Teaching Time Management at Home

by Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed.

Teachers often hear, "My child... never finishes his/her homework before bedtime... lives in the moment... puts things off until the last minute... is always late getting ready for school... never gets to practice on time... completes one assignment and doesn't finish any others. Why?" There may be several reasons. Some students are able to come home, finish homework, complete school projects, or practice piano lessons, *and* pack their book bags for the next school day – unassisted. Then, there are others, especially those who have weaknesses in processing or executive functioning skills, whose lack of time-management skills affects their success both in and out of school.
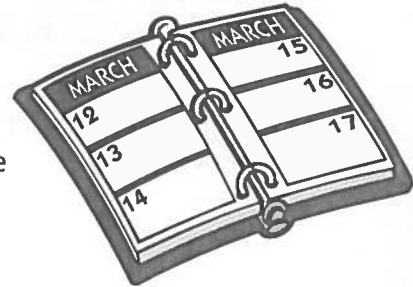
Children spend as many as seven hours a day at school and some as many as four more hours in after-school care and/or participating in after-school activities. Once arriving at home for the evening, there may be projects and homework to complete, more lessons to practice, etc. Should teachers teach time-management skills? **Yes!** Even if some students manage their time well, teachers should incorporate, directly and indirectly, simple time management strategies in the daily curriculum. Then, parents should help their children follow through with those strategies at home.

Tips for Time Management at Home

Time-management skills must transition from school to home. Use the following strategies to help your children continue learning and understanding the importance of time-management skills.

- **Provide a clock or visual timer for your children as early as preschool and help them gauge their time spent on tasks.** Some visual timers display time increments in color. As time passes, the colored section disappears. You can also use a sand timer. The child is able to "see" how much time is left. Use timers for bath time, dressing time, or TV time, and for homework. Set times should be appropriate for the age and ability of the child.

- **Give your children some "down time" before "homework time."** Provide a healthy snack of fruit or crunchy, raw vegetables and dip or crackers and cheese to give your children a boost of energy in order to push through another hour or so of "school."

- **Teach increments of time to early learners by relating a period of time they are familiar with to their time on a task(s).** For example, "You have thirty minutes. That is as much time as it takes us to get to Grandma's house."

- **Provide a quiet place, free from TV or other distractions, that is stocked with school supplies where your children can sit and work without interruption.** Set a clock/timer for an increment of time appropriate for the child's age and ability. Adjust times accordingly if you see that the "time's up!" factor is stressful. Allow them to have more time if time is not being wasted or interrupted.

- **Monitor homework assignments daily.** Guide your children in prioritizing lengthier or more challenging assignments first. If your child has an IEP (Individualized Education Program), ask the special education teacher for guidance as to how much time your child needs or should spend on assignments. Some students with IEPs have accommodations suggesting time increments for completing homework assignments. Some students may have a reduction in the amount of work assigned (e.g., writing 5 sentences with spelling words rather than 10). Ask your child's teacher for the strategies that work best for him/her while working in school.

- **Keep expectations for completing work at home the same as those in school.** Use your children's planners/agendas to keep open and consistent communication with their teachers.
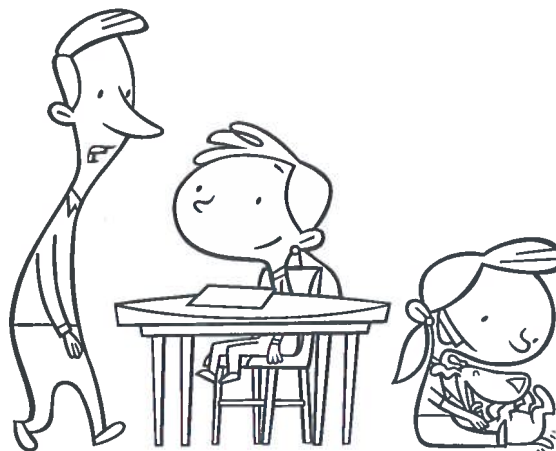
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Executive Functions—Something to *Think* About

by Julie A. Daymut, M.A., CCC-SLP

Executive functions are thoughts that we carry out or "execute" as actions in order to reach a goal. Another name for executive functions is *critical-thinking skills.* Our brains control our executive functioning. Executive functions include skills such as "maintaining attention, controlling impulses, keeping free of distractions, engaging in mental planning and problem solving, maintaining flexibility, time management, setting priorities, organizing, and executing a task" (Geffner, 2007, slide 2). Difficulty with any of these abilities can cause academic problems as well as problems with everyday life tasks. Terms for such difficulties are *executive dysfunction* or *executive function disorders.*

Academic Difficulties Related to Executive Functions

Focus, attention, and memory help us to carry out executive functions. In the school setting, a child with executive-functioning problems may...*not turn in* assignments, *miss* parts of assignments, *forget* to take home books, *forget* to write down important information, *not follow* a logical order when completing a task, *not finish* work on time, *not seek out* needed information, *have difficulty* solving problems, *delay* initiating projects, *not be able to monitor* progress, *not plan* next steps, *be unable* to revise plans, *not manage* several tasks at a time, and more. The classroom teacher and any specialists, such as a speech-language pathologist, can work with the child to help him/her learn and use strategies to improve executive functioning.

Strategies to Help a Child Who Has Difficulty with Executive Functions

Each child is unique with his/her own strengths and challenges, and certain teaching techniques and compensatory strategies may benefit one child more than another. Provide support and assistance as the child needs it, and let him/her be increasingly responsible for organizing his/her thoughts and actions. Acknowledge a child's attempts to initiate behaviors, complete tasks, and then self-evaluate performance. By recognizing these efforts, you are helping the child learn and grow as well as become more independent!

