

Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents

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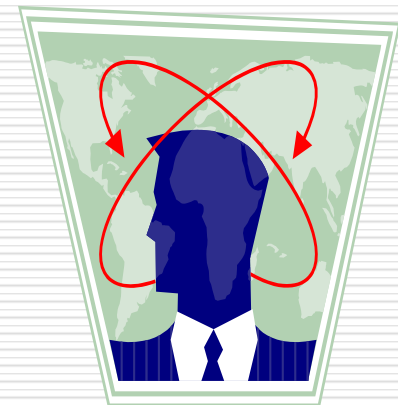
Executive Skills

- Response Inhibition
- Working Memory
- Emotional Control
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation
- Planning/Prioritization
- Organization
- Time Management
- Flexibility
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Metacognition

* Stress Tolerance
(Adult)

Executive Skills: Definitions (presented chronologically)

- ***Response Inhibition:*** The capacity to think before you act – this ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it.



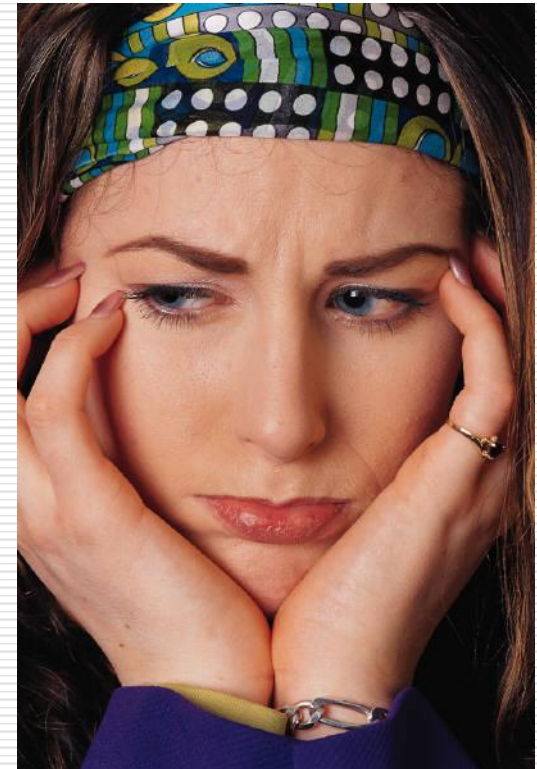
Executive Skills: Definitions (continued)

- ***Working Memory:*** The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future. Rewards and consequences are not effective methods of improving working memory.
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Executive Skills: Definitions (continued)

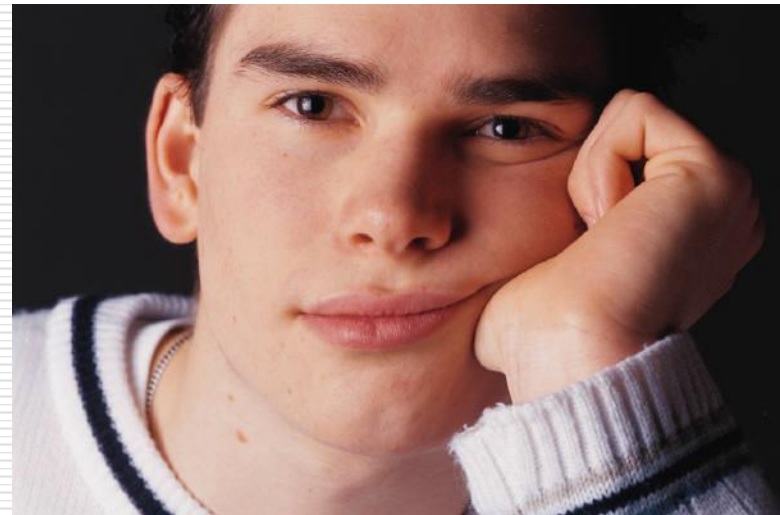
- ***Emotional Control:*** The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.
 - *If it's a difficulty, it will get worse as the student gets older = negative emotion.*

Students with good emotional control are able to manage their emotions.



Executive skills: Definitions (continued)

- ***Sustained Attention:*** The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom. Those students who struggle with this skill have difficulties making themselves pay attention.



