

Boys: Executive Function and ADHD

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SPEAKERS

Janet Allison, Seth Perler, Jen Fink

- J** Janet Allison 00:00
Let's take it from there. Parents, teachers, and students have been muddling their way through academics this past year. Parents have shouldered the burden of teaching, monitoring homework, and motivating attendance. Teachers have shouldered the burden of connecting in a virtual space with kids, often while parenting their own. Kids have shouldered the burden of, well, all of it. Learning virtually while missing their friends and all the things that go with a normal routine. And if you have an outside-the-box kind of kid, these struggles are only amplified. Our guest today says "If you want to help a kid who is struggling with homework, grades, procrastination, underachievement, time management, and motivation, then you have to understand one thing and one thing only. And that's executive function." Welcome, Seth Perler.
- S** Seth Perler 01:03
It is so good to be here. I'm excited. Good morning.
- J** Janet Allison 01:06
Great to be here with you. I love that you call yourself a 'renegade teacher turned executive function coach.' Start out by telling our listeners, what is executive function?

S

Seth Perler 01:22

Well, first of all, before I start out with that, I really do like to take time to acknowledge people. And I want to thank you, because you guys doing this podcast, it doesn't just happen. There's a lot that goes on behind the scenes, there was a lot of inspiration that got you started, that same saying, "We want to do this thing, put this thing into the world. We don't know how to do this, we'll figure it out," and right? Yeah, and there's so much, and then we don't know how to use the mics, or the tech, or the this or that. And so just acknowledging how much heart, and time, and energy, and love goes into something like this. And just thank you for putting something into the world like this that helps people. So thank you guys. I appreciate that.

J

Janet Allison 02:06

Back atcha, Seth.

J

Jen Fink 02:07

Janet and I are getting teary over here.

S

Seth Perler 02:10

Yeah, I mean, this is no small thing that you know, you've chosen to take on so. Do you want me to define executive function?

J

Janet Allison 02:18

Yeah, that's a great place to start.

J

Jen Fink 02:20

It's easy to say this is what you need to focus on. And then I need to know, what am I focusing on?

S

Seth Perler 02:28

Great, yeah. So to define executive function, let's start off by saying that a lot of experts define it very differently. And a lot of experts define it in a very clinical way. The problem with that is it makes it seem inaccessible to parents and teachers because the words 'executive function,' don't say what it is. Like, it's not just like, plain everyday words. But in

plain everyday words, all executive function is how our brains help us get things done. Now, that sounds very simple, how our brains help us get things done. But the things that are within that are way more complicated. So when you said in the intro, like "You just got to understand one thing, executive function." Well, that's great, but it's a very complex thing. I don't want to act like this is just some simple concept. But it's just getting things done. And in the context of the boys that people are listening for, the things that people who are listening are concerned about them getting done, are not things like Legos, and gaming, and art, and sports or things like that. The things that we are concerned about, the high interest things they have no problem executing on. But the things that they, meanwhile, the words executive function, it's how the brain helps us execute tasks. That's why it's called that, by the way. So but the things that we're concerned about are two things. And that generally is schoolwork and responsibilities. Those are two very broad categories, but I like to use those because it puts it into context for everybody listening. So let's recap that. Executive function means how the brain helps us to execute important tasks. Non-preferred activities are what we're concerned about, and in particular, schoolwork and responsibilities. Why do we care about schoolwork and responsibilities? Because we know, and our gut knows, and our fear, and our body knows that if this kiddo does not figure out, if this boy does not figure this out, how to get important things done, they are going to limit their choices, opportunities, and possibilities for their future. That terrifies us, because the reality of how difficult it is to live in this world, is it requires a lot of execution on things we may not feel like doing.

 Jen Fink 04:47

I love that you acknowledge that because so often, you know we kind of are teasing that part out, that a lot of our parenting is born of this place of fear. The fear is housed in our concern and care for our children. We want these boys to do well. You nailed it when you said terrified. We're terrified that they won't. And then often we get stuck there, because we don't know what do we do next. And so that's what you're going to help out.

