

# Helping Struggling Students Develop Executive Functions and Organizational Skills

Presented by:

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# What Are Executive Function Skills?

- 1) EFs are a critical set of cognitive skills
- 2) EFs are strong predictors of academic success
- 3) EFs are unrelated to intellectual ability (intelligence)

- **Organization**
- **Planning /Prioritizing**
- **Time Management**
- Working Memory
- Task initiation
- Response Inhibition
- Emotional regulation
- Metacognition
- Flexibility
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Sustained and directed attention
- Regulation of Processing Speed

# Executive Function Delays

## Why is this child struggling?

- **What is the cause?**
- The fault doesn't lie with parents, teachers or a child's willfulness.
- EF delays (including disorganization) are not the result of a lazy child or an uncaring teacher
- **Delayed development in the brain's frontal lobe**
- Executive functions do not always develop at the rate needed to keep pace with the academic/organizational demands placed on students
- Leading to difficulty mastering academic skills
- **Human brains are not hard-wired for academic skills**
- In simpler times, slower brain development of EFs was okay
- Now, many more executive demands are imposed on our students, much sooner **and** in a far more distracting world
- **Some students learn organization by observation and osmosis, but...**
- **The disorganized student needs skills *explicitly* taught**

# Lagging Executive Skills Impact on School Success

**Weak organizational skills may present as clutter, disorganization, and lost papers, but may also coincide with students experiencing difficulty with:**

- Processing information and following directions--**processing speed**
- Transitioning smoothly at school/home– **cognitive flexibility**
- Behaving appropriately in social situations and the classroom--**emotional regulation**
- Planning and prioritizing for long-term projects--**organization, time management, planning**
- Organizing their thoughts in words and writing--**processing speed, delayed writing skills**
- Perceiving potential consequences and inhibiting behavior accordingly--**response inhibition**
- Sequencing, categorizing, prioritizing information–**organization, reading comprehension**
- Concept of cause and effect– **metacognition (seeing the big picture)**
- Getting started/Staying focused on a task-- **attention regulation, goal directed persistence**
- Manipulating information to answer questions posed in an unfamiliar manner
- Holding onto new information while they are using it -**working memory**
- Using self-talk for planning and effective problem solving--**metacognition**
- Making step-by -step plans for breaking large multi-step assignments down-**planning**
- Managing and figuring out the amount of time needed to complete each step of the plan
- Poor concept of time-it looks like procrastination—but it may be an inability to feel the passage of time—**time management**

# ADHD, Executive Functions and Organization

- **ADHD always co-exists with executive functioning weaknesses which makes school and learning much more challenging**
- Why? Because the region of the brain that controls Executive Functioning is slower to develop in the brains of individuals with ADHD. **The individual delays can vary, but may be up to 30%**
- Executive Function challenges can exist without ADHD, however, all students diagnosed with ADHD will display executive functioning challenges- remember that all children develop at different rates
- When the diagnosis is ADHD, look for specific Executive Function weaknesses and strengths (to support EF weaknesses)
- **Medications for ADHD help focus attention and reduce distractibility. They do NOT meaningfully impact EF performance**
- Skills must be directly taught to students with ADHD or Executive Functioning disorders to reduce forgetfulness, disorganization and an innately impaired sense of time

# Organization: A Critical Skill for School Success

Lagging organizational skills impact a student's academic performance no matter how intellectually (or otherwise) gifted

- **Organization is a brain-based skill (Executive Function)**
- **Behaviors** signaling disorganization emerge at different stages of development
- **Organizational skill impairment** can be evident from early childhood, elementary school or..... they fly under the radar and...
- Things may not fall apart for 'under the radar' students until middle school, high school or college

**Disorganization is not a character flaw, it is a weak skill set!**

- **No one chooses (or likes) to be disorganized!**
- Disorganization has **no correlation** with intellectual ability
- **Disorganized students are not giving us a hard time, they are having a hard time!**