Executive skills: Definitions (continued)

- ❑ ***Task Initiation:*** The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.



Executive Skills: Definitions (continued)

- ***Planning/Prioritization:*** The ability to *create a roadmap* to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important.



Executive Skills: Definitions (continued)

- **Organization:** The ability to create and *maintain* systems to keep track of information or materials.



Executive Skills: Definitions (continued)

□ ***Time Management:*** The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important.

■ *This is the central deficit of individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).*



Executive Skills: Definitions (continued)

- ***Flexibility:*** The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information or mistakes. It relates to an adaptability to changing conditions.
 - *Individuals diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum struggle with flexibility.*
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Executive Skills: Definitions (continued)

- ***Goal-directed persistence:*** The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal, and not be put off by or distracted by competing interests.
 - *People often expect this to develop sooner than it does. It usually develops between 10th and 12th grades.*



Executive Skills: Definitions (continued)

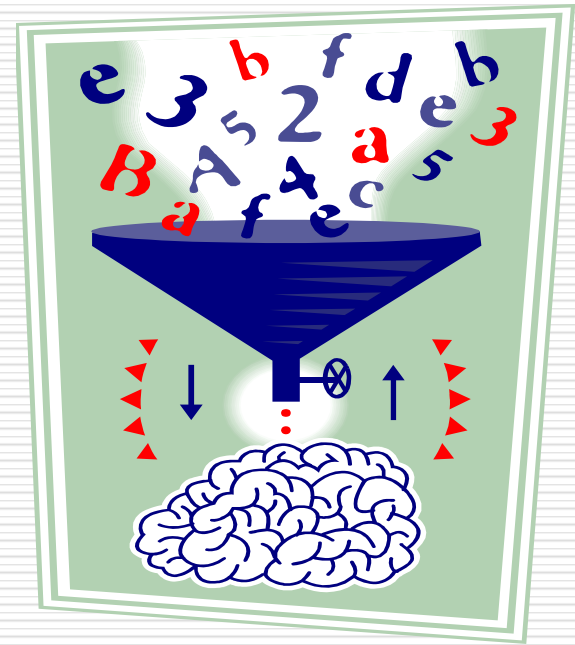
- ***Metacognition:*** The ability to stand back and take a birds-eye view of oneself in a situation. It is an ability to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self-monitoring and self-evaluative skills (e.g., asking yourself, “How am I doing?” or “How did I do?”)
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What do executive skills weaknesses look like in students?

- Acts without thinking
 - Interrupts others
 - Overreacts to small problems
 - Upset by changes in plans
 - Easily over stimulated & has trouble calming down
 - Low tolerance for frustration
 - Overwhelmed by large assignments
 - Doesn't notice impact of behavior on others
 - Slow to initiate tasks
 - Running out of steam before finishing task/work
 - Forgets to bring materials home
 - Keeps putting off homework
 - Forgets homework/forgets to pass it in
 - Leaves long-term assignments until last minute
 - Messy notebooks; can't find things in backpack
 - Passive study methods (or doesn't study)
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Wiring

- The more you practice executive skills, the better they become. The myelin becomes thicker around nerves as you practice. The thicker the wall, the quicker the firing.



Direct Instruction

- We expect students to know executive skills rather than provide them direct instruction. Students need direct instruction to learn those skills.



There are 3 primary ways adults can help kids with weak executive skills:

- 1. **Change the environment** to reduce the impact of weak executive skills;
 - 2. **Teach** the student executive skills or coping strategies;
 - 3. **Use incentives** to get students to use skills that are hard for them.
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Study Skills

- ❑ Work with your student at negotiating a set study time at home;
- ❑ Emphasize the importance of studying and homework-access PowerSchool (family rule/expectation);
- ❑ Set a specific location that is conducive to studying;
- ❑ Encourage your student to participate in study groups and MAV Intervention

Study Skills

- ❑ Keep a monthly calendar & record test dates- use your calendar in your phone and set reminders.
- ❑ 5 – 7 days before test devise study plan.
- ❑ Distributed practice more effective than massed practice, esp. first 24 hrs.
- ❑ Use different strategies- flash cards, study guides, reread/organize notes, etc.

