



Smart but Scattered: Executive Skill Building to Help Kids Reach Their Potential

smartbutscatteredkids.com

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Executive Skills that Underlie School Success

Foundational Skills

- Response Inhibition
- Working Memory
- Emotional Control
- Flexibility
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation

Advanced Skills

- Planning/Prioritizing
- Organization
- Time Management
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Metacognition

Response inhibition



The capacity to think before you act – this ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it.

Working Memory



The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future

Emotional Control



The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.

Flexibility



The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information or mistakes. It relates to an adaptability to changing conditions.

Sustained Attention



The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.

Task Initiation



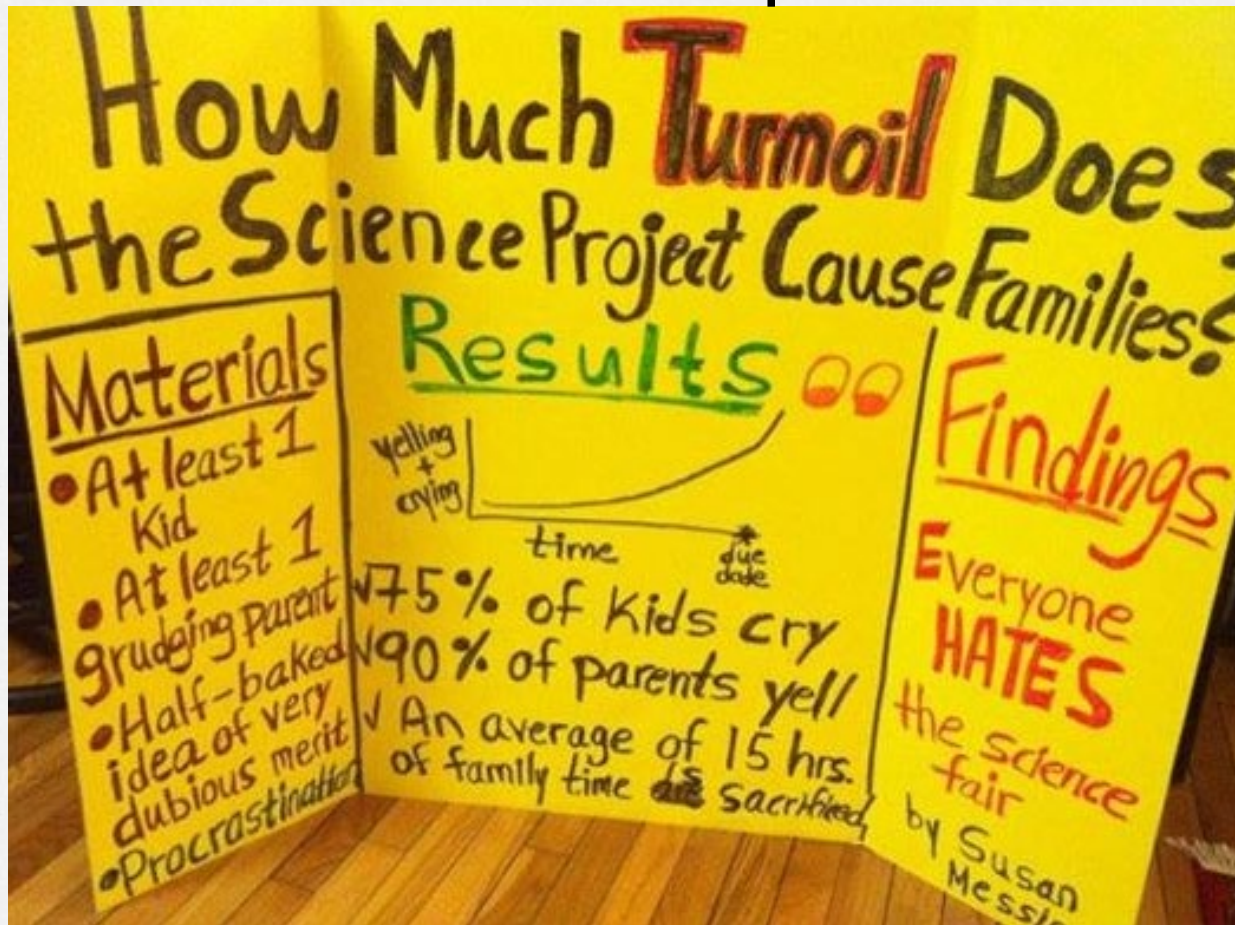
The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.