# The Organized Student:

- Consistently **brings home** personal belongings, books, binders/notebooks, packets, and worksheets for homework, tests, quizzes, essays and projects
- **Doesn't carry everything** they own in their backpacks...
- **Can locate HW**, completed HW and **hand it in** on time
- **Doesn't waste time looking** for class notes, hand-outs and HW- which is stressful
- **Uses a planner** to keep track of daily/long-term assignments
- **Is aware of** upcoming **tests** and **brings home** the correct **materials** to study
- **Plans** for and sets aside **time** to study
- **In these students, organizational skills are innately present and therefore easily absorbed**

# The Disorganized Student

- **Frequently loses** HW papers, personal items, pencils, pens, toys, permission slips, assignments, shoes
- **Can't find** or doesn't hand in HW
- **Unable to** consistently keep **track** of **due dates**
- **Messy** backpack, desk, bedroom, etc. (Ask-does the system work?)
- **Weak time management** skills
- **Poor concept of time** and difficulty tracking time in general
- **Trouble developing a plan** of action and **getting started**
- **Difficulty following through** and **breaking down** steps to **completion**
- **Difficulty following directions**
- **Forgetfulness**
- **Difficulty organizing thoughts**, sequencing ideas and recognizing **cause and effect**
- **Difficulty planning ahead** –event isn't even on their horizon sometimes
- **The root cause of these problems is disorganization and at every grade level should be a red flag for parents and teachers**



# Disorganization: A Red Flag

**Disorganization should indicate to teachers and parents that a student's executive functioning skills are lagging behind**

The disorganized student is not **yet** able to internalize age appropriate structures set up in the classroom or home.

Keep in mind, some students are innately able to organize themselves  
Others can not.

**Disorganized students must be explicitly taught:**

- Organizational concepts
- Organizational skills
- Methods behind organizational systems

And have ample opportunity to practice while developing skills before they are expected to perform the skill independently

**Why do some students need more support?**

- The answer lies in the frontal lobe of the brain which is home to the brain's Executive Functions

# Organizing Time and Its Impact on School Success

**Time management** is the ability to manage activities effectively in relation to time available.

Students are taught to tell time, not how to manage it

**Students with an impaired sense of time** Can't accurately feel or judge the passage of time

- Lose track of time
- Often late
- Constantly rushing
- Frequently unprepared
- Avoid HW and other assignments because they will “take forever”
- Often late with assignments
- Does not plan ahead for HW completion, tests or class projects
- Difficulty estimating time required for tasks
- Does not allow enough time to complete assignments leading to emotional meltdowns, rushing and performance below expectations
- Time either disappears when activity is enjoyable or creeps so slowly that it feels like a disease

# Elementary School Students

- **Teachers create structure and organization in elementary school classrooms**
- They break assignments down, remind students of due dates, what to take home, etc.
- Classroom procedures are well defined with clearly posted visual cues for staying organized
- Teachers model classroom procedures with the expectation that students will internalize the routines and perform them independently
- **Parents** often become their child's at-home academic organizers
- **Everyone is frustrated....this child could/should be doing better but...**
- Students who lack innate organizational skills don't internalize the structures teachers and parents set up
- **Students can't perform or transfer skills they have not *yet* developed**
- **Executive function delays in organizational skills prevent students from making the organizational connections needed to perform well in the "now" and in the future**

# It's Not So Simple--Getting the Work Completed/ Returned

- **Starts** with getting the correct **assignments** and **materials home**
- Continues with **planning, prioritizing and completing** the work
- Next, the work must be returned in the **correct HW Folder**
- Last, the work must be located and **handed in**

# Establishing Morning and Nighttime Routines

- **Structure and Routines create smooth transitions**
- **Waking up and getting ready** for school can be challenging without a system and structure
- **Post a checklist** to visually record each step - Brush teeth, wash face, get dressed, make bed, eat breakfast, put lunch in backpack, review planner
- **Move everything possible to the night before**
- **Nighttime routines checklist-** choose clothing at night, pack backpack, check for completed HW in folders
- **Set bedtimes** and stick to them
- **Set reminders** to “check the list” until habit is formed

