



**SUPPORTING EXECUTIVE
FUNCTIONING IN THE HOME**

OLIVIA FLINT

OVERVIEW

What is executive functioning?

What to expect from adolescents?

Does your child has executive dysfunction?

How can parents support executive functioning?

**JARGON WARNING– Sometimes I slip into Jargon. It is a hazard of the profession.
Please interrupt me if I am unclear or if there is something you want more
information about.**



WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING?

**“...the capacity to
control and
coordinate
thoughts and
behavior.”**

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

- Attention
- Organization and Planning
- Self Regulation




ATTENTION

- Identifying the area that most needs attention
- Directing and maintaining attention
- Switching attention
- Learning and remembering details



ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING


- Temporal and physical structuring of the world
 - Concept formation
 - Understanding contextual relevance
 - Assessing when something requires structure/problem solving
 - Following through on creating structure
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SELF REGULATION

- Emotional regulation
- Motivation



Examples of Adolescent EF Challenges

- Morning routine
 - Completing homework and long term projects
 - Communicating with teachers
 - Planning outings with friends
 - College application process
 - Learning to drive
 - Doing chores/taking an increased role in the household
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ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF ADOLESCENCE

- **Who Am i?**
 - Identity vs. Role Confusion (Erickson)

- **Time of firsts**
 - Positives: increased independence, many opportunities for mastery
 - Negatives: serious rejections & failures, understanding personal limits, risky situations

BIOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Structure of the Prefrontal Cortex changes during puberty and adolescence.

- 1.) Faster transitions of information across the neural cortex
 - Neurons in prefrontal cortex continue to be myelinated through adolescence

- 2.) Better established neural pathways in adolescence
 - Synaptic pruning
 - Loss of grey matter

Evidence that teens are less sensitive to small rewards are more sensitive to medium and large sized rewards than adults.



EF IS BOTH DEVELOPMENTAL AND LEARNED

- Children naturally improve in EF as they physically mature
- EF skills can be improved with instruction and through experience.


HEALTHY ADOLESCENT EF OUTCOME #1

- Develop a Positive identity as a “problem solver.”

“No problems, only solutions.”




HEALTHY ADOLESCENT EF OUTCOMES 2

- Ability to do something that is difficult or not immediately rewarding
 - Putting emotions aside to work on the task at hand
 - Ability to identify when something is a problem or difficult
 - Allocating attention to the problem
 - Generating plans to solve the problem
 - Accurately assessing the time needed to solve the problem
 - Following through on plan
 - Noticing if/when plan is not working
 - Regrouping and trying again
 - Learning from mistakes
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EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

WHICH ADOLESCENTS NEED MORE SUPPORT?


- Depression
 - Anxiety
 - ADHD
 - Brain injury
 - Autism Spectrum Disorders
 - Sleep Dysregulation
 - Working Memory or Processing Speed deficits
 - But all need instruction and
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SUPPORTING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING AT HOME

ALL CHILDREN NEED SUPPORT

CULTIVATE A SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP

- Parents and the home remains the child's primary learning context
 - Recent studies show that teens need parents as much as toddlers, maybe more.
 - New York Times article "Potted Plant Parents"
 - Be present in case something goes wrong.
 - Adolescents are asked to do things they haven't yet mastered.
 - We need to help them face these challenges, and not develop maladaptive avoiding/coping strategies.
 - When your child faces a problem, street them through the problem solving process.
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Modeling and encouraging problem solving

- “Lend them your frontal cortex.”
 - Let them drive the problem solving process
- Ask questions
 - “Why do you think your room is so messy.”
 - “What makes it easier for you to do some homework and not others?”
- Build in time for self-assessment, and model being reflective
- Offer strategies when asked
- When you are problem solving for personal situations, invite them to participate.
 - Family vacations
 - Shopping lists

GROWTH, MASTERY, INDEPENDENCE

- Increasing expectations and decreasing support
 - Chores
 - Homework routine
 - Scheduling appointments
 - Managing health and diet

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MASTERY

Volunteer positions

Summer camp opportunities/jobs

Ask your child what they want to learn

Chores

Household task analysis

Focus on one task/responsibility at a time

Increase responsibility

“Family chore time”

Ask for help when you need it




MANAGING MOTIVATION

- External rewards when internal motivation for a task is low or damaged.



ESTABLISH HEALTHY ROUTINES AND HABITS

- Routines simplify problem solving
 - Establish homework routines and hygiene
 - Practice good sleep hygiene
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QUESTIONS?

- Thank you so much for coming!

