

# News From Your School Psychologist

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**Issue No. 1**

Topic: Executive Functioning

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Executive function skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully.

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## What is Executive Functioning?

Executive function and self-regulation skills can be thought of as the “air traffic control center” of the brain; just as an air traffic control system at a busy airport safely manages the arrivals and departures of many aircraft on multiple runways, the brain needs this skill set to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses. Working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control are especially important to this process. Contrary to popular belief, kids aren't just "born" with these skills. The good news is that they can be learned over time.

Preliminary research shows Cognitive Flexibility may be the cornerstone of psychological health and resiliency. Cognitive flexibility occurs when kids are able to think about something in a new way. Or when they can let go of the old way of doing something in order to use a new way.

## The 8 Executive Functions

- Self-Control
  - Self-Monitor
  - Emotional Control
  - Flexibility
  - Task Initiation
  - Organization
  - Working Memory
  - Planning and Time Management
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# Executive Functioning

## What Does Executive Dysfunction Look Like?

Poor executive functioning may present in a variety of ways. A few examples are listed below:

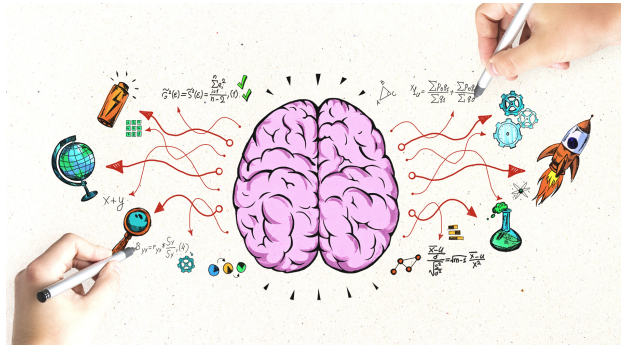
- Child does not know where to start.
- Shuts down due to feeling overwhelmed.
- Unable to motivate themselves.
- Expresses every emotion that is felt.
- Requiring someone else to organize or initiate tasks.
- Forgets steps needed to start or finish a task.
- Unable to filter what is important/unimportant to focus on.
- Difficulty focusing overall.



## Build Executive Functioning Skills

Remember, executive functioning skills can be learned. Below are some suggestions for building executive functions for children and teens.

- Have homework written in the same spot everyday.
- Explicitly teach executive functioning and study skills.
- Give an extra 3-5 minutes to organize before transitions.
- Schedule a weekly organization time.
- Create routine and practice them.
- Create an end of the day checklist to remember materials.
- Utilize brain breaks.
- Keep an extra set of books at home and in the classroom if this is an option.
- Utilize folders, dividers and binders to keep work organized.
- Complete a puzzle to practice metacognition.
- Practice coping skills.
- Create goals and create a plan to achieve them.
- Set time limits.



## Brainstorm for Success

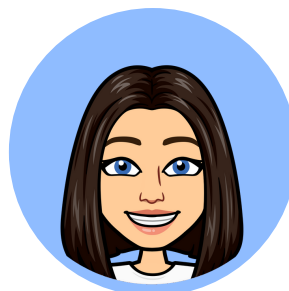
Something that is easy to do with your child or student is to pick an E.F. topic and brainstorm all of the obstacles associated with that topic and then the strategies to accommodate for or work through that challenge. This is a new technique created by Laurie Faith of Activated Learning. Chart it out. In doing so, you are actually building cognitive flexibility at the same time.

## Why Are Coping Skills Necessary?

Coping skills are methods a person uses to deal with various types of situations and emotions they are faced with. The development of coping skills may recruit multiple executive functioning components, particularly working memory, planning, sequencing, and cognitive flexibility. Coping skills can also be taught and should be practiced regularly. There are thousands of coping skills in existence, however, what works for one person may not work for another. The type of coping skill that works for a person is all based on trial and error, as well as the type of situation at hand.

## Self-Control Using Stop, Think and Choose

Self-Control is a large part of developing executive functioning skills. To practice good self-control, the "Stop, Think and Choose" method has proven to be useful, especially amongst children and teens. To utilize this method, the student begins by stopping their actions, thinking about the options they have and making a logical choice. Practice this with your student using a variety of scenarios, especially during times of noticeable stress or frustration.



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