# What Happens Next?

- **As curriculum demands increase, teachers have less time to teach soft skills**
- Specific instruction about the “how and the why” may still be needed for the disorganized child who lags behind in organizational skill development
- **When a student doesn't grasp the fundamentals of organization, they quickly fall behind**
- And will continue to fall further behind without specific intervention
- **Disorganized students may be left without an important set of academic and life skills**
- **In later years, disorganization masquerades as a failure to live up to the expectations of teachers, parents and themselves**
- **Disorganization is a red flag for parents and teachers !**

# Middle School, High School and Beyond

- **Disorganization** becomes **more problematic** as academic and organizational demands increase
- Faced with **multiple teachers and subjects**, survival skills of the past may rapidly disintegrate.....
- **Teacher** organizational **assistance** and leniency **fades**
- **Parents** often **function** at home **for students** by organizing for, not with them
- **Students resist organizing-** it causes them to become **overwhelmed, frustrated and stressed**
- As **academic demands increase**, **stress levels increase** for the student at home and in the classroom

# Middle School and High School Symptoms of Disorganization

- **Loses** / misplaces assignments and notes needed for HW and studying
- **Doesn't hand** assignments **in** on time (or at all)
- **No** consistent **system** exists for **recording assignments**
- **Difficulty breaking** projects **down** and **planning** for the future
- **Backpack** stuffed with crumbled papers, random objects, old lunches
- **Misses deadlines**/ doesn't keep track of due dates
- **Leaves everything** to the last minute
- **Disrupts** home life with frantic searches, urgent requests for last minute assistance which lead to.....
- **Anxiety** fueled meltdowns
- **Disorganization causes students to do twice as much work**



# Emotional Impact of Disorganization

- **Students** are **upset, overwhelmed** and **exhausted**
- They are often **told to try** harder...
- To **stop being** so lazy...
- And **irresponsible!**
- Hold on....
- **These kids may be trying as hard as they can**
- The **root of the problem** may have nothing to do with their motivation to do well--most kids at least start out wanting to do well
- The **language we use** about their disorganization frames our own **mindsets** and theirs-what are we saying to ourselves and them?
- **Students need help developing organizational skills to do well**
- BUT, they must be response-**able** to organize themselves
- In other words, they must have the **ability to organize themselves** (organizational skill set)

# Response-ABLE

- **Lack of organizational skills combined with heavier workloads and more academic stress becomes overwhelming and results in:**
- **Academic stress** at home and in school
- Missing and late assignments, **deteriorating grades**
- **Loss of self-esteem, hopelessness, self-blame, blaming others**
- Parent and teacher note- try not to buy into the image of the hopelessly disorganized student--this reinforces the behavior and...
- The **student's mindset** becomes “**nothing can be done**”
- A sense of **learned helplessness** and hopelessness develops in disorganized students (they need support systems)
- Students, parents, teachers often **believe** they are simply **lazy, unmotivated, disorganized and hopeless**

## **Good News: Something can be done! Solutions do exist!**

- Students can develop organizational skills with our support and appropriate scaffolding built around them while new skills are developing
- **Disorganization is not a character flaw! It is a developmental skill delay!**
- **While their brain's EFs may develop slower than average, the academic, social and emotional demands remain the same for them! Ready, or not...**

# They Are NOT Lazy, They Are Disorganized

- **Laziness and lack of motivation are not diagnoses or the root of the problem**
- **The real issue lies in slower brain development, resulting in EF delays**
- Due to these delays, after years of difficulty with school and homework students can become beaten down, learn not to try anymore, anxious and/or depressed
- Something simple like **following directions requires good mental organizational and attentional skills to focus and execute-** if they are not listening, they may not be willfully ignoring you-they may be **struggling to process** the information (Language Processing)
- The **disorganized child is stuck** and needs explicit age appropriate organizational skills to get them unstuck
- **Learning** to be organized **is a process** that requires acquisition of skills and creating and maintaining structure in the physical/cognitive environment
- **Organization skills** must be taught, practiced, and refined
- The process **requires dedication, optimism, support, patience and love**

