

Executive Functioning: A Parent's Quick Guide

Executive functions (EF) are the essential mental processes—the brain's air traffic control—that help us plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks. Simply put, they are the skills we use to set goals and get things done.-----

The 10 Key Executive Functioning Skills


- 1. Planning & Organization:**
 - **Planning:** Creating a roadmap to foresee and accomplish future tasks.
 - **Organization:** Structuring time, space, and information for clarity and productivity.
- 2. Time Management:** Deciding what's most important (Prioritizing) and estimating how long things will take (Time Allocation) to stay on schedule.
- 3. Task Initiation:** The ability to start a task without putting it off, even if it feels difficult.
- 4. Working Memory:** Holding and using information in your mind over a short period, like remembering a chore list or phone number.
- 5. Attention and Focus:** Staying focused on a goal and maintaining concentration, despite distractions.
- 6. Self-Regulation & Emotional Control:** Managing emotions, behaviors, and reactions, which includes controlling impulses and staying calm under stress.
- 7. Flexibility (Cognitive Flexibility):** Shifting between tasks and adapting to unexpected changes in plans.
- 8. Decision Making:** Evaluating choices, weighing consequences, and making selections that align with long-term goals.
- 9. Problem-Solving:** Identifying issues, thinking critically about solutions, and putting those solutions into action.
- 10. Self-Monitoring & Reflection:** Evaluating your own performance, noticing when you are off track, and making adjustments.

These skills develop over time and are crucial for success in school and life

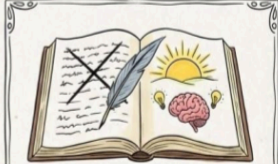
Attitude & Mindset Matters

By shifting thoughts such as “**how smart are you,**” to “**how are you smart?**” you teach your children to reflect on their strengths rather than worry about weaknesses to create or reinvent themselves as a learner..

What are you zooming in on or highlighting..



The Art of Reframing
Seeing Strengths.



It's Never Too Late to Change Your Story.

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Part of this process as parents is being mindful of how you are framing thoughts and conversations with your children to support the development of these strategies and habits of mind!

How Parents Can Help - Start with the ABCD's

Strategy: Always have Routines

Skills Targeted: Time management 🕒, Planning 📅 & Task Initiation 🚀

Strategy: Break things down

Skills Targeted: Attention 🧠, Working memory 🗂️, Planning 📅 & Prioritizing ⭐

Strategy: Curiosity & Consistency

Skills Targeted: Self-Reflection (metacognition) 🤔, Flexibility 🔄, Self-Control 🛑

Strategy: Designated spaces

Skills Targeted: Organization 📁, Working Memory 🗂️, Self-Regulation 🧘

A - Always Have Routines

- **How it helps:** Creates predictable structure, reducing the mental effort needed to figure out what to do next.
- **Tip:** Start by creating a routine for the most challenging time of day (like mornings or evenings).

How Parents Can Help: Always have routines!

Strategy: Routines & Checklists

Timely, Daily or Weekly:

- Think about what time of day is the most challenging and go from there!

Skills: Task initiation 🚀, Planning 📅, Time Management 🕒

My Daily Routine

Time	Task	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Morning (Before School)	Wake up	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Get dressed	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Eat breakfast	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Afternoon (After School)	Homework	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Play	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Snack	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Evening (Before Bed)	Brush teeth	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Read	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Go to bed	☑️	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How to start? Try a little TLC!

