



HELPING YOUR CHILD DEVELOP GOOD EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS AND SELF CONTROL

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The 8 Executive Functions

Self-Control

The ability to stop and think before acting

Self-Monitor

The ability to view and evaluate oneself

Emotional Control

The ability to manage feelings to achieve goals and complete tasks

Flexibility

The ability to adapt to changing conditions by revising plans or changing strategies

Task Initiation

The ability to start and finish tasks without procrastinating

Organization

The ability to develop and use systems to keep track of materials and information

Working Memory

The ability to use information held in memory to complete a task

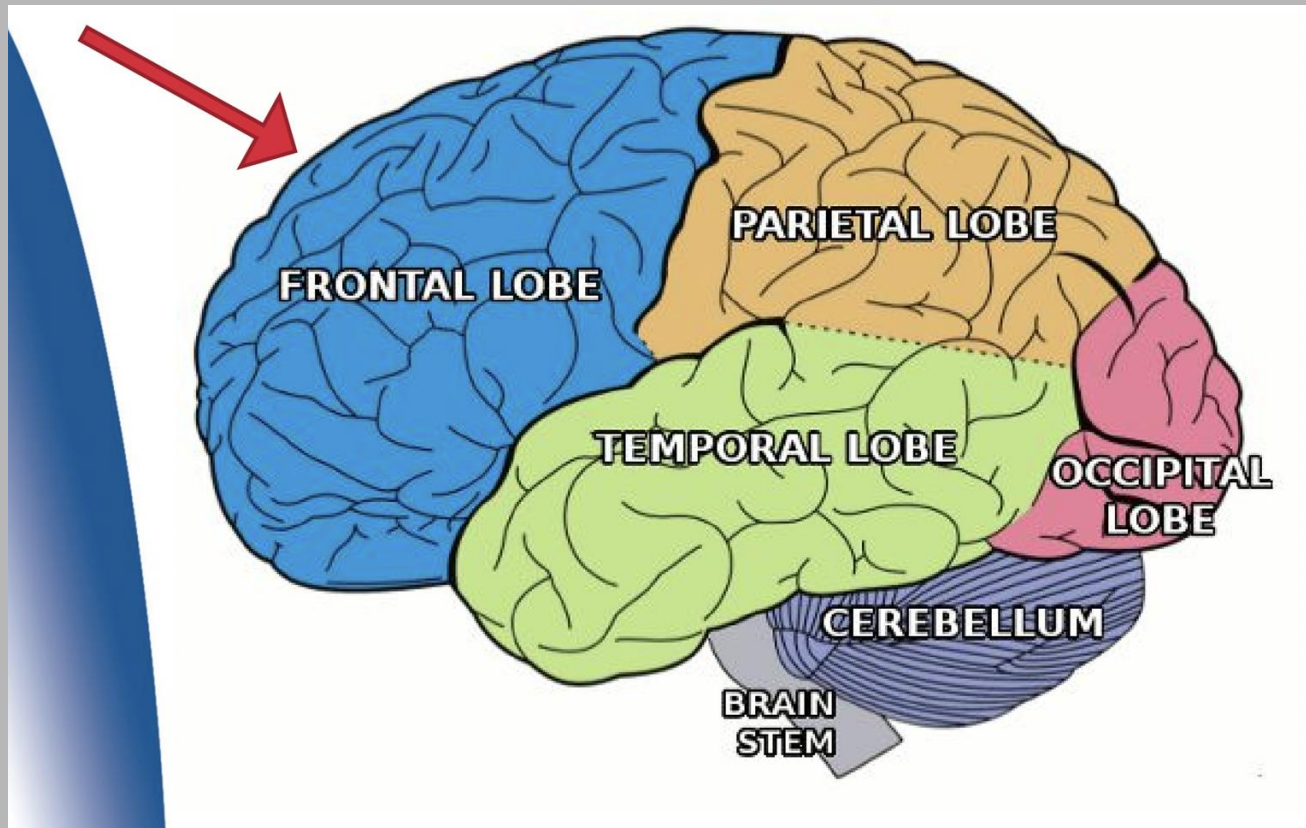
Planning & Time Management

The ability to create steps to reach a goal

GOOD
EVENING!

