



# Executive Functions in Early Childhood



Special Parent Information Network  
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special needs  
music  
law  
family  
children  
mom  
growing  
words  
beach  
hope  
books  
learning  
faith  
listening

# Session Overview



Define  
Executive  
Function



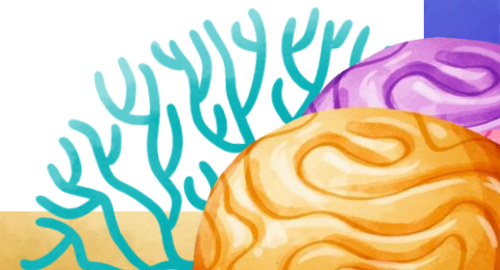
Group Activity



Components of  
Executive  
Function



Strategies &  
Activities



# Development and Executive Functions

- ★ Early childhood is a critical period for brain development
- ★ Form the foundation for academic and social skills
- ★ Early experiences develop skills for executive functions





What is  
Executive  
Function?





# Definition of Executive Function

Executive skills are responsible for a person's ability to *engage* in purposeful, organized, strategic, and goal-directed behavior.



# ABC's of EF

A

Crucial for Managing

Actions,  
Emotions,  
Thoughts

B

Become  
Efficient  
Learners

Helps with Learning,  
Remembering Instructions,  
Managing Tasks

C

Command  
Center



# Components of Executive Functions

<b>Goal-Directed Persistence</b>	The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal, and not be put off by or distracted by competing interests
<b>Metacognition</b>	The ability to stand back and take a birds-eye view of oneself in a situation. An ability of an individual to observe their own use of problem solving. This includes self-monitoring & self-evaluative skills
<b>Organization</b>	The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials
<b>Planning/Prioritization</b>	The ability to plan how to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important.
<b>Time Management</b>	The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important.
<b>Task Initiation</b>	The ability to begin projects without procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.
<b>Response Inhibition</b>	The capacity to think before engaging in an action-the ability to resist the urge to say or do something.



# Emotional Control

Managing emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.

# Cognitive Flexibility

The mental ability to switch between different concepts; to think about multiple concepts simultaneously.

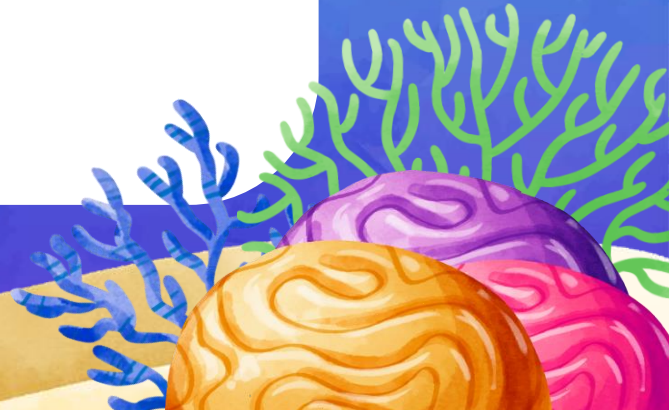
# Sustained Attention

The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.

# Working Memory

The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experiences to apply to the situation at hand or project into the future.

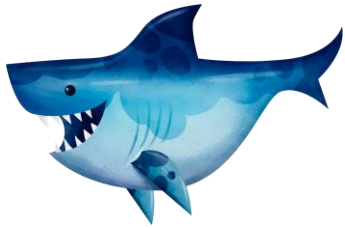
# Activity





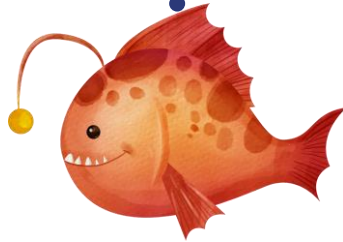
# Groups

01



Emotional  
Control

02



Cognitive  
Flexibility

03



Sustained  
Attention

04








Working  
Memory

1. Choose & Move to an Executive Function

1. Discuss with small group how your child demonstrates or struggles with this skill

# Emotional Control Strategies & Activities

-  Breathing
-  Stretching
-  Movement (high knees, crab walk, bird flaps, etc.)
-  Drawing
-  Calming Music