 Janet Allison 05:18

And it's that place of, you know, "Oh, if I could just motivate him," and that, "If we could just do it from the outside and motivate, motivate," and you cannot make someone be motivated. It's got to come from within.

 Seth Perler 05:33

Or we can temporarily, and it seems like it or it's a quick fix or fixes the issue in the moment, but what are some things that you all see people do to motivate kids, whether

they work or not? What what are the efforts that people take?

J

Janet Allison 05:46

Oh, it's all the things. It's either the rewards, you know, more screentime usually. Or, it's the penalty, less screen time is the big one. Right now, that feels like the only currency that parents have.

J

Jen Fink 05:58

That's one, you know, but parents paying, you know, for chores, or for grades, that's another one withholding. "If you don't get this done, you can't do X, Y, or Z activity or sport." It's kind of like bargaining, you know, "You do this and then I'll give you this," or I won't. But the converse.

S

Seth Perler 06:19

Excellent. And I asked this, I asked rhetorically, but I just like to hear how other people frame it. So we have punishments and rewards that are often used to motivate. And then what else do you guys see in terms of words that people use to motivate? Logic, reason, nagging, bugging?

J

Jen Fink 06:36

Yeah, everybody tries, nagging.

J

Janet Allison 06:39

Nagging. You know, and it's also the future forecasting of if you're not turning in your homework assignments now, you're not going to get good grades, you're not going to get into college, you're not going to... and, you know, boy #1 is doesn't really care, quite frankly, and isn't able to project into the future that far. So it's just white noise.

S

Seth Perler 07:05

Future forecasting, fear. I love that. That's, that's a good one.

J

Jen Fink 07:10

Yeah, so what do we do? Those don't work that well. I mean, like you said, maybe

temporarily, you might get compliance. But, okay.



Seth Perler 07:21

Can you talk more about that word? Why did you choose that word.



Jen Fink 07:24

Temporarily or compliant?



Seth Perler 07:26

Compliant.



Jen Fink 07:26

Because I used to be a nurse before I was a parent. And so compliance, we use that term too, which was basically when somebody does what you want them to do, and you would term somebody non-compliant. But that often, it wasn't that they didn't want to do the thing, often they didn't have what they needed to do the thing. So if you call somebody non-compliant for not taking their meds, but the actual issue is they don't have health insurance and they can't afford their meds. You're glossing over. I think this is very similar. So your kid can act compliant for a while, but if you don't start addressing that underlying issue, you're not going to get there. The kid is not going to be able to continue doing whatever it was he temporarily did, like actually doing the homework while you're there. You know, do your homework.



Seth Perler 08:21

Right. So it's it's this what's called an 'external locus of control,' where the parent, or the nurse, or somebody is trying to get somebody to comply. And that compliance does not indicate, tell me if the power saw outside is loud. So for all you listeners, there's a power saw outside. If you guys hear it I'll close the door. But yeah, we want to get this compliance for them to do the thing that needs to be done. Because we do have the future thinking, we see that this must get done, or there's gonna be consequences. And so we want the compliance, but then we need to back up too. Well, I don't necessarily need to back up at this point in the conversation, but we need to really ask ourselves, "Why are they doing this thing?" And it's usually because they're told to by the teacher or by whatever to jump through the hoop. So on the one hand, we're like, yes, our kidneys to figure out how to do things that they don't feel like doing because no matter what they do

in life, they will have to do that. Yeah. But then the question also comes, how reasonable is this thing that they're being asked to do in the context of everything? So for example, maybe they have math to do, they don't feel like doing it. And it is actually valuable for them to learn this math, but they're so far behind, they have 30 assignments to do. Them just like rushing through it and getting it done is not helping them learn math. Is the thing we're asking them to do, in the grand scheme of things, a reasonable thing in their life. Or maybe the worksheet has 50 problems and they really only need to do three or four high quality ones to actually get something out of it. It's like if I'm gonna do push ups today, and I do 1000 push ups today and no more for the month, that 1000 push ups is not going to get me any results. Whereas if I spread them throughout the month, there would actually be some toning going on. But that's what a lot of the kids, a lot of them in terms of this podcast, a lot of the boys going through, the kids that I work with, are going through this stuff. They're so far behind. And they're they're just trying. We're trying to get them to be compliant, to motivate them, to get them to do the things, but we're not giving them internal motivation or an internal locus of control. And then there's circling back to your question, Jennifer. So what do we do?



