

13 Executive Functions Assessment

By Seth Perler, M.Ed., SethPerler.com



PARENT, TEACHER, THERAPIST version: Directions: On this printable pdf, I detail the 13 Executive Functioning Skills I look at to assess challenge areas. Note that these are **skills** our brains build to help us “execute” complex tasks, in order to succeed in school, or successfully transition into adulthood. In other words, it’s **not** about the myths of “just trying harder” or “motivating oneself”, it’s about **skill building**. You’ll notice a lot of overlap in the skills below, because the brain uses them **together**. Feel free to **check off problem areas**, or **highlight words that resonate**, to help you **strategize solutions** more easily. -Seth Perler

13 Executive Function Skills	✓ What the problem looks like
<p>1) Planning skills: A massive set of time management and/or project/task management skills that help us estimate a <i>realistic</i> perception of the time, energy and steps necessary to “execute” or accomplish a goal/task. This includes planning one’s day, using a calendar, planner or agenda to plan long-term, scheduling, planning one’s writing/essays/papers, etc. Planning is how we break down and chunk tasks into subtasks or babysteps.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Schoolwork: A lot of late work, incomplete assignments, zeroes, missing work, misses deadlines. <input type="checkbox"/> Events: Unaware of upcoming responsibilities or events. <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids: Planning and planners feel like a burden. Avoids planning, using planners, calendars, etc. Says, “I don’t need a planner. I hate planners.” <input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination: Does things at the last minute. Says, “I don’t like planning. Planners don’t work for me. I don’t need to write it down, I’ll remember it.” Or, “the teacher has it online already.” <input type="checkbox"/> Execution: Approach homework randomly, chaotically, with no plan. <input type="checkbox"/> Unproductive: Wastes a lot of time, takes forever to do things. <input type="checkbox"/> Time blind: Unrealistic perception of the time, energy and steps needed to accomplish things. <input type="checkbox"/> Writing: Starts writing without a plan. Essays go all over the place, making revision extremely difficult.
<p>2) Organization skills: Skills for knowing how to create “organizational systems” to keep track of things, or do things that are organized <i>enough</i> that we can execute to meet our goals.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Disorganized: messy backpack, locker, desk, bedroom, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Piles: Lots of piles that don’t get organized. <input type="checkbox"/> Paper management: Loses school papers, papers not in the right folders, papers jammed in the backpack, locker or desk. Notes not in the right notebook, or disorganized note taking. <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetful: Forgets things or unprepared a lot because organizational systems aren’t there. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: Doesn’t know where to start, disorganized written assignments, disorganized thoughts.
<p>3) Prioritization skills: Executing (doing) the important thing over the preferred fun or easier thing, when it matters. Decision making skills.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids: Doesn’t start things they don’t feel like doing, puts things off. <input type="checkbox"/> Distraction: Distracted by the fun, easy things. <input type="checkbox"/> Excuses: Great excuses and arguments to justify procrastinating. “I’ll do it later, I promise, trust me!” but it doesn’t get done or is done at the last minute, rushed, and of poor quality. <input type="checkbox"/> Can even struggle to prioritize things they say they want to do or things that are important to them.

ps- If you benefited from this free resource, it would mean the world to me if you share my work far, wide and often, so more kids can get the support they need. Thanks! -Seth Perler

