

# EXTRA SPECIAL EDITION

Parent Newsletter

Fall 2020-2021

Welcome to the **Fall Extra Special Edition Newsletter**. Each issue contains information for parents and caregivers for children in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs.

## Suggestions for a Happy, Healthy Child

Children are being given material objects, but they are being *deprived* of the basic concepts of a healthy childhood.

**If we want our children to be happy and healthy individuals, we must get back to basics.**

Many families see immediate improvements after a few weeks of implementing the following recommendations:

**\*\*Require** child to complete age appropriate chores i.e. fold/hang clothes, set the table, feed the dog, etc.

**\*\*Implement** a consistent sleep routine to ensure your child sleeps enough.

**\*\*Teach** responsibility and independence—do not over protect them against frustration or error—mistakes will help them develop resilience and help them learn to overcome the challenges of life. For example, don't take forgotten items to school unless it is medically necessary.

**\*\*Teach** them to settle small problems on their own.

**\*\*Require** children to do age appropriate tasks for themselves i.e. carry their own backpack, peel bananas, make their bed.

**\*\*Teach** them to wait and delay gratification.

**\*\*Provide** opportunities for “boredom”, since boredom is the moment when creativity awakens. Do not feel responsible for always keeping the kids entertained.

**\*\*Do not** allow the use of technology as a cure for boredom or offer it in the first second of inactivity.

**\*\*Avoid** using technology during meals, in cars, restaurants, shopping malls. Use these moments as opportunities to socialize and train brains to know how to function when in “boredom” mode. Help them create a “box of boredom” with activity ideas for when they are bored.

**\*\*Be** emotionally available to connect with children and teach them self-regulation and social skills.

**\*\*Turn** off or take away phones at night when children go to bed to avoid digital distraction.

**\*\*Become** a regulator or emotional trainer for your children. Teach them to recognize and manage their own frustrations and anger.

Adapted from article by Luis Marcos, Psychiatrist

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- Ways to Improve Executive Function Skills

“Believe you can and you are halfway there.” Unknown



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## **Tips for Parents - Supporting Children in Virtual Formats**

### **Remember Your Child Needs YOU and Your Support!**

\*Explain that their teacher is still their teacher and that you are communicating with her/him to help them learn at home.

### **Set Up a Comfortable Space in Your Home as a Learning Center**

\*Choose a non-distracting space. Take into consideration that some students need a quiet area in their room, while others need oversight and frequent assistance.

\*Students with sensory needs might need pillows, a floor space, the couch, or even a yoga ball to help with learning.

\*Once you have a space established, gather needed supplies and any type of supportive or assistive devices your child needs and make sure they are nearby.

### **Schedules and Goals Are Important For You and Your Child**

\*Establish a daily schedule and set clear expectations and goals.

\*Some schedules and goals may need to be visual. Post the schedule and stick to it as closely as possible.

\*A daily chart may be helpful so that your child can check off each item as they complete it.

### **Allow Breaks and Time for Recess**

\*Most children don't have long attention spans.

\*Breaks are good times to allow your child access to their preferred activities and/or to have a healthy snack.

\*Exercise is extremely important! If your child cannot play outside, you can use exercise programs for video game consoles, or access video channels from YouTube or go to <https://www.gonoodle.com/>.

\*If your child receives physical or occupational therapy, ask your therapist for activities and exercises to do at home.

\*Use a timer to indicate the end of a break. If your child needs a visual timer you can download one at:

<https://www.online-stopwatch.com/classroom-timers/>

### **Limit Distractions as Much as Possible**

\*Siblings, gaming devices, tablets, and televisions are all very distracting and will take your child's attention away from learning tasks.

\*Soft background music with 50 to 80 beats has been found to have a positive impact on productivity and concentration for some students. Try some classical music or nature sounds.

### **Allow Socialization**

\*Consider using video chat or FaceTime for socialization.

\*Schedule times with immediate and extended family members and friends to interact and bond with them.

\*Even teens need more than texting... they need to "see" each other.

### **Provide Time Away from Screens**

\*Eye strain, screen glare, and sitting still all cause fatigue.

\*Books, drawing, writing, and other mediums of learning should be included in the learning plan.

\*Print pages out or have hard copies of textbooks and use highlighter tape for visual supports as needed.

\*Reinforce the lesson content through activities and hands on experiences.

### **Find or Create Support Networks - Remember You are Not Alone - Ask For Help**

\*Your child's teacher(s), service providers, therapists, and other professionals are still available to assist you and provide what is needed for your child to learn. They are working hard to be creative with ways to provide services virtually.

\*School and district websites, organizations for students with disabilities, and social media have provided increased access to websites and programs to support learning for students.

### **Be Patient**

\*Be patient with your child, the system, teachers, and yourself! This is an unusual time and nobody is perfect.

