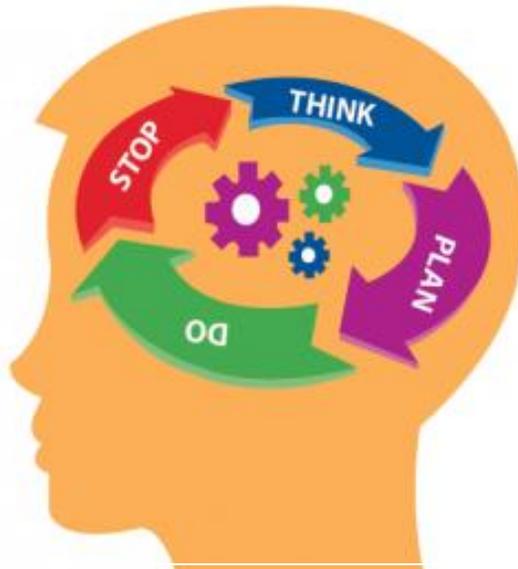


# Executive Functioning Explained

Information provided by Joan Ricker



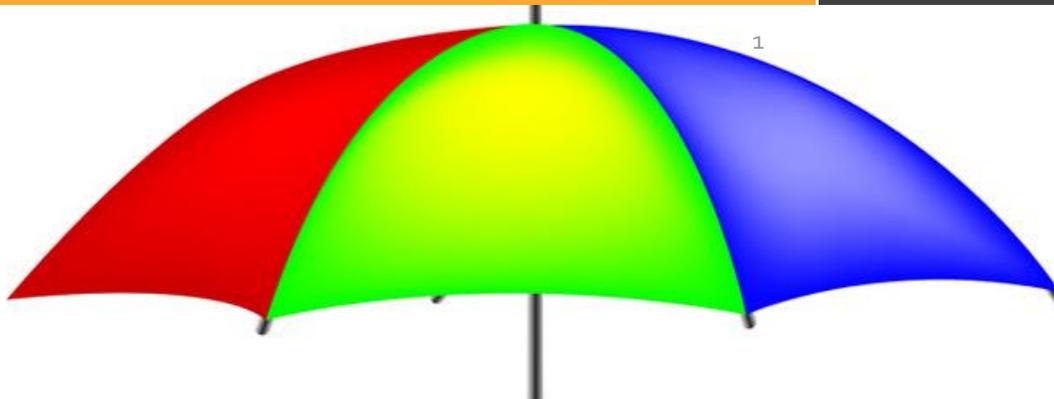
## Executive Functioning

What does it mean?

What is the research about it?

How can I help my child if they struggle with executive functioning?

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### What does it mean?

**Executive function** is an umbrella term that can be best explained as a set of higher-order processes in the brain.

The processes include: **inhibitory control**, **working memory**, and **attentional flexibility**.

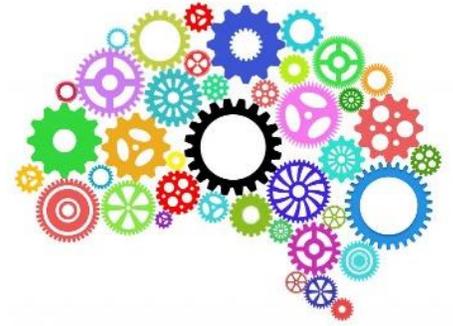
CLICK BELOW



Executive Functioning Video

## Three Main Components

1. Inhibitory Control
2. Working Memory
3. Attentional Flexibility



### Inhibitory Control

**Inhibitory control** also called self-control is defined as the capacity to regulate attentional or behavioral responses.

Or simply put, the control over one's behavior.

[LINK: Marshmallow Test](#)



### WHAT IS WORKING MEMORY?



### Working Memory

**Working memory** allows the brain to briefly hold new information while it's needed in the short term.

It may then help to transfer the information into long-term memory.

### Attentional Flexibility

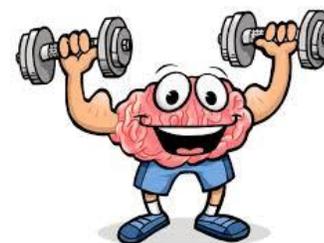
**Attentional flexibility** also called mental or cognitive flexibility helps us to sustain or shift attention in response to different demands or to apply different rules in different settings.



