

Executive Function: Best Practices for Skill Development to Foster Learning & Socialization

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Webinar

Michael C. Selbst, Ph.D., BCBA-D

Licensed Psychologist (NJ #3779, PA #9320)

Certified School Psychologist

Board Certified Behavior Analyst - Doctoral

Executive Director

Behavior Therapy Associates

Somerset, New Jersey; (732) 873-1212

mselfst@BehaviorTherapyAssociates.com

www.BehaviorTherapyAssociates.com

Follow me on Twitter @DrMikeSelbst



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What is Executive Function?

- Set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control.
- We use these skills every day to learn, work, socialize, and manage daily life...Simply put, they allow us to “execute” tasks.
- Includes:
 - thinking about what we want/need to do, initiating tasks, sticking with tasks, problem-solving when things are challenging, completing tasks, and monitoring performance, learning from your mental and physical performance.
- Difficulties with executive function can make it hard to focus, follow directions, plan and carry out tasks (think homework...) and handle emotions, among other things.

When do these skills develop?



- Babies are not born with executive function skills.
- These skills develop slowly, primarily within the prefrontal cortex, through learning and practice.
- Begin during early child development, continue throughout childhood and adolescence and into adulthood.
- Oftentimes, these skills are not fully developed until someone is in their 20's;
- However, various issues can make it longer/harder for these skills to fully develop
 - ADHD, autism, auditory processing issues, learning disability, cognitive deficits, neurological impairments, etc.

Executive Skills

- Response inhibition
- Working Memory
- Emotional Control
- Flexibility
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation
- Planning/Prioritizing
- Organization
- Time Management
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Metacognition

Controlling my Impulses

1

Stop what you are doing.



2

Think about what you are going to say or do.



3

Decide if it will make the situation better or worse.



4

Choose the behavior that makes the situation better.



Executive Skills



- **Working Memory**
 - Remembering all of the things you need to do
 - Remembering what was effective for you in the past so you can do it again where and when needed
 - Holding information in your mind while completing complex tasks

Executive Skills



- **Emotional Control**

- Managing/regulating emotions so that they do not interfere with doing what you intend to do
- Critical for school, work, socialization, daily living, etc.
- Noticing or being mindful of feelings, instead of trying to get rid of them or change them
- Accepting that “I can feel sad, frustrated, annoyed, tired, AND I can still do what’s important to me” – this is the essence of being flexible!

Executive Skills



- **Flexibility**

- Modifying goals, plans, solutions, and strategies
- Being able and willing to pivot when and where needed even when frustrated
- Adapt to unexpected events, especially things not working out as expected

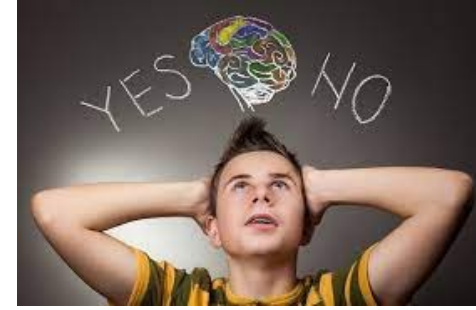
Executive Skills



- **Sustained Attention**

- Maintaining focus/attention to a task even when the task may be difficult, boring, long, etc.
- Noticing external and internal distractions and continuing to focus on what's most important in the moment
- ADHD – it's not that the person can't pay attention to anything...they have trouble figuring out what to attend to and sustain that attention

Executive Skills



- **Task Initiation**

- Committing to start a task, even when there are many other activities that may be more interesting, easier, or preferred
- This is the opposite of procrastination, avoidance, escaping
- There is a fundamental difference between “wanting” to do something vs. “willing” to do something

Executive Skills



- **Planning/Prioritizing**

- Knowing where you want to go is critical to determining where you will end up
- Need to know your first steps
- *“What’s the ONE Thing I can do such that by doing it everything else will be easier or unnecessary?”*

— Gary Keller, The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth About Extraordinary Results

Executive Skills

- **Organization**

- Ability to create order so that everything has a clearly identified/labeled place where it is kept
- This includes one's desk, locker, car, office, backpack, physical folders, computer folders / files, briefcase, bedroom, kitchen table, homework area, etc.