# Why is this so difficult?

- The **ability to set long terms goals** and break them into short term goals is **challenging** for disorganized children
- NOTE: **Breaking projects down into a series of simple steps allows students to feel less overwhelmed and they are less likely to melt down or shut down**
- **Poor concept of time and time management** leads them to believe they have plenty of time
- **Lack of foresight** prevents them from seeing the disadvantages of delaying starting a project
- **Lack of hindsight** prevents them from remembering that procrastination didn't work last time
- Disorganized children often **have extreme difficulty** with **initiating** and executing a task to **completion**
- Some become **overwhelmed** by having to do a project at all, so they put it off entirely
- Sometimes they simply **forget** they have a project OOSOOM
- Weak EFs cause difficulty in resisting the **temptation** to do something more fun
- These skill weaknesses are the direct **result of an underdeveloped brain, not the fault of the child**

# Benefits of Being Organized

- **Remind children of the benefits of organization:**
  - **Homework** gets done **faster**
  - **Less yelling** in the house
  - **Fewer punishments**
  - You **won't be on their backs** all the time
  - **More free time**
  - **Less frustration**
  - **Better grades**
- Organization is a prerequisite for student success

# What Can Parents Do To Help

- **Establish Daily Homework Routines/Schedules**– use timers as needed (prompts) for pacing and breaks
- **Choose a Designated Homework Time and Place** - consistent time, place, procedures creates structure and routine
- **Select a quiet distraction free location** distractions hijack attention
- **Organize study space** purposefully to **reduce visual distractions/clutter**
- **Set up a HW Command Center** in the study space- all supplies should be located here
- **Create a Supply Box** -Pens, pencils, markers, scissors, paper, sharpener, glue, 3 hole punch, etc. (**The Organized Student's Supply List handout**)
- **Select backpacks with limited pockets** More pockets mean more places to lose things. Make sure backpacks are large enough-tight spaces are hard to find things in OOSOOM-Out of sight, out of mind!
- **Schedule a weekly clean-out** of backpacks and binders on the calendar
- **Supervise organization** of papers in notebooks, binders and on electronic devices weekly

# The Right Stuff

- Why are their backpacks so heavy???? **Disorganized students live in fear of being caught without the one thing they need, so their solution may be to carry everything**
- A **routine** must be established at home **for returning assignments** to school.
- **Elementary students** should have a **take-home folder** and a return to school folder. Check and empty with your child nightly
- **MS and HS -The binder system.** Disorganized students often are better off with one or two binders. AM/PM –if they are resistant, use smaller binders , 1 per subject, color coded
- Students should **label all papers** with the **date** and **CW** (classwork) or **HW** (homework)
- All **handouts, assignments** and **quizzes** from **current units** should **remain** in the binder
- **Homework pockets** should be clearly **labelled and checked** against the planner for return to school nightly
- 3 hole punch papers and **file by subject** -nightly- in an ideal world (weekly in the real one)
- **Create lists with your child** for HW and getting it back to school routines Post in HW area
- **Weekly backpack/binder clean sweep** (mark it on the calendar)
- Establish a **Launching Pad** by the exit door : Everything you need for the next day goes here
- Create **exit reminder checklist** in launching area HW, sneakers, uniform, violin....
- **Point of performance reminders** –leave the things they need in view to **prevent OOSOOM**
- **Brain breaks boost performance**
- **Organizing is stressful for the disorganized student**

# Your Child/Student's Input is Critical to the Success of the System

**Create checklists**, use and post daily and weekly checklists and schedules at points of performance (located wherever they need the information)

- **Prioritize HW assignments** by importance together and create a plan of attack daily (see Daily Plan hand-out)
- **Develop and organize time lines for long term assignments** using calendar/planner (work backwards from the due date) (see hand-out)
- **Model calendar skills**/plan together- show them your methods
- **Break projects down** into chunks and impose interim due dates together
- **Use Google Calendar** with older students which can be shared with you and will send text message reminders to their phones
- **Encourage students to write everything down**, make lists, take notes, leave reminders on their phones
- **Prepare today for tomorrow**- Use checklists to create routines (visual support) Be specific. Ex- Put all papers, books, HW, gym clothes, instruments in backpack before bed - Check weather - Choose clothing at night
- **Point of performance reminders**- post lists at exit doors, bedrooms, kitchens, bathrooms, etc. – Wherever one is needed for success
- Specific checklists for routines offer visual support for developing skill sets
- Checklists reduce forgetfulness
- **Siri** is a great executive assistant