Controlling my Impulses		
<b>1</b>	Stop what you are doing.	
<b>2</b>	Think about what you are going to say or do.	
<b>3</b>	Decide if it will make the situation better or worse.	
<b>4</b>	Choose the behavior that makes the situation better.	

## Strategies to Support Inhibitory Control or Impulse Control

1. Provide clear guidelines and specific rules to teach acceptable behavior.
  - ✓ Actively reinforce desired behaviors.
2. Offer support using visual cues or verbal prompts to “stop” the unwanted impulse.
  - ✓ For example, provide an index card that says:  
**STOP THINK ACT**
3. Plan in advance for potentially problem triggers by identifying what leads to loss of control and providing extra support in those situations.
  - ✓ Provide assistance when beginning a new task. Verbalize clear explanations and instructions so that the child is made aware of exactly what is expected.
4. Teach alternatives to negative behaviors.
  - ✓ In order to foster a feeling of success or accomplishment, assign various additional responsibilities to the child that would be seen as a reward.
5. When appropriate, provide choices about several different activities they could choose to work on one at a time.



## Strategies to Support Working Memory

### 1. Work on visualization skills.

Encourage your child to create a picture in his mind of what he's just read or heard. For example, if you've told him to set the table for five people, ask him to come up with a mental picture of what the table should look like. Then have him draw that picture.

### 2. Have your child teach you.

Being able to explain how to do something involves making sense of information and mentally filing it. If your child is learning a skill, like how to dribble a basketball, ask him to teach it to you. This lets them start working with the information right away rather than waiting to be called on.

### 3. Suggest games that use visual memory.

There are lots of matching games that can help your child work on visual memory. You can also do things like give your child a magazine page and ask him to circle all instances of the word *the* or the letter *a* in one minute.

### 4. Play cards.

Simple card games like Crazy Eights, Uno, Go Fish and War can improve working memory in two ways. Your child has to keep the rules of the game in mind. But he also has to remember what cards he has and which ones other people have played.

### 5. Encourage active reading.

There's a reason highlighters and sticky notes are so popular! Jotting down notes and underlining or highlighting text can help kids keep the information in mind long enough to answer questions about it. Talking out loud and asking questions about the reading material can also help with this.

### 6. Chunk information into smaller bites.

Ever wonder why phone numbers and social security numbers have hyphens in them? Because it's easier to remember a few small groups of numbers than it is to remember one long string of numbers. Keep this in mind when you need to give your child multi-step directions. Write them down or give them one at a time. You can also use [graphic organizers](#) to help break writing assignments into smaller pieces.

### 7. Make it multisensory.

Processing information in as many ways as possible can help with working memory and long-term memory. Write tasks down so your child can look at them. Say them out loud so your child can hear them. Toss a ball back and forth while you discuss the tasks your child needs to complete.

### 8. Help make connections.

Help your child form associations that connect the different details he's trying to remember. Grab your child's interest with fun mnemonics like Roy G. Biv. (Thinking about this name can help kids remember the order of the colors in the rainbow.) Finding ways to connect information helps with forming and [retrieving long-term memory](#). It also helps with working memory, which is what we use to hold and compare new and old memories.

[Information Found at Understand.org](#)

## Strategies to Support Attentional Flexibility



**Be a Role Model:** Kids don't do as we say, they do as we do. When we think in a flexible way, we can share our experiences with our kids. We can talk about how we modified our plans, ideas and points of view and things turned out okay.

- *"I was going to make hamburgers for dinner, but I forgot to defrost it. Let's have spaghetti"*

➤ **Talk the Talk:** When we are working or playing with children, it is the perfect opportunity to speak to them in a way that promotes flexible thinking.

- *"This puzzle piece is giving us a hard time. Let's see if we can do this another way"*

➤ **Use Phrases that Promote Flexible Thinking:**

- *"The way other people do things is OK and might teach me something new."*
- *"I won't know if I like something until I try it."*
- *"This is not worth being upset about"*

➤ **One More Idea:**

- *Kids learn best when we talk about other kids who have similar issues. We can point out people who tried different options until they succeeded:*

**[Video that Explains Cognitive Flexibility](#)**

Link: **[Information From This Page is Found](#)**

## More strategies to help!

### Organization Strategy Ideas

Link: [Color Coding School Subjects](#)

Link: [Teaching Organization Skills](#)

Link: [SOAR Strategies](#)

**S**upport Imagination / **O**ffer Choices / **A**ssist Reflection / **R**aise Activity Levels



### Bedtime Checklists

Links: [Young Children](#) [Older Children](#)