Planning/Prioritizing



The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important.

Planning is a skill that takes time to develop



Organization



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

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.

Goal-Directed Persistence

The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal and not be put off or distracted by competing interests.

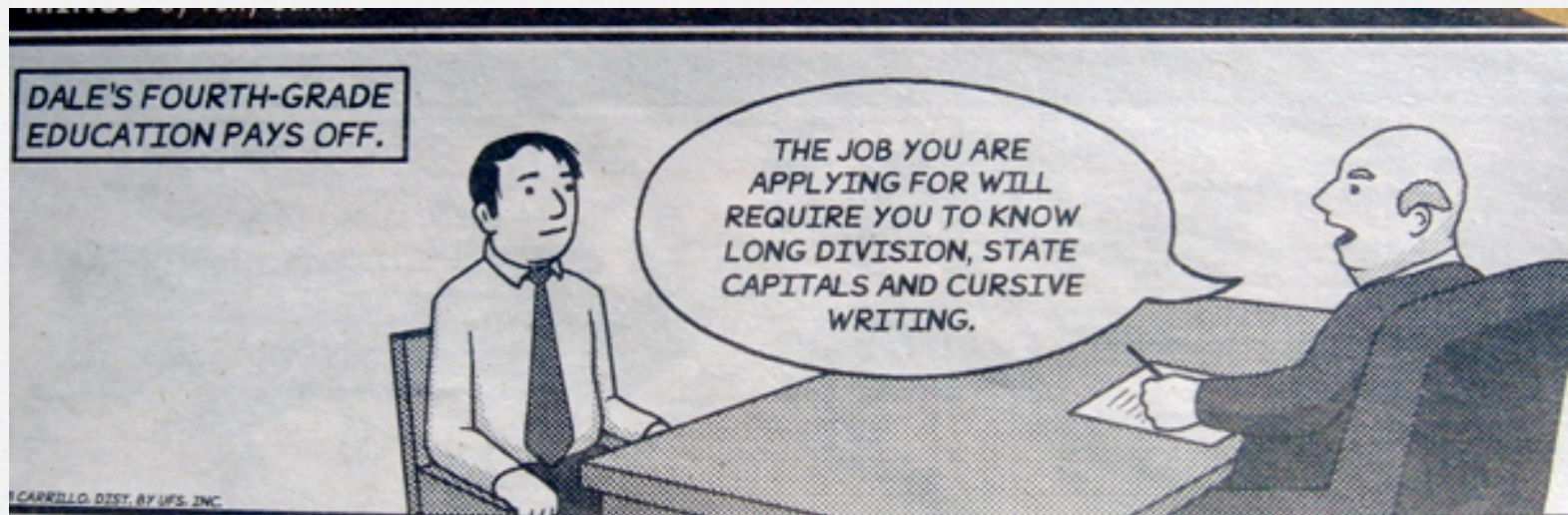


Metacognition



The ability to stand back and take a birds-eye view of oneself in a situation. It is an ability to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self-monitoring and self-evaluative skills (e.g., asking yourself, “How am I doing? or How did I do?”).

Why is it important to help kids develop executive skills?





<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/09/15/health/20080915-brain-development.html>

What Do Executive Skill Weaknesses Look Like in Students?

- Acts without thinking
- Interrupts others
- Overreacts to small problems
- Upset by changes in plans
- Overwhelmed by large assignments
- Talks or plays too loudly
- Resists change of routine
- Doesn't notice impact of behavior on others
- Doesn't see their behavior as part of the issue
- Easily overstimulated and has trouble calming down
- Gets stuck on one topic or activity
- Gets overly upset about "little things"
- Out of control more than peers
- Can't come up with more than one way to solve a problem
- Low tolerance for frustration
- Acts wild or out of control

What Do Executive Skill Weaknesses Look Like in Students?

