

Welcome to 2025 Leadership Convention

This session will begin soon



3H - Helping Parents Understand and Enhance Executive Function Skills for All Students, Including Students with Disabilities

Tanya Semerad M.Ed.
Autism/Significant Cognitive Disabilities Specialist
Utah State Board of Education



Welcome and Introductions

- Who is in the room today?
- What is your experience and understanding of executive function?



Learning Intentions

- Participants will understand the components of executive function
- Participants will learn how executive function challenges can impact daily life
- Participants will become familiar with tools and resources for supporting those with executive function challenges



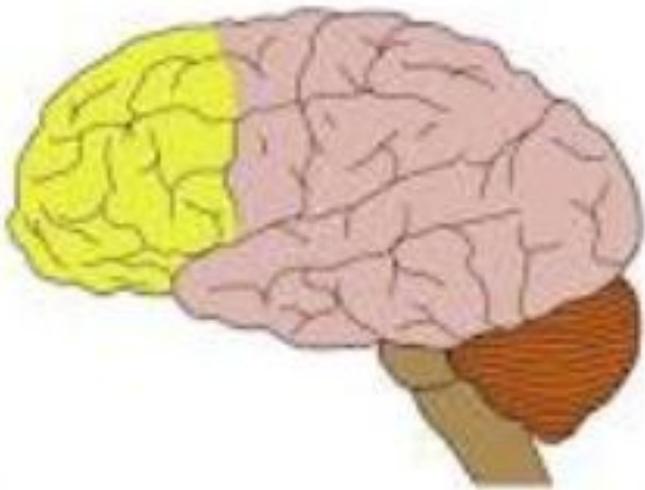
What is Executive Function?



Executive Function Skills and the Brain

The part of the brain primarily responsible for executive functions is:

- The prefrontal cortex located in the frontal lobe
- The frontal lobe, which is the largest lobe of the brain and located at the front of the head



What is Executive Function?

Executive Function in a Nutshell

1. The ability to set a goal
2. The ability to make a plan to achieve that goal
3. The ability to regulate behavior to follow the plan and achieve the goal



Executive Function Example

1. **Set a goal** - I need to sharpen my pencil to complete this task
2. **Make a plan to achieve that goal** - I need to get permission to get out of my seat, know where the pencil sharpener is, know how to use the pencil sharpener, know when my pencil is sharp, return to my seat
3. **Determine behaviors that are necessary to follow the plan and achieve the goal** - get the teacher's attention appropriately, take my pencil with me, walk directly to the pencil sharpener, use the sharpener appropriately and in a timely manner, walk directly back to my seat without disturbing other students



Executive Function Activity

With a partner, with a small group, or on your own:

1. Set a goal
2. Make a plan to achieve that goal
3. Determine behaviors that are necessary to follow the plan and achieve the goal



Executive Function Described

[What Is Executive Function Video](#)



Points to Know about Executive Function

- Executive functions are elements of cognition that allow for self-regulation and self direction, both day to day and long term.
- Executive functions affect the ability to disengage from the immediate environment in order to guide actions
- Executive functions are a set of processes that have to do with managing oneself and one's resources to achieve a goal
- Executive function deficits can feel like taking a road trip without a map



Elements of Executive Function

- **Inhibition**- wait for a period of time, accept a referee call
- **Cognitive shift**-math is over, time for spelling
- **Emotional control**- recover from disappointment, deal with anxiety
- **Initiation**- start a chore right after direction, don't wait until last minute to do assignment
- **Working memory**- remember several steps
- **Planning/Organization**- plan how to get something accomplished
- **Organization of materials**- organize for finding later
- **Self-monitoring**- monitor and critique own performance based on results of others
- **Sustained attention**- complete homework or chores without direct supervision
- **Flexibility**- adjust to change in plans
[Sheldon's Chair](#)
- **Problem solving**- What to do if classroom door is locked



Executive Function in Daily Life



Executive Function in Daily Life: Getting Ready for School/Job/Activity

- Get up on time
- Shift from sleep mode into action mode
- Keep track of time
- Complete sequence of tasks for getting ready (dressed, fed, ready with materials, presentable, etc.)
- Get out the door on time



Executive Function in Daily Life: At School

- Get organized coming into class (follow routines and procedures)
- Pay attention to the teacher
- Remember and follow instructions in context
- Interact with others
- Remember locker combinations
- Remember to bring materials to activities
- Work efficiently within time constraints
- Move from subject to subject



