Developing a Winning Culture

St. Helena Parish School District
Teaching Assistant Meeting | Executive Function Skills
September 8, 2017

Agenda

Do Now: KWL
Let’s Learn: What is Executive Function?
Your Turn: Organize Your Day
Next Steps: 3-2-1 Exit Ticket

Notes:
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AGENDA

- KWL Chart
- What is Executive Function Video
- Executive Function Around the Clock Handout
- Organizing and Prioritizing – Snowball
- Revisit KWL
- 3 – 2 – 1 Exit Ticket
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<th>What do I <strong>KNOW</strong></th>
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- Goal-Directed Behavior
- Organization
- Focus
- Planning and Problem-Solving Skills
- Impulse Control/Self-Regulation
- Flexibility
- Time-Management Skills
- Memory/Study Skills

KEYWORDS FOR THE VIDEO
Think About Your Day –

- What do you do in the morning before you leave the house?
- Are you prepared for your lessons?
- Can you remember your routines?
- Do you work at home on work related tasks? How do you determine what to do at work and what to do at home?

Josh’s Day
- Read the handout – Organizing and Prioritizing
- Using your materials, complete the Frayer Model worksheet
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**K-W-L CHART**
EXIT TICKET

3 – 2 – 1

- 3 New Facts I Learned
- 2 Ah-Has That Popped into My Mind
- 1 Big Question I Still Had
# Executive Function Behavioral Categories

**Impulse Control**  
**the ability to stop and think before acting**  
For many children with ADHD, lack of impulse control is a fundamental weakness. They often say or do things without using a cushion of time to reflect. They’ll do whatever pleasurable thing comes along without considering their obligations or commitments. Children with this weakness often speed through schoolwork, sacrificing accuracy and completeness along the way.

**Emotional Control**  
**the ability to manage feelings by thinking about goals**  
Children who can’t manage their emotions have trouble accepting even constructive criticism. They can’t keep their eyes on their goal when upsetting or unexpected things happen. They’re quick to call a situation “unfair.” They overreact to losing a game or being called on in class. They have difficulty sticking with schoolwork when they’re distressed about something.

**Planning/Prioritizing**  
**the ability to create steps to reach a goal and to make decisions about what to focus on**  
Children who have difficulty planning and setting priorities are easily overwhelmed by complicated, multi-part tasks. They can’t independently impose structure and order on ideas. They have trouble thinking through the steps required to achieve a goal. They tend to underestimate a project’s complexity and time requirements.

**Flexibility**  
**the ability to change strategies or revise plans when conditions change**  
Children who behave in ways that are inflexible have trouble when a familiar routine is disrupted or a task becomes complicated. They get frustrated when a first attempt to solve a problem isn’t successful. They are unable to see new ways to do familiar tasks or to make another choice when the first choice proves unworkable.

**Working Memory**  
**the ability to hold information in mind and use it to complete a task**  
Children with weak working memory are unable to remember and apply crucial information in order to move to the next step of a task. They falter when a task requires that they remember a series of directions, generate ideas in response to the directions and then express their ideas. Information just doesn’t “stick” for them.

**Self-Monitoring**  
**the ability to monitor and evaluate your own performance**  
Children who are weak at monitoring themselves may not notice that they’re not following directions until someone points this out. They tend to misjudge their own efforts and have trouble adjusting what they’re doing based on feedback or cues. They are often completely surprised by a low grade on a test or project.
Task Initiation

the ability to recognize when it is time to get started on something and begin without procrastinating

Children who are weak in this skill have trouble starting homework and put off projects until the last minute. They’re sometimes seen as lazy or unmotivated; keep in mind that kids like this may procrastinate because they really don’t know how to start. Many children who have difficulty getting started also have trouble with planning and organizing. They can get so overwhelmed by everything they have to do that they end up doing nothing at all.

Organization

the ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials

This skill is closely tied to planning, setting priorities and task initiation. Children who lack organizational skills lose permission slips, assignment sheets, notebooks and library books. They may face consequences for being disorganized (for example, if they lose their homework, they get a failing grade) but don’t improve their organizational skills in response to these consequences. Children with poor skills in this area may understand the value of organization but are unable to learn how to keep track of things.

Some kids will, through maturation, good teaching and trial and error, independently figure out ways to overcome or compensate for their executive skills weaknesses. Most children with LD and ADHD, though, need extra support to develop or compensate for such deficits. The good news is that you can help your children recognize, improve and work around their areas of executive dysfunction.

As schoolwork gets harder and students are asked to be more independent learners, children with weak executive skills fall further and further behind. Feeling anxious about what to do and how well they’re doing (especially when they’re “winging it” without a strategy or plan of attack) can easily lead to feeling overloaded and overwhelmed. This in turn leads to exhaustion, inattentiveness and a cycle of insecurity and feeling out of control. Not a great scenario for learning or self-esteem!

