

Targeting Executive Functioning Deficits Related to Mental Health Conditions

Cognition- A set of mental processes that underlies learning, including attention, memory, comprehending language, verbal and visual recognition, computation, reasoning, and problem solving (Green et al., 2004).

Executive Functions (“cognitive control system”)- An umbrella term for the cognitive processes that help thought and action (Friedman et al., 2008).

Five Common EFs:

1. Planning– plotting a sequence of steps to achieve a goal

- late to class, poor quality assignments (rushed), late assignments, missed exams

2. Reasoning– thinking through information in a logical way

- trouble connecting previously discussed ideas with current ideas, poor essay answers on exams, lack of problem solving at internship

3. Attentional control– choosing how one directs their attention

- Staring off into space, repeating questions, unfinished assignments

4. Inhibiting automatic responses– resisting urges that lead to undesired outcomes

- speaks out of turn (interrupts), preoccupied with technology

5. Working memory– the ability to hold and process information

- “What was the point I was trying to make?” lack of participation, difficulty holding what was read/seen/heard

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Executive Function	Functional Implication-Trouble with...	Support Strategies	Personal Strategies
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punctuality • Preparing for appointments, due dates, & deadlines • Estimating how long it takes to complete tasks 	Encourage habits/routines Varied deadlines for chunks of large projects Early availability of course materials/syllabus Automatic calendar invites and reminders set at varying intervals	Calendaring with weekly review Use To-Do lists (daily/weekly) Chunking for large tasks Transfer due dates/appointments immediately Task management over time management
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying solutions to problems • Completing assignments • Creative expression • Test-taking 	Opportunity for draft feedback Administrative accommodations (assistance w course selection, registration, financial aid) Requesting model of assignment	Brainstorming (pros/con list) Utilize office hours to clarify Partner with a classmate/colleague Talk through problems out loud Seek out feedback (natural supports) Utilize WISE Choice Model
Attention Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note-taking • Listening to lectures or meetings • Reading comprehension • Studying 	Learning Management Accessibility Exam reader/scribe/meeting transcripts Record lectures/meetings Use of SmartPen or Notability Extra time to complete exams Varied instructional strategy	Paraphrasing Active/pre-arranged breaks Shorter more frequent study or work blocks Use timers to count down to break Schedule based on energy
Inhibiting Automatic Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom norms • Interrupting others • Eliminating &/or ignoring internal/external distractions • Managing strong emotions • Dwelling on negative thoughts or problems 	Distraction-free testing area Private feedback on academic performance	Set up a low distraction environment Turn off Wi-Fi if writing Disable notifications on computer & phone Separate browser for fun/school/work Website blocking software Skill development for accepting/responding to criticism (don't send that email right away!)
Working Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committing what is read or seen to memory • Keeping track of appointments & due dates • Studying for & taking exams • Writing papers 	Discourage multi-tasking Increased frequency of exams Modified exam format Textbooks in alternate format (audiobooks) Use of assistive computer software	Summarizing Overlearning Note-taking: listen for restated points Flash cards Visualization & self-talk