Engaging Their Brains and Using Their Strengths
Executive Function Skills and Gifted Kids

Blue Valley Parent Advocates for Gifted Education
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Motivation...

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Procrastination...

Underachievement...
Introductions

- Who are you?
- Who am I?
- Who is this dog?
What will we learn today?

How are our brains wired to go from STUCK to UNSTUCK?

How are executive functions and strengths related?

How can we enhance executive functions in kids? (In a fun way without making them hate our guts for the rest of their lives)

TIME CHECK

Up Next: The Neurology of Stuck and Unstuck
The Neurology of Stuck and Unstuck

NEGATIVE Neurological Cascade

Struggles Past Failures “I can’t...”

Increased Cortisol

Frustration Depressed Stressed

LTS Shut Down Decreased focus Decreased motivation

STUCK! OR Slow Progress
Motivation is NOT enough to activate the brain and EFs.
TIME CHECK

Up Next: Strengths and Executive Functions

How are Strengths Related to Executive Functions?
Many Types of Strengths

- **Performance Strengths**
  What are my talents, abilities, things I do well?

- **Character Strengths**
  What personality traits drive me and make me who I am?
Many Types of Strengths

- **Executive Function Strengths**
  What are my strongest mental skills that help me get things done?

  - **Executive Functions**
    - Activation (organizing, prioritizing, starting)
    - Focus (obtaining, sustaining, shifting attention)
    - Effort (regulating alertness, persistence, speed)
    - Emotional Regulation (modulating emotions)
    - Working Memory (accessing and holding information)
    - Action (self-monitor and regulate behavior)

  *Brown (2008)*

Many Types of Strengths

- **Processing Modality Strengths**
  What are the most effective ways for me to take in and process information?

  - Auditory
  - Kinesthetic
  - Verbal
  - Emotional
  - Conceptual
  - Visual
  - Tactile
  - Intuitive

  *ADD Coach Academy (2014)*
### An IMPORTANT note about BOREDOM

- Boredom can be toxic
- “AGITATED BOREDOM”
- A *neurological* problem, not a behavior problem

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What are Executive Functions?

“The executive functions are a set of processes that all have to do with managing oneself and one’s resources in order to achieve a goal.” (Cooper-Kahn & Dietzel, 2008.)

Manage Yourself

Self-Regulation
- Impulse control
- Use of social filter
- Self-monitoring behaviors
- Tolerance
- Delay of immediate gratification
- Establishing attention & filtering attention

Manage Your Resources

Mental Control
- Organizing time, materials, projects
- Prioritizing
- Attention shifting
- Informed decision making
- Use of Verbal & Non-Verbal Working Memory
**The Amazing Brain**

**Pre-Frontal Cortex**
- Orchestra Conductor
- Allows us to control our thinking, behavior and emotions using EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

**Hippocampus**
- Memory
- Emotions
We use our memories from the PAST to think in the PRESENT about the FUTURE

**Amygdala**
- Switching Station
- Determines if incoming information will go to PFC or lower reactive brain for “fight/flight/freeze”

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**Teach the Language of Executive Functions**

- **Emotional Control**
  - Handle being upset & frustrated
  - Real Life: When changes happen or things we planned for differently start & end

- **Paying Attention**
  - Staying focused in class
  - Ignoring things that distract me
  - Starting my work when I am supposed to

- **Memory**
  - Making “mental pictures”
  - Ignoring distractions

- **Organization**
  - Using equipment
  - Keeping my desk organized

- **Planning**
  - Making a plan
  - Asking how to solve problems
  - Remembering if I am doing things the right way

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**My Brain’s Executive Skills**

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  - Orchestra Conductor
  - Allows us to control our thinking, behavior and emotions using EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

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TIME CHECK

Up Next: How Can We Enhance Executive Functions?
Question:
How can we enhance executive functions in kids?
In a fun way without making them hate our guts for the rest of their lives???

Answer:
Meet them in their world using their strengths, interests, and positive emotions.

Going to the Dogs

Self-regulation
Sustained attention
Filtering out distractions
Task initiation
Reading body language
Social awareness
Self-Regulation

What’s Cooking?

- Requires the use of many executive functions
- Foresight, planning, prioritizing, and time management
- Includes a built-in, powerful reward: you get to eat something!
Arts and Crafts

- Opportunities to use foresight and planning
- Sensory experiences
- Connections with areas of interests
- Great for tactile, kinesthetic, and visual processing modalities
- Create anchors for new awareness

Game On!

Games to practice virtually every executive function
Use quick games
Adapt how games are played
Use games for calming and waking up brain
Plan backwards
“Reverse Planning” or “Backward Design”

► Start with the end in mind.
  ► What will it look like when I’m finished? Picture/draw it!

► Break down steps and estimate time.
  ► What steps do I need to take to reach my end picture?
  ► In what order do I need to take the steps?
  ► How long will each step take?

► Prepare to take action.
  ► Who or what do I need to complete the steps?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3. GET READY</th>
<th>2. DO</th>
<th>1. DONE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What and who do I need to do the task?</td>
<td>What steps do I need to take to be done? How long will each step take?</td>
<td>Do a “Future Sketch.” What will it look like when I am DONE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Steps:</td>
<td>Time:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Prepare your space. Gather needed materials and supplies. Consult with people who may help.</td>
<td>Set up “Working Clock.” Start steps and adjust time if needed. Finish all the steps.</td>
<td>Know when to STOP. Close out the task: ALL DONE Review: What worked? Worked didn’t work?</td>
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Concept created by Sarah Ward and Kristen Jacobsen of Cognitive Connections: Executive Functions Practice.

Credit: Adapted from material by Sarah Ward and Kristen Jacobsen

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Final thoughts...

It is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.

—Ann Landers
TIME CHECK

Up Next: Q and A

References
References

- Jacobsen, Kristen. & Ward, Sarah. (2014). Cutting Edge Strategies to Improve Executive Function Skills; Presentation, St. Louis, Missouri www.efpractice.com

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