

Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

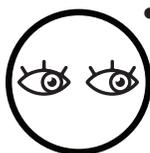
Executive Function at Home (Part 3 of 4)

by Ashley Eaton, M.A.T.

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. Paying Attention

Does your child struggle to pay attention to tasks? Maybe they are easily distracted by things in their environment, or have a lot of needs unrelated to the task. It may feel like all of us are struggling to pay attention in a world with a lot of screen time, but being able to give tasks our undivided attention is still an important skill, especially for kids. Here are some tips to help your child’s attention span.



- Reduce distractions in your child’s environment, especially where they work. An overstimulating environment is a recipe for a distracted child. Bright posters and artwork, fidgets and extra materials, sitting by an open window, or in a room with a lot of traffic can all be distractions for a working kid.



- Give your child a set amount of time they need to work before they stop or ask a question. Start small – even three or five minutes of sustained attention to a task is meaningful and you can build



up to more and more time. This works well for tasks that require a lot of stamina, such as reading and writing. Start small and build up to more time. For older kids it may be beneficial to have a chart showing their growth in paying attention/stamina for tasks such as reading.



- Allow for brain breaks! Everyone needs breaks, and children are no different. Make brain break expectations clear and explain what will happen after the break, so kids know what to expect.

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(cont.)

2. Working Memory

When given directions, does your child struggle to remember everything? Maybe you tell them to go to their room and get their bookbag, and they go to their room but can't remember what they need to grab, or when given multi-step directions, they don't complete everything or don't do things in (logical) order. Having a strong working memory, or the ability to hold information in your mind **and** use it or connect it to other information, is an important skill for all areas of life. You can help your child strengthen their working memory with the following activities.



- Practice mental math at home or while in the community. Ask your child to add up the groceries in the cart or estimate the total cost. Practice math facts, beginning with addition, with your child to build math fluency and number sense.



- Introduce sudoku to your child and practice it and other brain games.
- Practice note taking strategies and skills with your child.



Related Handy Handouts®:

[647 – Executive Function at Home \(Part 1 of 4\)](#)

[649 – Executive Function at Home \(Part 2 of 4\)](#)

[104 – Good Study Habits and Organizational Skills Create Successful Students](#)

[334 – Teaching Time Management at Home](#)

[274 – Visual Timers](#)

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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