

Report to PARENTS

Executive Function FAQs

Executive function is a set of skills that help your child make plans, control behavior, and set goals. Your child's growing brain, as Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child describes it, is like a busy airport, and executive function is its air-traffic control system. It allows a child to focus on an activity, remember details, and manage their time—all critical tasks for success in school.

The 7 essential executive function skills children need, according to researcher and author Ellen Galinsky, are:

- Focus and self-control;
- Perspective taking;
- Communicating;
- Making connections;
- Critical thinking;
- Taking on challenges; and
- Self-directed, engaged learning.

Read on for answers to common questions about these skills.

How can I tell if my child struggles with executive function?

Since executive function involves a set of skills, there is no single test to identify executive function problems. Generally, a child may have executive function weakness if she or he has trouble:

- Planning projects and staying organized;
- Telling stories verbally or in writing;
- Retaining information while using it (remembering a phone number while dialing, for instance);
- Estimating how much time a task will take; or
- Memorizing and retrieving information from memory.

Are executive function problems a learning disability? No. But many people with learning disabilities tend to struggle with executive function. Individuals with ADHD, autism, or other behavioral disorders might have trouble with executive function, as well.

If my child is struggling with executive function, what are my first steps to address it? Consider which skills seem to present the biggest problems for your child. Contact your child's teachers and principal to discuss how these issues may be impacting his or her school performance. Together, you can devise school and home-based strategies.

Is my sixth-grader too old to strengthen his or her executive function skills? No! Though a child begins to



develop executive function skills in infancy, his or her brain continues to develop through adolescence and into adulthood. It is never too late to help your child develop skills and processes to support learning.

How can I reinforce good executive function skills at home?

One of the simplest—and most fun!—is to play games. Simon Says, for instance, teaches learners to follow instructions; storytelling games boost communication; what-if and imaginative games challenge children to consider new perspectives; and memory games help children retrieve information.

How can I help my child complete schoolwork? Make a checklist for navigating assignments. For a child struggling with executive function skills, the steps necessary to complete a task might not be clear. Define them specifically. For instance: get out pencil and paper; put name on paper; read directions, etc. Encourage your child to write the due date at the top of each assignment as a visual reminder. At home, make a visual calendar with deadlines for projects.

Web Resources

Visit the **National Center for Learning Disabilities** for articles on managing executive function and learning disabilities.

www.nclld.org/types-learning-disabilities/executive-function-disorders

The **Child Mind Institute's** executive function hot topic page examines interventions and supports for struggling students.

www.childmind.org/en/hot-topics/executive-functions