

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Executive Functioning Skills

...Continued...

Organization – The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials.

Organization Tendencies:

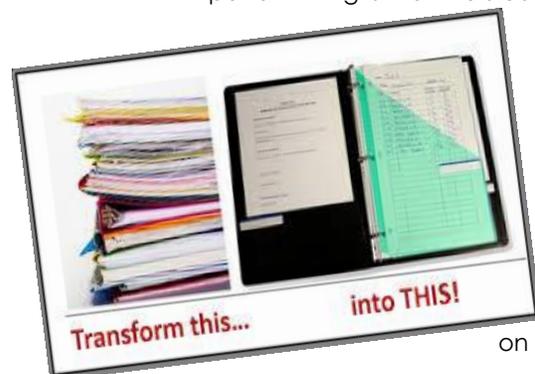
- Loses needed papers, books, and other materials
- Does not return homework assignments to school
- Does not return items to their previous location

Organization Scenario: *When his mom asked John if she could borrow his calculator, he told her it was in his backpack. When looking in his backpack, she found, not the calculator, but such a mess that she thought a natural disaster had occurred, including the homework assignments that John's math teacher stated were never turned in, the permission slip for the class field trip that was due two months ago, and a notice to parents requesting help with the schools fall festival (which took place six months ago).*

Organization Strategies:

- Binder systems

- Color coded materials
- Planners and calendars
 - There is no "one-size fits all" approach to creating organization systems. The important thing is that the student learns a



system that is easy to use and allows them to organize, store, and retrieve

paperwork on time

Time Management – The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important.

Time Management Tendencies:

- Frequently need to rush through their homework
- Difficulty estimating how long it will take to complete a task
- Spends more time procrastinating than working
- Performs poorly on timed tests

Time Management Scenario: Ray's mother woke him up early to finish an assignment he was unable to



complete the night before. She told him that he had an extra thirty minutes before the bus would arrive. Ray decided to get ready for school first, by the time he was dressed and ready he had only 5 minutes to complete his assignment. Ray's mother was frustrated that he had wasted time during his morning routine.

Time Management Strategies:

- Maintain a daily to-do list
- Reward effective time management
- Assist/teach the student to prioritize their to-do list
- Keep track of how long it takes to complete routines and challenge them to beat their record
- Teach test taking strategies such as answering all the questions they know before spending time on more difficult questions.

Goal Directed Persistence – The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal, and not be put off by or distracted by competing interests. This area of executive functioning intertwines with several of the other executive functions, such as organization, planning, working memory, sustained attention, and impulse control.

Goal Directed Persistence Tendencies:

- Has many ideas but doesn't follow through with them
- Abandons projects in the middle of them
- Struggles to complete multi-step projects on time
- Doesn't have goals
- Requires more redirection than typically would be expected

Goal Directed Persistence Scenario: Jack is a freshman in college. Jack wants to go to medical school after completing his undergraduate degree. Jack's core goal is to get accepted into a prestigious medical school. His short-term goals, or stepping stones to his core goal (long-term goal) include: GPA = 4.0, taking his MCATS within 2 years, and volunteering a minimum of 50 hours at his local hospital.

Goal Directed Persistence Strategies:

- Teach your child to set goals, write them down, and track progress
 - ✓ Make a detailed plan
 - ✓ Envision the final state
 - ✓ Set up rewards along the way, not just for the final outcome
 - ✓ Schedule time to work on your goal
 - ✓ Evaluate the plan and make changes along the way
 - ✓ Seek help if needed
 - ✓ Set a time limit for achieving the goal

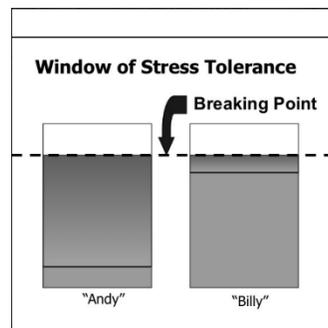


Stress Tolerance – The ability to thrive in stressful situations and to cope with uncertainty, change, and performance demands.

Stress Tolerance Tendencies:

- Overreacts emotionally
- Can't inhibit his/her emotions
- Emotionally impulsive; quick to show feelings
- Struggles to walk away from emotionally upsetting situations
- Becomes unreasonable once they are emotional

Stress Tolerance Scenario: *Each one of us have a certain level of stress from which we operate, as well as a point at which we reach complete overwhelm; where we essentially "blow". The figure on the right shows the difference between 2 students' stress windows. When a student has a large window of stress tolerance, he has the ability to function in life and at school. Andy can navigate his way through his academic day with ease and flexibility. However, Billy has a very small window. He lives only moments away from his breaking point.*



Stress Tolerance Strategies:

- Find opportunity in the challenge
- Look at the bigger picture
- Build in recovery time

Now what?

If you think that your child may be struggling with executive functioning skills the good news is research shows that these skills CAN BE taught! As with academics skills, teaching these skills will take time. We don't jump from counting to algebra in one year! Our suggestion would be pick the skill that is causing the most difficulty for you and your child within the home setting and possibly the skill that is causing the most difficulty in school. Spend time working on these one or two skills and be mindful of **TEACHING** to your goal. The following principles for improving executive functioning skills were taken from the book "Smart But Scattered" by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare.

1. Teach deficient skills rather than expecting the child to acquire them through observation or osmosis.
2. Consider your child's developmental level.
3. Move from the external (adult support) to the internal (independence).
4. Remember that the external includes changes you can make in the environment, the task, or the way you interact with your child.
5. Use rather than fight the child's innate drive for mastery and control.
6. Modify tasks to match your child's capacity to exert effort.
7. Use incentives to augment instruction.
8. Provide just enough support for the child to be successful.
9. Keep supports and supervision in place until the child achieves mastery or success.
10. When you do stop the supports, supervision, and incentives, fade them gradually, never abruptly.

Reminders:

1. We would like to send out the newsletters via e-mail, please email Jill Yost at jyost@bric.k12.mn.us to be added or taken off the e-mail list.

E-mail addresses will be confidential when newsletters are sent.

2. All the newsletters will be available on the BRIC website, <http://www.bric-k12.com/> look under the "Resources and Services" dropdown then click on "parent resources".