

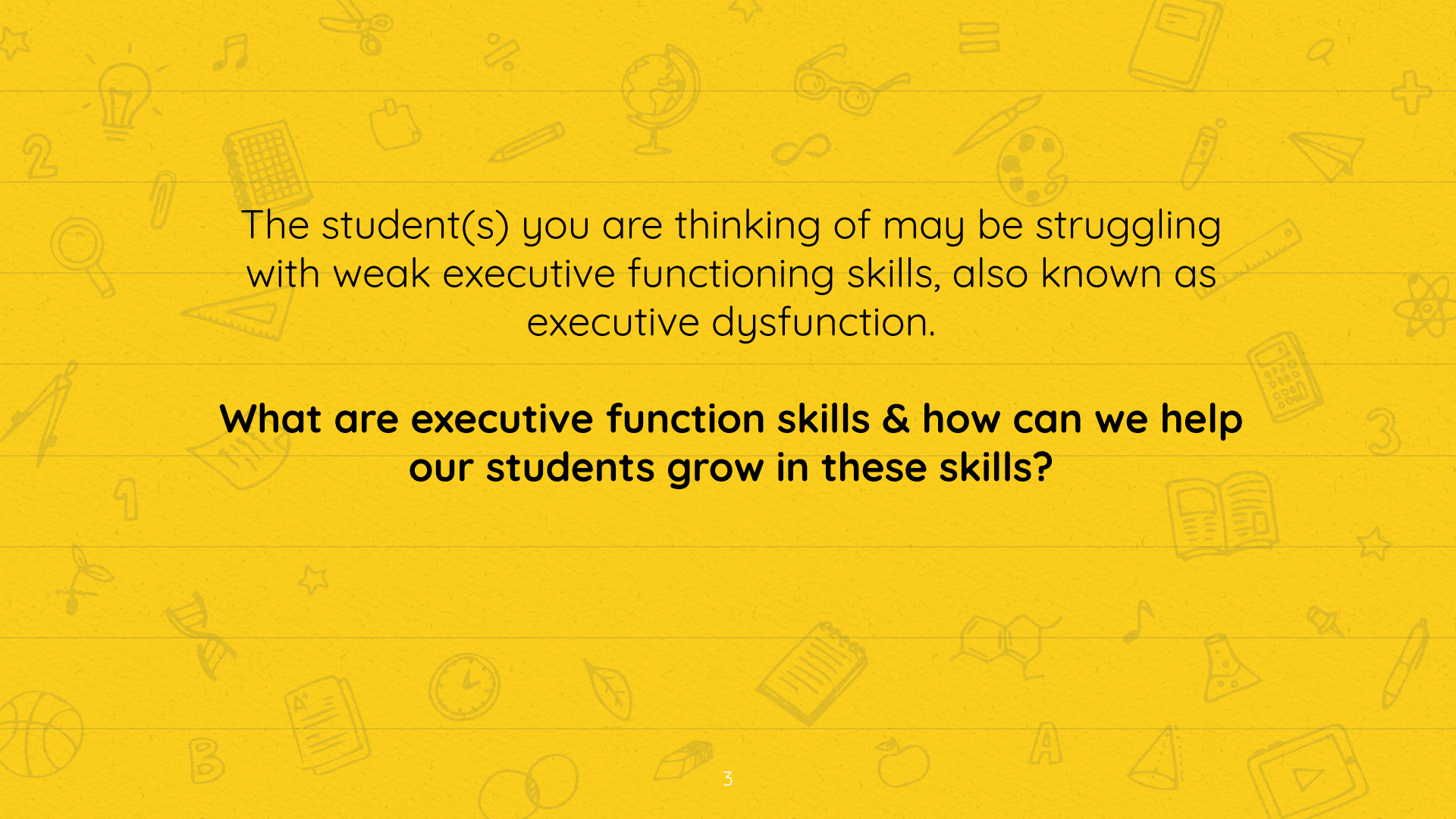
# EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS

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Think of that student who struggles with:

- ✗ Staying focused.
- ✗ Messy work space
- ✗ Controlling their body or emotions.
- ✗ Transitioning throughout the day.
- ✗ Staying on task
- ✗ Remembering information
- ✗ Time management
- ✗ Extra...