- Doesn't bother to write down assignment
- Forgets directions
- Forgets to bring materials home
- Keeps putting off homework
- Runs out of steam before finishing work
- Chooses "fun stuff" over homework or chores
- Passive study methods (or doesn't study)
- Forgets homework/forgets to pass it in
- Leaves long-term assignments or chores until last minute
- Can't break down long-term assignments
- Sloppy work
- Messy notebooks
- Loses or misplaces things (books, papers, notebooks, mittens, keys, cell phones, etc.)
- Can't find things in backpack

What Do Executive Skill Weaknesses Look Like in Younger Students (K-2)?

- Forgets directions
- Forgets to bring materials back and forth between home and school
- Runs out of steam before finishing work
- Chooses “fun stuff” over homework or chores
- Leaves a trail of belongings wherever he/she goes
- Sloppy work
- Loses or misplaces things (books, papers, permission slips, mittens, lunch money, etc.)
- Messy desk/cubby areas/backpack
- Leaves a “paper trail” — scattered around the room

What's the population we're talking about?

What concerns you most about this pupil?

That he is lazy and not working his potential.

Please describe the best things about this pupil:

He is sweet and has a good sense of humor.

A better way...

Instead of calling students this:

- Lazy
- Unmotivated
- Not working to potential
- Disruptive
- Oppositional
- Messy
- Tardy
- Forgetful
- Absent-minded
- Lacking a work ethic

Describe them as having challenges in this:

- Task initiation
- Sustained attention
- Response inhibition
- Emotional control
- Flexibility
- Organization
- Time management
- Working memory
- Goal-directed persistence

There are 3 primary ways parents and teachers can help kids with weak executive skills:

1. Change the environment to reduce the impact of weak executive skills.
2. Teach the youngster executive skills.
3. Use incentives to get youngsters to use skills that are hard for them.

Ways to modify the environment

1. Change the physical or social environment
2. Modify the tasks we expect children to perform
3. Change the way adults interact with kids.

Examples of environmental modifications

- Manage distractions
- Modify tasks (shorten them, build in breaks, create a schedule, build in choice)
- Give advance warning when something changes
- Use visual cues (rather than verbal “nags”)

Use Visual Cues

MONTH: February 2019

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					ELA STUDY HALL SCIENCE SS AUX P.E. HOMEWORK	1 2
3	4 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	5 ELA STUDY HALL SCIENCE AUX SS HOMEWORK	6 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	7 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	8 ELA STUDY HALL SCIENCE SS AUX P.E. HOMEWORK	9
10	11 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	12 ELA STUDY HALL SCIENCE AUX SS HOMEWORK	13 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	14 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	15 ELA STUDY HALL SCIENCE SS AUX P.E. HOMEWORK	16
17 Winter School Break Week	18 No School	19 No School	20 No School	21 No School	22 No School	23
24 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	25 ELA STUDY HALL SCIENCE AUX SS HOMEWORK	26 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	27 ALGEBRA ADVISORY SPANISH ART P.E. HOMEWORK	28 March ELA STUDY HALL SCIENCE SS AUX P.E. HOMEWORK	1 March	2

CHECK

- ☐ EMAIL
- ☐ Google Classroom
- ☐ TEACHER Websites
- ☐ BACKPACK PAPERS
- ☐ Do Homework

2019

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Gorham High School Midterm Exam Schedule

Proficiency Score	AJ	Sz
4		
3.75		
3.5		
3.25		
3		
2.75		
2.5		

Tuesday, January 22

7:50 - 9:20 Block 1 - ALGEBRA
9:35 - 11:05 Block 2 - SPANISH
12:00 - 1:30 Make Up

Wednesday, January 23

7:50 - 9:20 Block 3 - ART
9:35 - 11:05 Block 4 - SCIENCE

Thursday, January 24

7:50 - 9:20 Block 5 - ELA
9:35 - 11:05 Block 6 - SCIENCE
12:00 - 1:30 Make Up

Friday, January 25

7:50 - 9:20 Block 7 - SCIENCE

Effective Praise

1. Is delivered immediately after the positive behavior.
2. Specifies the particulars of the accomplishment (*I appreciate you loading the dishwasher without my having to bug you about it*).
3. Communicates the value of the accomplishment (*I know you didn't want to watch your sister after school, but it really got me out of a bind at work—thanks for helping out*).
4. Lets the child know you saw him working hard to accomplish the task (*Your brother was pushing your buttons, but you worked hard to keep your temper in check*).
5. Orients the child to appreciate her ability to problem solve or use other executive skills (*I like the way you thought about that and figured out a good solution to the problem*).