13 Executive Functions Assessment

By Seth Perler, M.Ed., SethPerler.com



<p>4) Focus, Attention, Concentration Skills: Skills to stay “on task” and without distraction. Ability to manage and sustain attention while executing a task until finished. Resist temptation to shift to preferred things. Able to avoid distractions. Able to redirect thoughts to the task at hand.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Unfocused: Distractible, not paying attention, lack of concentration, off task, daydreaming. <input type="checkbox"/> Off-task: Needs a lot of redirection. <input type="checkbox"/> Misses details: Doesn't know what the details of the homework are, doesn't know what they were just reading. <input type="checkbox"/> Unproductive: Seems to waste a lot of time, takes forever to finish.
<p>5) Inhibitory Skills: In order to focus, we must also build skills for “self-control” or “self-management” to resist or inhibit distractions. Inhibition is about one's ability to hold back, to pause, to think before acting/speaking, to slow down and not be impulsive, to have self-restraint when it matters. Inhibition is the opposite of impulsivity or hyperactivity. Inhibitory skills help us focus by inhibiting thoughts, emotions, behaviors that are inappropriate for the setting, or that go against our long term well-being and goals.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Distractible: Doesn't inhibit distractions, gets derailed, off track, off task. <input type="checkbox"/> Can't delay gratification <input type="checkbox"/> Poor self-monitoring <input type="checkbox"/> Poor filter: Calls out answers, blurts things out inappropriately. <input type="checkbox"/> Impulsive: Doesn't think before acting. mindless choices. <input type="checkbox"/> Bad decisions: Gets into “trouble” or difficult situations, may harm others, risky behavior.
<p>6) Task Initiation Skills: Now, if we can focus and inhibit, we need skills to initiate, self-start, activate, get the ball rolling, get the train moving, or begin execution of the important tasks.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Stuck: Doesn't know how to “initiate” or where to get started. <input type="checkbox"/> Inefficient: Wastes a lot of time. Not productive. <input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination: Delays starting. May be labeled as “lazy”, “unmotivated”, “undisciplined”. <input type="checkbox"/> Excuses: Creative reasons for not starting, homework arguments. <input type="checkbox"/> No plan: Doesn't prepare or have a runway for starting tasks by getting organized and making a plan first, so lacks an awareness of where a good starting point might be.
<p>7) Task Persistence Skills: Skills to follow through. Continuing to try until finished, working to full task completion, stick with it, perseverance, persistence. Self-regulates to sustain attention, effort, execution. Tenacity. Grit.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete: Starts but doesn't finish, or finishes but doesn't turn it in. A pattern of playing catchup because of missing, late, or incomplete work, zero's. <input type="checkbox"/> Stops: Gives up, gets derailed. <input type="checkbox"/> Studying: Often doing test corrections as a result of not persisting with actual studying. <input type="checkbox"/> Output: Might know the content, but doesn't produce or turn in work. <input type="checkbox"/> Reading: Struggles with reading assignments that requires persisting with focus and time.
<p>8) Transition Skills: Skills to be flexible, to shift from activity to activity or task to task effectively. Adaptable, can change gears, get back on track. Includes getting from one class to another on time, being prepared, getting out of the house in the morning on time with everything needed, even how we transition from one grade level to another.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Bumpy: Transitions can be bumpy. <input type="checkbox"/> Late: Trouble getting places on time. <input type="checkbox"/> Unprepared: Forgets things during transitions. <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated: Change or shifting feels overwhelming, lack good routines to manage transitions, haphazard. <input type="checkbox"/> Off-track: Hard to get back on track in a new setting.

ps- If you benefited from this free resource, it would mean the world to me if you share my work far, wide and often, so more kids can get the support they need. Thanks! -Seth Perler

13 Executive Functions Assessment

By Seth Perler, M.Ed., SethPerler.com



<p>9) Working Memory Skills: Verbal self-talk and visual imagery strategies that help us “keep things in mind” as we work through things. Like juggling balls, these are short-term memory skills. Able to track important details during a process.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Forgets multistep directions: Doesn’t know what the homework is or the important details of it.<input type="checkbox"/> Spacing out: Forgets what they are doing.<input type="checkbox"/> Note taking: Trouble listening & taking good notes at the same time.<input type="checkbox"/> Math: Trouble with math facts or juggling numbers to do mental math with accuracy.<input type="checkbox"/> Misremembers: “I turned it in, I know I did, I specifically remember turning it in”, then it turns up in the bottom of the backpack weeks later because it was never turned in.
<p>10) Emotional Regulation Skills: Having healthy tools to regulate emotional states, to stay focused on the tasks at hand. Ability to manage, express and work through challenging emotions. Mindfully aware of thoughts and feelings. Has understanding of emotional needs and a vocabulary to describe these things objectively. Not ruled by emotions, the nervous system or the narrative. Responsive more than reactive.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Resistant: Avoids working with difficult emotions.<input type="checkbox"/> Stressed: Overwhelmed, dysregulated nervous system, adrenal fatigue. Fight, flight, freeze. Difficult to calm.<input type="checkbox"/> Lacks skills, strategies or tools to process emotions intentionally, lacks emotional vocabulary. Doesn’t self-regulate well.<input type="checkbox"/> Avoidant, withdrawn, shut down.<input type="checkbox"/> Reactive. Longer than expected reactions.<input type="checkbox"/> Angry, mad, short fuse, running hot, defiance.<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious, depressed, intense.
<p>11) Metacognitive Skills: Skills for self-awareness, introspective, reflective, mindful awareness, conscious of what we are doing. Self monitoring. Thinking about thinking. Self evaluation skills to learn from mistakes and successes. Ability to take a step back and reflect and problem solve. Also refers to self-checking the quality of work, monitor progress. Self control, self regulation.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Denial: Lacking a realistic awareness about one’s challenges. “This school year will be different, this semester I’m turning over a new leaf, I promise, just trust me,” but not aware of lagging <i>skills</i>.<input type="checkbox"/> Not reflecting: Unaware of what does or does not work. Doesn’t look back purposefully to say, “wow, that works, I should do that more. And that isn’t working, I should change it.”<input type="checkbox"/> Doesn’t want help: “Leave me alone, get off my back, I’ve got this, why don’t you trust me? I can figure it out myself. I’ll deal with it later, it’ll take me 5 minutes.”<input type="checkbox"/> Avoids dealing with things.<input type="checkbox"/> Reads but doesn’t monitor comprehension.
<p>12) Skills to Move through Resistance: This is crucial, and is all about emotional regulation and “fear” of feeling uncomfortable doing the non-preferred task. Any approach to EF coaching that does not help with the resistance is missing the boat. These are skills that must be built.</p>	<p>What the problem looks like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Resistant: The core problem my students contend with is how to work with the resistance: Resistance to receiving help, implementing strategies that would help, to using planners effectively, to doing non-preferred homework or responsibilities that need to get done, to starting things early, and countless other things that would make life easier and get us closer to our goals.<input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance, procrastination, unwillingness, unmotivated, excuses, arguments.<input type="checkbox"/> Says: “I don’t wanna, I don’t feel like it. This sucks, this is dumb or stupid. Why do I have to do this?”

