



Strategies for Supporting Students: Executive Functioning

Executive functioning is the ability to plan, focus attention, manage multiple tasks, and attain goals. Students with executive functioning problems may have challenges in planning, organizing, managing, and successfully executing the steps needed to complete a task. Some students with these difficulties may be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or a learning disability.

STRATEGIES FOR DISORGANIZATION

Visual Aids and Written Instructions – It's important to pair oral instructions with visual supports to allow continued access for learners who are inattentive or have cognitive deficits.

Repetition – All new learners need to hear information multiple times as they work to incorporate a new skill or learn a new system. Asking students to repeat back instructions gives the educator an opportunity to ensure understanding and correct any misinterpretations.

Assignment List – Placing a schedule and assignment list on students' desks gets them in a good habit of keeping a to-do list and helps promote independence.

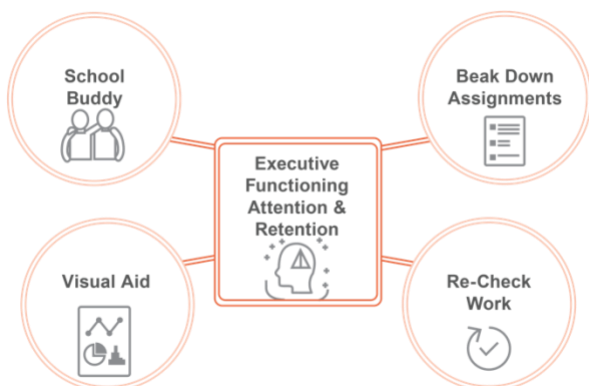
Homework Tracker – Use a homework tracker or daily planner that records assignments that go home and ones that are expected back, along with due dates. Sign their homework tracker each day to ensure that they wrote down the homework correctly.



Digital Recorder – It can be helpful to let the student use a digital recorder to record class lectures and discussions for later review.

STRATEGIES FOR ATTENTION AND RETENTION

Visual Aids – It can help to have printed classroom visual aids for information that is used frequently. This could include class expectations, due date reminders, word walls, key lesson concepts, and the daily schedule. Receiving information via multiple modes – hearing and seeing – helps improve understanding and retention.



School Buddy – School buddies who help in the classroom, in the hallway, and during lunch can help with modeling good behavior and meeting school expectations as well as bring a source of peer support. This should be organized only with the enthusiastic support of the school buddy and their family members or caregivers.

Breaking Down Assignments – Chunking, or breaking down assignments into manageable parts, helps to make work feel less overwhelming. It also provides an opportunity for reinforcement when smaller parts are completed.

Rechecking Work – Students often rush through work or miss part of the instructions, so it is helpful for teachers to scan assignments and prompt students to “find two places where you subtracted instead of added” or “find one place you should have capitalized.” This helps reduce careless errors and over time helps students improve their self-monitoring skills.

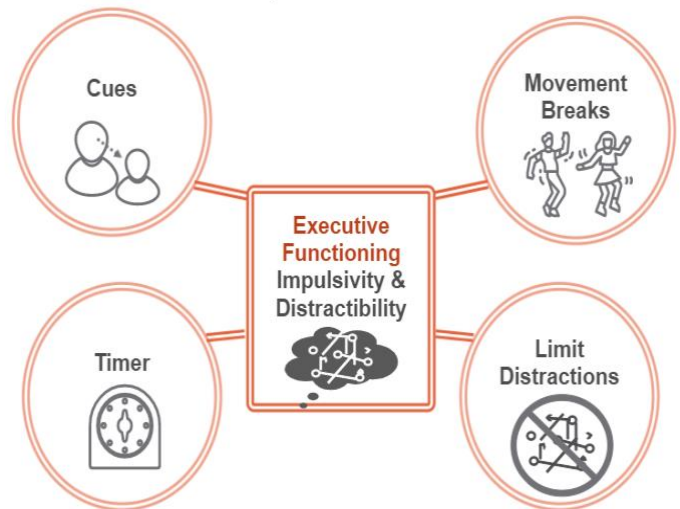
STRATEGIES FOR IMPULSIVITY AND DISTRACTIBILITY

Timer – Use a timer to establish work to break intervals, since knowing that a break is planned makes attending to tasks feel like less of a burden. Timers shouldn’t be used to speed work and add anxiety, but to encourage short-term goals, time management, and breaking down large tasks into manageable chunks. Just as timers are set for work, timers should also be set for breaks.

Cues – Saying a student’s names or making clear eye contact before speaking to them or giving instructions helps ensure you have their attention. A “secret code” between students and their teachers (e.g., a touch of a teachers’ ear after getting eye contact or a hand on the shoulder) can be a reminder to focus, slow down, check work, or redirect behavior.

Movement Breaks – Some students need more movement than others, and the chance to take a break from seated work can help to improve focus and attention on task work. Capitalize on opportunities for a student to assist a teacher by relaying a message to an administrator or completing some other productive and mutually beneficial task.

Limit Distractions – Preferential seating can encourage engagement with assignments. Sitting toward the front of the class keeps activity behind the student and less distracting while also making visualization of the teacher and instructional materials more prominent. Additionally, sitting near positive peers and away from windows, hallways, wall displays, or other distracting items supports focus on instructional content.



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