Executive Skills

- **Time Management**

- Scheduling important events for specific days and times
- Estimating accurately how long activities should last (homework, studying, extracurricular activities, meal prep, bedtime routine)
- Setting alarms/notifications
- Knowing when these events are scheduling and following the “appointments”
- Respecting the appointments as extremely important



Executive Skills



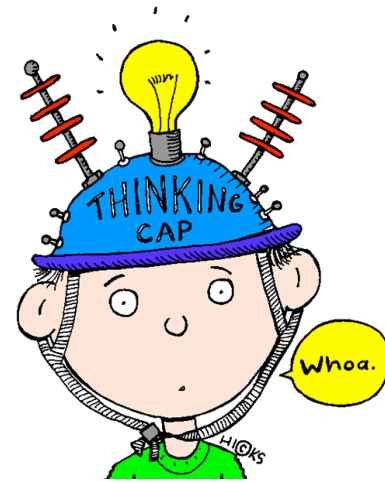
- **Goal-Directed Persistence**

- Honoring one's goal regardless of the challenges that show up, including physical barriers and when one gets in their own way with negative/ “stinking” thinking (“I can't do this”, “This is too hard”)
- Growth mindset, grit, persistence, resilience are very similar and critical for success
- Remind yourself why this is so important to me
- Most accomplishments/success require such goal-directed persistence

Executive Skills

- **Metacognition**

- Thinking about thinking
- Stepping back with a 360-degree view (bird's eye view) to consider what you've done, how it's worked, and what to change next time
- Self-monitoring and self-appraisal



Common weaknesses

- Sloppy work
- Missing materials
- Losing things
- Procrastination
- Giving up easily
- Blaming others
- Overreacts
- Anxiety/worry
- Low frustration tolerance
- Gets stuck easily
- Inflexible/rigid
- Overstimulated easily
- Distracted easily
- Acts without thinking
- Forgets directions
- Trouble starting tasks
- Makes excuses frequently
- Inconsistent performance
- Makes poor choices
- Not remembering details

Assessing Executive Function Skills

- Interviews with Parents, Staff, & Child
- Review of history/records
- Behavioral Observation
- Direct Testing/Assessment
 - Delis-Kaplan Executive Function System™ (D-KEFS™)
 - Cognitive/Intellectual and Academic Achievement Testing
 - Computerized Continuous Performance Test (CPT)



Assessing Executive Function Skills

- Rating Scales completed by staff, parent, child
 - Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function, 2nd Ed (BRIEF-2)
 - Children's Organizational Skills Scale (COSS)
 - Behavior Assessment System for Children – 3rd Ed
 - Conners Rating Scale -3rd Ed
 - Barkley Disruptive Behavior Rating Scale
 - Vanderbilt Assessment Scale

Executive Skills Checklist

Below, you will find a list of common school challenges. Please rate each one on a scale of 1 (not a problem) to 5 (a big problem). Your answers will help your teachers provide the best tools and supports possible!

Response Inhibition

1 2 3 4 5 ____ Rushing through work just to get it done

1 2 3 4 5 ____ Not having the patience to produce quality work

1 2 3 4 5 ____ Giving up on a homework assignment when I encounter an obstacle

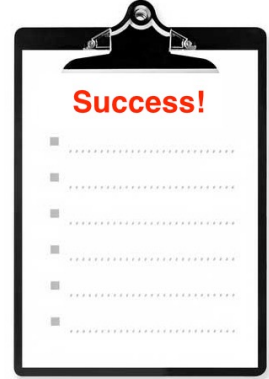
1 2 3 4 5 ____ Avoiding or not completing homework when there are more fun things to do

Setting up for success



- Having a structured and clean physical environment
 - Materials are easily accessible and ready to go (pencil sharpened, devices charged, seating area clean, water available, good lighting, minimal distractions, adult help available as needed)
 - Checklist / organizational chart available for student to review and check off

