

WHAT DO YOU
WONDER ABOUT
EXECUTIVE
FUNCTIONING?

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING: GETTING IT TOGETHER FOR WORK, PLAY, AND LIVING

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OVERVIEW

- What is executive functioning?
- What do executive functioning challenges look like?
- How might we support our children around challenges in executive functioning?

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING?

- Like the CEO of our brain
 - Self-monitors our behaviour and attention
 - Organizes, plans, and sets goal
- Crosses all domains
- Tends to impact all aspects of life
- Develops and changes over time
- Challenge for those with brain injuries, social/emotional issues (perfectionism, anxiety, & depression), as well as learning disabilities and ADHD

WHAT HAVE YOU
NOTICED IN YOUR
CHILD?

SOME OBSERVATIONS

- Forgets to hand work in
- Takes forever to start, yet work is correct
- Difficulty starting/completing tasks
- Quickly forgets information told or read
- Difficulty managing time
- Distracted, can't concentrate
- Impulsive, comments &/or acts before thinking
- Disorganized (messy bedroom, locker, backpack)
- Difficulty planning or keeping track of things
- Easily overwhelmed
- Reluctant to ask for help
- Can't see the forest for the trees

WHAT DOES GIFTEDNESS HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

- Asynchronous development
- Intensities
- Delayed development of executive functioning
- Processing speed (ability to complete mental tasks)- low or high
- Other exceptionalities such as LD, ADHD

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE
FUNCTIONING,
SPECIFICALLY?

BRIEF

1. Inhibitory control
2. Shift/Flexible thinking
3. Emotional control/regulation
4. Task initiation
5. Working memory
6. Planning/organizing
7. Organization of materials
8. Monitoring self/keeping on track

WHY SHOULD YOU
WORRY ABOUT THIS?

WELLNESS

WELLNESS

People who struggle with executive functioning may experience:

- Feelings of being overwhelmed & inadequacies
- Confusion around not knowing where to start and how to start
- Not knowing how to organize themselves
- Unhealthy perfectionism preventing starting or completing a task
 - Asynchronous development
 - Social anxiety
 - Performance anxiety

RELATIONSHIPS

RELATIONSHIPS

Poor executive functioning impacts relationships

- Others don't want to work with them because they don't engage in or complete a task
- Unreliable as they struggle to be organized & make plans
- Can't organize themselves to follow through with plans
- Behaviour is unpredictable, so others avoid them
- Unreliable because they forget plans, events, materials

THE DIFFERENT SKILLS

INHIBITORY CONTROL

❖ Ability to control impulses & to stop engaging in a behavior

- Blurting out
- Interrupting
- Difficulty waiting for turn
- Lack of filter
- Distracted

→ Writing or drawing response

→ Visual cueing

→ Build up wait time

→ Physical outlet

→ Fidgets

EMOTIONAL CONTROL/REGULATION

- ❖ Ability to regulate emotional responses
 - Reacting instead of responding
 - language
 - volume
 - aggression
- Reflect on impact
- Count before responding
- Practice deep breathing exercises for calming
- Encourage
 - ◆ good sleeping habits
 - ◆ good nutrition
 - ◆ regular exercise

TASK INITIATION

- ❖ Ability to:
 - begin an activity
 - generate ideas or problem-solving strategies
 - Avoidance
 - Distraction
 - Boredom
 - Emotionality
- Start with why
 - ◆ seek to understand
 - Break task down into smaller parts
 - Make lists, then prioritize order
 - Brainstorm ideas together, then identify criteria for selecting
 - Find different ways into the task

WORKING MEMORY

- ❖ Ability to:
 - Hold information when completing a task
 - Encode information
 - Generate goals/plans in a sequential manner
 - Forgets
 - Gets stuck
 - Frustrated
- Model how you remember everything you need
 - Provide visual cues to what needs to be remembered
 - Make lists, charts, totes for the day or event
 - Colour code items

PLANNING & ORGANIZATION

- ❖ Ability to:
 - Anticipate future events
 - Set goals
 - Develop steps
 - Grasp main ideas
 - Organize & understand the main ideas in conversations, movies
- Struggles to: start, continue, finish, & work with others
- Model how you plan & organize
- Breakdown the task(s) into smaller achievable steps & use checklists
- Work together to make plans & set timelines
 - ◆ Use cell phone
 - Calendar
 - Timer
 - Alarm

ORGANIZATION OF MATERIALS

- ❖ Ability to put order in:

- Work
- Play
- Storage spaces (e.g., desks, lockers, backpacks, and bedrooms)
- Money

- Kaos
- Confusion

- Discuss organizational preferences of materials
- Collaborate on what is needed when & how
- Practice skills at home:
 - ◆ Make a meal together to model
 - ◆ Do laundry together to model

MONITORING SELF

- ❖ Ability to check own work & performance
- ❖ Ability to notice the effect of own behavior on other people
 - Don't know what to do next
 - Wandered off task
 - Incomplete task

- Develop to do/checklist
- Model the standard of quality
- Model noticing of where you are at & adjusting
- Notice others' responses & checking for understanding

SHIFT/FLEXIBLE THINKING

- ❖ Ability to move freely from one activity or situation to another; to tolerate change; to switch or alternate attention; to consider other perspectives
 - reluctance to change from an activity/task
 - Inability to see other perspectives

- Use a timer for when to change activities
- Provide warning of changing activities, e.g. “in 3 minutes...”
- Have them hear/see different perspectives to build understanding
- Provide experiences to build empathy
- Model your processing of other perspectives

STRATEGIES IN REVIEW

- Identify challenges for what they are; they are not stupid or lazy or procrastinating
- No one sets out to do poorly, wonder why this is occurring; emotional? lack of skill/information? medical condition?
- Individual needs, individual strategies
- Target a single skill; breakdown the skills, develop & practice each to improve
- Use giftedness to identify strategies to try
- Keep strategies simple
- Accept change is incremental, not immediate
- Model, model, model

QUESTIONS?

RESOURCES

- Davidson Institute for Talent Development
 - Tips for parents: Executive functioning at home and school
 - Understanding, Diagnosing, and Coping with Slow Processing Speed
- NAGC, Gifted learners and executive functioning
- Understood for learning & attention
 - Areas of Executive functioning
 - Executive Functioning strategies you can try at home