

Executive Functioning Skills

The brain skills that help everyday life work a little more smoothly

Skills can feel shaky, but they can be supported.

Small steps make a big difference.

1 What is executive functioning?

Executive functioning is the set of brain-based mental skills that help us start tasks, plan, remember information, shift between activities, regulate emotions and follow through on what we want to do.

These skills help us manage our thoughts, behaviour, time and energy so we can reach our goals and navigate everyday life.



2 Eight important skills

These skills work together, and everyone's strengths and challenges can look different.



Task initiation
Getting started, especially when it feels hard.



Sustained attention
Staying focused, especially on less interesting tasks.



Working memory
Holding and using information in your mind.



Cognitive flexibility
Shifting between tasks, adapting to change and handling the unexpected.



Planning and organization
Figuring out the steps, keeping track of things and setting things up.



Inhibition / impulse control
Pausing, thinking first and managing impulses.



Time management
Estimating time, staying on track and meeting deadlines.



Emotional regulation
Noticing and managing big feelings so they don't take over.

3 How it can show up in real life

Executive functioning challenges can look different for everyone. Here are some common examples across home, school and work:



At home

- Trouble starting tasks like chores
- Messy spaces
- Forgetting steps in routines
- Losing track of time
- Feeling overwhelmed



At school

- Forgetting homework or assignments
- Difficulty following multi-step directions
- Trouble switching between subjects
- Disorganization (e.g., backpack, desk)
- Feeling stuck or shut down



At work

- Difficulty prioritizing
- Procrastination
- Missing deadlines
- Getting distracted easily
- Trouble with organization and follow through



In relationships

- Blurring things out
- Interrupting (unintentionally)
- Forgetting plans or messages
- Needing more time to respond
- Feeling bad when letting others down



Emotionally

- Feeling easily overwhelmed
- Big emotional reactions
- Difficulty calming down
- Feeling "stuck" or unmotivated
- Criticizing yourself
- Needing more time and support



During change

- Trouble with transitions
- Finding unexpected changes stressful
- Needing time to adjust
- Preferring routine and predictability

4 What helps?

These strategies can support executive functioning skills. Try what works for you!



Use visual schedules
(calendars, planners, whiteboards)



Make lists
Break tasks into smaller, doable steps.



Build routines
Consistent routines can reduce mental effort.



Use timers
Visual timers can help with focus and time awareness.



Set reminders
Use phone alarms, notifications or sticky notes.



Reduce distractions
Minimize visual and auditory distractions when possible.



Ask for support
It's okay to need help! Family, friends, teachers, colleagues or a professional.



Be flexible
Try different tools and find what works for you.

5 Important to remember

Executive functioning challenges are not a character flaw, a lack of effort or laziness. They are brain-based and very real.

Everyone's brain works differently. We all have unique strengths and areas that are more challenging.

Support works. With understanding, strategies and the right environment, life can feel easier and more manageable.

Different people need different tools. What works for one person may not work for another, and that's okay. It's about finding what helps you.

Progress looks different for everyone and it still counts.

