples
- Addressing Bigger Challenges
- Questions

Executive Functioning

Executive functioning encompasses a variety of cognitive abilities that allow for impulse control, strategic planning, cognitive flexibility, and goal directed behavior (Barkley, 2015)



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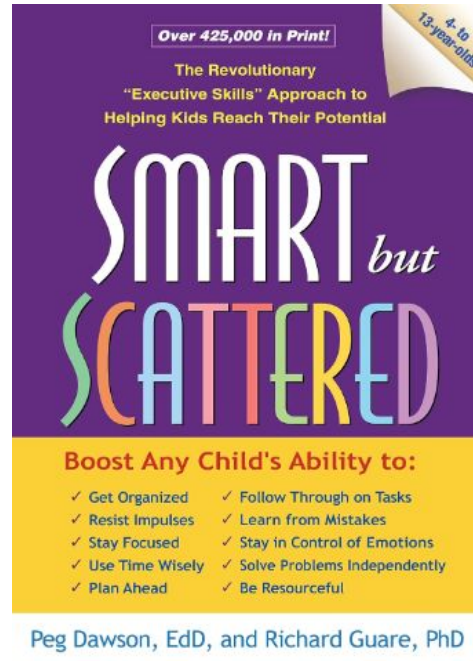
Executive Skills

“The skills that help us to decide what activities or tasks we will pay attention to and which ones we’ll choose to do” (Dawson & Guare, 2019, p. 3).



Executive Skills

- Response Inhibition
- Working Memory
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation
- Emotional Control
- Flexibility
- Planning
- Organization
- Time Management
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Metacognition



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Foundational

Development of Executive Skills

- In the primary grades, we want students to be able to...
 - Follow safety rules
 - Raise hand in class
 - Keep hands to self
 - Follow 2-3 step directions
 - Complete simple tasks/chores

Executive Skills

- Response Inhibition
- Working Memory
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation
- Emotional Control
- Flexibility
- **Planning**
- **Organization**
- **Time Management**
- **Goal-Directed Persistence**
- **Metacognition**



Advanced

Development of Executive Skills

- At the secondary level, we expect students to...
 - Manage coursework for multiple classes including completing and handing in work, preparing for tests, managing long-term assignments, seeking out additional help, and collaborating with peers.
 - Establish long-term goals and plans to achieve them including course selection, post-secondary planning, college/job applications.
 - Use free time wisely and productively including maintaining a healthy lifestyle, pursuing interests, maintaining social relationships, making financial decisions, and inhibiting reckless/dangerous behavior.

Individual differences...



- Biological / Genetic Influences (range of potential)
- Environmental Factors (nutrition, sleep, physical health, injury, stress, trauma)
- Learning experiences (models, expectations, opportunities, reinforcement)



Supporting Executive Skills: 2 Approaches

Environment (External)

