

What is Executive Functioning?

Executive functioning (EF) relates to a set of mental processes required for development of critical skill sets needed for every day socialization, learning, work, and management of daily life. These include:

- Self-awareness
- Inhibition
- Non-verbal working memory
- Verbal working memory
- Emotional self-regulation
- Self-motivation
- Planning and problem solving

EF development begins in early infancy, but it can be easily disrupted by a number of adverse environmental and/ or organic experiences; such as ADHD, LD, depression, anxiety, traumatic brain injuries, etc.

- No specific diagnosis for an *Executive Function disorder*; but is due to other neurological, mental health, and behavioral disorders, such as depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Executive functioning weakness can be identified indirectly by assessments (often administered by a school psychologist).
- A common assessment is the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF), a written survey that kids/young adults, parents, and teachers complete to assess executive functioning.

So what does that look like?

Trouble with executive function can impact important skill sets across settings, and manifest as:

- Difficulty paying attention
- Having trouble switching focus from one task to another
- Forgetting what was just heard or read
- Inability to follow directions or sequence of steps
- Inability Organizing, planning, and prioritizing
- Ability to start and complete tasks
- Understanding different points of view
- Regulating emotions/ emotional responses
- Panic when rules or routines change
- Self-monitoring (keeping track of what you're doing)



Effects on students:

Students who struggle with executive functioning difficulties may be at risk for:

- Lowered academic success & failure
- Lower grades
- Increased frustration
- Negative feelings or self-image
- Increased behavioral problems
- Social withdrawal

Strategies for the home and school:

- Increase the visuals (plus videos); decrease the verbal only
- Use of written planner/ checklists (make it visual)
- Use of routine schedule/ timers
- Set time limits for activities/ steps for activities
- Use interactive learning
- Use planned breaks (re-set mind and body)
- Use positive self-talk
- Use of praise and reward system
- Reinforce individual accountability

Some Online EF Resources:

<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/executive-functioning-issues-strategies-you-can-try-at-home>