



# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Executive Function at Home (Part 1 of 4)

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As children get older the mental demands on them increase exponentially. **Executive function** skills are essentially “the management system of the brain” (Belsky). Skills such as planning, organization, task initiation, time management and regulating emotions are all part of executive function. It is important for children to not only learn these skills, but be able to generalize them, or use them across settings, such as at school and home. Parents and caregivers can support executive function skills at home in easy and natural ways, that will likely lead to a more harmonious home and success at school.



### 1. Planning

Does your child jump right into projects or tasks, struggle to make a plan to accomplish a task, or when working towards a goal they're all over the place? They may have poor planning skills. Planning, informally or formally, is important for all kinds of tasks and goals, from making a meal to completing a project for science class. Here are some tips to help support your child with planning:



- Talk through your own planning processes with your child while doing things such as while running errands (i.e. explain why you're going to stores in that order) or while making a meal (i.e. explain that you start with the food that takes the longest to cook, so everything is finished around the same time).



- Model, using a calendar or planner, planning events for the family. Show how the calendar allows you to look ahead and figure out when to do things and when it might be best to reschedule or skip activities.

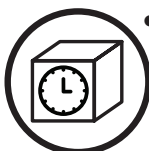


- Model creating to-do lists before beginning to work on things or to plan out the day. Let your child see your lists and help them make their own lists. Don't forget to go back to your lists to check things off!

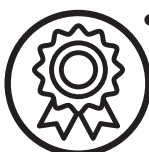
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## 2. Task Initiation

When it's time to work, does your child struggle to just get started? They procrastinate or dawdle, have a million off topic questions, urgently need things unrelated to what they should be doing? Sometimes merely **starting** a task is the hardest part for people. Help your child develop stronger task initiation tips with the following tips:



- Invest in a timer – digital or hourglass, and let your child know when the timer goes off it's time to start, or that when the timer goes off they can take a break if necessary. Making time more concrete for kids can work wonders for starting a task, especially a non-preferred task.



- Provide your child with a reward or preferred task option at the end of a non-preferred task to encourage them to get started on a task. Consider using "if... then..." statements. As kids get older it may be appropriate to provide even more structure by adding parameters, such as "If you finish

the dishes by 5, then you can watch TV," or "If you finish reading your book, then you can watch TV until 6:30."



- Talk to your child about the importance of starting a task, and sympathize with them if they're not excited to stop a preferred task or activity for a non-preferred task or activity. A little understanding goes a long way.



### Related Handy Handouts®:

- [268 – Planning a Trip Helps Children Practice Many Skills!](#)
- [334 – Teaching Time Management at Home](#)
- [492 – Visual Schedules for Daily Routines](#)
- [553 – Reinforcing Your Child's Education at Home](#)

### Resources:

<https://www.hillcenter.org/7-executive-functioning-skills-your-child-should-have/#:~:text=Executive%20functioning%20skills%20facilitate%20the,%2C%20time%20management%2C%20and%20organization.>

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/what-is-executive-function>

<https://www.thepathway2success.com/10-executive-functioning-skills-the-ultimate-guide/>

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