Setting up for success



- Have a nightly “planning conference”
- Set a schedule
 - “Success List” instead of “To Do List”
 - Use post-it notes to have flexibility moving them around for prioritizing the order
 - Incorporate rewards and movement breaks
 - Work (math), 5 min. break (walk, stretch, small snack), work (reading), 5 min. break (same as before), work (science), reward (e.g., inside or outside play)

STARTING OFF THE DAY

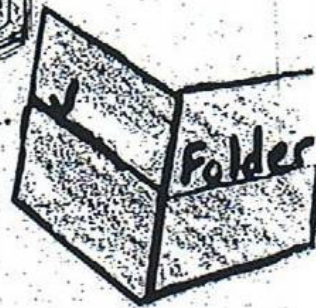
1. Hang up coat.



2. Unpack bookbag at desk.



3. Place homework folder on desk.



4. Put lunchbox in closet.



5. Put bookbag in pile in front of closet.



6. Return to seat and begin work.



Setting up for success

- “Time Bandit”
 - Help children acquire a sense of time
 - Track when you plan to start and finish work
 - Track when you actually started and finished work
 - Teach promptness for starting tasks

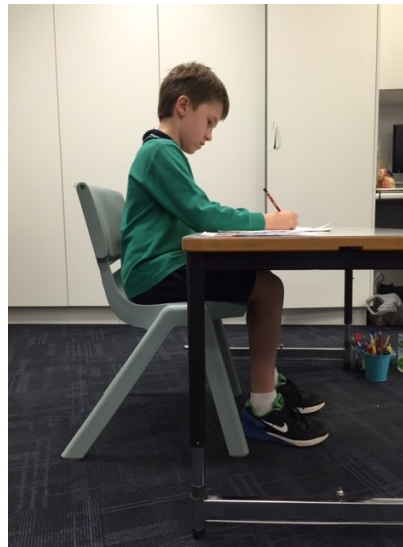


Setting up for success



- **Teach Executive Function Skills**
 - Learning takes time
 - Model these skills for your child (3-D approach)
 - Discuss the skill and specific steps
 - Demonstrate the skill and steps
 - Do – having your child practice with specific feedback
 - Ask your child what they did, how it went, and what they learned

What's Your Ready Position?



© Real Madrid via Getty Images

Situations in a Hat



- *Situations in a Hat Role Play*: trigger situations listed on cards and placed in a hat for children to choose one at a time.
- Discuss the situation, state the problem, state the feeling (“I feel ____”), discuss possible solutions, choose a solution and put the solution in place; act out the situation from start to finish and provide behavior specific feedback
 - “I’m getting ready for school, and I can’t find my library book.”
 - “I want to go to soccer practice, and I can’t find my soccer ball.”
 - “I really want to buy a snack and I forgot my money.”

Setting up for success

- Executive Function / Study Skills coaching class in school
- Peer coaching/tutoring
- Classroom-wide strategies
- School-wide & District-wide strategies
- Training & Consultation provided to staff (teachers, paraprofessionals, special areas teachers, speech therapists, OTs, PTs, etc.)
- Carryover of strategies throughout the day
- Fade supports gradually

Problem Solve*

- Put the problem into words: “I was _____ and then _____”
- Observe and notice feelings “I feel _____ because/when _____”
- Work out your goal: “My goal is to be successful with completing my homework.”
 - Should be child’s goal, not the parent’s goal
- Explore and evaluate solutions, choosing the best solution: is the solution safe, fair, will it solve the problem, will it help me reach my goal
- Review the solution you chose and Reward yourself
- *adapted from the POWER-Solving Social Emotional Learning Curriculum <https://power-solving.com/>

LEARNING MY FEELINGS LOG

CHILD: _____ DATE: _____

ADULT HELPING TO COMPLETE FORM: _____

WHAT HAPPENED?

- Somebody teased me
- Somebody took something of mine
- Somebody told me to do something
- Somebody was doing something I didn't like
- Somebody started fighting with me
- Other: _____

WHO WAS THAT SOMEBODY?

- Another child
- Teacher
- Parent
- Another adult
- Sister/brother
- Other: _____

WHERE WERE YOU?

