"How can you find anything in here? If you’d just get organized!"

"The report is due tomorrow and you haven’t started?"

"How could you forget to turn in your homework? We spent 2 hours getting that done!"

"If only you would spend as much time doing your homework as you do playing video games."

**Does this ring a bell?**

If your answer is yes, this GT News edition is for you. This month, there is a focus on information, strategies, and tips to help our children develop strong **executive function** skills. This is a big topic, and there’s lots of information; feel free to consume it in bits and pieces. You might find yourself wanting to revisit this information in the future; this edition will be added to the GT News Archive, available from the GT landing page, for further reference.

Sincerely,

Michelle Stout - Gifted and Talented Parent Liaison

**What are our Executive Functions?**

- Metacognition - the ability to think about your thinking.
- Goal-Directed Persistence - the ability to complete things.
- Flexibility - the ability to change strategies or revise plans when conditions change.
• Sustained Attention - the ability to stay focused.
• Working Memory - the ability to hold information in mind and use it to complete a task.
• Response Inhibition - the ability to stop and think before acting.
• Planning and Prioritization - the ability to achieve goals by creating steps and making decisions about what to focus on.
• Time Management - the ability to make good choices with your time.
• Organization - the ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information and/or materials.
• Task Initiation - the ability to recognize when it's time to get started on something without procrastinating.
• Emotional Control - the ability to manage feelings by thinking about goals.

Free Executive Functioning Assessment

Metacognition

Metacognition is part of our problem-solving ability, as well as self-awareness - why we act the way we act. You could think of your metacognition as the metaphorical devil on one shoulder and the angel on the other. "I really need to get out in the yard and rake those leaves, but this is a really good football game. I think I'll stick with the game." Some kids with underdeveloped executive function and metacognition aren't even aware that there could be an internal conversation or a choice. Metacognition and Executive Function: A Dynamic Relationship of Cognitive Functioning

Goal-Directed Persistence

Does your child have the ability to finish things? Or, does his or her brain quit in the middle of things? To put this in terms of the adult world, do you start projects around the house and complete them, or is that bathroom remodel still in process after 2 years? This ability to complete things may be easy if the task is something enjoyable, but becomes quite challenging if it is not an enjoyable task. Kids can continue to level up on their video games, but give up easily on the science fair project or writing assignment. Goal-Directed Persistence

Flexibility

Does your child struggle with transitioning from one task to another, or have difficulty looking at a problem and envisioning a different solution? Let's face it, some of us like to have our ducks in a row; throw a curveball into that order, and we come undone. Kids are no different than us when problems or demands unexpectedly arise, requiring them to pause and adjust in the moment. What Is Cognitive Flexibility and How Do I Help My Child With It?
Sustained Attention

Although not exclusively, sustained attention deficits are often associated with ADHD. Some children can focus on a video game or something super exciting for extended amounts of time, yet staying focused on the math lesson at school seems impossible. Again, are children so different from us? Personally, I find binge-watching Stranger Things far more appealing than completing my annual taxes. Executive Function Skills: Focusing, Sustaining, and Shifting Attention

Working Memory

Our working memory filters information that comes at us, holding it just long enough for our brain to determine what to do with it - does the information tie in with something we already know, is it new, and is it even necessary to retain it? The average adult can hold 5-7 pieces of information in our working memory for a short period of time; when more comes in, some fall off. In other words, there are only so many pieces of information that fit on the small post-it note that is our working memory. Now consider that the average young child can hold up to 2 or 3 bits of information, and older children closer to 4-5. Think of a typical morning trying to get out of the door for school and you tell your child, “Put on your shoes, grab your homework and lunchbox and put them in your backpack, don’t forget your coat and gloves, and make sure to feed the dog on your way out. I’ll meet you in the car.” That child would be lucky if they got their shoes on because you overwhelmed their working memory with too many instructions. What is working memory? Test your Working Memory Here

Response Inhibition

Does your child exhibit self-control? Can he stop and say no to himself...and listen? Response inhibition is an executive function used in tandem with metacognition. Think back to the voice on one shoulder telling you to rake the leaves and the other voice telling you to watch the game. Strong self-control has you working in the backyard, then watching the game. One thing to consider when you are reflecting on your child’s ability to control herself, or even your own ability, is that self-control can be compared to the fuel in the gas tank of a car. The tank is full while pulling out of the driveway in the morning, but we continue to drain the fuel tank as we move through and respond to the demands of the day. If your child comes home from a day at school and falls apart, it is likely because he or she used every bit of their self-control to manage the day and their tank is empty. 30 EFFECTIVE Impulse Control Strategies for Kids