Jen Fink 10:31

So that's such a common thing, especially right now with pandemic, it's really hard on everybody. So you've got this kid, Janet, I know you're working with parents who complain about this. You've got this kid who is like, 30 assignments behind in this class, he hasn't turned anything in the end of the semesters coming up. Do I just let him fail? Do I just push him through to do these things? What would be your recommendation for that?



Seth Perler 10:58

So again, sadly, this is complicated, this is not something simple. And there are a lot of experts out there that have, you know, these sort of pat answers for things, and I have sort of pat models for things. But it is complicated. Every kid is complicated. So first answer your question, isn't that they give you a crappy answer. That's different for everybody.



Jen Fink 11:22

I love that honesty. I mean, that's part of what we're about here. We do these podcasts because there aren't any easy answers. So we're gonna give you bits and pieces, and then listeners, you take what applies to you, your kid, your situation.

S

Seth Perler 11:36

Yeah. And second, I think it really is sort of looking at those two things that we were mentioning before, how reasonable is the thing? And then what do you do in that case? Then when they are doing the thing, what do you do to be supportive? So let's first look at how reasonable is the thing. What can parents do? Well you have to be really realistic in terms of how reasonable the thing is. Now we get into a problem here quite often because parents and teachers will get stuck in this particular trap. Some of you guys have seen this. They'll say, 'Well, we know he can do it. We've seen him do it before.' Do you guys hear that?

J

Janet Allison 12:15

Well, and along with that is we know he can do it, but he he didn't pass the quiz. He didn't pass the test. And one family I'm working with right now is 70% of his grade is the tests and the quizzes. And he can't, he can't do these quizzes, these tests online, he just can't do it. But he's doing the work and he knows the material. And he's getting penalised. I'll tell you what, that it's not very motivating for him to do the next assignment.

S

Seth Perler 12:47

Very good point. That's an excellent point. So I'm sorry for everybody listening, because we could go down so many tracks here.

S

Seth Perler 12:54

That one is so important. You have to understand the experience that these boys are having. They have been asked to do things so many times, they have quote, 'failed' or it's not been good enough. They've been told "Redo it, or you forgot to turn your name on it, or you're getting half credit, or it's late and you're getting a zero." But they've been told these things so many times and we forget that we are there to serve them. Now I'm speaking from an educators perspective. I mean, there's lots of context. But in our 'quote' system, we the teachers, the educators, the school, the principals, we are there for them. It's not the other way around, they are there to comply for us and our rules. We are there to serve them. But what has happened is we've created a system with these standards, and this common core, and these tests, and all this crap that gets teachers really off course from why they got into teaching. They got into teaching to help kids. Yeah, they get a lot of pressure from above to do things certain ways. And almost a lot of them, not all of them, lose sight of why they even got there in the first place. 50% burnout before your fifth year and quit. 50% of the people we have hired to serve our kids quit by year five,

what the hell are we doing here? And then the ones who stay, who do you think there are? A lot of them are brilliant, amazing teachers, but a lot of them are compliant. And they're just like, "It's good enough or whatever." And they're like, yeah, we want that for our kids. Well, that's the system we've created. And then so they're in a place where they're like, "I have this pressure to get these kids to look like this on paper, and to walk through these curriculum things, and meet these standards." But the experience of the boys is, I can't, for some boys who struggle with executive function, "I can't do what they're asking me to do. The absolute load of work." True story. I was speaking with a kid the other day, a beautiful conversation with this boy. He said, "Seth," actually I wrote it down. He said, I wrote it down because I'm gonna do a post on it if I can find this, but it was so key. I can't find it, but he said, "I have so much to do that I could literally spend every waking hour doing it. So he wants to do well, he struggles with executive function and focus. But he would spend every waking hour, every second he said, doing it. So where is the time to be a boy and to experience life? And then when you do it, you're told it's not good enough. So he had a teacher accuse him of cheating last week. He's like, "I didn't cheat." He's like, "Actually, I worked so hard on it to do it perfectly, and I spent so much time on this. And then he accused me of cheating."

