

ASD Family Help

Registered Charity No. 1135718

5 Top Tips Executive Functioning Skills

Why do some people struggle so much in simple, real life judgment and reasoning? Why can they know what they are supposed to do, but struggle so much while doing it? Executive functioning is a set of cognitive processes which enables young people to set goals, organise, plan, get things done, and stay focused, while connecting past to present experiences. Executive functions are responsible for the initiation of tasks and the monitoring of action (impulse control). These processes have been associated with the front section of the brain, known as the frontal lobe. We can however, help them plan and prepare for every day life skills. Please see below our 5 top tips.

- 1. Help Them to Plan and Be Organised** – before heading out or starting something new, let them know where, how long and what will be happening. A step by step guide can sometimes help. Make it visual as our young people can often have short term memory or easily get distracted. Check lists, task strips can help. You can make these as visual charts or put them on their phones. Use timers or text them as an aid to support them. Colour code items and take photos of completed work/areas.
- 2. Teach them about being flexible** – Sometimes things change and we may have to change the way we are doing something to make it work. This can be difficult for our young people. Try and show them different ways of doing things, avoid if you can always doing something the same way, teach sometimes good enough is ok. Practice making mistakes, model recovery. Play games around what else can it be? Make up new rules for games.
- 3. Practice working on their working memory** – This supports them to follow instructions, remember what needs to be done and not to become distracted! Write things down, use post it notes or voice recordings. Use visuals to label and structure tasks. Use comic strip conversations (please contact us to learn more). Play games to improve their memory skills – card matching, Kim's game, I went to the market etc.
- 4. Support their Attention and Emotion Regulation Skills** – This can be a difficult area and will take time. Be aware of their sensory difficulties and put the sensory tools in place (look at our top tips for sensory to learn more) to support their processing and attention skills. They may become upset if a mistake is made, and find it hard to manage impulsive actions and anxiety. Learning to understand feelings, explaining and acting on these feelings correctly again will take time. We do run workshops to support this.
- 5. Teach them to Stop and Think** – they can sometimes act too quickly. Help them to learn and breathe. Link into Prepare and Plan/ being Organised. Lay out Rules – define boundaries before an event. Do things together to start with and then slowly pull away. Stop and check to see how things are going, are they staying on track. Once a task is finished talk about how it went.

In conclusion, in order to support our children's executive functioning skills, we need to preview what is expected ahead of time, provide them a concrete path to follow, coach them down the path, and then help them evaluate how they did.

Stop Think Plan Do