

The Executive Functions in the Classroom



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Overview

- Define Executive Functioning
- Identifying the Executive Functions
- Classroom examples of Executive Dysfunction
- Frequently requested accommodations

Executive Functioning

- Definition
 - An umbrella term for the management of cognitive processes, including working memory, reasoning, task flexibility, problem solving including planning and execution.
 - A set of mental skills that helps you get things done. These skills are controlled by the frontal lobe. Allows you to manage time and pay attention.
- The brain's hub/administrator
- Not a specific diagnosis, but affected by
 - Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Learning Differences

Continuum from Skill to Pathology

- Not all struggles with Executive Functioning represent pathology
- Remediation is possible
- Direct instruction is necessary for some to develop

What are the Executive Functions

- As assessed by the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF)
 - Inhibit
 - Shift
 - Emotional Control
 - Initiate
 - Working Memory
 - Plan/Organize
 - Organization of Materials
 - Monitor

Inhibit

The ability to not act on impulse; to stop one's own behavior at the appropriate time

- Classroom Example
 - Blurts out answers without being called on
- Requested Accommodation
 - Sit child near the teacher to be easily accessible for non-verbal cueing

Shift

The ability to move freely from one situation, activity, or aspect of a problem to another.

- Classroom Example
 - Transition to specials, or from one type of instruction to another
 - This may be difficult on dress out days
- Requested Accommodation
 - Provide a schedule of activities for the day, week

Emotional Control

The ability to modulate emotional responses with change in situation/setting

- Classroom Example
 - Becomes tearful or irritable
 - Struggles to remain calm on school party or special activity days
- Requested Accommodation
 - Meet with the school counselor
 - Develop a specific strategy for special activity days

Initiate

The ability to begin a task or activity, as well as independently generating ideas, responses, or problem-solving strategies.

- Classroom Example

- Difficulty starting on their work or project

- Requested Accommodation

- Extended Time- struggling with initiate may take more time for the child to start their test

Working Memory

The ability to actively hold information in the mind for the purpose of completing a task or activity.

- Classroom Example
 - Difficulty following through with multistep sequential directions
- Requested Accommodation
 - Engage the child's multiple senses- provide a written copy of notes

Plan/Organize

The ability to manage current and future-oriented task demands within the situational context.

- Classroom Examples
 - Maintaining their planner, having supplies necessary to begin work
- Requested Accommodation
 - Review child's planner to ensure they identify the correct information

Organization of Materials

The ability to manage one's everyday environment with respect to orderliness of work, play and storage spaces (desk, backpacks, lockers)

- Classroom Examples
 - Student completed their homework or project and left it at home
- Requested Accommodation
 - Consistent application of consequence
 - Work with parents to develop a consistent strategy for helping the child remember materials

Monitor

The ability to measure the effect one's behaviors have on others, including teachers and peers.

- Classroom Examples
 - Student speaks tersely or disrespectfully to a teacher when angry
 - Student brags about abilities
 - Student asks teacher inappropriate questions about another student in front of the class
- Requested Accommodation
 - Provide real time feedback to student, “I am not for speaking to in that tone” or “Jenny I noticed the look on Tracy’s face when you said that. It seems you may have hurt her feelings.”

Resources

www.understood.org

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

www.ldaonline.org/article291122/



Thank you!

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