

Tips to Overcome ADHD & Executive Functioning Difficulties

How can you tell if your child has executive function difficulties?

- She might complete her homework but forgets to hand it in.
- Has difficulty transitioning from one activity to another
- Makes careless errors frequently
- Difficulty sustaining attention for extended periods of time when a task is boring
- Has great difficulty keeping track of assignments and materials
- Reduced working memory
- Students performance is highly inconsistent
- Great difficulty setting and executing goals independently
- Difficulty with planning, organization, and monitoring one's behavior

It is important to note that executive functioning is not what an individual knows, it is how an individual demonstrates his/her knowledge. Specifically, executive functioning includes planning and organizational skills, cognitive flexibility, reasoning abilities, processing speed, motor functions, and regulation of behavior. These are general tips for parents and individuals struggling with executive functioning weaknesses and/or ADHD.

Provide Structure and Help with Planning

- Provide a simple and clear plan or schedule for child to follow
- Use scoring rubrics when giving assignments or projects
- Break long-term projects in to clearly defined tasks and attach deadline to each
- Parents can create a list with 3-4 bullet points of tasks to be done each day, such as morning or evening routines or other tasks that are done regularly
- Impose structure via positive support and encouragement so not to have child feel "rushed all the time."

Help with Organization

- Folders for different subject areas
- Regular desk and locker cleaning demonstrations and schedules
- Teach your child how to organize his room and how to maintain the organization system (Keep it simple)
- Specific pockets in backpack for everything such as lunch, permission slips, money

Time Management

- Give student a schedule to follow and prompt them at each step of the way
- Impose time limits and provide reminders how much time is left
- Use cueing devices such as clocks and alarms

Strengthen Working Memory

- Agenda books for writing down assignments or appointments (Have parents sign when completed at home and teacher sign before students leaves school)

- Notebooks for keeping to-do lists
- Tape recorder
- Verbal reminders
- Alarms on cell phones or watches
- Index cards with bullet points to be used as visual cues
- Auditory cues
- Use mnemonic strategies such as applying meaning or past knowledge to new information
- Use retrieval cues, such as acronyms, when learning new information.
- Create meaningful associations between pieces of information to improve recall.
- Verbal Information should emphasize the overall gist of the information.
- Lengthy oral presentations and instructions should be given with a basic outline.

Teach Child to Monitoring his/her Behavior

- Model appropriate behavior
- Anticipate problem situations and prepare child in advance
- Give child scripts to follow in target situations
- Structure environment to avoid problem
- Break tasks into smaller steps
- Give pep talks before beginning tasks

How to Improve Sustained Attention

- Break tasks into small pieces and give short breaks after each piece is complete
- Set timer and challenge student to complete task within time limit
- Choose time of day carefully to maximize child's energy level
- Provide structure and supervision
- Make tasks interesting by adding a personal challenge
- Give child something to look forward to after task completion
- Provide positive feedback whenever possible

Initiating Tasks

- Positive verbal cues to get started
- Visual cues to prompt child to begin
- Walk child through first portion of task
- Note start and stop times when task completed
- Have child specify when she will begin task and cue when scheduled time arrives

General Tips

- Whenever possible, increased physical activity which is known to improve attention as well as provide a positive outlet for restlessness and adds structure to time and activities.

- Learning relaxation techniques to help child to relax and not feel overwhelmed.
- Include time for “re-charging” in daily/weekly schedule with enjoyable, relaxing activities
- Yoga, Tai Chi, and meditation can also be useful in helping to improve attention, reduce anxiety, and decrease impulsivity.