# Executive Functioning

## Overview

Executive function is an umbrella term in neuroscience that describes the neurological processes involving mental control and self-regulation, regulating cognitive and social behaviors like controlling impulses, paying attention, remembering information, planning and organizing time and materials, and responding appropriately to social and stressful situations. We use these daily skills to learn, work, and plan/manage daily life, staying focused despite distractions. Executive function takes time to develop fully, and it develops at different rates in different children. These skills are developed through experience and practice, scaffolding that includes relationships, engaging in routines, breaking big tasks into smaller chunks, engaging in games that promote imagination, role-playing, following rules, and controlling impulses.

Because of the human brain's plasticity and enormous capacity for learning, it is possible to improve the executive functions of students with deficits through classroom strategies and support.

When people struggle with executive function, it impacts them at home, in school, and in life. Executive dysfunction is ubiquitous in students with ADHD, but aren't the only ones who struggle with executive functioning skills. Students with executive function challenges often have difficulties during classroom instruction and working sessions; have trouble planning, managing time, and organizing; find it hard to focus, follow directions, and handle emotions, among other things. A student may know what to do to complete a task, but may have trouble knowing when and how to apply the appropriate skills.

Accommodations can help them work around these challenges and thrive in the classroom because the skills involved let us set goals, plan, and get things done.

## Some strategies to Support Executive Functioning Skills

### Tools

1. Use speech to text (dictation) technology for writing
2. Use graphic organizers and mind-mapping software
3. Use a visual timer during working/practice/application sessions
4. Use a desk organizer
5. Use paper strips/ruler to place under sentences when reading.

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## Environment

1. **Quiet Work Areas:** Use special spots to work where you won't be distracted.
2. **Consistent Routines:** Set up routines every day, and ask for advanced notice if anything changes
3. **Breaks for Brain and Movement:** Ask to have breaks to stretch and move around to help you stay focused and remember things better.
4. **Fidgets Allowed:** See if you can use fidget toys to help you stay focused and alert.
5. **Learn to Self-Advocate:** Speak up for things that will help you think, focus, and learn best.

## Instruction

1. **Step-by-Step Directions:** Ask for instructions both verbally and visually. Repeat them back to make sure you understand.
2. **Extra Time:** Ask for extra time to think about information, ask questions, and come up with your answers.
3. **Highlight Key Points:** Listen for phrases like "This is important because..." to know what to focus on.
4. **Simple Steps:** Ask for Directions to be given in easy-to-follow steps, both written and spoken.
5. **Connect What You Learn:** Link new information to what you already know to help make learning easier.
6. **Break Down Tasks:** Split into smaller assignments and tasks into more manageable steps.

## Resources

*Here are just a few resources about Executive Functioning*

- **What is Executive Function?** | Video from How to ADHD
- **What is Executive Function?** | Article from Understood
- **Bolstering Executive Function?** | | Video from Edutopia
- **What is Executive Function** | Video from Understood