

So You Have Executive Function Challenges: What Now?

An Informational Handout for Students

What is Executive Function?

- Executive Function (EF) is a term that refers to the set of skills and cognitive processes that work together in various combinations to enable a person 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 show self-control.
- According to ADHD expert Dr. Thomas Brown's model, the Executive Functions include **Activation**, **Focus**, **Effort**, **Emotion**, **Memory**, and **Action** (Brown, 2008).

If you have trouble with Activation, this means...

- You have trouble prioritizing and organizing for tasks.
- You may procrastinate or struggle with time management.
- You may have difficulty starting tasks that are not intrinsically interesting.



Some strategies you can try to use include...

- Asking yourself, "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 you have trouble with Focus, this means...

- You have trouble focusing attention on a given task and struggle to sustain attention for the duration of the task.
- You may feel easily distracted.
- You may struggle to shift attention from one task to another.



Some strategies you can try to use include...

- Minimizing distractions.
- Coming up with a way to reward yourself for on-task behavior

If you have trouble with Effort, this means...

- You have trouble remaining alert and sustaining effort during a given task.
- You may become drowsy or feel exhausted 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 try to use include...

- Setting timers and racing against them.
- Holding a fidget toy during work time (e.g. stress balls, clay)



- Scheduling manageable chunks of work time with short breaks in between.

If you have trouble with Emotion, this means...

- You have trouble managing frustration and regulating difficult emotions.
- You may have a low tolerance for frustrating situations and show emotional reactions to frustration that seem out of proportion to the triggering event.



Some strategies you can try to use include...

- Pausing whatever you're doing to take 10 deep breaths when you notice you're feeling frustrated.
- Taking a “mental time out” when you notice you're feeling upset: identify 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste.

If you have trouble with Memory, this means...

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



Some strategies you can try to use include...

- Writing down assignments and information, rather than trying to remember it.
- Trying different note-taking styles that include both text and visuals.

If you have trouble with Action, this means...

- You have trouble monitoring and regulating your own actions.
- You may behave impulsively or struggle with self-control.



Some strategies you can try to use include...

- Using self-monitoring checklists for on-task behavior (google “self-monitoring checklist”)
- If you struggle with impulse control in school (e.g. calling out), writing down any questions or comments you have and saving them for the end of class.

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