- My goals tonight are:
 - To explain what executive functions are
 - To explain why they are so important
 - To help parents understand how to build executive functions in their child
 - To answer any questions you might have!

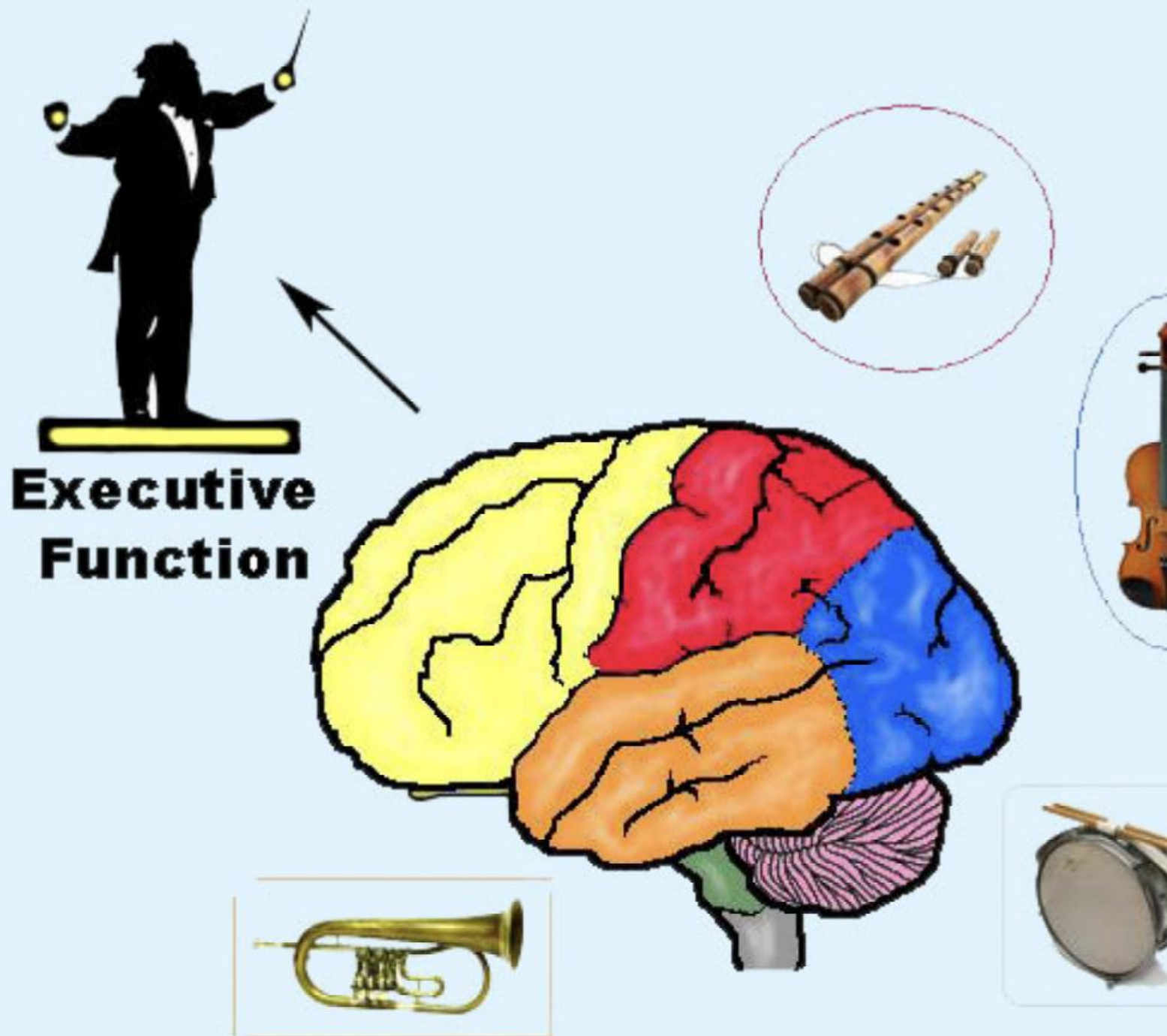
WHAT ARE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS?



