



Having A Successful Summer:
Helping your smart but scattered child learn to set and accomplish goals


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What are we talking about today?

- What are executive functions?
- How do I know is experiencing difficulties in this area?
- What can I do about it?

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What are Executive Functions?

- Brain-based skills that are required for humans to accomplish goals
- Skills necessary for learning
- Directs our behavior, helps us decide what to pay attention to and what actions to take
- Links our behaviors with past experiences
- Allows us to observe, assess, and fine tune, giving us the ability to correct and choose a new strategy
- Located primarily in the prefrontal region of the Frontal Lobe



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Executive Functioning Skill Development

- Improve throughout development
- Impacted by both positive and negative experiences
- Learned in day to day activities
- Developed by modeling and supported practice
- Developed throughout life and continue developing into 20's and early 30s
- Parents and teachers are the “frontal lobes” for young children and older children who continue to struggle



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Impairment of EF Skills

- At birth these skills exist only as potential and genetics/early environments/experiences then impact that potential
- EF dysfunction is commonly reported in a variety of conditions and diagnoses that affect brain development and cause changes to the brain structure (e.g., TBI, epilepsy, cancer, ASD, ADHD)
- Frontal lobe is sensitive to early brain injury and stress– abuse, neglect, toxic stress, prenatal trauma, prematurity
- There is increasing evidence related to the roles that community, school, and socioeconomic status plays in the development of these skills
- Deficits may not be apparent until middle school or high school when demands increase



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Executive Functioning and Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Executive functioning deficits are often present (~80%) in individuals diagnosed with ASD, but are not considered a key feature or criteria for diagnosis
- EF has largely been excluded from assessment and treatment ASD
- Treatment is typically focused instead on the social and communication difficulties common to all individuals on the spectrum (Also important!!)



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Executive Dysfunction in Childhood

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|---|---|
| ◦ Messy room, locker, binder | ◦ Rigidity |
| ◦ Can't find belongings | ◦ Lack of focus or hyperfocus |
| ◦ Forgets to turn in homework | ◦ Impulsive behaviors |
| ◦ Frustrated very easily | ◦ Difficulty making or keeping friends |
| ◦ Struggles to start tasks | ◦ Requires immediate and tangible rewards |
| ◦ Says the first thing that comes to their mind | ◦ Fails to attend to or use prior knowledge |
| ◦ Upset by transitions | |



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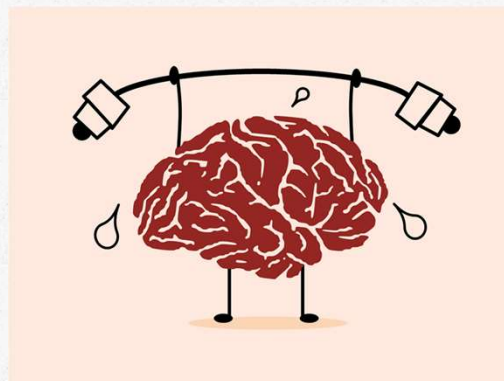
Executive Dysfunction In Adulthood

- Chronically late
- Missing deadlines at work
- Losing keys, phone, etc.
- Forgets to pick a child up after practice
- Poor problem-solving skills
- High risk behaviors



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Things to Consider

- Teach and model deficient skills – this happens in real life, with real life problems and guided support
- External supports first, internal motivation and recall comes much later
- Keep supports in place until mastery is achieved
- Mastery is different for each, supports will be different throughout development and based on the individual's preferences
- Fade the support gradually, if possible



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The Big Three

When exploring EF deficits and working on fostering these skills, there are three things to ALWAYS consider

1. Does the child understand?
2. Is there a reminder (multiple) – besides your voice
3. Are they motivated – tangible, consistent, important to the child



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The Big Three

Does the child understand?

- Specific, clear, concrete
- Is it realistic for their age and development?
 - Check for clarity
 - Use accuracy goals
 - Blank stare
- Continually spinning wheels and not accomplishing goals



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The Big Three

Is there a reminder (multiple) – besides your voice

- Concise, clear, many, VISIBLE/AUDIBLE (this seems obvious but is not always)
- Use tech when able and if appropriate
 - Explore family patterns
 - Child's preference/help
- "They won't use it" ...if you continue to be this support, the child will never use it



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The Big Three

Are they motivated – tangible, consistent, important to the child

- Due to the impact in the Frontal Lobe, a child with an executive functioning deficit will have lower internal motivation than the **AVERAGE CHILD THEIR AGE**

0%



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The Big Three

Are they motivated – tangible, consistent, important

- Easily the most important piece of the puzzle
 - Family patterns greatly impact this
- First and consistent goal until this is established and working
- What does the family currently have available – how consistently utilized?
- Create a hierarchy of incentives – helpful when they have accomplished some of the task but not all



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The Big Three

Are they motivated – tangible, consistent, important

- Allowance
- Do not underestimate the power of verbal reinforcement (5:1 rule) – but this is not enough
- Do not underestimate the power of one-on-one time (depending on age)
 - Tokens are very useful – make it simple
 - If the child uses tech, it should be earned
- Reward discounting – if it's too far away, it will not be impactful today
- They will hate it...