Planning and Prioritization

This function is part of our ability to think into the future. Does your child get projects done on time, or does she put them off until the very last minute? Think of all the steps it takes
for us as adults to complete long-range tasks over the course of weeks or months. Does the tax deadline sneak up on you every year? It’s likely due to the adult brain’s future thinking range of approximately 3 months. Now think about your child; children’s future thinking range is typically 5 days. It’s like that project that’s due at the end of the month doesn’t even exist; their brain isn’t developed enough to see that far forward to strive for that goal, thus the need for external tools to support long-range tasks. Executive Functioning Skills: Planning, Prioritizing, and Task Initiation

**Time Management**

Making good choices with your time can be summed up as working when you should be working and playing when it’s time to play. Time management partners with other executive functions such as metacognition and response inhibition to manage time and tasks efficiently. Time management also reflects the brain’s ability to track time. This has become especially problematic for our children in recent years due to digital clocks, watches, and phones. For many of us older timers, we sat in the classroom staring at the analog clock on the wall, watching the minute hand slowly tick, tick, tick until the bell rang, ending class. Digital timepieces don’t show the passage of time; they display 1:15, then magically display 1:16 with a flip of the number. Our children don’t benefit from seeing the hands moving, second by second, while that minute passes. Helping our children track time is a powerful tool for their success. Interventions for Executive Functioning Challenges: Time Management

**Organization**

I don’t know about your home, but my son’s bedroom looks like it was hit by a tornado. He couldn’t find his homework in his backpack unless it jumped out and bit him. He is not one that claims he can find what he is looking for amidst the piles; he clearly cannot, and it’s a challenge for him, our family, and his success at school. Another aspect of organization is our ability to organize language, both spoken and written. If your child has a writing assignment and can’t seem to find a way to begin, it could be a challenge with organizing the information or thoughts in a way for him or her to even begin the assignment. Tips and Tricks for Teaching Organization Skill

**Task Initiation**

Does your brain easily get started on something you need to do? Does your child dive into a task or does he or she procrastinate? Task initiation refers to our ability to be motivated, to take on new tasks, and to stay perseverant with those tasks until their completion, even if we encounter challenges. If we lack motivation, we procrastinate, we then rush through the work, we take shortcuts, we don’t recheck our work, and, of course, the quality, invariably, will suffer. Interventions for Executive Functioning Challenges: Task Initiation
Emotional-Control

Our amygdala resides in the region of our brain that processes emotions. The amygdala filters incoming information and determines if we are safe. If danger, emotional or physical, is anticipated or detected, the emotional-control part of the brain shuts down other executive functions to manage the danger. Early hunters, when encountering a bear for the first time, learned pretty quickly that bears are dangerous when their friend Walter was eaten. When encountering future bears, their amygdala kicked in; they remembered poor Walter and their fight or flight response took over. If your child fears getting nailed by a teacher for forgetting an assignment, your child feels emotionally unsafe; the amygdala takes over, shutting down other executive functions until the danger is managed, in this case, the scolding. Another example could be a parent becoming upset with a child over a messy room and the failure to tidy it up; the child senses emotional danger and the amygdala takes over. The child escalates, the parent escalates, and we all know what that looks and feels like. All parties’ amygdalas are now in control; neither parent nor child has access to their executive functions to de-escalate the situation. Here is the important thing to remember. The amygdala only takes control for approximately 90 seconds; if it is not triggered again, if it no longer senses danger, the other functions begin to come back online. Now, both parties can resume in a much more reasonable and controlled manner.

Emotional Regulation and Executive Function
Now What?

Okay, so you have all this information, but what to do with it? Depending on the age and development of your child, frankly, sometimes you need to be your children's frontal lobe. We have to recognize when expectations and demands on their executive functions are manageable for a child and when they are not. If a child is struggling, offer strategies, model appropriate actions and behaviors, and gradually and systematically teach EF skills. Remember, the demands on a kindergartner's executive function skills today are likely to be on par with what was asked of us when we were in 1st or 2nd grade. Think about breaking things down into manageable chunks. Instead of giving your child 10 instructions at a time, provide 3; allow the child to complete them successfully, then provide 3 more. If a school or home project is complex or spans weeks or months, sit with your child and teach them how
to break it into manageable pieces, how to plan and prioritize each piece, and how to manage short and long-term time requirements. As they fail and succeed, calmly sit with them and reflect on what worked, what didn’t, what was learned, and how that knowledge can be applied to future situations. This is such a critical component and is key to the development of metacognition. And, when all else fails, pause, breathe, and remember that our children’s skills won’t truly be developed until their mid-20s; but, they WILL get there.