- These are **mental processes** regulated by the frontal lobes which control our thoughts, actions, and our feelings. They involve purposeful, goal directed behavior aimed at paying attention, remembering instructions, getting organized, and juggling multiple tasks successfully.
- They involve the ability to control short-sighted, reflexive behaviors in order to take part in long term goals such as planning, decision making, self-control and problem solving.
- They help us persevere towards our goals while being able to adapt as circumstances change.
- Three types of brain functions are necessary to have good executive functioning:
 - **Working Memory:** It is like a mental scratchpad holding onto information that we need—it's how we remember information and then use it when we need it.
 - **Mental Flexibility:** allows us to shift our attention when we must pay attention to a different demand
 - **Self-Control** allows us to resist immediate temptations and pay attention to our important priorities

THE CONDUCTOR OF THE BRAIN

- Planning
- Time management
- Sustained attention
- Organization
- Working Memory
- Inhibition of Impulses
- Shifting and flexibility
- Goal-Directed persistence



HOW DO THESE SKILLS DEVELOP?

- We are not born with these skills, but we are born with the *potential* to develop them—depending on our experiences throughout childhood and adolescence.
- Our genes are the *blueprint* for what happens, but it is the early environment in which children live which determines how these genes are expressed. These skills develop through practice and are highly dependent on the experiences children have with their caretakers.
- “*Having executive function in the brain is like having an air traffic control system at a busy airport to manage the arrivals and departures of dozens of planes on multiple runways*”—Harvard Center on the Developing Child
- These skills are necessary for helping young children learn how to read and write, how to remember steps to solve a math problem, how to take part in class discussions, and how to enter into meaningful and fun play with other children. They are the building blocks for learning and for social interaction





THESE SKILLS ARE NEEDED FOR:

- 1. Academic Achievement and School
- 2. Behavior and Emotions
- 3. Social Relationships



WHY DO SOME CHILDREN HAVE EF DELAYS?

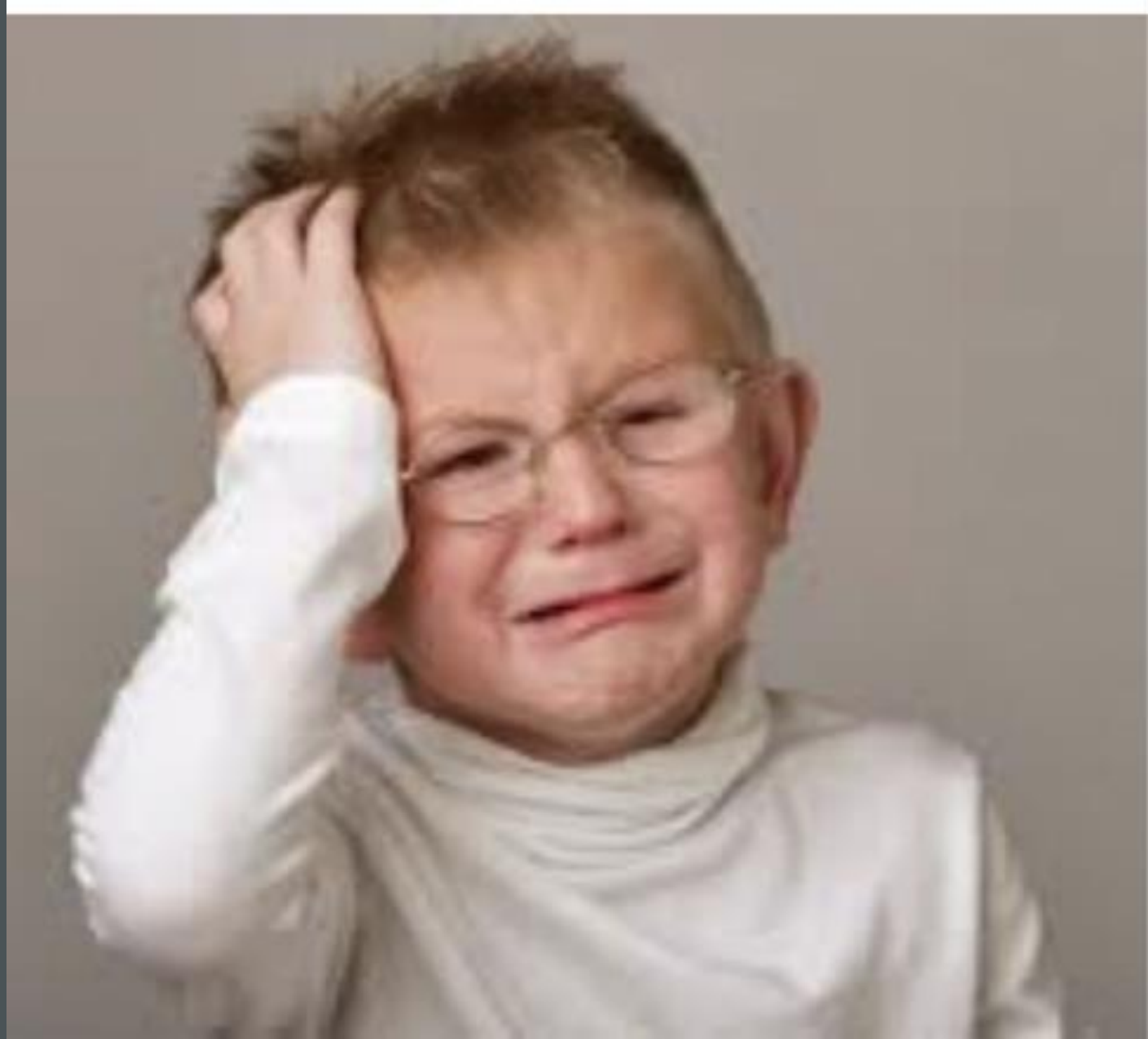
- ADHD
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Learning Disabilities
- Other Psychiatric Conditions
 - OCD
 - Depression
- Genetic predisposition
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Early damage to the prefrontal cortex
 - Trauma
 - In vitro exposure to substances
 - Severe Neglect

