



Executive Functioning and Speech-Language Therapy

What is Executive Functioning?

- As defined by the *American Speech-Language-Hearing Association*, **executive functioning (EF)** refers to the cognitive processes of:
 - Initiating tasks
 - Sustaining and shifting attention
 - Organizing
 - Setting Goals
 - Completing tasks
 - Planning ahead
 - Inhibiting behaviors (i.e., impulse control and emotional regulation)
- It is also noted that it includes higher level skills such as:
 - Evaluating one's own thought process, or **metacognition**
 - Reasoning
 - Perspective taking
- Children with suspected EF deficits may have difficulty with:
 - Beginning an assignment
 - Starting the first step of instructions
 - Managing multiple tasks or assignments
 - Planning and preparing for upcoming assignments or tests
 - Prioritizing tasks or assignments
 - Problem-solving
 - Time management
- Stated by the *American Speech-Language-Hearing Association*, "Assessment and treatment of EF deficits in children is important, because EFs are foundational for school readiness and success. Children with developed EF skills make larger gains on tests of math, language, and literacy development than peers with EF deficits during their preschool years (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011). There is an association between EF skills and academic achievement, although SLPs should remain aware that the causality of this relationship is yet to be determined (Jacob & Parkinson, 2015)" (ASHA, n.d.).

The Role of the Speech-Language Therapist

- As directly stated by the *American Speech-Language-Hearing Association*, “Speech-language pathologists (SLPs), among other professionals (e.g., neuropsychologists, psychologists, occupational therapists, and physicians), play a critical role in identifying and treating EF deficits in children and adults”¹
- A speech-language therapist may also educate the interprofessional team about what strategies maximize a student’s participation and success in the classroom such as using visual supports, encouraging self-advocacy, etc.
- In addition to educating the team, the speech-language therapist can identify and recognize the impact of EF deficits on other language skills and everyday tasks (ASHA, n.d.). For example, a student may struggle to follow multi-step directions, remember key information, etc.

Instruction and Intervention in the Classroom

- Intervention and instruction for EF skills can look different for each child. Some examples can include:
 - Providing and teaching how to use visual planners and schedules
 - Timers to assist with time management
 - Use of graphic organizers
 - Preferential seating
 - Designated timed breaks (ASHA, n.d.)
- Sharing these modifications amongst the child’s academic team will hopefully increase efficacy and independence.

If you’re interested in Speech-Language services at AIM for your child, please contact supportservices@aimpa.org

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Executive Function Deficits (Practice Portal). Retrieved August 12, 2025 from..*continued on page 2.*
<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/executive-function-deficits/>