Parents, in partnership with schools, can be enormously helpful in the improvement of children’s executive skills. Because each child is on a slightly different developmental path and has a unique executive function profile, you’ll need to work with your child’s teacher to personalize strategies that will best address your child’s needs. Directly teaching your child these skills, offering frequent reassurance and giving clear, specific feedback are all essential.

Up next, enjoy our “Executive Function Around the Clock” illustration, which will take you through the challenging day of Josh, a sixth grader who struggles with executive function.
Organizing and Prioritizing are important executive functions that all of us use at work and in school.

Organization involves arranging possessions, information or tasks into a structured whole so that the parts are coordinated efficiently. As adults, we use a variety of organizational strategies and tools (e.g., calendars, file cabinets and computers) to schedule and manage tasks and keep track of important information. These techniques help us accomplish tasks. As we organize, we also need to prioritize based on our goals and the level of importance of the tasks. For example, we need to select which tasks to tackle first. Let’s look at how children call upon those same skills in school.

**Why Is Organization Important for Academic Performance?**

From the early elementary grades to middle school and beyond, the increasing demands of the curriculum and independent learning call for stronger organizational strategies.

The key areas in which students face organizational challenges are:

- **Homework:** This requires students to write down all assignments correctly, bring home materials needed for their work, complete tasks on time and remember to turn in their work.

- **Long-term projects:** Students need to keep track of many details and manage multiple elements of their projects simultaneously.

- **Studying:** Students need to organize class notes, homework and other materials to prepare for tests and quizzes.

- **Writing:** Students are required to produce cohesive, integrated, analytical compositions that are well organized and prioritize important details.

**Why Is Prioritizing Important for Academic Performance?**

Students who understand where to focus their efforts on a given day or for a given task are able to complete complex tasks with ease. Students need to prioritize when they do the following tasks.

- **Juggle** long-term and short-term tasks day to day

- **Select** the most important information for note-taking, studying or writing

- **Manage** the competing demands of school, homework and extracurricular activities without losing track of important deadlines

**What About Children With LD and ADHD?**

Of all the executive skills, organization and prioritization loom especially large, particularly for children with LD and ADHD. Disorganized children with LD or ADHD are often called lazy, unmotivated—even defiant. You may be one of the few people in your child’s life who understands how having a disability complicates his or her ability to develop these skills.
How Can Parents Help Children Organize and Prioritize Effectively?

Your child may understand the value of being organized but may not have the slightest idea how to get that way. That’s where you can provide invaluable assistance and encouragement. The following strategies can help children succeed with academic and leisure activities and provide a strong foundation for future performance as adults.

Organizing Time

- Use a family calendar to record important commitments. Weekly family meetings can help you coordinate everyone’s schedules so that you model good planning and organizational strategies.
- Help your child select calendars (paper or electronic) that can be updated with commitments and tasks whenever you update the family calendar. Encourage your child to review these calendars daily to anticipate new events.
- Encourage your child to schedule fun activities (such as time with friends) along with important obligations.

Organizing Tasks

- Teach your child to think of a long-term project as a “mental movie” by breaking complex tasks into manageable chunks (like movie scenes). Use a white board or sheet of paper to map tasks into flowcharts.
- Encourage your child to write down important tasks in a calendar and to allocate time accordingly. You can teach your child to estimate the time each task will take and to track the time while working. Help kids make lists of homework assignments or chores. Let them experience the satisfaction of checking off tasks as they’re completed.

Organizing Materials

- An organized workspace helps children find the materials they need for homework easily and independently. Storing materials in different sections is helpful. For example, all writing tools should be located together.
- Keep reference materials, including calculators, dictionaries and atlases, near your child’s homework workspace.
- Help kids identify a regular time during the week for clearing out and organizing their backpack. Work together to make this a pleasant experience so that it becomes a habit!
- Encourage them to use a brightly colored folder to bring important papers (like homework and permission slips) to and from school, so those items don’t get lost.

TECH-SAVVY ORGANIZATION TIPS

Technology-savvy middle and high schoolers can try:

- File-sharing software like Dropbox to keep notes handy anywhere there’s an internet connection
- Smartphone apps that serve as digital sticky notes or bulletin boards
- Digital flashcards, also available as apps on smartphones
- Password manager software to keep track of passwords
**Prioritizing Tasks**

- Help kids prioritize homework tasks based on due dates, difficulty level or the level of stress they have about the tasks.
- Encourage them to list the steps needed to complete long-term projects.
- Help them sequence tasks logically. For instance, before looking up vocabulary words in the dictionary, they could alphabetize the list first.