Physical & Social Context

Task Modification

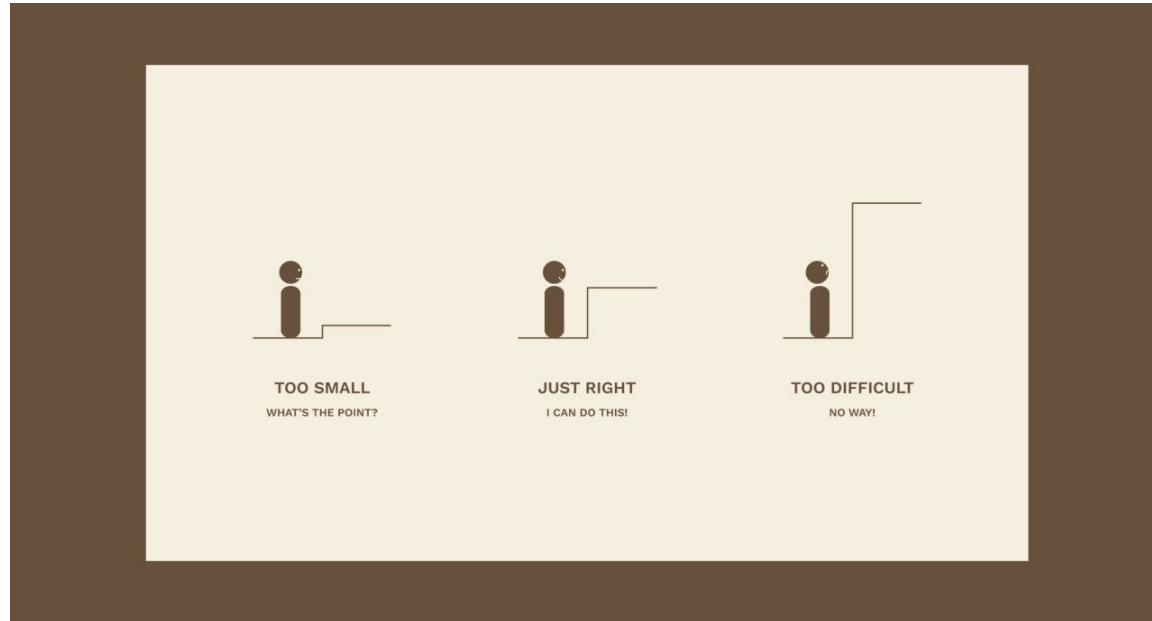
Cuing & Adult Support

Person (Internal)

Teach the Skill

Motivate (*effort)

Supporting Executive Skills: Goal



“Goodness of Fit”

Response Inhibition

The capacity to think before you act – this ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it.



Response Inhibition

- Establish clear expectations, limits, and consequences
- Use waiting periods for things your child wants to do/have (e.g., first...then...)
- Have your child work to earn something they want (delayed gratification)
- Anticipate a problem? Review the rules and expectations in advance
- Debrief / practice self-reflection (building metacognition)

Sustained Attention

The capacity to attend to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.

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Sustained Attention

- Set up the physical environment to support attention (organize spaces and materials; remove distractions; *use effective fidgets)
- Be intentional with scheduling (time of day; estimated time for completion)
- Build behavioral momentum (tasks requiring less effort to start that activity)
- Gradually increase expectations (build stamina over time)
- Gradually reduce external cueing (reduce dependence on others)
- Teach self-monitoring strategies (explicit timing & goal setting)
- Build in “rewards” or “breaks” at appropriate intervals

Planning + Time Management

Planning - The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important.

Time Management - The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also a sense that time is important.

Planning + Time Management



Planning + Time Management

- Model good planning and time management habits
- Practice with things that are naturally reinforcing (e.g., planning itinerary for an outing; planning a special day with a friend)
- Use physical tools: planning form, assignment rubric, calendars, task lists
- Break long-term projects into clearly defined tasks (*are the tasks clear and simple enough for independent completion?)
- Establish timelines for subtasks + Estimate time needed to complete
- Reinforce constituent skills along the way (accurate time estimation, task initiation, short-term task completion, following routines, organizing information and materials)
- Complex skills should follow a progression over time: I do (model) ... We do (teach) ... You do (independence)

Working Through Bigger Challenges

- 1.) Identify the problem situation (the behavior & setting conditions)
- 2.) Identify the executive skill(s) involved
- 3.) Decide what to address first (“This is better.”)
- 4.) Identify possible changes to environment (external)
- 5.) Specify goal(s) - (outcome & process)
- 6.) Step-by-step procedures (teach, support, and motivate)
- 7.) Record & reflect on progress (visuals are great)



Closing Thoughts / Questions

- Executive Functioning / Executive Skills develop over a long period of time ... patience is important.
- In order to support executive skill development, we can implement strategies that slowly build our children's awareness of and capacity to execute skills independently.
- The aim should be to gradually shift support from the external (environmental + parent/teacher supported) to the internal (learned skills / strategies + motivation)
- “Goodness of fit” is a key element (balancing expectations and ability)
- At times, we may need to adopt a more intentional and systematic approach
- This is hard work - partnerships are important