



## DCDSB Understanding & Supporting All Learners

### What is Executive Functioning?

Executive Functioning refers to a set of higher-level cognitive skills that help us set goals, monitor our progress, and achieve our goals. They refer to how we organize ourselves, attack a task, and adjust our behaviour to reach our goals. They continue to develop into young adulthood, and are made up of several sub-skills that develop more or less in the following order (Dawson, 2013):

- Response Inhibition (ability to think before you act)
- Working Memory (ability to hold information in mind while working on a complex task)
- Emotional Control (ability to manage emotions in order to achieve a higher goal)
- Flexibility (ability to adapt to a change in plans)
- Sustained Attention (ability to persist with paying attention)
- Task Initiation (ability to efficiently start tasks or projects)
- Planning / Ability to Prioritize (ability to develop a good plan of action)
- Organization (ability to organize one's self as a student)
- Time Management (ability to manage time in order to complete a complex task and meet a deadline)
- Goal-directed Persistence (ability to persist with a goal)
- Metacognition (ability to evaluate one's self as a learner and make adjustments as needed to reach the goal)

Students who struggle with Executive Functioning skills tend to struggle academically and may also have a diagnosis such as a Learning Disability, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

At home, you may observe that your child has trouble:

- Knowing how to start or complete a task
- Breaking down a task into smaller parts
- Finding and correcting errors
- Creating structure and organization
- Meeting deadlines

For more information you may wish to explore these books by Peg Dawson & Richard Guare: ***Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary Executive Skills Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential*** (2009) or ***Smart but Scattered Teens*** (2012)

*This information contained in this resource is not intended for diagnostic purposes. It is to be used a reference for your own understanding and to provide you with some information about the different kinds of difficulties you may encounter with your child, and about different ways you may be able to support your child at home.*

### Strategies to support Children & Adolescents with Executive Functioning Difficulties at Home

- Carefully review Assessment reports and learning profile
- Directly teach study skills
- Break down tasks into smaller, more manageable steps; for teens give mini-deadlines for steps of a larger assignment
- Help your child make a plan before starting a complex task
- Encourage your child to prioritize tasks, helping them to identify tasks on their to-do list that must be completed
- Teach your child how to use alarms and electronic reminders to stay on track
- Directly teach time management skills by providing clear structure and expectations (e.g., do Questions 1-5 in 30 minutes)
- Help your child to predict how long a task will take and then check in to determine if the time estimate should be adjusted in the future
- Model good planning, organization, and mental flexibility (e.g., be aware of your reaction when things do not go according to plan)
- Use an easily accessible calendar to keep track of family and school activities and deadlines
- Carefully plan your child's workspace
- Directly teach self-monitoring, like regularly monitoring progress by comparing it to the plan, and then making adjustments to meet deadlines
- Teach your child that they are not finished a task until they have checked their work and made corrections
- As your child gains success with these skills, slowly increase goals and gradually fade (or remove) your prompts
- Teach self-calming, relaxation, and problem-solving skills
- Consult with school staff when needed