IF A CHILD IS
DELAYED IN
DEVELOPING
THESE
SKILLS:

- Trouble focusing on more than one thing at a time
- Forgetting instructions/directions
- Trouble managing your emotions
- Trouble starting a task
- Trouble with organization, time deadlines
- Getting distracted, often misplacing needed items
- Trouble managing day to day normal functions and activities

KEY CONCEPT OF
EXECUTIVE
FUNCTIONING

- It's not about KNOWING what to do, it's about DOING what you know!
- “I can't do it!”—Don't assume your child has these skills and is just “lazy”
- If you tell your child they should know what to do, you are reinforcing a skill that just isn't there which makes a child frustrated and angry
- Slowly decrease your role as your child's frontal lobe
- Teach the skill—teach it over and over—practice it—positively reinforce it
- **START THESE SKILLS AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE!!!**
- Example: **GET READY FOR SCHOOL!**



GET READY FOR SCHOOL!

- If your child has EF challenges, they may not know where to start, what exactly to do, what do they need to get ready.
- Make your child an active participant in this process!
- Important to mentally walk with your child through their day--
-what are the classes you will have, what are the special events, what are you doing after school? Having your child have a mental representation of their day will allow them to learn how to imagine themselves in future time, and therefore plan for what they need.
- Talk about it the night before, have them practice the night before.



CLEAN YOUR ROOM!

Many children with executive functioning problems have no idea how to start, or what to do.

Make a mental movie with your child.

Take a picture of what an organized room should look like.

Work together on a plan for how to get to that picture:

What will you need?

How long will it take?

How will I feel when it's done?



BUILDING WORKING MEMORY

- Capacity to hold information in mind while doing complex things.
- It enables us to remember a phone number long enough to dial it, to recall whether we had added the salt to what we were cooking before we had to help our child find a missing shoe. It enables children to remember and connect information from one paragraph to the next, to perform an arithmetic problem with several steps, to keep track of the moves and make a logical next step in a game of checkers, or Scrabble, and to follow multiple-step instructions without reminders.
- Usually we are doing this for our children, and not allowing them to develop this skill
- Help your child make a “mental movie” of what they have to do (we do it all the time!). It’s a way to pre-experience the future and then plan for how they will complete their task. Help them imagine themselves doing the task.
- Take pictures of what the finished product looks like
- Use verbalization as much as possible.
- Learning is reinforced by talking about what you have learned.
- Great ways to build working memory: Follow a recipe and plan a meal, plan a family day. Play Monopoly, Clue, Chess and other strategy games.





