At a Glance:

8 Key Executive Functions

Executive functions are skills everyone uses to organize and act on information. If your child has executive functioning issues, he may struggle with some or all of the following skills.

Skill 1

Impulse Control

What it means:

Impulse control helps your child think before acting.

How it looks:

Kids with weak impulse control might blurt out inappropriate things. They're also more likely to engage in risky behavior.

Skill 2

Emotional Control

What it means:

Emotional control helps your child keep his feelings in check.

How it looks:

Kids with weak emotional control often overreact. They can have trouble dealing with criticism and regrouping when something goes wrong.

Skill 3

Flexible Thinking

What it means:

Flexible thinking allows your child to adjust to the unexpected.

How it looks:

Kids with "rigid" thinking don't roll with the punches. They might get frustrated if asked to think about something from a different angle.

Skill 4

Working Memory

What it means:

Working memory helps your child keep key information in mind.

How it looks:

Kids with weak working memory have trouble remembering directions—even if they've taken notes or you've repeated them several times.

Skill 5

Self-Monitoring

What it means:

Self-monitoring allows your child to evaluate how he's doing.

How it looks:

Kids with weak self-monitoring skills may be surprised by a bad grade or negative feedback.

Skill 6

Planning and Prioritizing

What it means:

Planning and prioritizing help your child decide on a goal and a plan to meet it.

How it looks:

Kids with weak planning and prioritizing skills may not know which parts of a project are most important.

Skill 7

Task Initiation

What it means:

Task initiation helps your child take action and get started.

How it looks:

Kids who have weak task initiation skills may freeze up because they have no idea where to begin.

Skill 8

Organization

What it means:

Organization lets your child keep track of things physically and mentally.

How it looks:

Kids with weak organization skills can lose their train of thought—as well as their cell phone and homework.

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