**Tomorrow is a New Day, so Stay Positive, Healthy, and Focused**

## Executive Function

Executive function is a set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control. We use these skills every day to learn, work, and manage daily life. Trouble with executive function can make it hard to focus, follow directions, and handle emotions.

### Executive function is responsible for many skills, including:

- Paying attention
- Organizing, planning, and prioritizing
- Starting tasks and staying focused on them until they are completed
- Understanding different points of view (flexible thinking)
- Regulating emotions
- Self-monitoring (keeping track of what you're doing)

### People struggling with executive skills may:

- Have trouble prioritizing, starting, and/or completing tasks
- Have difficulty thinking before they speak or act (self control)
- Have problems remembering what they just heard or read (working memory)
- Have trouble following directions or a sequence of steps
- Panic when rules or routines change
- Have trouble switching focus from one task to another
- Get overly emotional and fixate on things
- Have trouble organizing their thoughts
- Have problems keeping track of their belongings
- Have difficulty managing their time

Executive function is developed over time. A lot of growth happens in early childhood. But research shows that the areas of the brain that are responsible for executive function keep developing into the twenties.

Part of executive function is how fast you process information. Some people have a slower processing speed, which means they need more time to take in and respond to information.

Since executive skills develop over time, people can struggle in different ways at different ages. Here are some signs you might see at various grade levels:

### **Preschool—Grade 2**

- \*Gets frustrated easily and gives up instead of asking for help
- \*Has trouble following directions
- \*Often throws tantrums over minor things
- \*Insists on doing things a certain way
- \*Answers questions in vague ways

### **Grades 3-7**

- \*Starts a task, gets distracted, and never finishes it
- \*Often mixes up school assignments and brings home the wrong books
- \*Has a messy desk and backpack
- \*Wants to have friends come over, but never sets it up
- \*Seems to focus on the least important point in a discussion

### **Teens**

- \*Loses track of time
- \*Often does risky things
- \*Has trouble working in groups
- \*Forgets to fill out job or college applications
- \*Is overly optimistic or unrealistic

**Note:** Some of these signs sound like ADHD for a reason. ADHD is a problem with executive function. However, people do not have to have ADHD to have trouble with executive function skills.

# Ways to Help Improve Executive Function Skills

## Ways to Help Your Child at Home:

**Play Games**—Board games require players to follow directions, take turns and plan strategies—three skills that may be tough for kids with executive functioning issues. But the following games are easy to learn and understand. Better still, when you point out how the skills your child uses in each game connect to everyday situations, you'll actually be helping them improve their **key executive functioning skills**.

### Some Helpful Board Games Are:

- Max - **Ages: 4 - 7 Executive functioning skills:** Emotional control; planning and prioritizing; flexible thinking
- Jenga - **Ages: 8 and up Executive functioning skills:** Self-monitoring; flexible thinking; impulse control
- Distraction - **Ages: 8 and up Executive functioning skills:** Working memory; flexible thinking
- Mind Trap - **Ages: 12 and up Executive functioning skills:** Flexible thinking
- Animal Logic - **Ages: 5 and up Executive functioning skills:** Planning and prioritizing; flexible thinking; organization
- Snake Oil - **Ages: 10 and up Executive functioning skills:** Task initiation; flexible thinking; organization
- Quiddler - **Ages: 8 and up Executive functioning skills:** Organization; flexible thinking; planning and prioritizing
- No Stress Chess - **Ages: 7 and up Executive functioning skills:** Planning and prioritizing; organization; task initiation; impulse control; flexible thinking

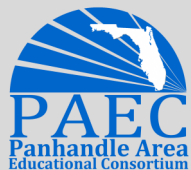
**Schedules Can Help.** A picture schedule can be very helpful especially for young children. i.e. Getting ready for school—a picture of an alarm clock with words wake up, next a picture of clothes with words get dressed, etc. For older children & teens a schedule with boxes to check off as each step is completed is helpful. For more examples go to: <https://www.understood.org/>

**Plan ahead for organization.** If your student has trouble remembering needed school supplies and homework, set them up for success by requiring them to pack their backpacks each night with new supplies and any work that is due.

**Avoid procrastination.** Whether it's homework, chores, or other responsibilities, give kids a scheduled chunk of time that they must work on a task. If your child is overwhelmed by large tasks or assignments, break them down into several steps with a completion date and time for each step. Easing the anxiety of large projects and/or tasks can help your child avoid procrastination.

**Set goals and avoid over-scheduling.** Help your child choose goals and identify potential stumbling blocks to achieving those goals. Set limits for extracurricular activities and social events so they don't become overwhelmed with too many activities. For times when there are too many tasks and not enough hours in the day, help your child decide which tasks or responsibilities must take priority and which are not necessities. Learning when to say no can be just as important as learning initiative and perseverance.

**With the right support, kids & young people who struggle with executive function can improve skills and feel more confident.**



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