Step 1 Talk with your child

Step 2 Location matters

Step 3 Create or update the routine

Step 4 Reflection (Metacognition)

****doing this as a family or even just you & your child is more impactful****

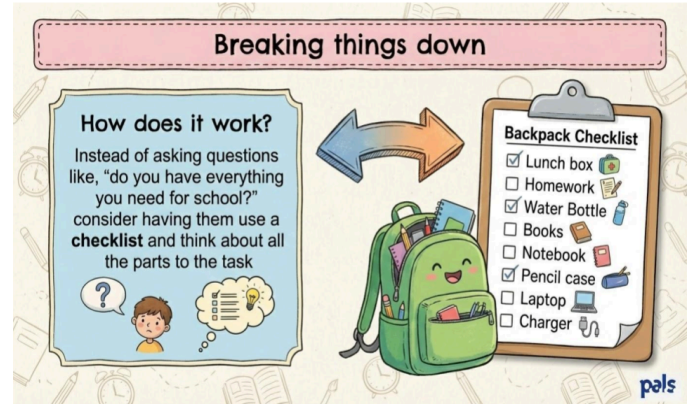
MORNING checklist

	MAKE YOUR BED	<input type="checkbox"/>
	GET DRESSED	<input type="checkbox"/>
	EAT BREAKFAST	<input type="checkbox"/>
	BRUSH TEETH	<input type="checkbox"/>
	BRUSH HAIR	<input type="checkbox"/>
	BACKPACK READY	<input type="checkbox"/>
	PUT SHOES ON	<input type="checkbox"/>

HAVE A GREAT DAY!

B - Break Things Down

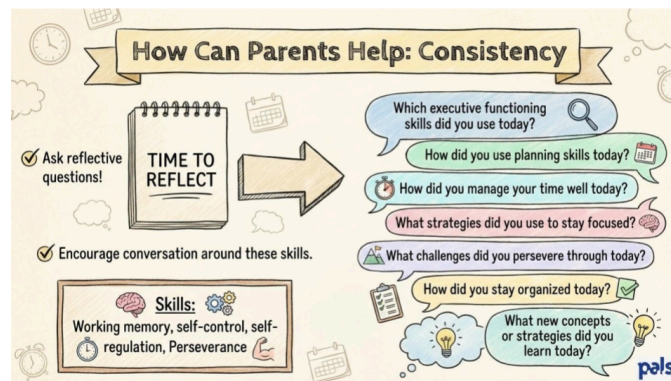
- **How it helps:** Students often don't see all the small steps in a large task, which can lead to overwhelm or poor time management.
- **Tip:** Instead of asking, "Did you finish all your homework?" use a simple **checklist** and discuss all the individual parts that complete the overall task.



C - Get Curiosity and Stay Consistent

- **How it helps:** Encourages self-awareness, emotional regulation, and mental flexibility.
- **Tip:** Ask open-ended questions regularly from a place of curiosity, not judgment.

General Questions	Reflection Questions	Behavior-Specific Questions
"What was the best part of your day?"	"What are some of your strengths?"	"What do you think made you feel that way?"
"What's something you're proud of today?"	"What are your goals for X class?" (or more generally, the week, a sport, etc)	"How did you know you were angry/sad?"
"What are you looking forward to tomorrow?"	"What do you like about yourself?"	"What do you think we can do differently next time?"



D - Designate Spaces

- **How it helps:** An organized environment creates mental boundaries, reducing distractions and freeing up brainpower for thinking.
- **Tip:** Give "a home" to everything. Use clear visuals and labels for storage. Set up a weekly routine to check in on organization.



Benefits of Designated Spaces:

- **Increased Productivity:** Spend less time looking for things.
- **Improved Focus:** Less visual clutter leads to a clearer mind.
- **Reduced Stress:** Orderly spaces create a calming effect and a sense of control.
- **Better Memory:** Consistent placement improves recall and reduces mental overload.

Conclusion & Key Takeaways

Executive functioning skills develop over time. The more opportunities children have to practice these skills at home, the better they will become as students, friends, siblings and more!

