EXECUTIVE FUNCTION 101

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD'S EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS



PRESENTED BY
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Today's Roadmap

- Executive Function skills: what are they and why are they so important?
- Real Life Examples
- How you can support the development of your child's Executive Function skills

Importance of Executive Function Skills

Executive Function skills are the greatest predictor of success in life (not IQ!).

Executive Function skills do not begin with the child.

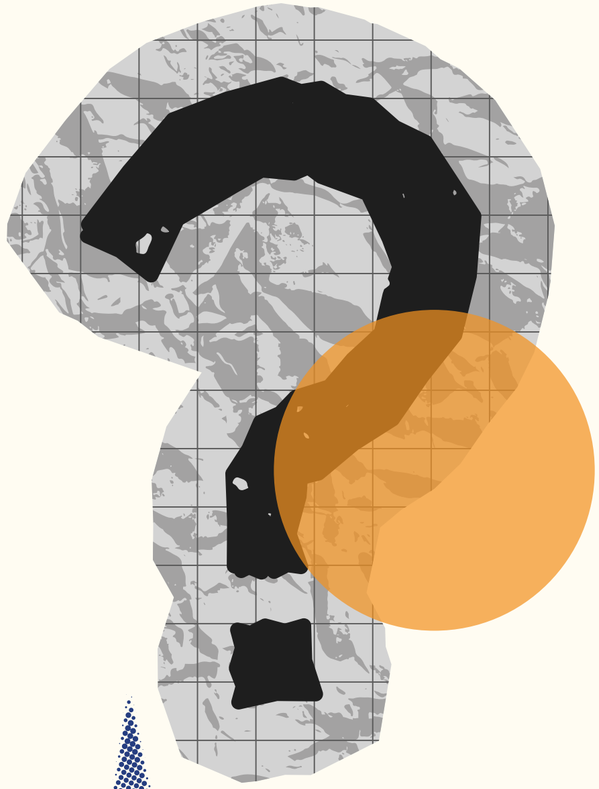
EF skills begin with the environment *around* the child.

Adults can provide clear, consistent and calm leadership within the environment to allow the growth and development of these skills to occur.

Just like reading, writing and math, EF skills can be taught, learned, practiced and supported.

What are Executive Function Skills?

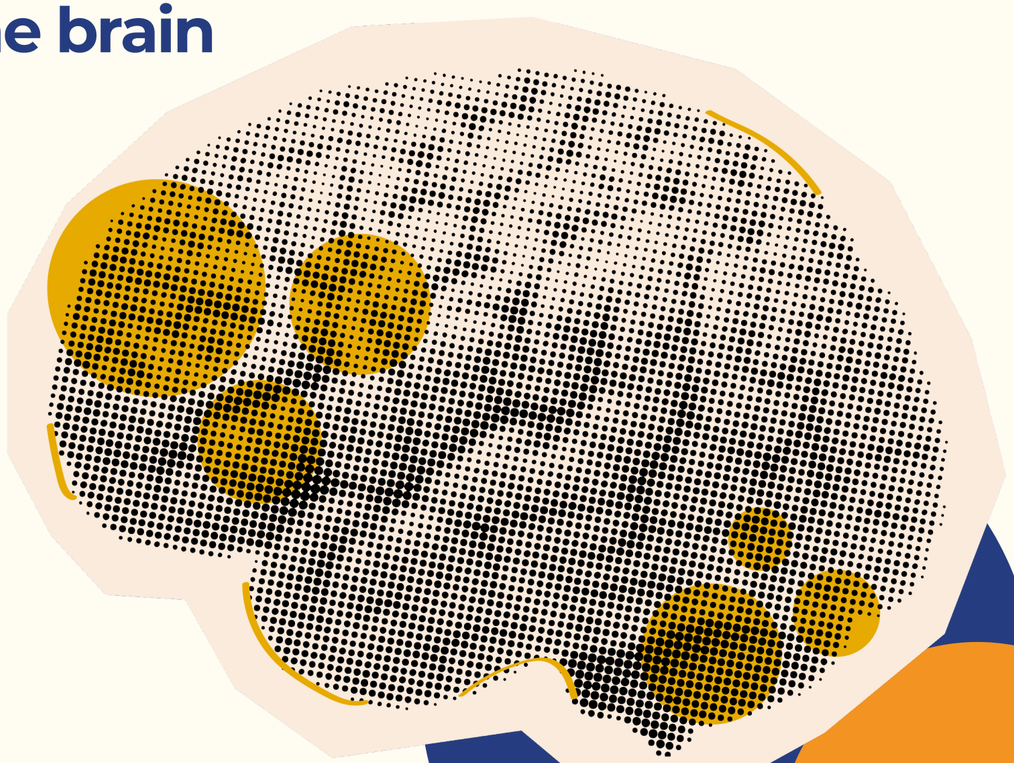
Executive Functions are a set of cognitive skills that have to do with managing oneself and one's resources in order to achieve a goal.