BUILDING
FLEXIBLE
THINKING

- **. Mental Flexibility:** the capacity to nimbly switch gears and adjust to changed demands, priorities, or perspectives. If a friend asks if we like her new haircut and we don't, we are able to flexibly shift to the social convention that governs not hurting people's feelings. Stated differently, self-control and persistence are assets, rigidity is not.
- Imagine a sudden change in plans: cancellation of a play date, bad weather prevents the activity, illness happens, sudden change in schedule at school.
- Let your child know things will happen like this and they will feel upset, disappointed, let down---how is the best way to handle this? How do you cope with disappointment?
- Do role plays--use actual events from the pandemic
- Let your child hear about some disappointments you faced and how you handled them.

IMPULSE CONTROL

- **2. Inhibitory Control:** the skill we use to master and filter our thoughts and impulses so we can resist temptations, distractions, and habits and to pause and think before we act. This capacity keeps us from acting as completely impulsive creatures who do whatever comes into our minds.
- One very important executive function is **emotional regulation**. If emotions become out of control they can impact our ability to manage behavior and we can do things that can have adverse consequences.
- It means controlling your temper and being able to tolerate distressing emotions.
- It means having **PATIENCE**.
- Children need to learn to recognize their emotions, understand why they felt a certain way when something happened, and understand how their emotions and behaviors can impact others.
- Having rules, chores, expectations at home are important. You need to put off what you **WANT** to do to do what you **NEED** to do.
- Practice strategies for waiting, delaying gratification, tolerating distress



The Marshmallow Test



- “If you wait and don’t eat the marshmallow until I return I will give you TWO marshmallows.”
Children aged 3-5 years old.
- 2/3 could not wait
- At 18 years old, majority of the kids who had not eaten the marshmallow had better SAT scores, educational attainment, body mass index, higher self-esteem, and greater ease dealing with stress.



SOME TIPS

- 1. Stay organized: calendars, schedules, timers, to-do lists, organized work space.
- 2. Explain why something you are asking for is important, rather than dictating or yelling.
- 3. Help your child have a goal in mind, make it visual, how will you get there?
- 4. Encourage self-reflection—how do you think you did? What would you have done differently?
- 5. Turn off screens: DIGITAL DETOX!
- 6. Have your child plan an event, a dinner, an activity.
- 7. Work on Study Skills: learn in small chunks, write down info on index cards, have child teach you what they learned.

- REMEMBER: Children who spend LESS time in structured activities and MORE time directing their own time, have better executive functions.
- BOREDOM---it's not so terrible!!!





LET'S NOT FORGET
ABOUT TIME
MANAGEMENT!

- It helps all children and teens to keep track of how long activities/tasks take---the use of a clock or timer on your phone can be very useful, especially a dry erase clock for younger children.
- Have your child tell you what tasks/assignments need to get done--- help them strategize their time
- Try to make time for dinner together--this is an important time to review the day, let them know about your own day, and talk about events taking place in the world.
- Speak actively about **PROCRASTINATION:**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/25/smarter-living/why-you-procrastinate-it-has-nothing-to-do-with-self-control.html>

WHY EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS MATTER IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS



- Flexibility: It's either my way or the highway!
- Working collaboratively involves listening, controlling your impulses, focusing attention and planning and organizing
- Playing a sport with others involves remembering directions, having patience, being prepared to not play, losing, and always being on time.
- Having a play date: you can't always choose what to do. It's about compromise.
- How to refrain from criticism, blame, hurting someone's feelings. How do you model this in your relationships?
- Work on social scenarios: [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org), [EducationandBehavior.com](https://www.educationandbehavior.com).

WHAT'S THE STORY WITH VIDEO GAMES?