# Actively Listen to Your Child and Stay Positive

- **What makes sense to you may not work for them**
- Learn what works for them by asking and listening (if nothing else you will learn what doesn't work)
- If you want to preserve your relationship with your child and bring out their self-motivation keep it positive
- **Organization is really hard for the disorganized child and they may become frustrated or angry**
- **Stay calm**
- **Punishments don't teach organizational skills**
- If you must punish: make it short, to the point and given without a nasty attitude
- Fact: Punishments may shut down performance by adding stress and anxiety (for everyone)
- Find something to praise-Effective praise is specific to the developing skill “ I like how you remembered to pack your sneakers for gym”
- Develop a growth mindset
- **You and your child are teammates, not adversaries**

# How Parents Can Help With Time Management

- **PLAN**-- Create a “To Do” list for homework daily. First brain dump and then prioritize
- Have students **estimate** the amount of **time** needed to **complete** each assignment
- Develop a schedule with start times (plan backwards)
- Encourage studying for tests first and then HW
- **PRIORITIZE**—Model decision making about where to start, offer choices—imposing your will invites pushback
- Use **timers** to help concretize time
- Take timed **breaks**
- **Distribute practice**- 20mins/night vs. 2 hours of cramming allows the brain time to process information more fully through review and repetition. Retention of information is better because neural connections are made and it becomes encoded in memory through repetition
- Use timers or stopwatches to visualize the passage of time ( I love the Time Timer)

# Teaching Developing Skills

- **We can't teach disorganized students a skill once and expect them to perform the skill next time independently**
- Skills need to be explicitly **taught, then reviewed and practiced**
- Why? The frontal lobes of the brain are having trouble grasping and consistently carrying out the plan due to delayed EF development
- **Kids may know *what* to do. They just *can't* do it.**
- Supervision and practice of organizational skills is essential
- Disorganized kids **can't be left to sink or swim** because their brain needs the support of a life jacket
- Allowing **failure does not teach skills**
- **Pills do not teach skills** (for those students on medication)
- A 2008 study showed “ Of all the tools, keeping the binder organized in MS and HS was the most effective because it accomplishes basic necessities for order: student's have a definite place for HW, they could find returned assignments to review for tests, and they had paper to take notes on.”

# Daily/Weekly Planners are NOT Optional

- **Why use one?** Planners create a visual tool that is a representation of a student's workload and schedule
- **Disorganized students may tell us planners don't work for them because they have been unsuccessful in the past using them -- due to weak skills**
- **Planners are non-negotiable**, but students should have the option to choose - paper or electronic (see apps like Myhomework)
- Help students **develop habits for successfully recording assignments** Repeated support may be required both in class and at home - It takes a minimum of 21 days to create a habit - **Be patient**
- **Elementary students** can work with a teacher or be paired with a reliable homework buddy to double check that they have what is needed for HW or studying – checklists can be posted on desks
- **Checklists for the forgetful** are lifesavers in school and at home
- **Middle and HS students** are expected to have internalized the skill for recording assignments
- When they haven't, make sure they have 2 reliable classmates (**friend lifeline**) per class in their phone **contacts**
- Record lifeline info, **teacher email info, extra help days**/room number in the front of the binder and/or planner for each class
- If there is **no HW**, have the student **write NO HW** for that subject

# Planning Skills

- **Students must be explicitly taught how to plan for HW and assignments with both attention and intention**
- Intentionally, check **Google classroom** or teacher websites for online HW daily
- **Encourage** reviewing the **planner** for the current day, twice a day and looking ahead in the planner (create a routine for this)
- **Anchoring** the **action** of checking the planner or google classroom for assignments **to something the student always does** will help to develop the habit (breakfast, snack time, before or after dinner) and make it a routine
- If the current planner isn't working, engage your child in deciding what type of planner will work (many choices online) Make sure there is **plenty of space to write down assignments**
- **Writing down assignments consistently is not an easy task for disorganized students- be calm and patient-they know they messed up---again...**
- Put a **binder clip** on the current week in the planner to make the day easier to find
- **Store** the **planner** in the front of the backpack **with intention**. It will always be in the right place for access
- **REMEMBER: Coping with multiple teachers during MS and HS can be an organizational nightmare for students. Be sensitive. Be calm.**

