

# Executive Functioning

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# Overview of session



- To understand what Executive Functioning is
- To consider how to support children with Executive Functioning difficulties

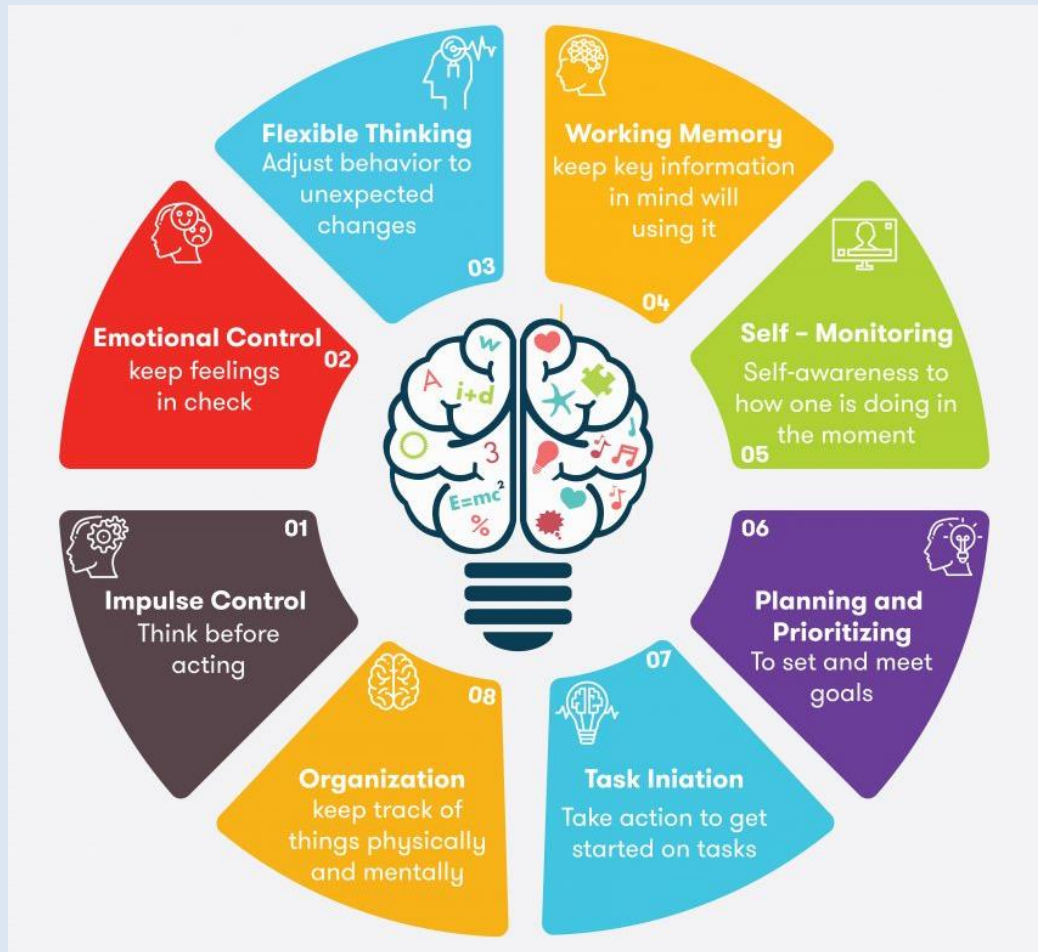
# Baseline

Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code:

- How well do you understand the term executive functioning?
- How confident do you feel supporting children/young people with executive functioning difficulties?

# What is Executive Functioning?

# Executive functioning



- Executive functioning refers to the mental processes that help us to complete tasks effectively
- Executive functions are like the 'air traffic controller' in our brain – coordinating all thought processes

# The skills involved:

Executive function comprises skills such as:

- Planning
- Monitoring one's own actions
- Organising
- Sequencing
- Prioritising and Time Management
- Ability to Control Impulsive Actions
- Inhibition of Irrelevant Responses
- Flexible thinking and Problem Solving
- Working memory

## 3 basic dimension of these skills:

Working  
Memory

The ability to hold information in mind and use it.

Inhibitory  
control

The ability to master thoughts and impulses to resist temptations, distractions, and habits, and to pause and think before acting.

Cognitive  
flexibility

The capacity to switch gears and adjust to changing demands, priorities, or perspectives.

# Development of Executive Functioning Skills

Developmental model of Executive Functioning skills holds the position that all humans are born with a predisposition/innate capacity to develop behaviours related to executive functions

As children grow they begin to practice Executive Functioning skills through play

Between 5-12 years, children take on greater responsibilities at home and school. Adults build scaffolding of support to help children develop Executive Functioning skills within these activities e.g., organisation, time management, emotional control.

During adolescence scaffolding is slowly taken away as teens/young adults Executive Functioning become more developed.







[https://youtu.be/efCq\\_vHUMqs](https://youtu.be/efCq_vHUMqs)

# How can we support children/young people with Executive Functioning difficulties?

# Key principles for EF intervention

- Important to get the right balance between helping the child/young person so that they can access a task and not doing too much hindering Executive Function skill development.
- Help to make the child/young persons conscious of the Executive Function skills they are using.
- Intervene at the level of the **Environment** as well as at the level of the **Person**.

# Executive Function Interventions

1. Change the way cues are provided to prompt the child/young person to perform tasks or behave in certain ways.
2. Change the nature of the task.
3. Consideration for their physical environment.
4. Verbal/Visual prompts.
5. Time management aids.
6. Change the way an adult interacts with the child.

# Activity!

- How could we support a child/young person who is having executive functioning difficulties in relation to one of the below skills?
  - 1) Response Inhibition
  - 2) Emotional Control
  - 3) Planning/Organisation
  - 4) Cognitive Shifting/Flexibility
  - 5) Working Memory

# Response Inhibition



- Learning/movement Breaks
- Use of a fiddle toy or doodling
- ‘Wait’ object
- Use of metacognitive strategies
- Reinforce efforts
- Use of timers
- Use of first/then schedules
- Create rules collaborative, review and practice
- Use visual cues
- Signals
- Turn taking games

# Emotional Control

- Emotional literacy
- Co-regulation
- Key adult approach
- Safe space
- Emotion coaching
- Use of a sign/card
- Teach scripts for problem situations
- Use of stories
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy based approach
- Mindfulness
- Social stories/comic strip conversations
- Role play
- Routines



# Planning/organisation



- To do/check lists
- Task management boards
- Modelling
- Metacognitive strategies
- Use exciting tasks to practice planning skills
- Goal setting
- Weekly planner/homework diary
- Use of technology
- Use mind maps/flow charts/graphics organisers



# Cognitive shifting/flexibility

- Coaching
- Advance warnings
- Provide choices
- Social stories/comic strip conversations
- Encourage alternative approaches to problem solving
- Discuss jokes, puns, word puzzles
- Explicit teaching
- Model flexibility



# Working Memory



- Gain attention
- Reduce distractions
- Repeat
- Written reminders and visual aids
- Reduce amount of information
- Increase meaningfulness and familiarity
- Chunk information
- Model and encourage children to use strategies

# One final thought....

We wouldn't chastise a child who we knew to be dyslexic for not being able to read a more advanced book so why are children punished when they struggle with Executive Functioning skills?

# Where are we now?

Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code:

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- How confident do you feel supporting children/young people with executive functioning difficulties?

# Any questions?



## References and websites

Diamond, A, (2013). Executive Functions, Annual Review of Psychology, 64, 135-68.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child and National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs. (2011) Building the brain's "air traffic control" system: How early experiences shape the development of executive function. Harvard University. Center on the Developing Child.

Activities Guide: Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

# Useful Resources

Book – Smart but Scattered, by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare



Book – Smart but Scattered Teens: The “ Executive Skills” Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential, by Richard Guare, Peg Dawson and Colin Guare.

Book – Executive Function Skills in the Classroom, by Laurie Faith, Carol-Anne Bush and Peg Dawson

Executive Function Profiling Questionnaire for adults -  
<https://s.surveyanplace.com/executivefunction>

Harvard Developing Mind – Free Executive Functioning Activity Guide from 6 months – adolescence <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/activities-guide-enhancing-and-practicing-executive-function-skills-with-children-from-infancy-to-adolescence/>

Resource to be e-mailed – Executive Functions Accommodations and Interventions