

Executive Functioning

9. Time Management- estimating and allocating time and staying within deadlines

Strategies:

- * Make timelines explicit
- * Teacher monitors student's time management and provides feedback
- * Give individual support with breaking down tasks and estimating timelines
- * Encourage parents to have homework routines

10. Goal-Directed Persistence- creating and executing a goal to completion

Strategies:

- * Help students set simple and achievable goals
- * Model setting classroom goals and tracking progress
- * Verbally reinforce effort or persistence not accuracy
- * Remind students to periodically monitor their behaviour and consider whether they are achieving their goals
- * Have students verbalize goals



10. Cognitive Flexibility- revising plans when the unexpected happens

Strategies:

- * Provide advanced warning of transitions/changes
- * Decrease speed, volume or complexity of information presentation
- * Provide close-ended vs. open-ended tasks when possible
- * Use social stories to describe possible solutions to familiar problems
- * Give scripts for dealing with problem situations

11. Metacognition- observing how you problem solve

Strategies:

- * Teach students to make inferences, draw conclusions, grasp the main idea and read between the lines
- * Help "bump" work up
- * Students make personal list of common errors
- * Provide specific feedback highlighting what was done well and what can be improved
- * Active studying strategies that focus on understanding specific concepts by defining, explaining, giving examples, providing proof or historical context, and most importantly relating it to other concepts they have already learned

Adapted from the book "Smart But Scattered" by Drs. P. Dawson and R. Guare (2008)

Understanding Executive Functioning: Supporting Students' Work Habits in the Classroom



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What Is Executive Functioning?

Executive functioning involves skills that help us focus our attention, ignore distractions, transition from one activity to another, inhibit our emotions, and hold onto information long enough to use it. These skills are vital for our productivity at school and the workplace, but also affect our relationships and the extent to which we achieve our goals.

Some students have difficulty developing these skills. The good news is that executive functioning skills can be taught and improved with repeated exposure, practice, and feedback. There are many specific skills that collectively make up executive functioning and **strategies for each skill are described below.**

Executive Functioning:

1. Response Inhibition- resisting the urge to say or do something

Strategies:

- * More time to answer
- * Hiding temptations
- * Measure waiting periods
- * Pre-teaching
- * Praise examples of self-control
- * Manipulatives or phrases to distract when waiting

2. Working Memory-holding information in mind and using it

Strategies:

- * **M**ake eye contact
- * **E**ncourage paraphrasing of instructions
- * **M**inimize distractions
- * **O**rganizational strategies such as prompts and not directives
- * **R**ehearsal
- * **Y**ellow post it notes, reminders, pictures schedules to refer to

3. Emotional Control- managing feelings such as anxiety, frustration or anger

Strategies:

- * Identify tricky situations
- * Use language/ visuals to explain emotions;
- * Encourage positive self-talk
- * Use class-wide relaxation strategies regularly

4. Sustained Attention- attending to any kind of task even when distracted or tired

Strategies:

- * Identify on-task behaviours
- * Ask students to rate their attention at infrequent intervals
- * Give positive feedback about staying on task
- * Have a preferred activity or reinforcer to look forward to

5. Task Initiation- beginning projects in a timely manner without procrastination

Strategies:

- * Give positive feedback about **promptly starting** tasks throughout the day
- * Use visual prompts as a reminder to begin working
- * Provide explicit instruction on breaking up tasks into chunks
- * Discuss how & when a task will get done

6. Planning and Prioritization- creating a roadmap to reach a goal

Strategies:

- * Student designed plans or templates
- * Goal setting and graphing progress
- * Facilitating step by step progress through a plan
- * Prompting to think about prioritization

7. Organization- keeping track of information and materials

Strategies:

- * Provide model/ example/ checklist
- * Classroom wide routines
- * Easily accessible reference materials
- * Require planner use
- * Organizational tools
- * Prompt to think about organization
- * Demonstrate organizational process and **monitor** student practice