- Sedentary games, first person shooter games are associated with lower executive functioning
- Games that may help executive functioning are problem solving games which call for sustained attention, response inhibition and planning. Also games that have movement.
- ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) has ratings for specific games.
- *Pause and Reset: A Parent's Guide to Preventing and Overcoming Problems with Gaming.* by Nancy Petry.



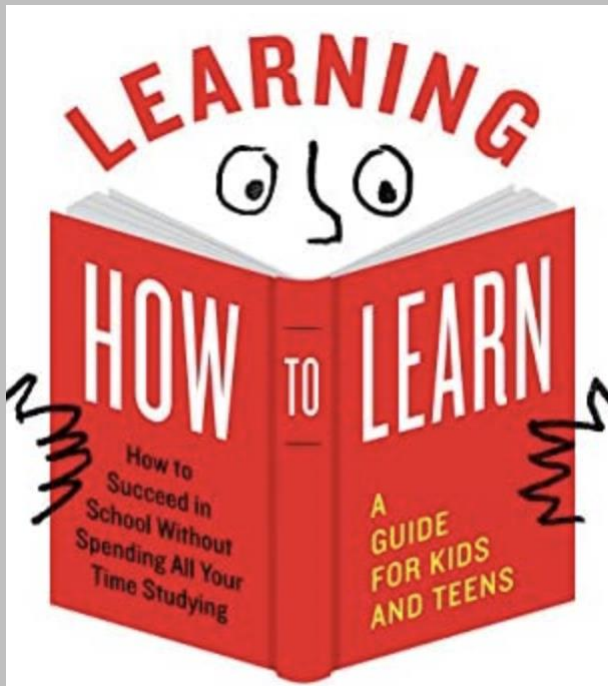
Some Parting Thoughts



1. In a world in which our needs can be met immediately (Google, Door Dash, Amazon) it seems that executive functions will suffer.
2. In a world in which children's brains are often hyperaroused by constant changing content on screens, video games and You Tube videos, many other parts of life, such as school and learning, could feel more boring.
3. As parents, how do you reinforce excitement about learning? How do you reinforce patience, delayed gratification, kindness and compassion in relationships?
4. How do we prioritize education/learning skills/learning vocational trades/having an interest in the world around us?