J Janet Allison 12:55
So many rabbit holes.

J Janet Allison 13:29
It's demoralizing. It is just demoralizing.

S Seth Perler 15:44
So you have to when we're looking at what's reasonable, we really do have to, and when we say things like, "Well, I know you can do it, I've seen you do it before," well, maybe they can do the cognitive work. Maybe when you've seen him do it before, all of the stars were aligned, they had good sleep, they didn't have social issues that particular day, they didn't have parents issues that particular day, they didn't have a big pimple that was making them feel completely insecure, particularly like things we don't even think about that were you know, that was going on that day. But with executive function, this day that they're not doing it, they don't have also the executive function, massive skill set to do this. So and now let's get a little bit deeper with that, and I'll stay on topic here. But with executive function skills, let's say how do we get them to do the thing, and we know they can do it? Well, executive function has to do with planning. Maybe they didn't plan the time out, didn't manage his time well. It also has to do with emotional regulation. Maybe they're

dysregulated and they don't have tools to reregulate themselves. They're not in the prefrontal cortex, the front part of the brain that helps them execute because they're in the amygdala, and the fight flight or freeze, and their bodies and anxiety. They can't even get to a place where they can think clearly, yet they're expected to perform. I had a kid tell me last week that they were, this this was a girl, but she said that she was in an online class and she started to have a panic attack or an anxiety attack, or didn't know if it was one, and felt like they couldn't leave the class. Can you imagine being in an online class, you're required to be visible on the thing, and you're starting to have an anxiety attack and you can't take care of yourself? But teachers would never know that. But it just shows some of the just, the again, we're talking about how do we get them to do the thing? Well, first, we have to really be asking, is the thing reasonable? Is it reasonable from their lens? What are we asking them to do? Why are we asking them to do it? Are we setting them up to have an experience of success or failure? What's it going to feel like if they do do that. We want them to feel like they accomplished something, like they learned something, like it was valuable. But clearly, we're seeing a lot of experiences where they're like, "Why do I have to do this? This is stupid. This makes no sense. I keep trying. Nobody sees how hard I try," like all these things. So we have sort of that aspect of it. Let's put that on one side. You know, how do we get them to do the thing? First, let's examine the thing very realistically from all sorts of angles. And let's ask the boy, and let's listen. And let's ask them more and more and more, not just a surface question. I mean, a indepth conversation where they do 90% of talking, and we do 90% of the listening and we do 10% of the talking.



Jen Fink 18:27

One of the things that I have done as a parent of boys who had that missing assignment list growing pretty damn long that I was getting, when I talked to them. A lot of the assignments they were missing were, I'm gonna say it sorry, teachers, they were stupid ones. They were like stupid little five point homework things. And my son had already calculated. He's like, "I can skip all of these and if I do okay, on the test, yeah, who cares? Why am I gonna waste all my time for five points?" And when he explained it to me, I'm like, that makes perfect sense. Skip them. Yeah, skip them. So that listening, and deciding, and realizing what is reasonable for your child in conjunction with your child and then giving yourself and your child permission to let some of it go, it can be incredibly freeing, and create space for you to then work on the other things.