**Executive Function for Grownups**

**Overcommitting Your Time? Here’s How to Change**

Fall is a time of new beginnings. So many opportunities present themselves this season! This can feel very exciting and stimulating. However, be careful! It is a slippery slope, and you might find yourself soon overwhelmed. [Read more]

**The Decline of Executive Functions**

If you are hitting middle age and wondering if, some days, you shouldn’t even leave the house, you can blame your declining executive functions. I shared this image above, showing the development of executive functions as children grow and mature. You might not have paid attention to the right side of that graphic, so I thought I would highlight the adult side of the graph and when these functions begin to decline. Take a gander at that black diamond ski slope that is our declining working memory! You can take small comfort in the fact that there is a legitimate reason for forgetting why you enter a room, for misplacing your car keys, and for the endless hunt for your reading glasses (that are sitting upon your head).

**Ways To Improve Executive Function As You Age**

Research shows both aerobic exercise and cognitive stimulation fortify executive function and promote good brain health. They are especially effective when combined with a diet that includes foods that boost your brain function and slow cognitive decline. [Read more]

**Time Management**
To help children develop a sense of time increments, you can try the following:

1. Invest in an analog clock; ask children to predict how long a task or assignment might take. This is called the minute gauge rule.
2. Use time markers such as magnets or sketch pies of time on the clock (glass face works best with dry-erase markers) to visually show the passage of time.
3. It is also helpful to mark a halfway point to check that the task is being attended to.
4. Help identify “time robbers” such as being hungry, scattered papers, notebooks, and too much phone/screen time.

**Backpack Readiness**

1. Take a side-view photo of your child fully dressed with all their school supplies (backpack, coat, lunchbox, etc.) and tell them to match the picture when they are getting ready.

2. To make sure they have everything in their backpack, lie out the contents (homework folder, snack) and take a picture.

3. To preserve the photo, laminate it or shrink the picture, put it in a luggage tag, and attach the tag to the backpack.

(Use visuals whenever possible to communicate with your child.)

**Homework Hassles**
1. Students visualize in their mind (thinking bubble), "What will this look like when I'm done?" Students draw this image in the Done! Box, making it concrete.

2. Students think about what steps they need to take to get to the Done! picture. When they draw the action in the middle, they must include themselves (smiling) in the drawing.

3. Lastly, students list what they will need for materials to accomplish the goal.

Learn More...

Brain Break

Try solving this simple problem with your child: A bat and a ball together cost $1.10. The bat costs a dollar more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?

Find the answer and information about Getting Fast Thinkers to Slow Down here.

Kids vs. Cookies

Additional Information
Better Grades in 5 Minutes or Less
“Here's the bad news: If you're a college student, then you’re probably terrible at studying. The twist, however, is that this is also good news. When you're terrible at something, there exists tremendous room for immediate improvement. This article will help you take advantage of this situation. None of these tips ask you to spend more time studying, and you should be able to read and internalize them in five minutes or less.” - Cal Newport, Better Grades in 5 Minutes or Less

Executive Function Problem or Just a Lazy Kid?

Jared, 14, was a bright and likable 9th grader. Difficulties at school and at home were heightened this year. Fights at home centered around how often Jared was online and playing video games instead of doing homework. Though Jared's parents knew he had executive function deficits, they believed that Jared lacked ambition, was lazy, and maybe defiant. They were convinced that he didn't care enough about his future. They commented that Jared seemed selectively disabled when it came to hard work... Read more

The Consequences of COVID-19 on Children's Executive Function

Research confirms that trauma can affect cognitive abilities and executive function in both children and adults. Can you think of any circumstances of late that might have induced trauma in our kids? Um, can you say PANDEMIC?! Learn more from the research article: Consequences of COVID-19 Confinement on Anxiety, Sleep and Executive Functions of Children and Adolescents in Spain

Is it EFD or ADD/ADHD?

A child with ADD/ADHD might be hyperactive, inattentive, and/or impulsive. Clinicians have always understood hyperactivity and impulsivity. The understanding of inattention, though, has shifted from primarily “the inability to stay on task” to a broader concept called executive function disorder (EFD), which involves a pattern of chronic difficulties in executing daily tasks. Read more

Upcoming Events

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<tr>
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<td>5:00 PM - 6:00 PM</td>
<td>Conversations with CAGT - Facebook Live Events</td>
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<td>Nov 9</td>
<td>6:00 PM - 7:00 PM</td>
<td>GT 101 - Parent/Guardian Night</td>
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<td>Nov 9</td>
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Resources

Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted

Hoagies Gifted Education Page

Articles, Blogs, Podcasts, and Videos

TSD GT Lending Library

Executive Functioning Success - Marydee Sklar

GiftedGuru - Lisa Van Gemert - Gifted Parenting

Seth Perler - Executive Function, ADHD, 2e