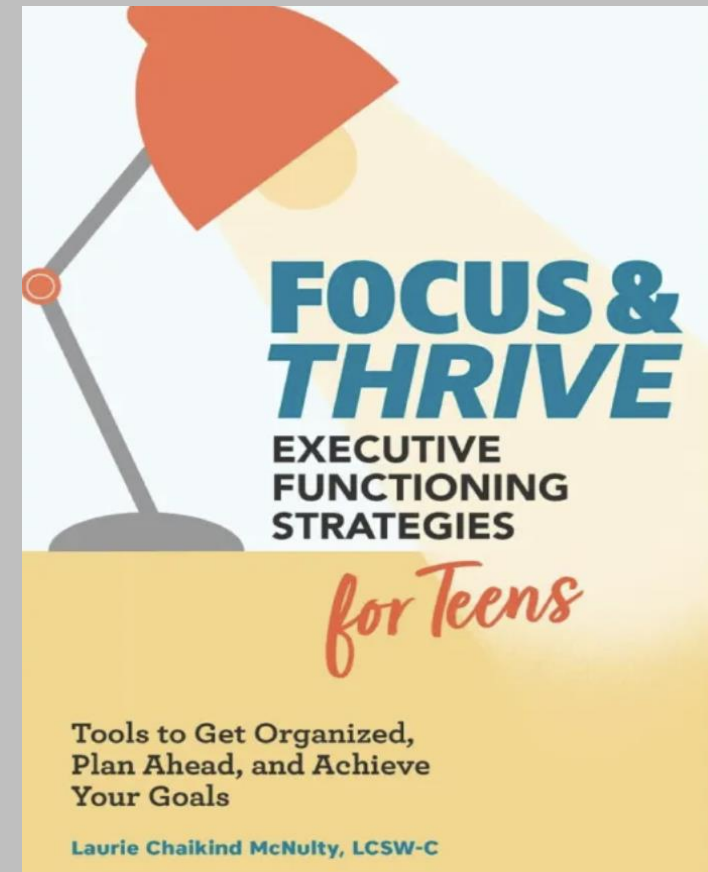
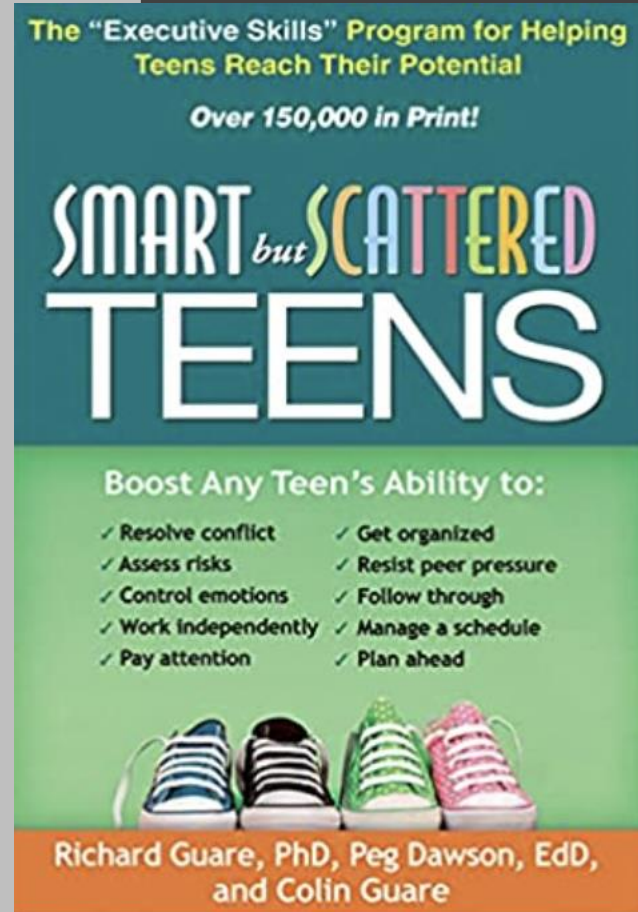


BOOKS CAN HELP!

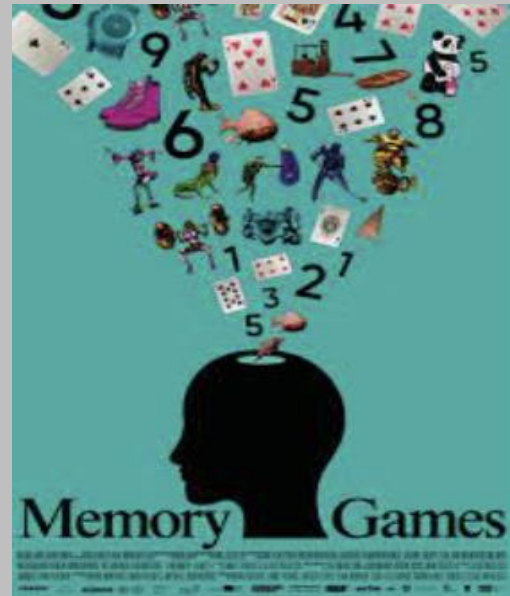
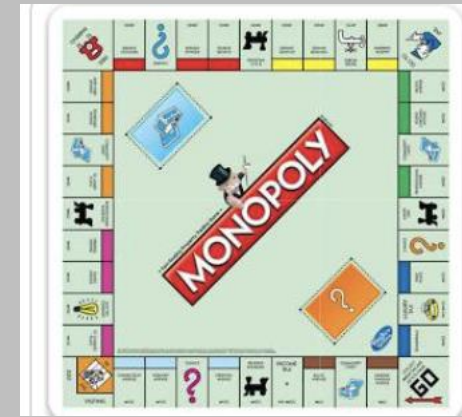


BARBARA OAKLEY, PhD, AND
TERRENCE SEJNOWSKI, PhD,
WITH ALISTAIR McCONVILLE

an instant help book for teens
the
executive functioning
workbook for teens



GAMES ARE GREAT!



Thank You!

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