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Sustaining Factors

- Family patterns
- Behavioral concerns of the child/mental health diagnoses - Suicidal ideation, cutting, high-risk behaviors, aggression
- Extra family members in the home and/or other caregivers
- Inconsistent incentive-based system



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SMART Goals

- **Specific** – needs to be concrete, make sure they understand!
- **Measurable** – really important to not have goals that are too broad and not able to be measured (i.e. clean your room)
- **Achievable**
- **Realistic**
- **Time-bound** – start by, finish by, deadline date, etc.

Also...

- Encourage your child to take ownership – compromise is important
- Revisit and revamp often



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QUESTIONS



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QUESTIONS

Are there any brain programs that improve executive functioning?

- There is not evidence at this point to show that brain training programs are effective in improving executive functioning
- They are likely not detrimental but generalization of the skills to the real world is not yet proven
- Actual improvement requires knowledge of the skill, understanding how and when to use it, and practice across many situations



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Considerations for Driving?

Safer Driving for Teens with ADHD

Young drivers with ADHD are at greater risk for

points on a license	traffic accidents
driving without a license	injuries
suspended license	traffic tickets
	speeding tickets

than young drivers who do not have ADHD.

Auto accidents are the leading cause of death for teenagers.

Keys to Successful Teen Driving

Before Driving

- Sign a parent-teen driving agreement
- Know driving laws
- Start driving in stages to gradually get more comfortable

On the Road

- First, drive with an adult. Then, drive only during daytime when driving alone. Then add hours driving at night.
- Minimize Distractions:
 - No passengers for the first 6-8 weeks
 - Turn off the radio
 - Turn your cell phone out of reach
 - Don't drink or do drugs
 - Keep music volume low

When prescribed, teens who take their medication are less likely to have accidents than teens who don't take their medication.

help4adhd.org

- 2-4x more likely to have traffic accidents
- 3x more likely to have injuries
- 4x more likely to be at fault
- 6-8x more likely to have license suspended



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QUESTIONS

What are some ways to work on executive function with a three year old?

- Great time to be proactive and foster these skills
 - The brain adapts to demands placed on it
- Pretend play, matching, sorting, cooking, storytelling (books and oral), singing, dancing
 - Let them explore and learn (safely)
- Meet them at their executive functioning age



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QUESTIONS

Content geared toward 7 and 9 year old boys

- Still a great time to work on fostering these skills (no age is too late!)
 - Consider their interests
- Board games, movement games, dancing, singing, cooking, sorting, organizing, crossword puzzles/sudoku
 - Meet them at their executive functioning age



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QUESTIONS

How to engage in something other than iPad

- Difficulty regulating attention (it's not really an "attention deficit")
 - Limit use
 - Use as an incentive/reward



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Common Concerns

- Morning/Bedtime
 1. Routine – should be similar during the week, weekends, summer, at dad's, etc.
 2. Time will always be an issue – will always use as much time as you allow – time frames usually work well
 3. Sustaining factors – mom is the alarm, tv before everything is done, got their reward for the evening and then refuse to go to bed
 4. Use the sink or swim approach when there is no rush to see what the child is capable of



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Common Concerns

◊ Homework

1. Routine – should be similar regardless of where they are ending up each day (if possible – if not use strong incentives and cut losses when necessary)
2. Does not have to be exact time dependent (i.e. start homework at 415) – actually helpful to set a time limit upon arrival
3. Short break after school, no tech/friends/whatever is most important until this is done
4. Sustaining factors – alone after school, parents don't know what the child needs to do



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Common Concerns

◊ Planner

1. Tech is your friend in this case
2. Abandon all old school, written, antiquated forms of the planner (unless this is the child's preference or tech is not an option)
3. If tech is not an option – double the incentive related to writing homework down
4. Set grade guidelines – get off the progress book
5. Sustaining factors – progress book is not to be trusted, lying usually works (at least for a little while), reward discounting (\$50 for an A at the end of the semester)



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Common Concerns

o Organization

1. A couple common issues– doesn't know/recall what they need to do, did it but forgot to turn it in, doesn't care – can all be true of the same child
2. It doesn't matter what the school "requires", does it work for the child? Most schools will be flexible.
3. Accordion files do not work
4. One binder, one folder for each subject, in order, "to-do" on one side, "turn-in" on the other
5. Mailbox system for papers to turn in
6. Help re-organize often
7. Sustaining factors: parents are not organized, there is no recourse for not turning things in (progress book is not your friend), parent always figures it out



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Resources

- o Late Lost and Unprepared- Cooper-Kahn and Dietzel
- o Smart But Scattered/Smart But Scattered Teen/Smart But Scattered and Stuck – Dawson and Guare
- o <https://www.additudemag.com>
- o <https://chadd.org>
- o Understood.org
- o Russell Barkley – look him up on Youtube!



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