skills that manage
HOW you execute
what you intend to do

Executive Function Skills

- Located primarily in the pre-fontal cortex of the brain
- The last part of the brain to develop
- Typically fully developed by 25+ years of age



Executive Function Skills

- Task Initiation
- Planning & Organizing
- Working Memory
- Attention
- Processing Speed
- Flexible Thinking
- Self Monitoring
- Emotional Regulation



Task Initiation

The ability to begin a task without undue procrastination

Parent Support

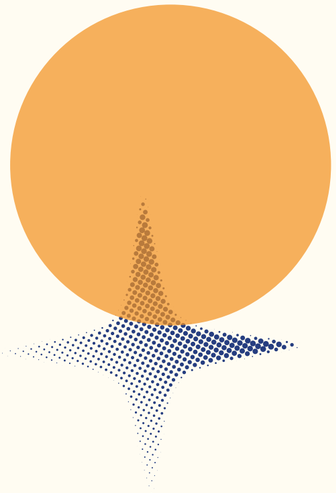
- Build consistent routines together

Planning & Organizing

Creating and prioritizing order and structure

Parent Support

- Maintain consistent routines
- Talk about what is expected next
- Showing the passage of time with timer or analog clock
- By mid-elementary: have child practice time estimation and multi-step project planning



Attention

The ability to regulate and sustain focus for tasks that are challenging or uninteresting

Parent Support

- Build child’s self-awareness and stamina
- Use PINCH for motivation (Play, Interest, Novelty, Challenge & Hurry Up)
- Remove known distractions when possible

Working Memory

The ability to keep multiple bits of information in mind and apply them to a task - the brain's "search engine"

Parent Support

- Visual checklists
  - mornings, after-school tasks, packing backpack
- Landing Pad
  - dedicated consistent spots for everyday items
- Break Down Instructions
- Have Child Repeat Instructions
- Play Auditory & Visual Memory Games
  - I'm Going on a Picnic
  - Memory

Processing Speed

The time it takes to process and respond

Parent Support

- Build awareness if you see your child processes slower
- Provide wait time when possible for child to process

Flexible Thinking

The ability to take feedback and adapt; shift gears and find new ways to solve problems

Parent Support

- Practice problem solving together when plans change
- Model flexible thinking out loud for your child

Self-Monitoring

Using “self-talk” to monitor and regulate one’s behaviors and direct future actions

Parent Support

- Live your life out loud

Emotional Regulation

A person’s ability to understand and accept their emotional experience, manage their emotions and respond with appropriate behavior in the moment.

Parent Support

- Identify emotions (yours and theirs)
- Model Calm
- Co-regulate when appropriate
- Identify to your child when you “lose your cool” and what you plan to do next time
- Identify triggers (yours and theirs)

Executive Function Skills

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How do Executive Function skills show up daily?



- Morning Routine
- Homework

Morning Routine

Executive Function Skills Required:

- Task Initiation
- Sequencing
- Working Memory
- Sustained Attention
- Emotional Regulation



How can I support EF skill development with the Morning Routine?

- Planning & Organizing; Task Initiation
  - Plan ahead with your child
    - talk about upcoming schedule and display family calendar
    - lay out clothes & pack bag/lunch the night before together

- Working Memory & Sequencing
  - Visual Checklists

- Emotional Regulation: model calm, co-regulate and build in extra time to reduce stress

Homework Routine



Executive Function Skills Required:

- Task Initiation
- Organization
- Working Memory
- Processing Speed
- Sustained Attention
- Emotional Regulation

How can I support EF skill development with Homework?

- Task Initiation & Organization
  - Set a Routine
    - ahead of time with a clear start time
    - when you do this, then you can...

- Task Initiation
  - 5 Minute Start/Visual Timer
  - Body Doubling

- Processing Speed/Emotional Regulation:
  - Break into chunks to reduce overload
  - Ensure emotional fuel take has been refueled

Seeing some EF Struggles?

If you see your child may be struggling with the development of some of these EF skills in a particular area, use the 4 C’s

1. Calm
2. Curiosity
3. Connection
4. Collaboration

Collaboration Builds Executive Function Skills

Collaboration fosters the development of your child's

- Communication Skills
- Cognitive Flexibility (perspective taking)
- Self Regulation (frustration tolerance)
- Problem Solving Skills
- Resiliency

Am I doing too much or too little?

Keep in mind:

- **Try not to jump in too quickly with suggestions or solutions**
- **Leave space to let them build their planning, regulating and reasoning muscles**
  - **To build their reasoning muscles:**
    - ***What is your plan*?**
    - ***What are you going to do about that*?**
- **Let them pack the bag, let them make mistakes**

mistakes = opportunities to learn

When you are skill building, remember:

- **Skill building requires a marathon view. Give yourself and your child grace.**
- **Praise effort, persistence and growth to build confidence and resilience**
- **Celebrate the micro wins!**

Questions



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