- Classroom Lunchroom Playground Street
- Hallway Bathroom House Other: _____

HOW DID YOU FEEL?

-  Happy  Sad  Scared  Embarrassed  Mad

HOW STRONG WERE YOUR FEELINGS? (circle best choice)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Weak				Medium					Strong

WHAT DID YOU DO? (check all that apply)

- Hit back Told adult
- Screamed Walked away
- Ran away Talked it out calmly
- Cried Told another child
- Threw something Ignored
- Broke something Other: _____

HOW DID YOU HANDLE YOURSELF?

- Very poorly Not so well Okay Good Great

WHAT WILL YOU DO NEXT TIME? (Role Play this with child now)

My plan is to: _____

Set aside time

Clean out and organize	Clean out and organize bookbag, folders, desk at home
Folders	Have color-coded folders for school
Review HW	Review homework assignments to do
Review completed HW	Review completed assignments
Discuss	Discuss what steps can be taken to improve

Collaborate with School for Carryover and Accommodations

- Discuss strengths and needs
- Share what works and doesn't work
- Consider accommodations
 - Additional staff prompts
 - Visual and textual checklists
 - Time to organize desk and lockers
 - Morning and afternoon check-ins



Collaborate with School for Carryover and Accommodations

- Shorter tasks
- Multi-sensory: visual, tactile, auditory, etc.
- Make tasks engaging
- Sometimes having music playing (especially without lyrics) can be helpful
- Incorporate choices (where to sit, which writing materials, dictate responses first, which problems to do)
- Use spell-check and grammar-check



Adult Behavior



- Provide behavior specific praise: “I like the way you...”
 - Praise effort, persistence, flexibility, organization, planning, work completion, etc.
- At least 4 positives/praise statements for every redirection
- Guided discovery (Socratic approach) – “What do you need to do?” instead “You need to...”
- Demonstrate patience & take a deep breath, even when you’re frustrated

What can you do?

- **The 4 P's:**

- **P**oint Out
- **P**rompt
- **P**ractice
- **P**raise



Christophersen, E. & Mortweet VanScoyoc, S. (2003). Strategies for Teaching Important Social Skills to Young Children. Developmental and Behavioral News, Autumn 2003.

Positive Note Home

- Your child, _____, has received this note home as a result of positive behavior today at _____ School. Your child's behavior exemplifies the type of behavior that we aspire to in our school. Congratulations!
- Your child exhibited strong behavior:
 - following directions helping the teacher
 - helping another student great homework
 - outstanding participation excellent test or quiz

Behavior Therapy: Organizational Skills Training*

- Developed for children with ADHD
- Tested with children grades 3-5; applicable to others with modifications
- Research study
 - 20 sessions with child and parents
 - Collaboration with school personnel
 - Includes: Prompting, monitoring, praise, and reward
 - Home Behavior Record (HBR)
 - Daily Assignment Record (DAR)
 - Results:
 - Improved organizational functioning (at school and at home)
 - Reduced homework problems
 - Improved academic performance
 - Improved family relationships
 - Gains maintained into next academic year

*Abikoff, et al. (2013); Gallagher, Abikoff, & Spira (2014)

Homework/Assignment Sheet

Name:	[Type Name Here]	Week Ending:	[Type Text Here]
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Directions: Each day, enter the assignment in the proper spot. If you do not have enough space, use the back. Sometimes your teacher will have you write special directions for studying or finishing work on the back as well. If there is no assignment write "none".

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Math					
Science					
History					
Spelling Language					
Reading					

Long Term Project Dates:			Upcoming Test Dates:		
Subject(s)	Date(s)	Notes	Subject(s)	Date(s)	Notes

Next Steps...

