



Chasing a
Child's Potential

IMPROVING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING IN THE CLASSROOM – PART 2



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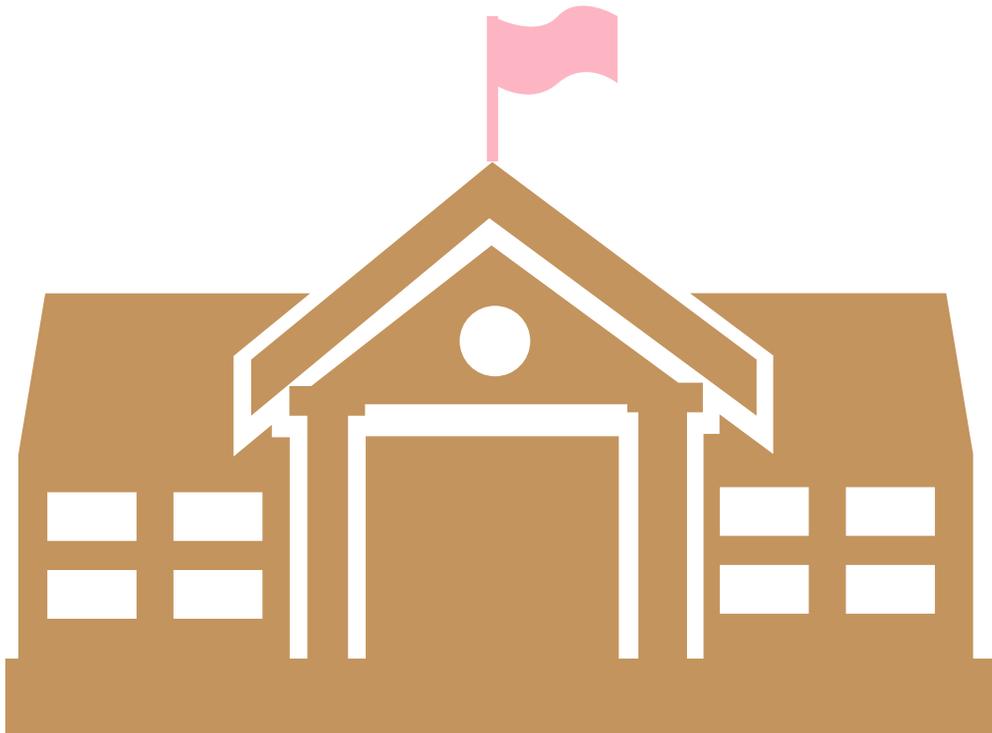


Improving Executive Functioning in the Classroom – Part 2

Here are five ways we can help students who need more support with executive functioning. Students develop executive functions at different rates. In a typical classroom there will be students who are advanced and doing well, whereas other students need more support and for a longer period of time than their age-mates. It's important to recognize those students who need more support and provide them with what they need.

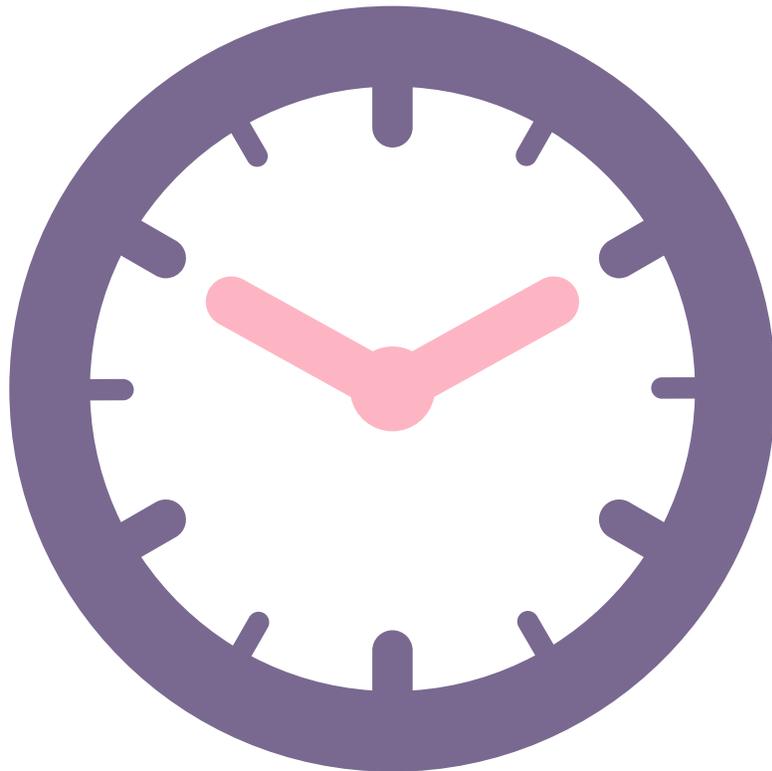
These five strategies include:

1. Make time concrete
2. Break down big projects into separate, smaller steps
3. Find out what motivates these children and use it
4. Make learning concrete
5. Teach new information slowly and clearly



Make time concrete

Time is a pretty abstract concept and not easy for many students to grasp. If you can, translate time into a language children understand. It will help them to learn how to manage and control themselves. You might explain to them about an upcoming assembly by saying "It'll be as long as two TV shows." If they are wondering when their turn is, tell them to "Sing happy birthday three times." That will help them understand the passage of time and make it more concrete. Another helpful way is to time them doing various things. For example, let them know what three minutes playing with Legos feels like, or have them read quietly for ten minutes and let them know how much time has passed. Another option is to provide clocks, be they digital or analog, all over the environment so students are able to look up at the clock regularly and see how much time has passed.





