

# Executive Functioning Disorder? There's no such thing!

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- “Executive Dysfunction” and “Executive Functioning Disorder” are not disorders in any formal diagnostic system.
- Executive dysfunction is a description, not a diagnosis.
- EF problems are generic; they can be part of a larger pattern of difficulties or occur alone.

# Who has trouble with EF?

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## Developmental Disorders

- ✓ ADHD
- ✓ Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ✓ Learning Disabilities

## Developmental Advantage

- ✓ Giftedness

## Acute and Chronic Stress

- ✓ Fight or Flight
- ✓ Long term changes in the brain
- ✓ Energy depletion

## Who has trouble with EF? (2)

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### Psychiatric Disorders

- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Anxiety

### Lower Incidence Disorders

- ✓ Tourette's Syndrome
- ✓ Velo-cardio-facial Syndrome
- ✓ Schizophrenia

# AD/HD

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- Children with AD(H)D tend to be at least 1-2 years behind in areas of development, including social-emotional.
- New brain imaging studies show that the delay in brain development can be much more significant, as much as 3-5 years behind.
- Children with ADHD have different wiring in their motivational systems, arising from functional differences in dopamine response to rewards.

# Stress, Anxiety, Depression..

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# What can we do?

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Meeting the Challenge

## 4 Rules for Intervention

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1. Use a two-pronged approach: Focus on support in the short term and on building competency over the long term.
2. Build habits and routines.
3. Focus on executive thinking, not just executive skills.
4. Consider the principle of successive approximations.

# Rule 1: Use the Two-Pronged Approach

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Short-term interventions provide support so the student can be successful on a daily basis (Barkley's concept of a "prosthetic environment").

These supports:

- lighten the load on the executive system.
- may involve "lending" our own executive competence.
- may need to remain in place for years, despite expectations when we use the term "short-term."



## Two-Pronged Approach (2)

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Long-term interventions teach skills and strategies that will allow the student to become independent and to succeed on her own. The goal is to:

- Build a repertoire of specific skills
- Build toward self-awareness
- Require as much active engagement as possible.

## Rule 2: Build Habits and Routines

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- Habits compensate for weak executive functioning
- Habits are formed through 'context- dependent repetition.'
- Habits are mentally efficient
- Require time and patience to build automaticity

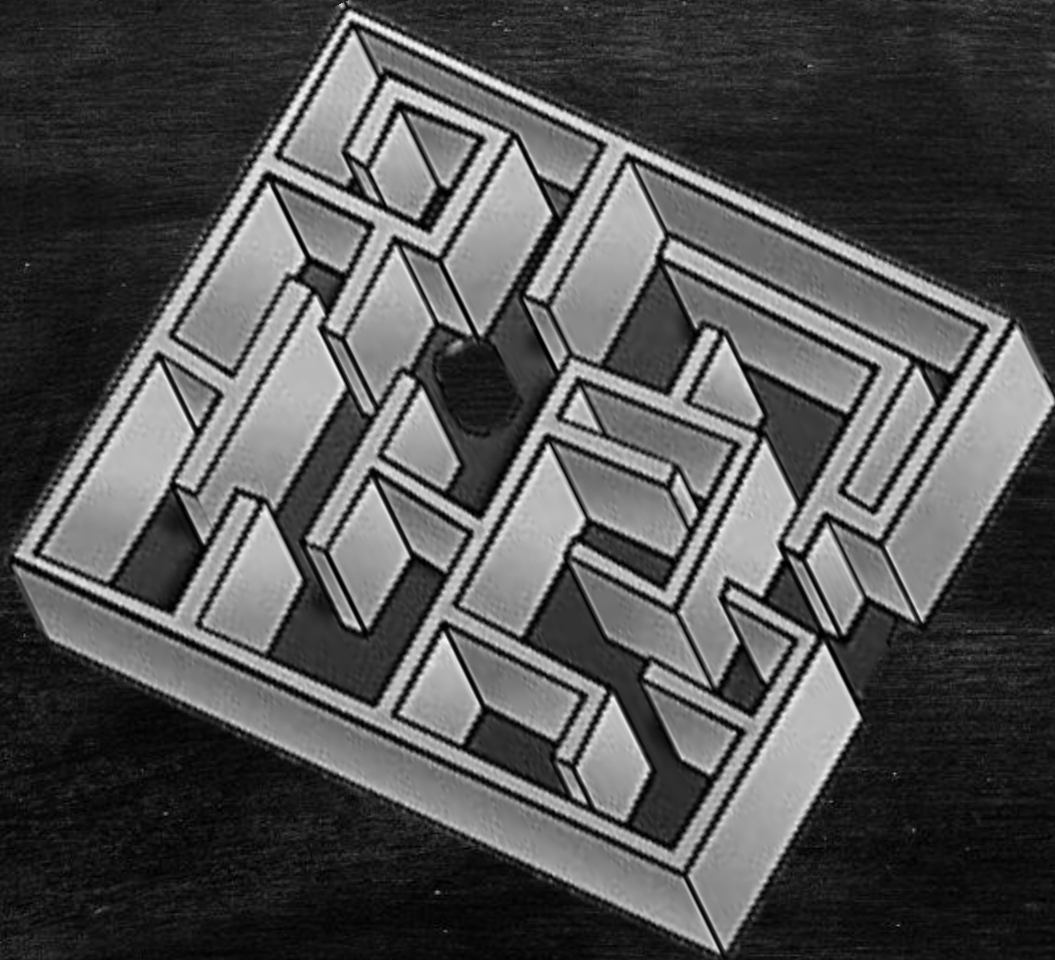
## Rule 3: Focus on Executive Thinking, Not Just Executive Skills

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- Make the “how” of success a goal that is as important as the “what.”
- As new demands are introduced, discuss strategies and options for how to complete the task (e.g. book reports, essays, new chores)
- Celebrate successful management of tasks as a separate and explicit accomplishment.

# Rule 4: Consider The Principle of Successive Approximations

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# Building Organizational Skills

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Planning, task monitoring, working memory

# General Principles of Intervention to Improve Organization

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- Introduce behavioral routines that teach the student to begin with the end in mind.
- Teach cognitive routines that help kids organize information
- Highlight the planning process
- Relieve the burden on working memory

## Begin with the end in mind

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- Use a hands on approach to help the student create a template for the end product.
- Create a list of steps needed to make it happen.
- How long will each step take?
- Map out a timeline.

Adapted from Ward, S. and Jacobsen, K. 360 Thinking, in press.

# Planners

- Use the planner to teach planning
- Focus on “do” dates, not just “due” date