The student(s) you are thinking of may be struggling with weak executive functioning skills, also known as executive dysfunction.

**What are executive function skills & how can we help our students grow in these skills?**

# WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION?

**What's  
executive  
function?**







# CORE EXECUTIVE SKILLS

1. Planning and organizing
2. Working Memory
3. Initiation
4. Task Monitoring
5. Self-Monitoring
6. Inhibition
7. Emotional Control
8. Shifting

A decorative border at the bottom of the page featuring various line-art icons related to education and science, including a lightbulb, globe, calculator, musical notes, microscope, and geometric shapes.



## DISCUSS:

What elements of Executive Functioning are you already addressing in your classroom and daily routines? How are you boosting those skills in your students?

What areas do you not currently lack in your classroom?  
Listen for strategies later in our discussion.

## HOW DO EF SKILLS DEVELOP?

We are not born with these skills. We learn them over time by watching how it is modeled by others around us and through practice.

People develop these skills at different paces and with different strengths and weaknesses in these skills.





# The Executive Functioning Ladder

Response Inhibition  
Working Memory  
Emotional Control  
Flexibility  
Sustained Attention  
Task Initiation  
Planning/  
prioritization

6-12 months

12-24 months

Preschool

Organization  
Time  
management  
Goal-directed  
persistence  
Metacognition

Early  
Elementary  
School

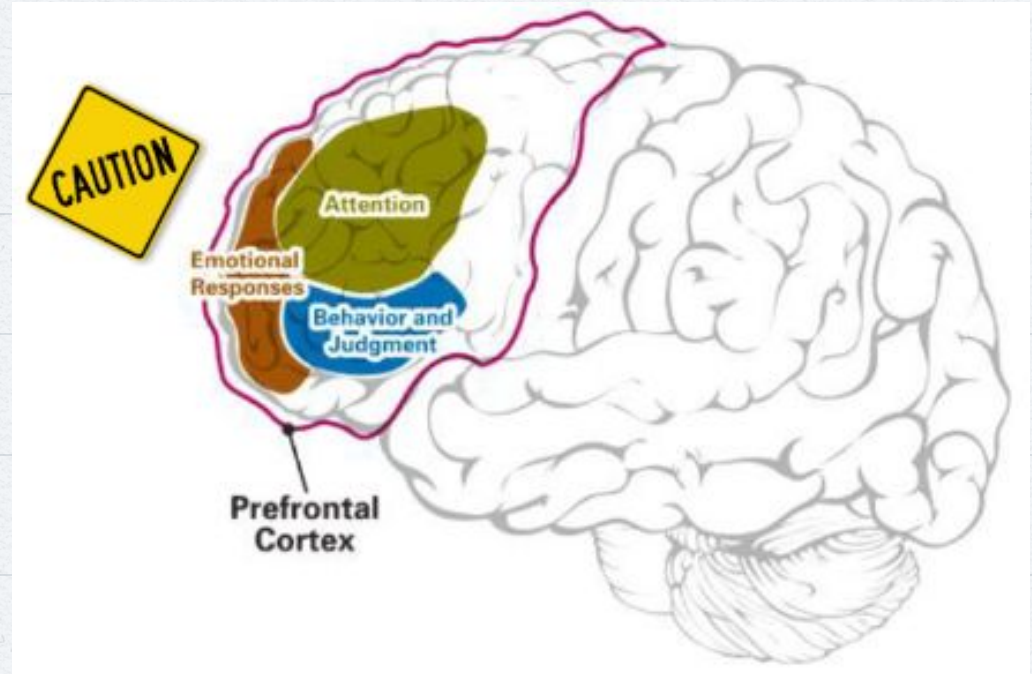
10 – 11 years

~ 25 years

# PARTS OF THE BRAIN

Frontal Lobes are mostly involved, however there are other regions of the brain that do the different processes of EF.

If there is a problem with a certain region, that it can cause difficulties with EF.





# EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

“Executive Dysfunction is not a disorder... instead it describes difficulty with a cluster of skills and may be associated with other difficulties,” (Cooper-Kahn, Fost, 2013).

There are a variety of underlying conditions or situations that could cause Executive dysfunction in an individual.





# QUESTIONNAIRE TIME!

Think of one student in your class. Fill this questionnaire out as if you are this student. This can be used as a tool with your student in the future.

**Executive Skills Questionnaire —**  
Peg Dawson & Richard Guare

Step 1: Read each item below and then rate that item based on the extent to which you agree or disagree with how well it describes you. Use the rating scale below to choose the appropriate score. Then add the three scores in each section. Use the Key on page 2 to determine your executive skill strengths (2-3 highest scores) and weaknesses (2-3 lowest scores).

Strongly disagree	1	Tend to agree	5
Disagree	2	Agree	6
Tend to disagree	3	Strongly agree	7
Neutral	4		

**Item**

- I don't jump to conclusions.
- I think before I speak.
- I don't take action without having all the facts.

**Your score**

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- I have a good memory for facts, dates, and details.
- I am very good at remembering the things I have committed to do.
- I seldom need reminders to complete tasks.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- My emotions seldom get in the way when performing on the job.
- Little things do not affect me emotionally or distract me from the task at hand.
- I can defer my personal feelings until after a task has been completed.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- No matter what the task, I believe in getting started as soon as possible.
- Procrastination is usually not a problem for me.
- I seldom leave tasks to the last minute.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- I find it easy to stay focused on my work.
- Once I start an assignment, I work diligently until it's completed.
- Even when interrupted, I find it easy to get back and complete the job at hand.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- When I plan out my day, I identify priorities and stick to them.
- When I have a lot to do, I can easily focus on the most important things.
- I typically break big tasks down into subtasks and timelines.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- I am an organized person.
- It is natural for me to keep my work area neat and organized.
- I am good at maintaining systems for organizing my work.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly disagree	1	Tend to agree	5
Disagree	2	Agree	6
Tend to disagree	3	Strongly agree	7
Neutral	4		

**Item**

- At the end of the day, I've usually finished what I set out to do.
- I am good at estimating how long it takes to do something.
- I am usually on time for appointments and activities.

**Your score**

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- I take unexpected events in stride.
- I easily adjust to changes in plans and priorities.
- I consider myself to be flexible and adaptive to change.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- I routinely evaluate my performance and devise methods for personal improvement.
- I am able to step back from a situation in order to make objective decisions.
- I "read" situations well and can adjust my behavior based on the reactions of others.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- I think of myself as being driven to meet my goals.
- I easily give up immediate pleasures to work on long-term goals.
- I believe in setting and achieving high levels of performance.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

- I enjoy working in a highly demanding, fast-paced environment.
- A certain amount of pressure helps me to perform at my best.
- Jobs that include a fair degree of unpredictability appeal to me.

YOUR TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

**KEY**

Items	Executive Skill	Items	Executive Skill
1 - 3	Response Inhibition	4 - 6	Working Memory
7 - 9	Emotional Control	10 - 12	Task Initiation
13 - 15	Sustained Attention	16 - 18	Planning/Prioritization
19 - 21	Organization	22 - 24	Time Management
25 - 27	Flexibility	28 - 30	Metacognition
31 - 33	Goal-Directed Persistence	34-36	Stress Tolerance

**Strongest Skills**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Weakest Skills**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1. After completing the questionnaire with one student in mind, what did you discover?
2. How might a questionnaire like this help you when working with this student?
3. Was this helpful?
4. What strategies do you think might be helpful to support this child?





## RESPONSE INHIBITION

### Definition:

To be able to think before doing or being able to stop behaviors at appropriate times

### Impact if weak skill:

Can be impulsive and unfocused.

### Supports/Strategies in the classroom:

1. Post classroom expectations in visual area.
2. Discourage multitasking, but increase brain breaks.
3. Use verbal and visual prompts
4. Help student identify where and when impulsive behavior occurs.
5. Coping skills, slow down, think first, positive self talk.
6. Increase external controls in classroom environment.