**Prioritizing Materials**

- Teach kids to review homework and gather materials before starting work so that everything is collected before they start working.
- Store the most commonly used items within easy reach in accessible locations.

**Keep It Simple, Relevant and Real**

Here are some general attitudes and approaches to keep in mind as you teach your child how to organize and prioritize schoolwork and life in general:

- **Call upon your intimate knowledge of your kids**—their personality, strengths and challenges. Consider how your child thinks and works.
- **Focus first on short-term strategies** related to certain tasks or assignments.
- **Start small**. Help your child see that the smallest improvements will make life easier.
- **Keep it simple**. Help your child be flexible, since children’s preferences change as do teachers’ requirements. Look for quick, easy ways to begin organizing: a simple planner that you and your child check daily, a routine for filling and emptying a backpack, a schedule for daily homework, study and review.

**Partner with your child and the teacher.** Collaborate to develop an organization system that works for your kids. Encourage them to express their opinions and preferences. After all, no organization method will work unless your child is willing to use it!

**Lead by (honest) example.** Show your child the importance of organization in your own life. Point out how a shopping list gives direction to a trip to the supermarket. If you rely on lists, a datebook or apps on your smartphone to stay organized, talk with your child about how your personal organizing system works (or falls short). Be honest about your own organizational frustrations, so your child understands that organization is a skill that many people—even adults—struggle to master.

**Create comfortable routines.** All of us develop routines and habits to get us through the day. Your child will benefit greatly from knowing what to expect during a typical school day and week. Keeping track of homework and assignments by writing in a planner every day gives your child a visual reminder of what needs doing.

**Relish the Rewards With Your Child**

Students with LD and ADHD need extra time and practice to develop these skills. But once they learn these habits, they’re rewarded with greater success in school, more free time to have fun—and a sense of pride and accomplishment.
Meet Josh, a sixth grader who struggles with executive function. This is a day in his life.

7 A.M. Argh! Josh knows that he has forgotten something. Ah, that's it—his cleats for today's game. He sprints back inside the house to get them ... and leaves his backpack in the kitchen. He walks right past the checklist his mom made to help him remember what he needs for school. But it's too late: The bus is here and about to pull away! He's going to miss it again.

EF Area: ORGANIZATION

11 A.M. Josh's English teacher stands at the blackboard and asks: “Tell me how last night's reading relates to the words on the board.” Every hand in the class goes up...except for Josh's. His heart sinks thinking about all the steps answering this question takes.

I don't know...
I wasn't thinking about those words when I read last night. I'm so overwhelmed.

EF Area: WORKING MEMORY
Last night I was playing my video games and it was AMAZING!! There were like eighty-five CRAZY MONSTERS and I got ALL of THEM, POW-POW-POW-POW-POW!!

1 P.M. It’s the best part of the school day...lunch! At a table with his friends, Josh shouts at a mile a minute and jumps in and out of his seat. He doesn’t even notice that the lunch monitor is glaring at him and that his friends look annoyed.

3 P.M. Time for soccer! A teammate kicks the ball toward Josh. He knows that in soccer, you do one thing—you kick that ball as hard as you can! But where? He can’t exactly remember, so he just kicks. Wham! Uh-oh. He’s sent the ball right into his own team’s net. Anger brews on his teammates’ faces as Josh’s heart sinks yet again.

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6 P.M. It is time for dinner—but first, Josh has to set the table. Hmm. Josh scratches his head and tries to remember exactly what goes at each place setting. He thinks he has got it right this time, but his little sister reminds him that he doesn’t. How dare she! He blows up screaming at her.
8 P.M. After hours of cajoling from his mom, Josh finally sits down to do his homework. But, ugh, where to begin? He knows he has several projects and papers that need attention, but what's due when? What needs done for tomorrow? Overwhelmed, he puts his head down.

**EF Area: TASK INITIATION**

12 A.M. Delays and procrastination mean that Josh is burning the midnight oil. He is exhausted, but his history paper is due tomorrow. But he just can’t figure out a structure for his paper and the steps he needs to take to get it done.

**EF Area: PLANNING & SETTING PRIORITIES**

3 A.M. Finally, the paper is done and Josh can catch a few hours of Z’s. But he can’t seem to drift off to sleep—he’s worried that he didn’t do the paper right. And then there’s the problem he’ll discover tomorrow morning: His disorganization has gotten the best of him, and he forgot to put the finished paper in his backpack.

**EF Area: SELF MONITORING, ORGANIZATION**
Draw a picture showing how you can help your students organize effectively.

Draw a picture showing how you can help your students prioritize effectively.

Write a sentence about your picture.

Write a sentence about your picture.

Organizing and Prioritizing
### Three new facts I learned...

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### Two ah-ha’s that popped into my mind

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### One big question that I still have:

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