



Executive Function

"Executive Function" is a term used to describe the way that our brains associate past experience with present action. It includes activities such as planning, organizing, strategizing, and paying attention to and remembering details. Signs of Executive Function challenges often begin to appear in children in elementary school, when the child faces new expectations for self-management.

Parents and Teachers May Notice:

Behavior or Emotion Management Challenges - the student seems to lack the same degree of self-control as peers, is easily frustrated, and/or has difficulty settling down to do work.

Academic Challenges - The student may lack persistence or often not start or complete even small assignments. While in elementary school these challenges may seem relatively minor, they have increasing relevance as a child matures, ultimately playing a central role in shaping student achievement. Unaddressed, a deficit in the area of executive function can have long-term effects on a student's success and, consequently, self-confidence as a learner. These skills form the basis of a smooth transition to middle school, where academic demands increase rapidly.

Executive Function in Elementary School:

Elementary School is a critical time for the development of initial Executive Function skills. These include:

- **Self-Regulation** - Managing emotions and inhibiting impulsive behaviors
- **Attention** - Sustaining focus, especially for multi-part tasks
- **Task Initiation** - Starting a non-preferred task
- **Organization** - organizing and maintaining materials at in school and at home
- **Planning** - Mapping out multi-step tasks such as longer-term class projects

While some children seem to develop these skills seamlessly, many struggle and benefit from strategies within the classroom.