



Navigating through... Special Education

Accommodating Executive Functioning Deficits

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Welcome to the third installment of Navigating through Special Education. In this month's article, I will present you with information related to December's SEPTA Meeting, [Nailing Jell-O to the Wall: Accommodating Executive Functioning Deficits](#). Executive Functioning is a term psychologists use to describe the many tasks our brains perform that are necessary to think, act, and solve problems. Executive functioning includes tasks that help us learn new information, remember and retrieve information we've learned in the past, and use information to solve problems of everyday life. Executive functions help to manage life tasks of all types. For example, executive functions let you organize a trip, a research project, or a paper for school. Often, when we think of problems with executive functioning, we think of disorganization. However, organization is only one of these important skills.

Executive Functions Work Together in Various Combinations:

- **Activation:** Organizing, prioritizing and activating to work
- **Focus:** Focusing, sustaining and shifting attention to task
- **Effort:** Regulating alertness, sustaining effort, and processing speed
- **Emotion:** Managing frustration and modulating emotions
- **Memory:** Utilizing working memory and accessing recall
- **Action:** Monitoring and self regulating action



ACTIVATION:

Organizing, Prioritizing and Activating to Work

- Create “Homework Space”
- Keep supplies well stocked and handy
- Review Agenda/back pack consistently
- Store several phone numbers of “homework buddies”
- Know all email addresses & websites for each teacher
- Break down long assignments according to due date & plot on a calendar
- Color code (P-Touch Labels) notebooks, folders, files grouped by subject



FOCUS:

Focusing, Sustaining, and Shifting

Attention to Task

- Verbal Prompt: ‘What do you need to do now?’
- Verbal Prompt: mutually designed sign or hand signal
- Special designed watches to vibrate and scroll a customize message
- Teacher approved test/assignment modification
- Scheduled/Timed work breaks
- Color highlight important words when reading or test taking
- Increase margin on test paper for space to show work
- Re-design test to require one step tasks



EFFORT:

Regulating Alertness, Sustaining Effort, and Processing Speed

- Dry erase board to allow decoding
- Hand held manipulative to help stay engaged-fidget, putty, pen
- If allowed, gum chewing/tick tacs
- Directions read for tests/assignment-check for understanding
- Assign class work buddy to keep on track
- Give extended test/class work time



EMOTION:

Managing Frustration and Modulating Emotions

- Develop emotional awareness
- Re-set your system-develop techniques with your child
- Practice calm breathing together
- Internal positive self talk
- Designate a “cool off” area at home/school
- QTIP perspective-”quit taking it personal”
- Parental example, “Master of your emotions



MEMORY:

Utilizing Working Memory and Accessing Recall

- Rely on written material-agendas, calendars, lists, websites
- Memory tricks ex: FACE for music notes space holders
- Use post it notes, graphic organizers
- Tape recorders (hand held, key chains, cell phones)
- Dry Erase Boards



ACTION:

Monitoring and Self Regulating Action

- Visual pictures: stop sign, child raising his hand, frog (think before leap)
- Hand signals co-created by child for desired behavior
- Charting behavior throughout the day by child and/or adult
- Social groups, sports, drama, art, religious
- Role playing scenarios
- Exercise before/after school
- Model Behavior: yoga position, exercise ball, sport/interest behavior

As with all interventions, it is important to be aware of how they affect the person with executive functioning disorder. If a student is not helped with the strategy or is making no progress after a reasonable amount of time, look for a better way. Older students may be able to identify more effective strategies or ways to adjust strategies to better meet their needs. It's important to remember that executive functioning disorders is as much of a disorder as any other. Although it is an "invisible disability," it can have a profound effect on all aspects of a student's life. Be prepared to share this information with teachers as needed to ensure the disorder is not mistaken for laziness or carelessness.