# WORKING MEMORY

## Definition:

To be able to retain, ,  
retrieve, and manipulate  
stored and new information.

## Impact if weak skill:

Have difficulty  
remembering multiple bits  
of information to complete  
a task.

## Supports/Strategies in the classroom:

1. Display agendas or calendars
2. Have checklist/to do list
3. Review previous knowledge/experiences
4. Encourage rehearsal
5. Give directions in multiple formats
6. over-learn material
7. use visual images and other memory strategie
8. Give teacher-prepared handouts prior to lessons
9. Encourage active reading
10. Write down steps and procedures
11. Provide retrieval practice





# EMOTIONAL CONTROL

### Definition:

To be able to reflect on one's feelings and manage and control behavior.

### Impact if weak skill:

May have extreme emotions and poorly controlled reactions.

### Supports/Strategies in the classroom:

1. Connect the idea that emotions drive behaviors
2. Be patient with the individual
3. Help students understand emotions in real time
4. Do check ins throughout the day with student
5. Help build emotional vocabulary
6. Designate a calm-down spot
7. Share your own feelings
8. Teach coping skills

# TASK MONITORING

### Definition:

To be able to monitor and reflect on one's own performance and how well they are reaching the set goal.

## Supports/Strategies in the classroom:

1. Use rubrics and examples
2. Allow time for reflection
3. Get peer feedback
4. Allow for multiple attempts/drafts

### Impact if weak skill:

Might not be able to adjust thinking to keep content of task or work at slow pace, or listen to feedback



# PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION

## Definition:

To be able to make a goal or put thoughts or things in order. To know where things are stored.

## Impact if weak skill:

May have problems breaking task into small steps to reach goal/complete task. May look things easily. Might not use good time management.

## Supports/Strategies in the classroom:

1. Set up and Stick to a Routine
2. Clean Out the Clutter
3. Create a Checklist
4. Use Memory Aids and planner
5. Use the Buddy System
6. Label and Color Code Everything
7. Model and discuss strategies as a whole group
8. Provide handouts that are three-hole-punched in advance
9. Keep classroom systems simple



## SELF-MONITORING

### Definition:

To be able to observe one's own behavior and determine whether it conforms to the expectations.

### Impact if weak skill:

Student will miss the signs that their behavior is not appropriate and can be causing problems for others.

## Supports/Strategies in the classroom:

1. Mindfulness activities
2. Feelings chart
3. Guided meditation/yoga
4. Cool down conor
5. Social stories/Use literature
6. Practice self-control with games
7. Create a share journal
8. Explicitly teach self-regulation skills/Discuss scenarios
9. Use visuals as reminders
10. Create a social scripts binder
11. Give movement breaks
12. Develop routines for success



# SHIFTING/FLEXIBILITY

## Definition:

To be able to change from one subject/situation to another smoothly. To go with the flow or adapt to changing conditions.

## Impact if weak skill:

Student will have trouble making transitions throughout the day. Student may not be comfortable with change or unexpected situations.

## Supports/Strategies in the classroom:

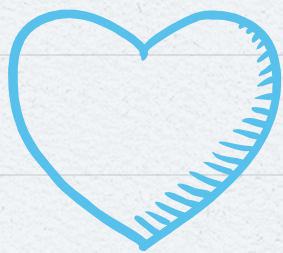
1. Timers for warning of transitions
2. Have daily schedule displayed. Change it up once in a while when possible. Notify students of changes to the day as early to help them mentally prepare for change.
3. Help students problem-solve
4. Teach flexibility explicitly
5. Teach self-advocacy skills
6. Focus on growth mindset
7. Reassure students who love routines
8. Build collaborative partnerships with students
9. Include group work with individual roles
10. Use literature
11. Discussion scenarios

# HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR STUDENTS DEVELOP THEIR EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS?

- ✕ These were just a few ideas to how to support your students.
- ✕ What are things you are already doing that have worked well?
- ✕ What are areas that you need to improve?
- ✕ What other strategies might you try?







THANK YOU!