Below are some examples of strategies to help a child who has difficulty with executive functions.

In School:

Use timers. Help a child monitor and manage time by having timers in the classroom. Sand timers or *Time Timers* are great ways to let a child "see" how much time is left to complete an assignment, task, or test. Audio timers can beep when time is almost up (five minutes left, for example).

Display to-do lists. Write a daily outline on the board to visually show the structure of the school day. Include subjects and times (e.g., Art – 10:15-11:15).

Provide organizational tools. For example, have a child keep different colored homework folders together — *red* = due tomorrow, *yellow* = due this week, *green* = due in the future.

Encourage self-responsibility. Ask questions to a child to help him/her focus on a task. Have the child generate his/her own questions to extend what you've already asked. Ask the child to come up with a plan and follow through with it. Use a checklist to do this.

At Home:

Keep a "reminder" calendar. Mark important dates with specific times and places. You can color code the calendar (e.g., doctor's appointments are *red,* sports practices are *blue,* etc.).

Provide organized storage. Have labeled bins for keeping things in their places (e.g., *yellow* bins are for toys, *green* bins are for art supplies, *blue* bins are for sports equipment, etc.).

Give praise and feedback. For example, when your child completes an executive-function task, like pre-planning, you can say: "I like how you put your homework in your homework folder" or "I like how you made yourself a note to put your homework folder in your book bag at the end of the school day."

Help your child "think through" a problem or project. Ask questions about the problem/ project and have your child answer them. Then see if he/she can come up with questions on his/ her own. For example, you could say, "What is your science project?" "When is it due?" "What supplies do you need to make it?" Then, you could say, "What other questions do we need to answer about your science project?" Make a list of all these questions and answers together. Refer to the list as your child completes the project. Add in new questions and answers that will help complete the project as you go along.

Resource

Geffner, D. (2007). *Managing executive function disorders.* Retrieved from http://search.asha.org/default.aspx?q=executive_function

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Item #TTA-88

Sequencing and Executive Functions

by Clint M. Johnson, M.A., CCC-SLP

Sequencing refers to students' abilities to put events in order. These events may be familiar, daily routines (making the bed, washing hands, eating breakfast) or unfamiliar (crossing a drawbridge, grilling hamburgers, snowboarding) depending on students' prior knowledge. Sequencing is necessary for:

- understanding and telling stories;
- performing daily activities;
- solving problems;
- reading comprehension;
- succeeding in school and at work.

In order to sequence events correctly, a student has to:

- understand cause and effect;
- make predictions;
- understand time and transition words in stories like *first, next, last*;
- know the elements of a story like *beginning, middle, and end*;
- have adequate reasoning and planning skills.

Executive Functions

The ability to sequence events relies heavily on our reasoning or executive functions abilities. The term *executive functions* refers to our abilities to solve problems and monitor, plan, and direct future behaviors (Tstatsanis, 2004). These mental processes help link past experiences and prior knowledge to our present actions ("Executive Function," 2009). Executive functions are activated when we begin a novel task or we are faced with a new challenge (Singer & Bashir, 1999). Meltzer (2004) identified the following executive function processes.

• planning	• prioritizing	• memorizing
• organizing	• shifting	• checking

(p. 80)

Sequencing tasks require students to use all of their executive function processes, especially when the task is unfamiliar. For example, some students may not have had the experience of going snowboarding. This event is unfamiliar to them so they have to use their reasoning skills to figure out a logical sequence of the events.

Many times, speech-language pathologists and teachers will give the students sets of cards that are out of order and ask the students to put the cards in order. In order to do this, students have to use their executive functioning systems. They need to *plan* and *prioritize* steps for placing the pictures in the correct order. They have to *organize* the steps so that they relate to each other logically, *shift* attention to the details in each picture, *remember* (memorize) the details of each picture, and *check* the pictures to make sure that they are in the correct order.

Teaching Sequencing

Sequencing activities benefit students by helping them to remember a process, to learn the names of the steps in a process, know the tools used to complete the process, and to understand and use the specific vocabulary associated with a process (Marr & Morgan, 2005). Sequencing activities that include the manipulation of pictures, words, and sentences help build important literacy skills like reading left to right, comprehending important details, predicting, and identifying the parts of a story. A majority of states have educational standards that address sequencing at basic levels (identifying what happened first, next) and at advanced levels (writing essays, performing experiments; Academic Benchmark, 2010). The federal government's *Common Core Standards* includes standards for describing the details of an event at nearly every grade level (2010).

Resources

Academic Benchmarks. (2002). K–12 educational standards. Retrieved from http://www.academicbenchmarks.com

"Executive Function." National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2009, March). Executive function fact sheet. Retrieved from http://www.ncld.org/ld-basics/ld-aamp-executive-functioning/basic-ef-facts/executive-function-fact-sheet

Marr, B., & Morgan, B. (2005). Integrated activities for VET teaching: Section 3, sequencing activities. RMIT University. Retrieved from http://mams.rmit.edu.au/bpcufknw8tdv.pdf

Meltzer, L., & Krishnan, K. (2007). Executive function and learning disabilities. In L. Meltzer (Ed.), Executive function in education: From theory to practice (pp. 77–105). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Singer, B. D., & Bashir, A. S. (1999). What are executive functions and self-regulation and what do they have to with language-learning disorders. Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 30, 265–273.

Tsatsanis, K. (2004). Heterogeneity in learning style in Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism. Topics in Language Disorders, 24, 260–270.

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