Executive Function in Daily Life: After School/Homework

- Know homework assignments and due dates
- Bring home proper materials
- Properly estimate and budget time necessary to complete assignments
- Check for errors and completeness
- Assemble all that is needed to go back to school
- Remember to turn the assignments in



Executive Function in Daily Life: After School/Homework

- Know homework assignments and due dates
- Bring home proper materials
- Properly estimate and budget time necessary to complete assignments
- Check for errors and completeness
- Assemble all that is needed to go back to school
- Remember to turn the assignments in



Executive Function in Daily Life: At Home

- Keep room clean and organized
- Manage time - running late, procrastination, estimating how long tasks will take, transitions between tasks
- Accept changes in routine
- Stay on task - easily distracted, forgetting to complete tasks
- Control Impulsivity - acting without thinking about consequences, difficulty waiting
- Get started on tasks - not motivated to start, not understanding the first step



Principles for Improving Executive Skills

- Teach rather than expect child to learn from observation
- Consider the developmental level
- Move from the external to internal
- Use, rather than fight, the innate drive for mastery and control
- Modify tasks to match capacity for effort
- Use incentives
- Provide just enough support for success -accommodations
- Provide supports and supervision until the child achieves mastery.
- Fade supports, supervision, and incentives gradually.



Strategies and Tools for Supporting Executive Function Challenges



Environment and Visual Supports

- Visual checklists
- Planners or calendars
- Timers
- Alarms, notes, whiteboards
- Provide picture/written instructions



Organization

- Work folders
- Labeled bins, baskets, shelves
- Color code materials and spaces
- Give extra space for organizing materials
- Checklists for daily routines
- Checklists for organizing - backpacks, drawers, desk, closet, etc.
- Technology Apps
- Provide concrete spaces for objects - shoe bin, hook for backpack, coat hooks, basket for dirty clothes, etc.



Time Management and Task Completion

- Chunking - break large tasks into smaller steps
- Give one-step directions
- Use Simple directions
- Breaks
- Countdown timers
- “first-then” system
- Show visual of completed or finished task
- Remove distractions
- Have child repeat the direction(s)
- Provide extra time for task completion
- Make task completion a game for reward - beat the timer, who can do it faster



Controlling/Regulating Emotion

- Sensory/calming items and activities
- Feelings charts - 5 point scale
- Mindfulness apps
- Calm down space
- Ignore minor misbehavior
- Give redirection



Motivation

- Reinforcement - stickers, points, tokens, etc. to earn desired rewards
- Mystery motivators
- Make task/assignments interesting
- “first-then”
- Offer choices - who to work with, order of task, when to start



Working with the School

- **Universal Design for Learning(UDL)** - UDL is a framework that creates flexible learning environments, materials and experiences. UDL aims to address the diverse needs of all learners by minimizing barriers and maximizing accessibility.
- **Accommodations** - Accommodations do not alter what is being taught, they alter how it is taught. Accommodations are changes in the environment or format that help students access the general curriculum and other activities similar to their peers.
 - 504 Plan
 - Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- **IEP** - Special education services can provide specially designed instruction to teach executive function skills for students who are eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).



Resources



Resources

- [ADDitude How to Sharpen Executive Functions](#)
- [Learntully Tools for Improving Executive Function](#)
- [Executive Functioning 101 Resource Hub | Life Skills Advocate](#)
- [Childmind.org How to Working Memory](#)
- [The OT Toolbox Building Executive Function Skills](#)
- [Transitionsusa.org 9 Free Apps to Support Executive Function](#)
- [Smart but Scattered - Book](#)
- [Executive Functioning Printables Workbook](#)
- [Executive Functioning Activities \(ages 4-10\)](#)
- [Late, Lost, and Unprepared - A Parent's Guide](#)



Thank you!

Tanya Semerad

tanya.semerad@schools.utah.gov



Connect with us on social media



FACEBOOK

- Utah PTA
- Utah PTA Advocacy
- Utah PTA Super Secondary
- Utah PTA Excellent Elementary
- Utah PTA Treasurers
- Utah PTA Reflections
- Utah School Community Councils
- Utah PTA Battle of the Bands
- Utah PTA Teachers



Connect with us on social media

INSTAGRAM - @UtahPTA



X - @UtahPTAOneVoice



PINTEREST - Utah PTA



YOUTUBE - Utah PTA One Voice



Thank you to our sponsors



ASSOCIATION INSURANCE
MANAGEMENT INC