# Cognitive Flexibility Strategies & Activities



Freeze Dance



Red Light Green Light



Visual Cue Cards



Games that require student to wait their turn

# Sustained Attention Activities



Shared Reading



I Spy



Simon Says



Group Stories



# Working Memory Activities

 Songs with Hand Gestures

 Matching Games

 Sorting Games

 Clapping Games

# Practices to Strengthen Executive Functions

Teaching to use & follow a schedule to anticipate activities (Organization, Time Management)

Teaching to identify and express their emotions (Metacognition (M), Emotional Control (EC))

Teaching children to engage in social problem solving (Response Inhibition, EC, M)

Providing engaging activities to promote learning & reduce challenging behaviors (Sustained Attention, Goal-Directed Persistence)

Engaging in conversations to acknowledge and expand on communication and interactions (M, EC, Working Memory, Sustained Attention, Response Inhibition)

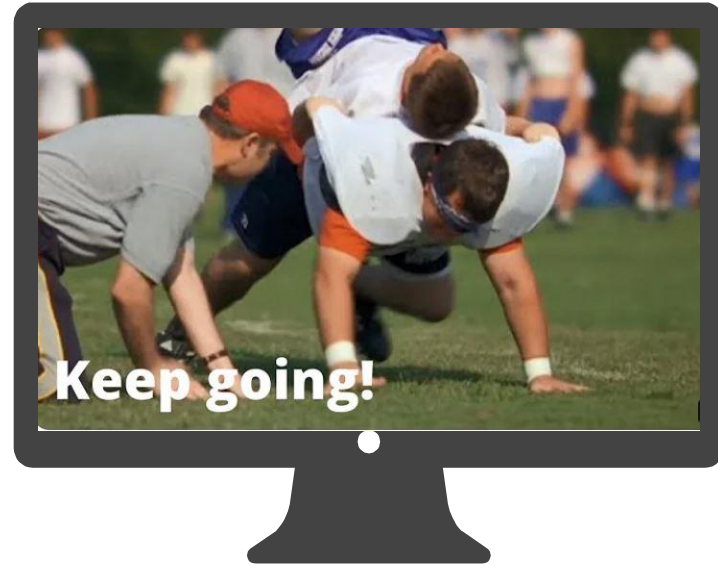
# IEPs & Executive Skills

An underwater scene with a blue background. Sunlight rays filter down from the top. In the foreground, there is a sandy seabed with various colorful coral reefs: yellow and orange, purple, and red. A white rounded rectangle is centered in the upper half of the image, containing text.

The best "toy" a child can have is an  
engaged adult.

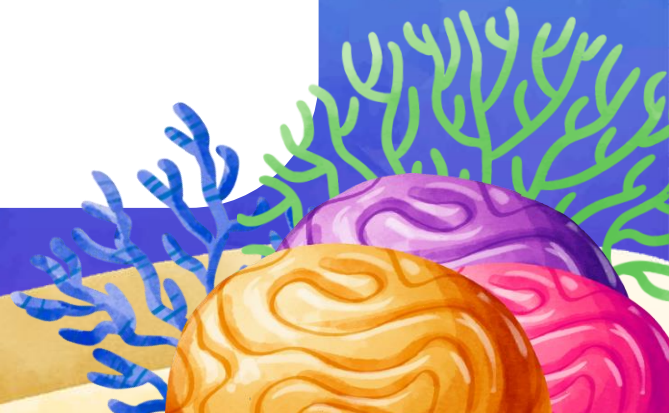
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# Beyond The Limits





Mahalo



# Resources

- Linder, T. W. (2008). *Transdisciplinary play-based assessment: A functional approach to working with young children*. Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co.
- Brown, S. (2008). Stuart Brown says play is more than fun. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e515602011-001>
- *Center on the developing child at Harvard University*. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2023, October 31). <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>
- [A Guide to Executive Function](#) (Harvard University)
- [Social Competence and Emotional Well-Being](#)