ps- If you benefited from this free resource, it would mean the world to me if you share my work far, wide and often, so more kids can get the support they need. Thanks! -Seth Perler

13 Executive Functions Assessment

By Seth Perler, M.Ed., SethPerler.com



13) Self-care Skills: While “self-care” isn’t exactly an executive function “skill”, I listed this because one’s ability to practice good self-care and wellness habits has a **massive** impact on EF, and requires EF skills. Restful sleep, food that actually nourishes the body, adequate exercise.

What the problem looks like:

- Not rested:** Electronics interfering with sleep, poor sleep hygiene.
- Irregular routines.
- Lack of exercise:** Movement, sunlight, sedentary.
- Nutrition:** Doesn’t eat enough healthy food. Eats a lot of processed foods, chips, candy, breads, food with chemicals and dyes.
- Unable to relax or wind down.
- Poor posture.
- Self-care:** Not showering regularly, brushing teeth, cleaning clothes.
- Picking, cutting, biting nails, self-harm.

➤ Now that I know more about the EF Challenges, what do I do?

This should point you in the right direction: Follow [my work](#) and the amazing work of others who successfully help kids. Check out my [courses and workshops](#). And build upon **strengths**, see below:

➤ Strength Based Support: Build Your Child’s Strengths

While the checklist above is very useful in getting a clear picture of the challenges, it can be daunting, and it’s **absolutely essential** to take stock of the positives as well: your child’s strengths. All kids are **amazing**, and we want to empower them to build a future life and career that capitalizes on their unique strengths, gifts, passions, interests, curiosities, the things that matter to them, that are meaningful and purposeful. Sadly, many neurodiverse kids aren’t recognized enough for the positives, and there is too much emphasis on the challenges.

So I invite you to fill out any of the following questions you like, and find a time this week to **sit down with your child/student to share these positives with them**. When you do this, try to be fully present, smile, make it memorable, meaningful and fun. Try to help them to feel seen, understood and validated. Strength based support is essential!

What are the child’s strengths, gifts or talents? (get creative in your answer!)

What amazes you about this child?

13 Executive Functions Assessment

By Seth Perler, M.Ed., SethPerler.com



How do you hope/wish this child feels about themselves?

What does this child do that makes you smile and laugh?

What special things do you notice that you wish more people understood about this child?

What has this child taught YOU? How have THEY inspired or positively impacted YOU?

What are your greatest hopes and wishes for this child?

13 Executive Functions Assessment

By Seth Perler, M.Ed., SethPerler.com



What positive things do you want this child to know **most** about how you feel about them or see them?

Anything else?

Question for parents: First read through your written responses above. Next, consider how you can creatively use your child's strengths to address some of the challenges. Brainstorm ideas here: