

Executive Function Needs: A Checklist for Teachers

Completed by families to help identify the specific supports that fit their child

Executive function skills (planning, organizing, starting tasks, holding information in mind, shifting between ideas, managing time, and regulating emotion) are still developing well into a person's twenties. A child who struggles with these skills isn't lacking motivation; the neural systems that support them are still under construction. Reviewing our checklist with your child's teacher can help target support to address what's getting in the way.

Check All That Apply

Not every child needs each strategy listed. Check only what applies and use the matching strategies as a starting point for conversation.

Getting Started

- ☐ Struggles to begin tasks even when the material is understood
- ☐ Needs several reminders to start homework or classwork
- ☐ Freezes or avoids when a task feels overwhelming

Strategies that may help:

Chunked instructions with visible steps; graphic organizers and planning templates; a designated check-in point for reviewing what's due

Organization and Materials

- ☐ Loses or misplaces assignments, books, or supplies
- ☐ Desk, locker, or binder is difficult to keep organized
- ☐ Loses track of what has and hasn't been submitted

Strategies that may help:

Graphic organizers and planning templates; a designated check-in point for reviewing what's due and submitted; visual or written checklists

Time Management

- ☐ Underestimates how long tasks will take
- ☐ Misses deadlines despite understanding the material
- ☐ Struggles to pace work during in-class assignments or tests

Strategies that may help:

Chunked assignments with visible steps; extra processing time for multi-step directions; extended time where appropriate

Working Memory

- ☐ Forgets multi-step instructions partway through
- ☐ Loses track of what they were doing after an interruption
- ☐ Needs to be told things more than once

Strategies that may help:

Extra processing time for multi-step directions; chunked, visible steps; written or visual reminders rather than verbal instructions alone

Flexibility and Transitions

- ☐ Has difficulty shifting between subjects or activities
- ☐ Gets stuck on one approach even when it isn't working
- ☐ Struggles with unexpected changes to routine

Strategies that may help:

Advance notice before transitions or schedule changes; predictable, consistent routines

Emotional Regulation

- ☐ Becomes frustrated or shuts down when work feels hard
- ☐ Shows visible stress around deadlines or evaluations
- ☐ Avoids or refuses tasks that feel unmanageable

Strategies that may help:

Scheduled movement breaks during class, tests, or exams; a quiet space to regulate or test in, separate from the classroom

Sustained Attention

- ☐ Difficulty staying focused for extended periods
- ☐ Easily distracted during independent work
- ☐ Work quality drops off toward the end of longer tasks

Strategies that may help:

Scheduled movement breaks; a quiet testing environment; chunked assignments with visible steps

Written Output

- ☐ Knows the content but struggles to get it into written form
- ☐ Written work doesn't reflect what they understand verbally

Strategies that may help:

Assistive technology such as speech-to-text or audio recording (legally permitted in Canadian classrooms without special permission); graphic organizers for written work

Note: *a modified curriculum is generally not a useful accommodation for executive function needs, since it limits a student's progress and future academic options. The strategies above work by reducing the load of the task itself, not by reducing what the student is expected to learn.*

Sources

[Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University — Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System](#)

[CHADD — Coaching for ADHD](#)

This handout is intended as a general guide and does not replace individualized advice from your child's assessment team or school board.