

UNDERSTANDING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

By Dr. Kate Aubrey, Clinical Psychologist

Executive functions are a set of mental skills that help you get things done. These skills are controlled by an area of the brain called the frontal cortex (the region behind your forehead).

Kids with ADHD have weak executive function skills and this is what impacts their attention and concentration. Here's a brief look at the different executive functions and the skills they impact.

3 EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

1. Working Memory

The mental sticky note we use to keep track of information until we need to use it. A child will use this skill to read a passage, hold on to the information, and use it to answer questions. It's important for both learning and doing many everyday tasks.



2. Flexible Thinking

Being able to think about something in more than one way. The ability to switch gears and look at things differently. A child might use this skill to answer a math questions in two ways or find relationships between concepts.



3. Self-Control

The ability resist impulsive urges and ignore distractions. A child might use this skill to stop them from blurting out an answer in class. It helps kids regulate their emotions and keeps them from acting in impulsive ways, such as hitting or yelling.



Executive Function is responsible for these 5 skills:

1. **Paying attention:** Ability to maintain focus on a task, even when not very interested.
2. **Organization and planning:** Keeping track of time and belongings, making plans.
3. **Initiating tasks:** Knowing how to approach a task and shifting between tasks.
4. **Regulating emotions:** Controlling arousal and behaviour during challenging situations.
5. **Self-monitoring and reflection:** Keeping track of what you are doing.



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