

## 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).

### 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 twice weekly sessions for EF skill building
- 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. We strongly recommend that a school advisor or teacher is in the loop, along with the parents, to facilitate a team approach

### V. Within four weeks, the student should have the following established:

1. Calendaring system
  - a. A calendaring system is the core of EF skill building. It is the primary tool for keeping track of daily assignments, projects, exams, and extracurriculars.
  - b. The student will be involved in choosing a digital or paper calendar
2. Task management system
  - a. A task list should be created at each session. It should be broken down by day, by subject, and by individual task in terms of how specifically the student will execute the task
  - b. The task list can be paper/digital and will be shared with the student and tutor
3. Physical organization
  - a. Students should be an active participant in designing the organization system and determining which school supplies need to be purchased.

- b. Once a system is established, the student should gradually accept responsibility for maintaining physical organization
- 4. Digital organization
  - a. Monitor and create systems for keeping the student's electronic devices well organized
  - b. Sample tasks include creating folders and color coding systems in Google Drive, cleaning up desktop files, and adding name/date to all documents

#### **VI. Sample session breakdown (middle and high school students)**

- a. Every session must include the following checklist, which can take as little as 15 minutes and as much as 45 minutes, depending on the student.
  - i. Check every class on the online portal
  - ii. Update calendar and task list accordingly
  - iii. Physical organization upkeep
  - iv. Contact teachers as needed
  - v. Create and share task list
- b. Study Skills
  - i. Focus on one study skill per session, as related to the student's curriculum
- c. Homework support
  - i. Make sure the student knows what to complete that evening and how to approach each assignment
  - ii. If time allows, begin the most difficult tasks of the evening
  - iii. Student should expect to have homework to complete outside of session

#### **VII. 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) without:
    - 1. Turning in a late assignment
    - 2. Forgetting to bring home necessary materials to complete homework
    - 3. Forgetting to submit completed work
  - ii. Noticeable improvement in physical and digital organization
  - iii. Maintain a calendar on a regular basis without reminders or assistance
  - iv. Maintain a task list on a regular basis without reminders or assistance
  - v. Initiate and complete homework and study tasks independently
  - vi. Grade improvement

#### **VIII. 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. Notetaking: during lectures and while reading/studying
  - ii. Exam prep & study guide creation: using notes, handouts, maps, outlines, vocabulary
  - iii. Active reading strategies: annotation / highlighting
  - iv. Chapter summaries
  - v. Previewing and reviewing
  - vi. Memorization techniques