Change the Environment

- ***Change the physical or social environment:***
 - ***Reduce distractions (study carrels, separate desk, away from window, etc.)***
 - ***Provide organizing structure (e.g., storage bins, look at traffic flow at home, etc.)***
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Change the Environment

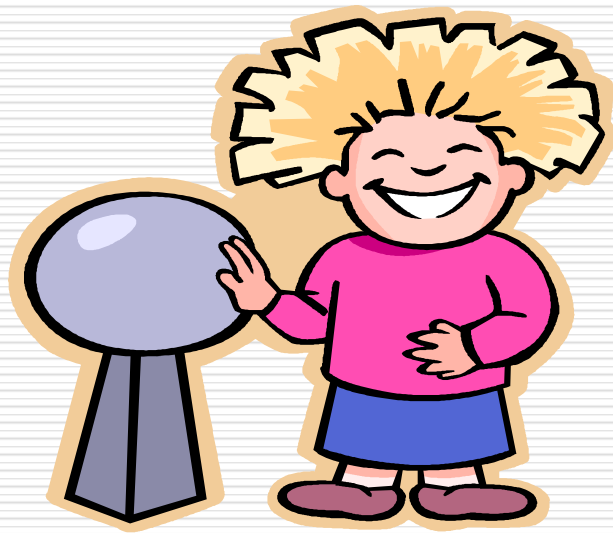
- ***Modify the tasks we expect youngsters to perform:***
 - *Make the task shorter – reduce the amount of work required or divide it into pieces with breaks built in along the way. The end should be in sight when they begin.*
 - *Make the steps more explicit.*
 - *Create a schedule, esp. if there are working memory issues.*
 - *Build in variety or choices with respect to the tasks to be completed or the order in which the tasks are to be completed.*
 - *Make the task closed-ended (e.g., provided word banks on tests, multiple choice, etc.).*
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Change the Environment

- ***Change the way adults interact with the youngster. You are the students' frontal lobe, especially through middle school:***
 - *Rehearse with the youngster what will happen and how the youngster will handle it - **Rehearse and Practice.***
 - *Use of verbal prompts/cues.*
 - *Verbally and visually remind the student to check his list or schedule.*
 - *Praise the student for using his executive skills.*
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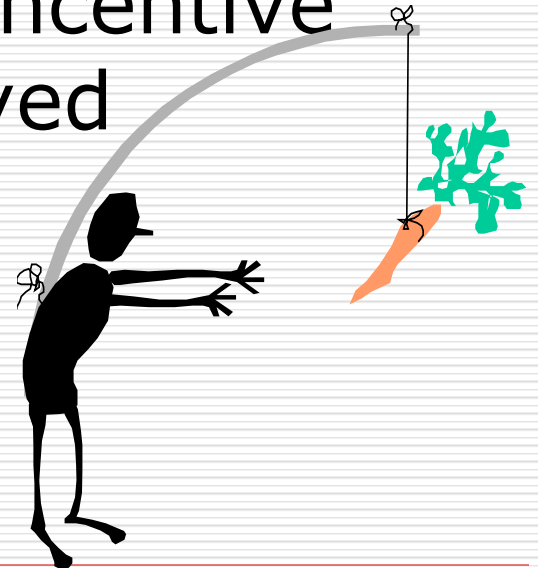
TEACH Executive Skills

- Don't expect the student to acquire executive skills through observation or osmosis.



Use INCENTIVES to augment Instruction

- Incentives make both the effort of learning a skills and the effort of performing a task less aversive.
- Furthermore, putting an incentive after a task teaches delayed gratification.



Use INCENTIVES to augment Instruction

- Seven Steps to Creating INCENTIVE SYSTEM (include parent participation & involvement):
 - 1. Describe the problem behavior(s).
 - 2. Set a Goal.
 - 3. Decide on possible rewards and contingencies.
 - 4. Write a behavior contract.
 - 5. Implement the contract. Make the rewards visible.
 - 6. Evaluate success & make changes, if necessary.
 - 7. Fade the rewards.
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References

- Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2004). *Executive skills in children and adolescents: A practical guide to assessment and intervention*. New York: The Guilford Press.
 - Dawson, P. & Guare, R. *Smart but scattered: The revolutionary "executive skills" approach to helping kids reach their potential*. New York: The Guilford Press.
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