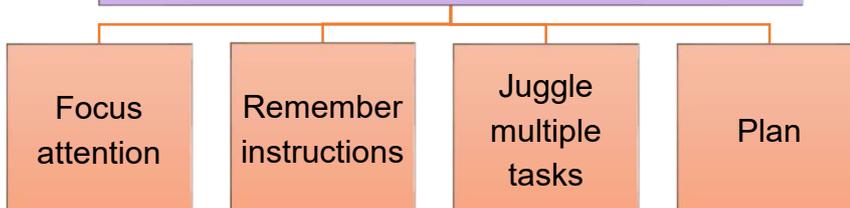




Executive Function

Simply put, our executive function skills are mental processes that enable us to...

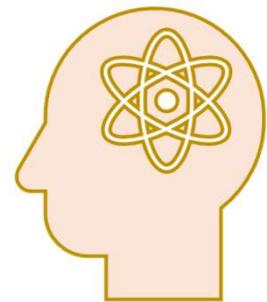


Children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions often have deficits in areas of executive function. This is due to their differences in processing information.

Difficulties in communication mean they miss opportunities for developing their skills.

Children and young people with neurodevelopmental conditions will need additional help if they are to develop and grow in these areas

Think of an air traffic control system: multiple aircraft, from multiple directions coming onto multiple runways, with incoming and outgoing planes of various sizes, are all co-ordinated and decisions made about timing, sequence etc. This is a good metaphor for our brain's executive functioning.



Where do we see the impact of executive function deficits?

- Difficulty in staying calm when things go wrong
- Impulsive behaviours – shouting out, acting before thinking
- Finding it difficult to stay on task – especially doing schoolwork at home!
- Unable to get themselves to start a piece of work without a strong external stimulus (usually an impending deadline)
- Lots of projects started but unfinished...
- Struggling with changes to the daily routine

Executive Function



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Things we don't see:

- Confusion due to difficulties in planning and prioritising
- **Struggling to keep given information in their head in order to complete a piece of work.**
- Difficulty in keeping their thoughts organised (we may see the results of this!)
- **Time management – estimating time needed and using time efficiently.**
- Difficulties in understanding themselves and their approach.

How can we help build skills?

Children's executive function skills and self-regulation skills grow at a varied rate for different children, so you need to adapt these suggestions to each child.

- Imaginary play: involves complex ideas, creating and following rules
- **Encourage joining in with other children – you may need to support 1:1 play if they find this difficult.**
- Encourage them to plan out the game, or model this.
- **Get them to make their own play props.** 
- Encourage children to make up stories and write them down to read- make up group stories (helps with sequencing, planning).
- **Encourage movement – of all kinds, encourage children to challenge themselves, obstacle courses, balancing, climbing, skipping.** 
- Freeze dancing – hold up cards of different body shapes one by one and your child can imitate the shape when the music stops (children learn to inhibit action and shift attention to the picture).
- **Planning an obstacle course and persisting to make it and then complete it.**

Developing self-control, resilience and an awareness of their impact on others and the world around them is vital for our children and young people with executive function difficulties to move forward and to make a successful transition into the adult world.



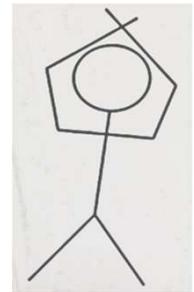
Executive Function



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Games and music are a great way to learn and practice executive function skills

- Repetitive songs that add an extra line each time
- Matching and sorting games, classifying objects and words
- Bingo, lotto, other board games
- Increase independence gradually, as you are able
- Games that require inhibition can be challenging for some children so they will require extra modelling and support.



Building skills in adolescence:

We encourage all of our young people to develop greater independence; those with executive function challenges will need more support and structure.

- Break tasks down into manageable chunks
- Help them to identify goals, and to develop plans to reach them
- Encourage them to regularly check how they are doing towards these goals.
- Celebrate small successes

Support in educational settings:

- Reasonable adjustments: *it's important to view on a case-by-case basis to see where the root of any difficulties lies and how best to support.*
- Provide accommodations that are specific to area of executive function difficulties,
- Aim to encourage increasing independence,
- Encourage the input of the child/young person when considering accommodations,
- Encourage areas of particular interest and/or skill,

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Executive Function



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How to deal with challenges:

Strategies for ongoing difficult situations that can arise

We need to have a no-blame approach.

Work together – what do they think?

Engage your child in identifying the area that matters most to begin with,

Agree to work together on this issue,

Listen to their perspective,

Focus on one thing at a time,

Talk to others (teachers, TAs, friends, siblings) for their perspective,

Create a collaborative plan with the child/young person for success,

Keep a positive and encouraging approach,

Engage teachers, support staff and other professionals as needed,

View and solve as an executive function need.



Be collaborative:

Share ideas

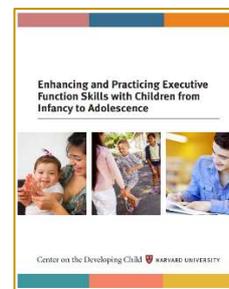
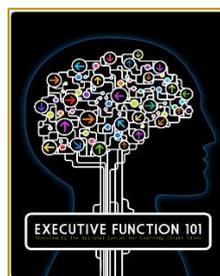
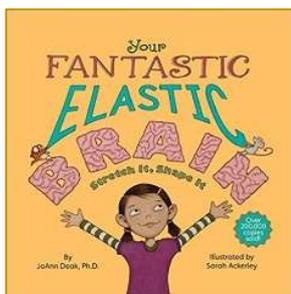
Support with kindness and empathy

Building their skills and independence

Encourage ownership of their working towards increasing their executive functioning skills

Create a plan that works for all involved

Set a time to evaluate



[executivefunction101ebook.pdf \(understood.org\)](#)

[Activities Guide: Enhancing & Practicing Executive Function Skills \(harvard.edu\)](#)

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