



PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #42



projectaccess.missouristate.edu
 projectaccess@missouristate.edu
 866-481-3841

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING (EF) SKILLS:

Teaching Executive Functioning Skills

Fortunately for teachers and parents, there are increasing numbers of publications available to help us teach effective executive functioning skills to children from toddlers to young adults. Some resources are available free online, some are included in research journals and in practitioner journals, and some are whole books and curriculums. You'll want to sample several different types of resources to get a big picture of strategies you feel comfortable using.

My school has a set curriculum. Does teaching EF skills interfere with that curriculum? This is an important question. Your job as a teacher is to cover the mandated curriculum so that your students learn the information required to pass on to the next level. Just as you currently use many methods, tricks, games, and routines to teach, the strategies necessary to teach EF skills are incorporated into the mandated curriculum to support the students' learning. You already demonstrate and teach things that aren't official content, such as manners, compliance, social behavior, following routines, problem-solving, etc. You do this automatically and don't think anything about it. It doesn't "interfere with learning", it enhances the likelihood of learning.

Should I tell my principal/parents that I'm teaching EF skills? Why not? Your principal already knows that you cover the mandated curriculum and you manage your classroom well. She'll be pleased that you're keeping up with the latest teaching/learning research and applying it in the real world of your classroom. Your students' parents probably already know the glitches in their children's learning, and will likely welcome your efforts to enhance their children's skills. They want to know that you're still teaching what is required, and they want their children to succeed in life. These skills will increase that success.

Are the strategies hard for me to learn? Do I need special training to implement them? You don't need special training. The hard part was gaining awareness of the EF skills and then doing some assessment, formal or informal, to find where your students are functioning.

I'll give you some examples of strategies you can use. The actual things you will do look remarkably like the things you already do. Now you'll choose those specific methods for a concrete reason, not just because someone randomly suggested you "try this" with a particular student. Here's a sample of interventions from research done by Margaret Oliver in 2012.

Missouri's educational leader in autism support

EF skill	What the challenge looks like	Intervention
Working Memory	Difficulty following multiple-step directives from teacher, boss, parent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Decrease the number of steps given. -Create a visual or written list of multiple-step routines. -If verbal, teach the skill of asking for clarification when confused or forgetful. -Be patient.
Working Memory	Confusion, forgetfulness in acquisition of materials such as grocery shopping or packing items for school or work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create a list for the most common routines for easy access; keep list handy even when it appears that the child has mastered it. -Suggest that the child limit the number of outlets for items purchased to support familiarity.
Working Memory	Needed for academic success: planning and executing assignments; organizing multiple tasks; remaining attentive during instruction even when feeling distractible; comprehension challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Research shows success by taking a behavioral approach when addressing working memory – using positive reinforcements – those improvements in performance were maintained. -Electronic and paper organizers. -Extended time, reduced work. -Visual supports. -Help student access prior knowledge.
Planning and Initiation	Difficulty transitioning; difficulty switching tasks; difficulty in responding to an interruption.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Research shows that students who memorize and apply rules are more successful at task switching. -Put routines and rules into a visual and/or written format that is easily accessible. -Give verbal and visual advance notice of changes in routine.
Planning and Initiation	Child or adult appears to be lazy and does not finish, or even begin, necessary tasks. Has messy desk or living area. Oblivious to due dates on bills and other paperwork.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Overwhelming demands for task organization can cause a shut-down. -Teach the student to talk himself through tasks and problems. -Intense support in learning to complete tasks via organizational tools and task analysis.

You can see from these examples that the strategies are not so different from those you already use in your classroom.

There's a long list of resources at the end of this Fact Sheet. I'm sure you'll find additional resources, too. Your students will be better prepared for school and for life when they have good executive functioning skills. Have fun teaching!

Resources

Branstetter, R. (2014). *Everything Parent's Guide to Children with Executive Functioning Disorder (The)*.

Avon, MA: Adams Media publisher. www.everything.com.

Cooper-Kahn, J. & Foster, M. (2013). *Boosting Executive Skills in the Classroom: A Practical Guide for*

Educators. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Council for Exceptional Children, CEC Today. (Summer, 2008). *Improving Executive Function Skills – An*

Innovative Strategy that May Enhance Learning for All Children.

http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/PrinterTemplate.cfm?Section=CEC_Today1&CONTENTID=...

Dalgliesh, C. (2013). *Sensory Child Gets Organized (The): Proven Systems for Rigid, Anxious, or Distracted*

Kids. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. www.simonandschuster.com.

Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2010). *Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents, 2nd Edition*. New York, NY:

Guilford Press. www.guilford.com.

Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2009). *Smart But Scattered: The Revolutionary "Executive Skills" Approach to*

Helping Kids Reach Their Potential. New York, NY: The Guilford Press. www.guilford.com.

Dorminy, K.P., Luscre, D., and Gast, D.L. *Teaching organizational skills to children with high functioning autism*

and Asperger's syndrome. Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 2009, 44(4), 538-550.

Guare, R., Dason, P. & Guare, C. (2013). *Smart But Scattered Teens: The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping*

Teens Reach Their Potential. New York, NY: The Guildford Press. www.guilford.com.

Hansen, C. (2013). *Executive Functioning Workbook for Teens (The): Help for Unprepared, Late & Scattered*

Teens. Oakland, CA: Instant Help Books, an Imprint of New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

www.newharbinger.com.

Executive Function Around the Clock, National Center for Learning Disabilities,

<http://www.nclld.org/content/view/865/391/>

Kaufman, C. (2010). *Executive Function in the Classroom: Practical Strategies for Improving Performance and*

Enhancing Skills for all Students. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

www.brookespublishing.com.

McClelland, M.M. & Tominey, S.L. (2015). *Stop, Think, Act: Integrating Self-Regulation in the Early Childhood*

Classroom. New York, NY: Routledge.

Oliver, M. (2012). *Linking Theory to Practice: A Framework for Supporting Individuals with ASD*. Poster

presentation at the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) annual conference.

Powers Dorminy, K., Luscre, D., & Gast, D.L. (2009). *Teaching Organizational Skills to Children with High*

Functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome. Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 2009,

44(4), 538-550.

Richard, G.J. & Fahy, J.K. (2005). *Source for Development of Executive Functions (The)*. Austin, TX:

LiguiSystems, Inc. through Pro-Ed. www.linguisystems.com.

Twachtman-Bassett, J. (2014). *Tips for Enhancing Executive Function Skills*. In *Autism Spectrum Quarterly*, Spring

2014, p. 35. www.ASQuarterly.com.

© Project ACCESS - 2019 *Project ACCESS is a collaboration among the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri State University, and Missouri's public schools.