TEACH deficient skills

Don't expect the child to acquire executive skills through observation or osmosis.

BEDTIME ROUTINE

Task	Number of reminders Tally marks (////)	Done (✓)
Pick up toys		
Make sure backpack is ready for school		
Make a list of anything you have to remember to do tomorrow		
Get clothes ready for next day		
Put on pajamas		
Wash face or bathe		
Brush teeth		

From *Smart but Scattered* by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare. Copyright 2009 by The Guilford Press.

Jack's Clean Room Checklist

My Clean Desk



- ☒ garbage is cleared and thrown away
- ☒ desk items are placed in the appropriate drawers

My Clean Bed



- ☒ bed is made (sheets and pillows in place, blanket spread evenly)

My Clean Shelves



- ☒ toiletries are put away
- ☒ clothes are folded and in correct place
- ☒ shirts are on hangers

My Clean Floor



- ☒ dirty laundry is picked up and in the hamper
- ☒ all other items have been put away
- ☒ garbage has been thrown out
- ☒ there is nothing on the floor

Introduction to the History of Computing

STUDY PLAN

Date: _____

[illegible]

Use incentives to augment instruction.

Incentives make both the effort of learning a skill and the effort of performing a task less aversive.

Furthermore, putting an incentive after a task teaches delayed gratification.

Simple Incentives

- Give the child something to look forward to doing when the effortful task is done (we call that Grandma's Law).
- Alternate between preferred and non-preferred activities (use simple language: First...then, e.g., *First work, then play*).
- Build in frequent, short breaks (depending on the child's attention span, breaks could come every 10 minutes and last 5 minutes).
- Use specific praise to reinforce the use of executive skills.

Key Strategies for Parents to Use (the biggest bang for the buck)

- Keep tasks and chores brief or build in breaks.
- Give your child something to look forward to when the effortful task is done.
- Build in choice whenever possible.
- Use lists and checklists as reminders.
- Build in routines.

How can we work with kids to get them to use their own executive skills?

- Ask children to reflect on their own performance, **especially when they are successful** (What worked for you today? Why do you think it worked?)
- Use questions to get them to use *their* executive skills (What's your plan? Do you have a strategy for that? What's your goal? How long do you think that will take?)

How can we work with kids to get them to use their own executive skills?

- When problems arise, share your observations in a nonjudgmental way (I noticed you....What can we do about that?).
- Brainstorm strategies. Together with the child, make a list of possible strategies. Ask the child to pick one, and then make a game plan for trying it out.

Keep your eye on the biggest prize: building goal-directed persistence!

- Model this yourself—if your child sees you persisting over time to achieve a goal, that can make an impression.
- Help him/her set and achieve little goals—they add up over time.
- Praise effort— “Wow, you stuck with it!” “You figured it out.” “I can’t believe how hard you worked for that!”
- Emphasize your *child’s* goals, not yours.

I already used some of the tips you offered regarding emotional control with my daughter last night as we worked on her language assignment. We set the timer, took breaks, got a drink of water, and when she really started to freak out I asked her to "make a plan" and I thought of your daughter-in-law and smiled!

Estimating how long it will take to do the assignment and then doing it in less time than she thought made my daughter feel sooo proud. When it was all done I praised her ability to self regulate and her effort to stick with it even when it wasn't going the way she wanted (especially when I too wanted to freak out, yell and quit - smile).