- What is the One Thing you can do after leaving this webinar that will make a meaningful difference for your child/students?
-

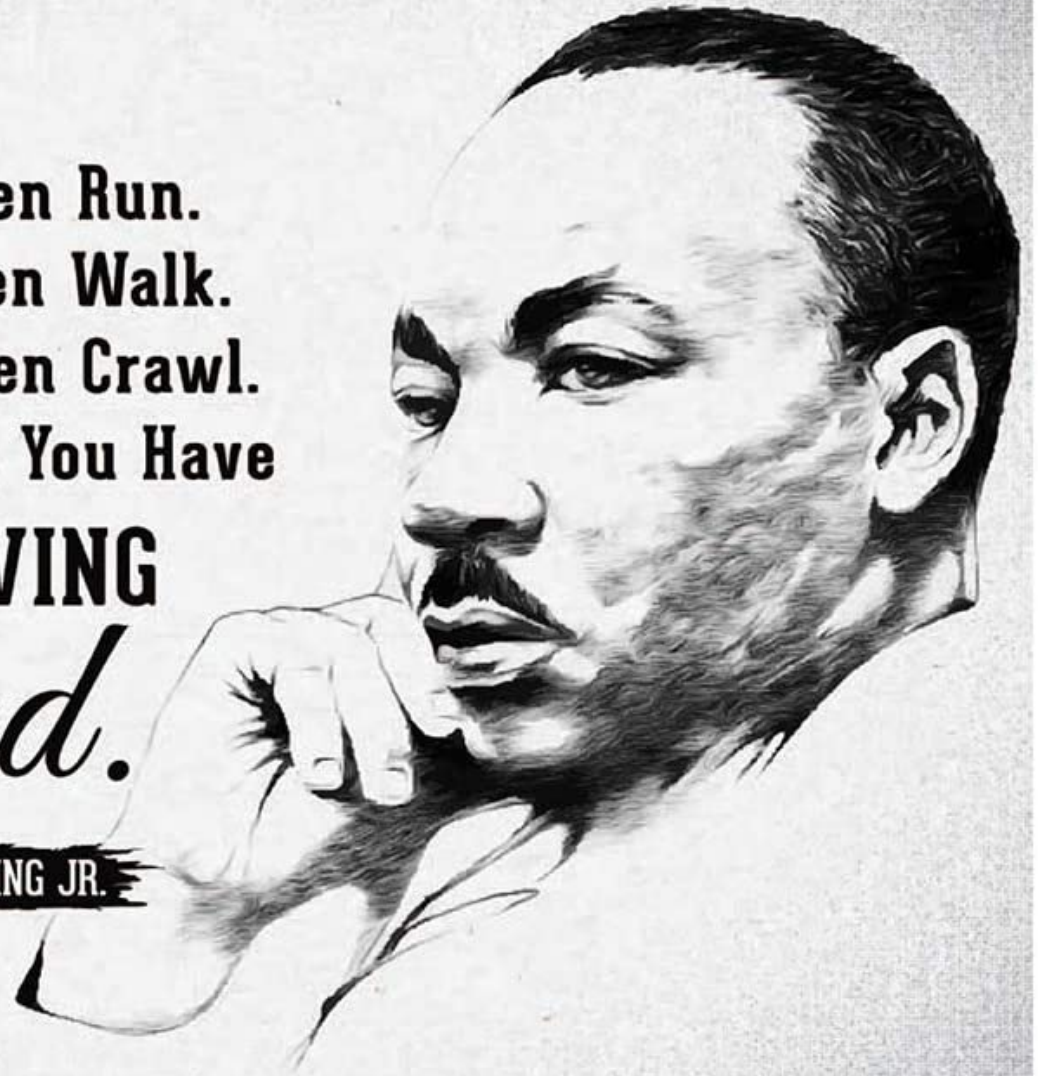
- When will you do this?
-

- Schedule this now.

**If You Can't Fly Then Run.
If You Can't Run Then Walk.
If You Can't Walk Then Crawl.
But Whatever You Do, You Have**

TO KEEP MOVING
Forward.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.



You make a difference...keep inspiring others!