<p>Always have routines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time of day: morning, afternoon, evening• Daily → weekly• Family calendar <p>Skills: Time management, Planning & Task Initiation</p>	<p>Break things down</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chunking• Categorizing• Rules of 3 <p>Skills: Attention, Working memory, Planning & Prioritizing</p>	<p>Curiosity & Consistency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask reflective questions• Set up routine check-ins <p>Skills: Self - Reflection (metacognition), Flexibility, Self - Control</p>	<p>Designated Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Labeling• Everything has a home• PIP <p>Skills: Organization, Working Memory, Self-Regulation</p>
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Executive Functioning Across the Lifespan

Age Group	Key Skills & Uses	Challenges
Early Childhood (Ages 2-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Impulse Control: Learning to wait and manage immediate reactions.- Attention & Focus: Beginning to concentrate for short periods.- Emotional Regulation: Learning to handle frustration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Difficulty controlling impulses- Emotional outbursts (e.g., tantrums).
School Age (Ages 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Working Memory: Remembering instructions and tasks.- Task Initiation: Starting schoolwork independently.- Time Management: Beginning to manage homework and chores.- Problem-Solving: Learning to break down and solve problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Staying organized and on top of assignments.- Maintaining focus.- Managing multiple tasks.
Adolescence (Ages 13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Planning & Organization: Managing schoolwork, social activities, and interests.- Emotional Regulation: Handling complex emotions like anxiety or stress.- Decision Making: Making choices about the future.- Goal Setting: Setting personal and academic goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Impulse control and risk-taking behavior.- Balancing social life with school responsibilities.- Managing stress or anxiety.
Young Adulthood (Ages 18-30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Time Management: Balancing work, school, and relationships.- Self-Monitoring & Reflection: Evaluating progress and making adjustments.- Decision Making: Making significant life decisions (career, relationships, finances).- Adaptability: Adjusting to life changes like moving or new jobs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Juggling multiple roles and responsibilities.- Making long-term decisions under pressure.- Managing stress and emotional challenges.

- Middle Adulthood (Ages 30-60)**
- **Goal Setting:** Focusing on career, family, and retirement planning.
 - **Problem-Solving:** Dealing with complex life and work challenges.
 - **Cognitive Flexibility:** Adapting to new roles or changes.
 - **Self-Regulation:** Managing stress, health, and emotions.
- Balancing family, career, and personal life.
 - Managing stress and personal goals.
 - Navigating major life transitions (e.g., children leaving home).
- Late Adulthood (Ages 60+)**
- **Cognitive Flexibility:** Adapting to changes (e.g., retirement, health).
 - **Self-Monitoring:** Keeping track of health, medications, and routines.
 - **Time Management:** Managing social, medical, and personal time.
 - **Problem-Solving:** Navigating challenges like health issues or retirement adjustments.
- Dealing with cognitive decline or memory loss.
 - Managing health challenges.
 - Adjusting to lifestyle changes (e.g., living alone, moving to a new home).

Executive Functioning Spans Across a Lifetime

Age Group	Key Skills & Uses	Challenges
Early Childhood (Ages 2-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Impulse Control ● Attention & Focus ● Emotional Regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Difficulty controlling impulses ● Emotional outbursts (e.g., tantrums)
School Age (Ages 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working Memory ● Task Initiation ● Time Management ● Problem-Solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staying organized and on top of assignments ● Maintaining focus ● Managing multiple tasks
Adolescence (Ages 13-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Planning & Organization ● Emotional Regulation ● Decision Making ● Goal Setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Impulse control and risk-taking behavior ● Balancing social life with school responsibilities ● Managing stress or anxiety
Young Adulthood (Ages 18-30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Time Management ● Self-Monitoring & Reflection ● Decision Making ● Adaptability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Juggling multiple roles and responsibilities ● Making long-term decisions under pressure ● Managing stress and emotional challenges
Middle Adulthood (Ages 30-60)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Goal Setting ● Problem-Solving ● Cognitive Flexibility ● Self-Regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Balancing family, career, and personal life ● Managing stress and personal goals ● Navigating major life transitions (e.g., children leaving home)
Late Adulthood (Ages 60+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cognitive Flexibility ● Self-Monitoring ● Time Management ● Problem-Solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dealing with cognitive decline or memory loss ● Managing health challenges ● Adjusting to lifestyle changes (e.g., living alone, moving to a new home).

