

Executive Functioning

Executive functioning skills are the skills that everyone uses to complete tasks in our daily lives. It is an “umbrella” term for all processes that help us get through everyday tasks including organisation, planning, problem solving, time management, flexibility, task initiation and maintaining attention.

It is important to note that all executive functioning skills work together. Every person has a unique profile of strengths and challenges. This may mean that someone is great at planning out and organising a task, but they struggle with getting started. We can learn tools and strategies to embed these functions into our daily lives and make tasks easier.

How to tell if my child has problems with Executive Functioning:

- Difficulty setting goals (long term and short term)
- Has difficulty getting started on a task
- Use the same strategy to solve a repeated problem, even if proven ineffective
- Skips steps in a procedure and is surprised when the outcome is not reached
- Has difficulty beginning tasks such as homework
- Has difficulty putting a sequence of steps in order
- Often forgets when tasks are due or what they need to do in order to complete a task

Strategies to support Executive Functioning

	At school	At home
Planning	Provide structured timetables, daily schedules that outline activities and transitions, and break down large tasks into smaller ones.	Have a family calendar with important events, and plan in advance for the week. Keep copies of these in easily accessible areas.
Organisation	Use colour coding for subjects and tasks, offer folders, binders and labelled materials, use visual supports, and encourage the child to use a diary and write down important dates.	Create a designated study area that is clutter free and implement regular check ins to review tasks and responsibilities. Support the child to complete higher priority tasks first.
Time Management	Use timers, alarms and allocate specific periods for tasks and breaks.	Set and establish clear routines for household jobs and leisure activities, encourage the use of daily or weekly task lists with items to be ticked off.
Attention	Ensure the environment it set up to meet the child’s learning needs, incorporate regular movement breaks and provide tools like timers, headphones, fidgets, and seated supports to support the child with their learning.	Schedule breaks during activities to maintain focus, encourage physical activity or activities that will refresh the mind e.g. colouring in, reading, running outside.
Task Initiation	Use verbal or visual prompts to signal the start of a task, ensure the student has access to necessary resources for starting class tasks and use language such as first then to support initiation.	Use visual reminder’s such as charts, sticky notes or checklists, and ensure the environment is organised with the tools they need to begin the task.
Flexibility	Create scenario-based learning opportunities such as role play and problem-solving tasks and integrate lessons that discuss concepts of change and adaptability.	Play games promoting flexibility and practice problem solving together, engage in family projects where plans may need to change.