



PROUD to be part of the
Brooke Weston Trust



Brooke Weston Trust Primary SEND Newsletter

Welcome to the February SEND newsletter. This month's newsletter is all about understanding executive functioning. We hope you find the information useful. If you have any questions please contact your child's class teacher or SENDCO at your school who will be more than willing to discuss anything with you.

What is Executive Functioning?

Executive function is a set of skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control. We use these skills every day to learn, work, and manage daily life but we are not born with these skills, we need to learn them. Difficulties with executive function can make it hard to focus, follow directions, and handle emotions, among other things. Some people refer to executive function as 'the management system of the brain' - it's the set of skills that allow us to get organised, plan ahead and perform tasks.



There are three main areas of executive function:

- **Working memory** - which governs our ability to retain and manipulate distinct pieces of information over short periods of time.
- **Cognitive flexibility** - which helps us to sustain or shift attention in response to different demands or to apply different rules in different settings
- **Inhibitory control** - which enables us to set priorities and resist impulsive actions or responses.

These three main areas then affect a huge number of smaller skills beneath them, examples of which can be seen below.



Is executive functioning a disability?

No, executive dysfunction isn't a disability, or a diagnosis on its own. However, it's very common among neurodiverse people (people who have neurodevelopmental differences). It's one of the primary symptoms of ADHD, which is a condition where the brain struggles to regulate focus, energy and emotions, but it's also common among other conditions, such as Autism.

What are some signs of executive functioning difficulties?

Difficulties with executive functions can look very different from person to person - although there are some common ways that these issues can manifest, such as:

- having trouble starting and/or completing tasks
- having difficulty prioritising tasks
- forgetting what they just heard or read
- having trouble following directions or a sequence of steps
- panicking when rules or routines change
- having trouble switching focus from one task to another
- getting overly emotional and fixating on things
- having trouble organising their thoughts
- having trouble keeping track of their belongings
- having trouble managing their time



Strengthening executive functioning skills

The first thing to remember is to be patient! Forming warm and responsive relationships with children is important for their executive function development. In particular, providing comfort when children are distressed or need support helps to scaffold executive function skills.

Classroom environments that support the development of strong executive function skills have many characteristics in common. These include:

- Organised classroom environments where routines are clearly communicated and children have the necessary classroom materials for successful learning available in an accessible location.
- Cosy spaces for children to take time to calm down after stressful events.
- Clear expectations for children's behaviour and encouragement for children to self-monitor their own behaviours.
- Children are prepared for transitions and know what is coming next.
- Adults modelling, reinforcing, and teaching executive function skills in supportive way, sharing aloud the decisions they make throughout the day.
- Use of checklists to break bigger tasks into a series of smaller ones that can be followed through, step-by-step or with visual support.

Useful References

A day in the life of Josh: [A day in the life of a child with executive function challenges \(understood.org\)](https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-issues/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-child-with-executive-function-challenges)

Understood Practical activities and resources: [Activated Learning | Calm, capable, in-control pilots of our learning and our lives.](https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-issues/activated-learning)

Further reading on early experiences and executive functioning: [Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function \(harvard.edu\)](https://www.harvard.edu/news/building-the-brains-air-traffic-control-system-how-early-experiences-shape-the-development-of-executive-function)

The Schools SEND information report can be found at : <https://www.oakleyvaleprimary.org/page/?title=Equalities%2FSEND&pid=49>

The Local Offer can be found at: <https://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/children-families-education/send/local-offer/Pages/default.aspx>

If you have any questions your SENCO at Oakley Vale is Becky Annetts and can be contacted on rebecca.annetts@oakleyvaleprimary.org or via the school office.

Next months newsletter will focus on Dyscalculia