

Executive function skills

Executive function skills are the cognitive abilities that serve as the "command center" in our brain. These skills manage our daily lives and develop through childhood and adolescence in our prefrontal cortex, or frontal lobe. Although these skills do not fully mature until we are in our mid-twenties, they are essential for developing self-esteem, social skills, school success, and emotional wellbeing during adolescence.

Children and teens develop executive function through relationships that combine modeling, support, stress reduction, and exposure to tasks of gradually increasing complexity. Opportunities to practice, consistent physical activity, social connections, and stress management further strengthen this development.

These executive function skills can be further divided into 12 categories:

1. Response Inhibition

This is the capacity to think before you act. It involves the ability to resist the urge to say or do something immediately, thereby allowing time to evaluate a situation and consider the potential impacts of our behaviors.

2. Working Memory

This is the ability to hold information in memory while executing complex tasks. It includes the ability to draw on past learning experiences to apply to the current situation or project into the future.

3. Emotional Control

This involves the ability to manage emotions to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.

4. Task Initiation

This is the ability to start projects without undue procrastination and in an efficient or timely manner.

5. Sustained Attention

This is the capacity to maintain attention on a situation or task despite distractions, fatigue, or boredom.

6. Planning/Prioritizing

This involves the ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or complete a task. It also includes determining what's important to focus on and what's not.

7. Organization

This is the ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information and materials.

8. Time Management

This is the capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. A sense of time is very important.

9. Cognitive Flexibility

This involves the ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information, or mistakes. It relates to adaptability to changing conditions.

10. Metacognition

This is the ability to stand back and take a "bird's-eye" view of oneself in a situation. It involves observing how you problem-solve, self-monitor, and self-evaluate skills.

11. Goal-directed persistence

This is the capacity to set a goal, follow through to the task's completion, and avoid being put off or distracted by competing interests.

12. Stress Tolerance

This is the ability to cope with and thrive in stressful situations, including dealing with uncertainty, change, and performance demands.

A Wellthy Care Coordinator can help you find providers and identify other solutions to assist you as you navigate your child's teenage years.

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