Seth Perler 19:27

Right. And then let's look on working on the things we do choose to work on. So now we have a realistic view. We're gonna say yeah, we you know, you got to pick your battles,

here the battles we are going to pick, but we are consciously doing it mindfully with intention right now. Yeah. And we've really looked at the battles we're going to pick. So let's take your example there with, you know, the assignments that just you really look at them and you do not find legitimate value in them. Or legitimate enough, there may be value in doing the things. But it's just like, given the time and them failing or not, obviously, your kids perspective is perfect. I mean, you and I, we would as adults, if we were looking at, you know, this system, whether it's somebody we pay bills to every month or whatever, they want us to jump through certain hoops, the IRS or whatever Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying cheat on your taxes. But that's an example that makes my head spin. Where you have to jump through a million hoops, and how do you figure that out? But anyhow, so we have this massive list of things to do for your kid to do. Now, the first one, not the first thing, but one thing in like a situation like that, you got a million things, is advocating to the teacher. Now if you have a middle or high schooler, or they're not going to want you to email the teacher. Most boys will say, "My teacher doesn't like it when you email them," blah blah blah or whatever. But you need clarity, and you can email. I'm just going to be real quick on advocacy. But you can email a teacher and say something like, "Hey, please don't tell my kid this. They're stressed enough already. Don't tell him I'm emailing you, just give me some clarity. I need some clarity. What the hell is going on? When do you post your grades? Where do you post your grades? I'm confused. It seems like a bunch of time goes on, then you enter a bunch of them, they then have a bunch of zeros. Then I can't support my kid. And where are you posting the work? And when we find where you post the work, there aren't enough details for us to sift through it and I can't rely on my kid to tell me the details. Help me here." So first of all, advocate. Be the squeaky wheel, do not give up, be a pain in the butt. CC other teachers, counselors, or admin. If it's a teacher, now most teachers are amazing and care about your boys. Most. And but there are those ones. It's not that they don't care, but there are those ones that are set in their ways that really don't get it. And that think that "Oh," and especially now and the pandemic times, like it is, I could really cuss right now. It is just absurd what's happening with the expectations not changing. And I will say something that's on my mind right now is, this is one of the best times ever to not take standardized tests. And I don't know what's gonna happen with all that. But it's like, on top of everything, you're gonna evaluate a kid that just went through this.



Seth Perler 20:10

I think you're going to make me cuss too.



Jen Fink 20:55

I don't know if I've heard you cuss yet.

J Janet Allison 21:06
You haven't.

J Jen Fink 21:12
Hmm, you've heard me say it.

J Janet Allison 22:11
That's the level of frustration. And I want to, I just want to pause and interject here too, because I think that this happens often. And with middle school and high school, you're talking about the parent emailing the teacher. With this one family in particular that I'm working with, it's, you know, the encouragement of, of course, the parents encouraging the boy to reach out to the teacher and ask about the quiz. And the mom is going around to the teacher saying, you know, "My boy just needs a few words of encouragement from you. Can you email him directly," and they don't do it. And the same situation is, the teacher will say. the parents saying to the teacher, "My boy needs help with this. He's feeling shy to come to you." They'll say, "Well, he needs to reach out to me," says the teacher.

S Seth Perler 23:36
Oh my god.

J Janet Allison 23:37
Or, "I can't help him right now." I'm going to cuss. That's like, that just makes me crazy. He's in middle school. He probably has the pimple that you were talking about, and he doesn't have the capability to approach an adult. These are teachers he's actually never met in-person. He's never met him in person.

J Jen Fink 24:00
Oh, yeah. That too this year.

J Janet Allison 24:02
Oh, baby. I'll settle down now. Go ahead, Seth.

