

Executive Function Overview

I. What is Executive Function?

- a. The term comes from the CEO, or the business executive; we all have executive functioning and it develops over the course of childhood and adolescence. EF is an umbrella term referring to one's ability to initiate, breakdown and follow through on multi-step tasks (Amy Hayutin-Contreras).
- b. Executive functioning begins to emerge in young children between 3 and 5 years old but continues to develop well into adolescence and early adulthood (Dawson and Guare, 2010)

II. What are the Executive Functions?

- a. Working memory
- b. Planning and activation
- c. Organization of thoughts, time and space
- d. Cognitive flexibility
- e. Self-regulation
- f. Prioritizing
- g. Sequential thinking

III. The Basic Steps in Developing Executive Function Skills (Dawson & Guare)

1. Describe the problem behaviors
2. Set a goal
3. Establish a procedure or set of steps to reach the goal
4. Supervise the child following the procedure
5. Evaluate the process and make changes as necessary
6. Fade the supervision

IV. What to Expect from Executive Function Coaching

- a. An individualized skill building program adapted for your student's needs
- b. We typically recommend 1-2 times per week, depending on homework load
- c. Some students make major improvements in 8-10 weeks while others take 6 months to a full academic year
- d. Consistency, repetition, and regular feedback are key
- e. Parents and primary teacher participation in EF skill building is crucial, so the EF coach will communicate with the family and school regularly regarding the home routine

V. Common problem behaviors

- a. Physical disorganization
- b. Difficulty with transitions
- c. Inappropriate behaviors
- d. Misses oral instructions
- e. Forgets to bring home materials to complete daily assignments
- f. Not reading and following written instructions
- g. Not checking work
- h. Not submitting completed homework

VI. Organizational systems established during sessions

1. Daily routines
 - a. Morning checklist— performed before school
 - b. Afternoon checklist— performed when home from school
 - c. Evening checklist— performed before bed to set up the next day
2. Calendaring / task list system
 - a. Most elementary students are too young for a digital planning system
 - b. Paper planners work well
3. Check school website / email communication with teacher
 - a. Some elementary teachers list curricula and assignments online, while others don't

VII. Our approach (elementary students)

- a. The basis for EF skill building with elementary aged students is to spend a lot of time modeling, creating routines, and making checklists to match the routine.
- b. Students in grades 4-5 should learn through modeling and practice to create their own checklists and work towards initiating the checklists without reminders.
- c. Encouraging goal setting and self-reflection

VIII. Measures of Progress

- a. Measures of progress will vary individually. Goal behaviors should be identified with the student and parent at the beginning of the relationship.
- b. Examples of common measures of progress include:
 - i. Makes it through 1 week, 2 weeks, 1 month (progressively):
 1. Managing classroom and home transitions independently
 2. Following written and oral directions without reminders
 3. Maintaining physical organization
 4. Maintaining a calendar and task list regularly without reminders
 5. Initiating and completing homework and study tasks independently
 6. Remembering all necessary materials to complete homework
 7. Submitting homework on time without reminders

IX. Study Skills

- a. Most students with EF deficits need to be taught study skills in addition to time management and organization.
- b. Examples of common study skills addressed:
 - i. Creating a good study space
 - ii. how to study for tests
 - iii. memorization techniques (for spelling, math facts, etc.)
 - iv. breaking down written and oral directions into clear, multi-step tasks
 - v. active reading strategies
 - vi. summarizing and paraphrasing