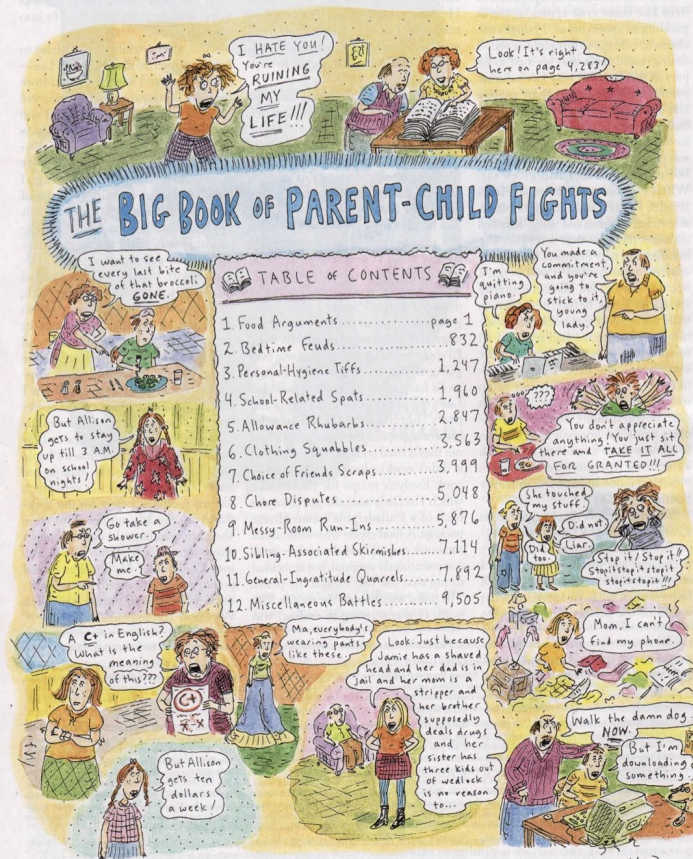
~Mary Haggerty, Guelph, Ontario

“Human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them rather than to them or for them.”

~Ted Wachtel
International Institute for
Restorative Practices

Q & A

THE BACK PAGE BY ROZ CHAST JANUARY 11, 1999



Tips for working with teenagers

As a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much he had learned in 7 years.

~Mark Twain

Tips for working with teenagers

- Pick your battles.
- Use natural or logical consequences.
- Make access to privileges contingent on performance.
- Be willing to negotiate (make deals!)
- If something is non-negotiable, ask this question: What will it take for you to go along?
- Involve others when you can (tutors, teachers, guidance counselors, coaches).
- Build in verification.

Tips for working with teenagers

- Understand that everybody has to work harder (parents, teachers, student).
- Work on positive communication skills.

Communication Strategies

If your family does this...	Try to do this instead:
Call each other names.	Express anger without hurt.
Put each other down.	“I am angry that you did _____”
Interrupt each other.	Take turns; keep it short.
Criticize too much.	Point out the good and bad.
Get defensive	Listen, then calmly disagree.
Lecture.	Tell it straight and short.
Talk in sarcastic tone.	Talk in normal tone.
Dredge up the past.	Stick to the present.
Read others’ minds.	Ask others’ opinions.
Command, order.	Request nicely.
Give the silent treatment.	Say what’s bothering you.
Make light of something.	Take it seriously.

From *ADHD in Adolescents: Diagnosis and Treatment* by Arthur L. Robin. Copyright 1998 by The Guilford Press.

Tips for working with teenagers

- Seek help if you need it--therapists often act as 3rd party mediators that help parents and teenagers communicate better.
- Set goals that are realistic--sometimes the best you can do is keep your kids “in the game” until their frontal lobes mature enough for them to take over.

Strategies for Building Executive Skills

Task initiation (getting started). Have your child—

- Make a plan; put it in writing and tell someone what your plan is.
- Stick to a routine--start your homework at the same time every day whenever you can.
- Start with the easiest task--or have him/her work on a hard task for only a short time before switching to something else.
- Figure out when your child's high energy times are and work then.

Strategies for Building Executive Skills

Sustained Attention (sticking with something long enough to finish).

- Give your child something to look forward to when you're done.
- If it takes more than 30 minutes to do, build in brief breaks to do something fun (e.g., play 1 level on a video game).
- Switch off between several tasks so your child doesn't have time to get too bored with any one.
- Teach your child to use self-talk to motivate himself/herself ("You can't walk away from this").

Strategies for Building Executive Skills

Working memory (keeping track of everything you need to keep track of). Help your child—

- Find a memory aid that works for him or her (assignment book, subject notebook, smart phone apps, post-its, writing on the back of your hand).
- Create a checklist of things he/she need to remember to bring to school or bring home .
- Put stuff by the front door where the child will trip over it.
- Find someone or something to remind him/her of what needs to be remembered.

Strategies for Building Executive Skills

Time management (getting done everything that needs to get done). Help your child—

- Make a written plan; decide when you plan to start each task on your plan.
- Estimate how long it will take you to do something (and then compare your estimate to the actual time).
- Take advantage of small periods of “down time.”
- Figure out what the common distractions are and try to get away from them.