Yeah, so to put that in a smaller box, it's advocacy. Whether it's parents, whether it's the kid advocating for themselves. Obviously, we want the kid to advocate for themselves, but they don't have the skills yet. So these are complex skills that they need to learn also. In an ideal world, the kids able to advocate and be like, "Look, you're serving me." Not in a condescending way, but in a confident way. But they don't have that story. Ideally, they'd be like, "Look, you're serving me, I need help here. Get off your high horse. Let's figure this out. What can you do to help me?" That's sort of the ideal, that would be great, you know? But that takes understanding the whole frame, like them having a frame like that, them having the skills of doing it, them having the confidence to do it and blah, blah. Then the parents advocating, yeah, to ask for that. I do again, I want to give so much kudos the teachers. What teachers are going through isn't ideal. Most teachers are amazing, most teachers are amazing. But the ones who do that in a condescending way, and who don't get it, and who have that contemptuous tone, I mean that, even the slightest bit of that, the kids feel it's so deep, and it is so not appropriate. It's so common, it's disgusting. But most teachers, I just want to really plug them, we really want to approach them with, "Hey, we're on the same team. Give you the benefit of the doubt, you probably didn't know how much time and energy this was taking, or what our family is going through, I don't need to tell you everything our family is going through because we have a private life, but you do need to know that we are going through some stuff here and our kid cannot do even what's being asked. So help us here. If they don't do all this stuff, they're gonna fail. And it makes sense for my kid to do nothing else in your class this semester. And if we have that fact, we're gonna not make them do anything for your class." So like, why would we? If like, why wouldn't we have them put their energy towards classes, they can be successful. You got to really think these things through parents. So there's advocacy. Now, let's say that, you know, you're getting some support, and your kid really does need to do some stuff, and they are not motivated. And they're, they're maybe not even going to be motivated, then how do we help them? Okay. And this is kind of where we'll probably start wrapping up and moving towards this stuff. This is sort of in my model. Now, the advocacy is actually part of this model. But I wanted to start there. What I do when I'm helping people, boys, but anybody with executive function stuff, the people coming to me are parents of kids are struggling in school. They go through this pattern every semester where everything falls apart, then they try to clean everything up at the end of the semester, and deal with all the missings, and late work, and zeros, and incompletes, and all this stuff. And it's a pattern year after year after year, and it doesn't fix itself. The thing is that, you know, the kids will be like, "Oh, this year is different. I've turned over a new leaf," blah, blah, blah. That happens maybe once in 1000 times. Right, what happens is they start off like that, because they really do want to be independent.



Jen Fink 27:11

It lasts for a week, maybe two.



Janet Allison 27:13

It's our new year's resolutions. It's that, you know, we're gonna get toned and fit this year. It's the same thing.



Seth Perler 27:20

It's the same thing, and it really is the same thing. I won't go into the metaphor about that, but it really is the same type of thing. And then things start to fall apart. So the pattern is there. Now, like I said, it won't fix itself, it won't fix itself, it won't fix itself. So what do you do? You need three things. Now this is just Seth talk, you could look up a million people find tons of people with great models, this is just the way I articulate it. But if you want to help your child, I will tell you that this is what I do professionally, and this is where my heart is. So you can trust what I'm about to say. So this is a model that will work for you. Basically, there are three things that these boys need if they're going to, quote, turn the corner. So I want to get people from point A to point B. Point A is they're struggling with executive function, they don't have the skills, they're going through this pattern all the time over and over and over. Point B is they've turned a corner. It is not perfect, there are plenty of issues still, but they've turned a corner. What corner have they turned? They've turned a corner where you, the parent, you go, "Ahh, this kid's gonna be okay. They've got it good enough. It's not perfect, but it's good enough. We have turned a corner." That sigh of relief, unless you're a super anxious person, and you have your own anxiety to work with, but when you get to that, so aside from that, when you get to that sigh of relief, you know that your kid turned that corner. You know they're at that point B. That's where we want to get. That may take a semester, that may take years. We have to be realistic, this is not "go to this tutoring center, or go to Seth, and go listen to a bunch of podcasts, or this or that and we'll turn the corner." This is an investment in your child, your time, your energy, your heart, your money, and whatever it takes to get to that point B. So one thing that's point A to point B is three things.



Seth Perler 29:10

Thank you, Jen. Jen has good executive function. Systems, mindsets, habits and routines. That sounds like two but I lump them together. Systems, mindsets, habits and routines. I'm actually going to start with mindsets. The mindset that our kids are really struggling with is the resistance mindset. If you know Steven Pressfield. But I talked about the resistance.