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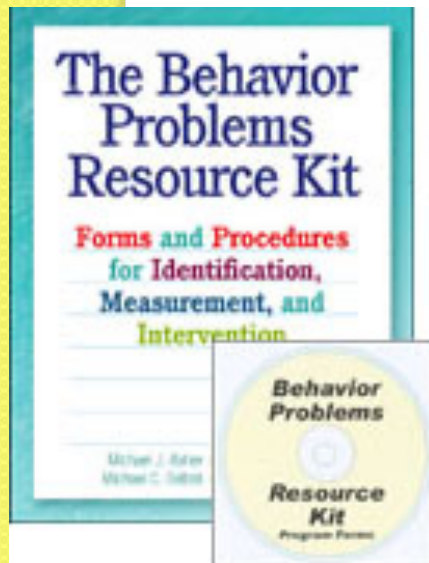


The Behavior Problems Resource Kit: Forms and Procedures for Identification, Measurement, and Intervention

by Dr. Michael J. Asher, Dr. Steven B. Gordon, Dr. Michael C. Selbst,
and Dr. Mark Cooperberg

<http://www.researchpress.com/product/item/5560/>

to order: 800-519-2707



- All grade levels. This user-friendly resource provides over 50 reproducible forms and numerous intervention procedures founded in evidence-based research and standards. These forms and procedures have been developed and successfully applied in clinical work with children and adolescents having a wide range of diagnoses, including AD/HD, autism spectrum disorders, mood disorders, oppositional defiant disorders, and anxiety disorders.



POWER-Solving® Curriculum: Stepping Stones to Solving Life's Everyday Social Problems

Michael C. Selbst, Ph.D., BCBA-D
Steven B. Gordon, Ph.D., ABPP

POWER-Solving®: Stepping Stones to Solving Life's Everyday Social Problems is a social problem-solving curriculum designed to teach children and adolescents to become independent problem-solvers via a hands-on, user-friendly, positive-practice, interactive approach. They are taught how to problem-solve first using their “toolbox” (i.e., the five steps of POWER-Solving®). Subsequently, they can apply this “toolbox” to various challenging social situations, which allows them to develop and enhance their social-emotional skills. The goal is for children and adolescents to learn valuable POWER-Solving® skills that they can apply to an infinite number of social situations throughout their lives.

For more information regarding the POWER-Solving® Curriculum, please contact Dr. Selbst or Dr. Gordon at power-solving@comcast.net or call 732-873-1212. or visit www.POWER-Solving.com

Resources

- Abikoff, H., Gallagher, R., Wells, K. C., Murray, D.W., Huang, L., Feihan, L., & Petkova, E. (2013). Remediating organizational functioning in children with ADHD: Immediate and long-term effects from a randomized control trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 81, 113–128. doi:10.1037/a0029648
- Dawson, P., & Guare, R. (2009). *Smart but scattered: The revolutionary "executive skills" approach to helping kids reach their potential*. Guilford Press.
- Gallagher, R., Abikoff, H.A. and Spira, E.G. (2014). *Organizational skills training for children with ADHD: an empirically supported treatment*. Guilford Press, New York
- Meltzer, L.J. (2010). *Promoting Executive Function in the Classroom*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Meltzer, L.J. (Ed). (2007). *Executive Function in Education: From theory to practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Websites:

- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) <http://www.chadd.org>
- National Center for Learning Disabilities, Inc. (NCLD) <http://www.nclid.org>
- Learning Disabilities Association of America <https://ldaamerica.org/>
- Executive Function Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efCq_vHUMqs&t=79s

Web-Based Applications

- **Listening Comprehension / Auditory Processing Practice**
 - https://www.amazon.com/Hutch-Listening-Comprehension-Practice/dp/B01E6FWOS0/ref=as_li_ss_tl?s=digital-skills&ie=UTF8&qid=1492060496&sr=1-12&keywords=kids&linkCode=ll1&tag=sugaun-20&linkId=89c4f0f4251ef7a505c19ec63aaea2be
- **Goal Tracker**
 - https://www.amazon.com/Hoogalit-Goal-Tracker-by/dp/B01N0OOPAR/ref=as_li_ss_tl?s=digital-skills&ie=UTF8&qid=1492060781&sr=1-20&keywords=kids&linkCode=ll1&tag=sugaun-20&linkId=8d77152a7b21e072b7142e5f6256f710
- **Task Manager / List application (ToDoist)**
<https://todoist.com/>