# *Explicitly Teach Planning Skills*

- **We can't assume students know how!**
- **Teach skills for:**
- **Scheduling backwards from a due date**
- **Finding the day/week easily**
- **Looking ahead in the planner**
- **Planning and working with a daily "to do" list in sight**
- **Practicing time estimation for task management**
- **Breaking down larger assignments into chunks**
- **Managing daily study time, preparing in advance for exams**
- **Making sure they have 2 reliable classmates (the friend lifeline) per class in their planner and phone contacts**
- **Recording student name and contact information, teacher email info, extra help days/room numbers, schedules and other important information in the front of their planner for reference**

# Supporting Students With Structure

*Disorganized students need external structure and routines for remembering to remember!  
These students often have disorganized thinking patterns and poor memories for information*

To increase comprehension and retention, teach students to preview new written material, notes, textbook headings, summaries, questions at the end of the section/ chapter

- For reading comprehension-SQ3R Survey Question Read, Reflect, Recite, Review, Record
- Practice highlighting and reviewing class notes, main ideas (retention goes way up)
- Have students highlight or underline the who, what, when, where, why and how
- Encourage active listening skills and engage students with varied learning opportunities
- Use mnemonic devices to aid memory retention
- Use graphic organizers
- Create flashcards, use Quizlet, Khan Academy (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>) for review and practice
- Keep and learn from old quizzes and exams
- Encourage disorganized students to come for extra help to organize binders if necessary
- Post important reminders at Points of Performance- externalize important information at key points-homework stations, classroom bulletin boards, exit doors
- Premack Principle = More probable behaviors will reinforce (anchor) less probable behaviors
- Anchor actions by linking behaviors – create a planner habit by encouraging students to pair breakfast with a planner check, snack with a planner check
- Same time, same place -supports habit creation in the disorganized student
- Store it on the cloud! School emails can be use to access files on Google Drive. Teachers, parents and students have access

# Calendars

- Use **electronic, desk, whiteboard or wall calendars** for short and long range planning – monthly calendars allow a big picture view of the day, week and month
- Create a **color coded key** for the calendar-use a different color for each subject
- **Record all due dates**, tests, quizzes, projects, midterms, SATs, practices, games, lessons, tutors, doctor/dentist, social plans, end of quarter dates, AP exam dates, SAT II's, final and regents dates/times
- Use **RED PEN** to enter tests, quizzes and other important due dates
- Create **Daily “To Do” Lists** - What do I have to do? How long will this take? How will I prioritize these tasks? (See Daily Plan handout)
- Develop **time lines for long-term assignments**- record actual due date
- **Estimate total time needed - Schedule specific interim due dates starting backwards** from the actual final due date
- **Break large tasks into smaller chunks** and **record** these interim **due dates** on calendar to make the work less intimidating
- **Monitor** the students ability to execute the organizational timeline/plan and their ability to maintain accountability to the plan- break it down further into smaller bites/chunks if needed
- **Live your life out loud.** Talk to your children about your upcoming plans, calendar entries, conflicts in schedules, planning the days events, practices, cooking, packing lists, social plans, all of it...model organizational skills



# Tips for Increasing Working Memory and Recall

- **Weak attention limits the capacity of working memory and recall**
- **Disorganized students** often have **poor memories**
- Make **To Do lists**-to reduce forgetfulness
- Teach students to **preview new material** for **greater comprehension- the sooner the better**
- **Textbook Reading-SQ5R** Survey Question Read, Reflect, Recite, Review, Record (google it)
- **Daily practice, highlighting** and **review of class notes, main ideas**
- Teach **note-taking skills**
- Encourage **active learning** skills and multi-sensory learning
- Use **mnemonic** devices to aid memory retention
- **Flashcards, Quizlet** for review and practice
- Keep and learn from **old quizzes and exams** (See handout)
- Post important reminders at **Points of Performance-** externalize important information at key points-homework stations, exit doors, bedroom walls, bathrooms
- **Anchor actions by linking behaviors** ie: breakfast anchors with planner review- same time, same place will support developing habits
- **Disorganized students need external structure and routines for remembering to remember!**