Why do these kids resist using planners? Advocating, being honest with their parents, starting their homework, following through with their homework, finishing their homework, putting their name on their homework, checking their homework, putting effort into their homework, doing high quality work. They resist letting the teacher help them. They resist it. So the problem is resistance. That's a mindset. And the reason I call it a mindset is it's, "This is too hard, just too frustrating. This isn't worth my time, my effort." What mindset we want is, "Hey, this is actually good for my life. I may not like the teacher, or the class, or all the content, but I can do this. I can handle this. I don't wait till the last minute. I actually can do things early. I actually don't have to put 100% effort into everything. I can go for the D sometimes and find out I'll actually get a C or a B." Go for the D, this is something that I teach. "And I can just turn the stupid thing in." And so Jen, when you were talking about your list at the beginning, one of the strategies I probably would use as well, maybe we can get done 5 or 10 or of the 30 and just get them half-assed because you'll probably get a 70 anyway. But anyhow, it depends on the teacher and the gravity of the assignments. But so the mindset is from Carol Dwek, you know, "I can grow. I can do this, I can get something out of this." Let's not stay in analysis paralysis, resistance land. So mindset, you have to work with the mindset. If you're just a slave driver or a taskmaster, you and your kids executive function, "Just get it done," punishment, reward, nagging, lecturing, fear all this stuff. That is not changing a mindset.



Janet Allison 31:22

Mm hmm. And part of that, too, and Jen and I talked about this a lot, is that boys feel shame and embarrassment so deeply. And that's part of this whole mindset area that needs to be looked at too.



Seth Perler 31:38

And if you want to hear what I think about shame, look at my post from last week, shame is in the title. And it explores that.



Janet Allison 31:45

I'll put the link in the show notes.



Seth Perler 31:47

Yeah, awesome. I don't have time to get into that, but it is massive. Massive. I'm glad you brought that up. So now we got systems. Well, there are a finite number of systems that these kids have to have to be successful. Now, kids with good executive function naturally

pick up on the systems that seems like through osmosis. It's not because they've actually been learning it for years, but nobody has done what's called direct instruction. So in school, teachers do what's called direct instruction, like I am going to directly teach you how to do long division, let's say. Well, we don't directly teach executive function skills. So the kids who pick up on it, pick up on it. And with these ones, it goes in one ear and out the other. For years, they haven't practiced these very important skills. Yeah, so these systems, our system of planning, planners, calendars, daily planning, blah, blah. A system of organizing your backpack, your folders, your locker, your desk, your stuff. A system of starting your homework, having a place to study. Yeah, things like this. A system of knowing how to filter out things through your head to be able to advocate what methods you use. Where do you start? You know, so these are all systems. So we need mindsets, we need systems, and then we need habits and routines. So if this, and this again, goes to "I know you can do it. I've seen you do it." Well, they don't have the habit and routine of doing it, right? The system is not jelled, the mindsets not there at the moment. But once we have the systems and the mindsets, then we want to use them so that we can build habits and routines because what good is any of that stuff if we don't have a habit and routine? So I can tell, Jennifer you have pretty good executive function.

- J** Jen Fink 33:33
You know, it's interesting. I think I do sometimes, but man I struggle with that whole resistance.
- S** Seth Perler 33:38
I see your pile behind you.
- J** Jen Fink 33:40
Oh, yeah, that's one. You don't see the one in front of me.
- S** Seth Perler 33:43
But that might be a system that works for you.
- J** Jen Fink 33:46
That's stuff I don't need right now.