Break down big projects into separate, smaller steps

The second way is to break down big projects into separate, smaller steps. We may not think anything about telling students to do a worksheet, but that could be pretty overwhelming. So you may want to give them more specific instructions such as, "Do numbers one through five, and then come show me what you've done." Rather than tell a student to clean out his or her desk, we can make it much more specific by saying, "Throw away your old papers and then come and check with me before we move on to the next step." So rather than giving students one large project to finish, break it down into smaller steps and give them a high five when they finish each of those smaller steps.



Find out what motivates them and use it

The third way is to find what motivates your students and use it. Students are motivated by different things. For one student it may be getting an A on a report card is what gets him going, but for another student, time on her video game system is what she enjoys. For both students, if they have a paper to do, student number one might not need any extra support, but student two may need her work tied to the motivator of interest. In other words, she gets time on her video games when she finishes her paper.

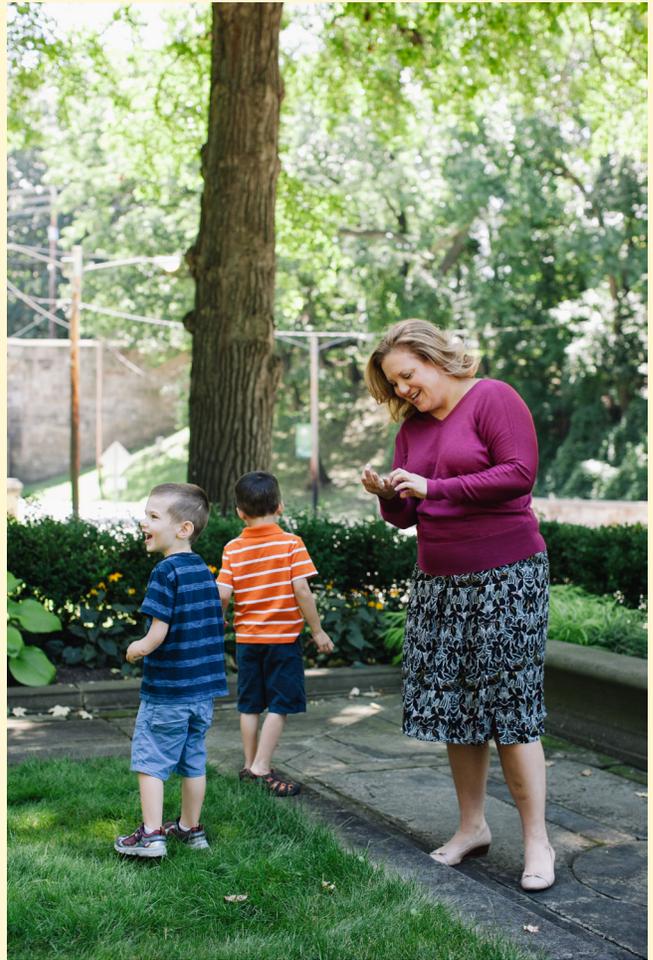
Find out what motivates them and use it (continued)

Some students, especially those who are older, don't understand why the concepts they are being taught are important or relevant. There are some students with whom I have actually sat and explained very directly how these concepts in school apply to what they want to be as grown ups. For example, how the math they are learning today is going to help them own a clothing store in the future. Not everyone is motivated the same way by good grades, but it is possible to get to know your students, understand what motivates them and use that to help them achieve throughout the school year.



Make learning concrete

The fourth way is to make learning concrete. What I mean by that is, take abstract concepts and make them manual and tangible for students. Allow them to count beans when they're learning about addition, or have them play with money if they are learning about coins. We do that regularly with younger kids, but there are many ways to do that with older students as well. We can learn about the digestive system by coloring a diagram. We can learn about the circulatory system through dissections. We can learn about the solar system through making 3-D models.



Make learning concrete (continued)

Another example is to have students act out vocabulary words so they can have a real world feeling of what “proud” might feel like, for example. For many students, acting it out makes it concrete for them. There are lots of ways we can make learning concrete so students can have a real world experience with these concepts. The possibilities are endless, and the internet is full of ideas.

A B C



Teach new information slowly and clearly

The fifth way is to teach new information slowly and clearly. Students need explicit explanations the first time they are learning something new. If you are introducing a new concept to your students, be sure to provide ample opportunity for practice while you are watching students trying the new skill. This way you can give them feedback right away. It is very important the information be explained to them clearly, slowly and explicitly, and that students are able to ask questions when they need to. This is difficult in an environment and world that are really pushing for a quicker instructional pace, but I can't stress to you enough how important it is to teach new concepts slowly and clearly.

Closing

If you are faced with a student who struggles with executive functioning, remember there are things you can do. Make time concrete, break down big projects into small steps, find out what motivates them and use it, make it concrete and teach new information slowly and clearly. I'm sure you'll find these strategies helpful as you and your students are out there, chasing a child's potential.



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