# At-Home Paper Filing System

- **Everything needs a home. Everything has a place.**
- Students need to stay organized in multiple locations- classroom(s), lockers, backpacks and at home
- Teach students to **date every paper and label them clearly with HW(homework) or CW (classwork)** to save time and energy
- Help your child **create a home filing system** so they will be invested in its success
- Remind them: when **quarterlies, midterms and finals** approach they can spend time studying, not hunting and gathering
- **Be positive.** Allow your child to meet with success along the way to encourage sticking with the system

## How to File Papers for School Success

- First, **sort papers by subject** (use one subject per folder/ hanging file)
- Model sorting **chronologically for each subject** (dates on papers are key)
- At the **end of every unit, papers** can usually be **filed** (unless told otherwise)
- **Label each unit by quarter and name**, clip/staple unit and **add to subject file**
- **Include test, quizzes, review sheets, hand-outs homework and notes**
- **File** in single subject file either **chronologically or in reverse** (newest first) **by topic/unit**
- **Schedule filing time** in HW planner at the **end of each unit**

# Organizing E-Notes & Computer Files

- Teach your child to **create a folder** labeled with **subject name, grade and school year**
- **I like the Notability app for its notetaking/ highlighting features and ease of organizing files**
- Within folders **create additional sub-folders for each subject**
- Sub-folders for **each unit** should include **Class Notes, Homework, Handouts (scan or take pictures), and Projects**
- Create a **separate folder for each long term project assignment** and file **all drafts under this project folder only LABEL drafts CLEARLY**
- **Remember to be patient- support and non-judgmental supervision is needed while students develop organizational skills**
- **If they are doing it wrong, offer to brainstorm ways to fix it, they know what isn't working**
- **No criticism**
- **Be compassionate while they are developing new skills**

# Backpacks and Lockers

- **An organized backpack translates into an organized brain**
- Some students are embarrassed by the mess, but still accept help
- Others are reluctant to let you in, or to do things differently (**cognitive inflexibility**)
- Others may not see the value of organizing papers/notes (teachers do!)
- **The more involved the child is in creating the organizational system, the more likely they will consistently use it and stick to it**
- Make a list of supplies needed (planning)
- Bring your child with you to the store
- Everyone loves new school supplies, let them choose
- Purchase a locker shelf to prevent the locker black hole
- Other locker organizing accessories are available online
- Store textbooks on locker shelves by AM/PM or whatever makes sense to the child
- **Let them make decisions and choices about their space**
- Post a **checklist inside the locker** to serve as a visual reminder to reduce forgetting
- Let them know you don't expect backpack/locker to stay that way
- **Systems need to be maintained**– especially for the disorganized

# NOT “Soft Skills.” EF’s are Essential Skills

- Students need to believe they can acquire and learn organizational, planning and time management skills- They are not hopeless!
- Students need support, not criticism, in developing lagging skills
- Through specific, individualized skill development, practice and patience, academic potential can be reached!
- When we believe in them, and praise students for their efforts, success grows!

# Key Takeaways

- **Students do well when they have the skills needed to succeed**
- Students must be response-**able** to develop lagging executive function skills
- All kids start out wanting to do well in school
- **We must explicitly teach organizational skills to struggling students to prevent them from falling behind**
- Disorganization is not their fault (or yours)
- **Students who are disorganized tend to be less successful and have lower self-esteem** throughout school (and life)

**Teachers, parents and students must work together to develop lagging executive functions and organizational skills- what works for you may not work for them! Involve students in the process!**

**Be supportive, positive, non-judgmental, uncritical and kind!**

**Underneath that disorganized mess lives a child who needs our love, support and skills.**

Thanks for joining me tonight! - Marj

# How to contact me...

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- Questions and comments are always welcome!
- Available for private consultation, staff development, parent lectures and student skill workshops