- S** Seth Perler 33:48
Well, there's your planner.
- J** Janet Allison 33:50
Yeah, I'm planner man.
- J** Jen Fink 33:52
I've got my planner under my microphone right now.
- J** Janet Allison 33:55
Still paper and pencil because I tell you what, for our boys this online scheduling everything is less tangible for them. So hard. So paper and pencil. Yeah, and pretty. I mean, I use different colors for different appointments.
- S** Seth Perler 34:14
So you really go into systems, and it seems like maybe then Jen has them good enough. Right?
- J** Jen Fink 34:21
Good enough.
- S** Seth Perler 34:23
And you've got like I said, good enough executive function. And then Janet maybe goes more into "Let's really develop our systems I see needed. So we have systems, mindsets, habits and routines.
- J** Jen Fink 34:34
Why I work with Janet, you guys, I work with Janet because she's better at that stuff than I am.
- S** Seth Perler 34:40

And yeah, I have an assistant who's like so good at everything I'm horrible at. But I struggle with this stuff, that is me. I mean I failed out of college, dropped out of a second college, almost failed out of high school. Since first grade, you know, my report cards and first grade said, "Daydreams. Does not pay attention. Lazy." Blah blah blah blah, you know.

J Janet Allison 35:01
Yeah, yeah.

S Seth Perler 35:02
I've lived it, and that's why I love helping these kids.

J Jen Fink 35:05
Mm hmm. And you are a successful adult, I just think we need to draw that out for parents sometimes. With our future forecasting, we look at our kids, and we are afraid that they are not going to be able to live satisfying adult lives, they're not gonna be able to support themselves. You're doing all of the things. You're fine.

S Seth Perler 35:27
Thanks for saying that. I had my struggles and I figured it out. I do not want my kids to go through what I went through, the kids that I work with. And when we have a structure, again, since it's not taught directly, when we have a structure to teach them these things, they don't have to go through so much frustration and we can know earlier that they got to that point B. They're going to be successful. So the thing I hear from parents is, "I just want my kid to be happy and successful." For them, more than any other sentence ever that I've heard from parents. That's what we all want. And then as we started, this is a nice segue to the beginning, circling back. They're terrified that their kid won't be happy and successful. Everybody wants their kid to be happy and successful. They can do it, and they don't have to look like what our imagination thinks, what standardization seems to imply, or testing, or all of these things seem to imply. What we need to do, if your kid doesn't fit in the box. I mean, there's homeschooling, there's unschooling, there's don't worry about school, there's GEDs, there's so many options. And that terrifies people. But it doesn't matter. All we want is them be happy and successful. So let's get real on what all the options are and let's build their strengths. School often does not, sadly, not often doesn't build their strengths. The teachers are well intended. The parents are well intended. But these kids are walking out saying "I hate school. I hate learning." What? What have we've

done here?

S

Seth Perler 35:46

And we know, I mean, we have created a system that does not work for many of our boys. And so that's, you know, I love that you're bringing this wisdom to parents, to our listeners. I think our parents need some reassurance that you know what, your boy might not fit in the academic box, but he still has the skills, and it's so much about also addressing his passions and interests.

S

Seth Perler 37:30

Even if it's not taught in schools.

J

Janet Allison 37:32

Even if it's not in school.

J

Jen Fink 37:35

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

S

Seth Perler 37:38

Oh, we're not just saying let him play video games all day long.

J

Janet Allison 37:41

No, we're not saying that. Yeah, there's so things. Yeah. So Seth, where can people find out more from you? This has just been like the tip of the iceberg. This is such a fascinating conversation. Where can people find you?

S

Seth Perler 37:58

Yeah, in August, we have [executivefunctions.com](https://www.executivefunctions.com) is my executive function summit. I get these amazing experts every year and it's like an immersive, amazing, crazy weekend of just immersing yourself and these people who really help. It's for parents. It's a great experience. [SethPerler.com](https://www.SethPerler.com) is my website. You can sign up for my weekly updates. YouTube, I'm on YouTube, I have a million videos. But usually people sign up for my weekly updates on [SethPerler.com](https://www.SethPerler.com). Every week, I put something out to the world to be of service

to people.



Janet Allison 38:31

That is so great. And thank you so much for all of that service to the world. I think we all have our hearts in that same place. Reaching out and reassuring parents, it's all gonna be okay. And parents take that sigh. Seth did such a great sigh. Take that sigh of relief and share it with your children.