

So Your Child Has Executive Function Challenges: What Now?

An Informational Handout for Parents

What is Executive Function?

- Executive Function (EF) is an umbrella term that refers to the set of skills and cognitive processes that work together in various combinations to enable an individual to manage the tasks of daily life
- EF helps people plan, organize, focus, sustain effort, remember instructions, juggle multiple tasks at once, regulate emotions, and inhibit impulsivity.
- According to ADHD expert Dr. Thomas Brown's model, the Executive Functions include **Activation, Focus, Effort, Emotion, Memory, and Action** (Brown, 2008).

If your child has trouble with Activation, this means...

- He or she has trouble initiating, prioritizing and organizing tasks.
- He or she may procrastinate or struggle with time management.
- He or she may have difficulty starting tasks that are not intrinsically interesting.

Some strategies you can use include...

- Encouraging your child to ask him or herself, "What is one small action step I can take at this moment?"
- Breaking tasks down into smaller chunks and creating a schedule for completion.

If your child has trouble with Focus, this means...

- He or she has trouble focusing attention on a given task and struggles to stay focused for the duration of the task.
- He or she may appear excessively distractible.
- He or she may struggle to shift attention from one task to another.

Some strategies you can use include...

- Minimizing distractions.
- Recognizing and reinforcing on-task behavior

If your child has trouble with Effort, this means...

- He or she has trouble remaining alert and sustaining effort during a given task.
- He or she may appear to become very drowsy when asked to be quiet and listen.
- He or she may take a long time to read and write, known as slow processing.

Some strategies you can use include...

- Encouraging your child to use and race against timers.
- Allowing your child to hold a fidget toy during work time (e.g. stress balls, clay)
- Helping your child come up with work and study schedules that include

manageable chunks of work time with dedicated short breaks in between.

If your child has trouble with Emotion, this means...

- He or she has trouble managing frustration and regulating difficult emotions.
- He or she may have a low tolerance for frustration and show emotional reactions to frustration that seem out of proportion to the triggering event.

Some strategies you can use include...

- Keeping the atmosphere lighthearted and positive.
- Modeling appropriate, non-judgmental reactions to frustrating situations.

If your child has trouble with Memory, this means...

- He or she has trouble using working memory and retrieving information from longer-term memory.
- He or she may appear to have difficulty holding onto one piece of information while engaging in another task.
- He or she may struggle to remember information or ideas, leading to impairments in reading comprehension, writing ability, or math achievement.

Some strategies you can use include...

- Reminding your child to write down assignments and information, rather than trying to remember it all.
- Providing written instructions for tasks and repeating instructions as necessary.
- Presenting information using a combination of modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile)

If your child has trouble with Action, this means...

- He or she has trouble monitoring and self-regulating his or her own behavior.
- He or she may act impulsively or start activities before instructions are given.

Some strategies you can use include...

- Implementing rewards for good behavior.
- Recognizing and acknowledging instances where your child demonstrates self-regulation and/or impulse control.

For more resources on Executive Function, visit www.yourbestprep.com/execfunc

