

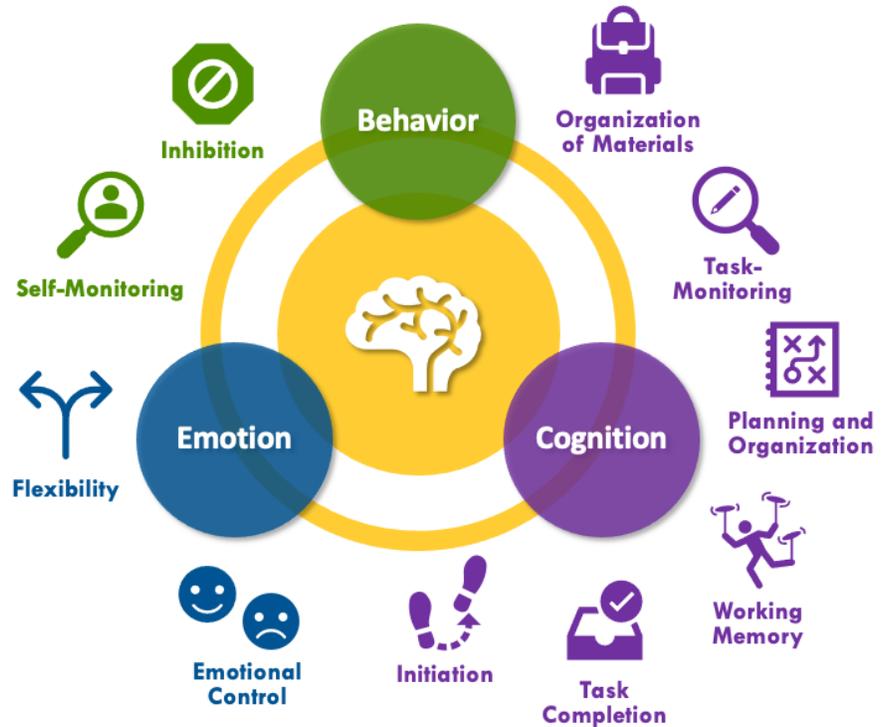
# PARENT HANDOUT

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## SUPPORTING AND IMPROVING SAMPLE CLIENT'S EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

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### THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS



Parent ratings of Sample's skills suggest difficulties with their executive functions. Concerns are noted in the following areas: inhibition, self-monitoring, flexibility, emotional control, initiation, working memory, planning and organization, checking their work and organizing their things.

Review this handout for general recommendations for supporting and improving executive functions in adolescents. Additional handouts describe how to support and improve specific executive function difficulties.

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## SUGGESTED STEPS TO HELP IMPROVE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS



Learn what executive functions are and why they are important.



Build understanding of how the executive functions affect behavior and learning.



Provide supports and accommodations that will help at home and in school.



Teach skills and provide interventions designed to improve the executive functioning. Informal supports and accommodations may help address their needs. Special education or formal supports/accommodations written in individualized education program (IEP), 504, or other intervention plans may also be needed.



## WHAT ARE THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

The executive functions are brain-based abilities. They help people control or manage their behaviors, feelings, and thoughts, particularly when stressed. Specific executive functions include controlling impulses, managing emotions, adapting to change easily, paying attention and concentrating, and managing information in memory. The networks in the brain that support executive functions develop over a long time, from birth to about 30 years of age. Genetics play a part in this development, but things like injury, poverty, disabilities, mental health diagnoses, trauma, and other stressful life events can, too. Because they take a long time to develop fully, the executive functions can improve with help, including direct instruction in learning strategies.

The executive functions are critical for supporting learning and success in school. They allow an adolescent to manage new or difficult information and to show what they know. They influence social, emotional, behavioral, and daily living skills. Executive functions can have a lifelong impact on success in school, work, and relationships.

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## BUILD UNDERSTANDING

It's important to understand that Sample's difficulties with the executive functions are brain-based and not due to personal choice or willful behavior. People with executive function challenges can be misunderstood as "lazy," "careless," "stubborn," or even "mean." Work to change these opinions—and reduce blaming and shaming—by helping everyone, including Sample, understand that Sample's executive functioning difficulties are not a choice. Also be sure to notice and celebrate Sample's strengths to increase hope and expectations!



## PROVIDE SUPPORTS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

There are many simple things that you and Sample can do at home to support their executive functions. Research suggests that these supports may be helpful. Working with the school team to implement them across settings may be most effective.

**Be positive.** Adolescents with executive function difficulties get lots of negative messages from adults and peers about how to behave, learn, and contribute. This can be very hard on Sample's self-esteem, sense of connection, and motivation.

- Tell Sample what they are doing right, not wrong. Provide at least twice as much praise as correction. Make sure that Sample's expectations for success are both realistic and positive.
- Make sure Sample feels like part of their community. Find activities Sample can do in the community and at home that help everyone.
- Help Sample find an extracurricular activity that they are good at, like sports, robotics, theater, music, art, etc.
- Make sure that Sample and those who work with them know that most executive function difficulties can be overcome. Share information about how executive functioning relies on brain structures, which, for Sample, are still developing. This means that their brain can and will change, especially with support.

***[Redacted for Sample Report]***

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## TEACH SKILLS AND PROVIDE INTERVENTIONS

Once Sample has these supports in place, they can learn and practice new self-directed approaches to improve their executive functions. Simply showing an adolescent with executive dysfunction how to do something is not enough. Interventions can be most effective when they become part of the adolescent's everyday routine at home. They should also be reinforced in all settings. New executive functioning skills also require lots of practice across settings so they become automatic. These basic principles should guide you when you build a plan to improve Sample's executive functions:

*[Redacted for Sample Report]*

**Coach.** Show Sample, rather than telling them, what to do. When Sample understands a new skill, lessen your support. Continue to supply just enough structure to make sure Sample will succeed. Think about how you teach someone to ride a bicycle. You model how to ride a bike, then you use training wheels or hold on to the bicycle seat to support them until they can balance on their own. Then you let go. While teaching executive functions, most people need a lot of support while they learn.

*[Redacted for Sample Report]*

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## GENERAL RESOURCES ON EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS



A Parents' Guide to Helping  
Children with  
Executive Functioning

Joyce Cooper-Kahn, Ph.D. & Laurie Dietzel, Ph.D.

<https://www.woodbinehouse.com/product/late-lost-unprepared/>

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