

# Commentary... Executive skills and your child's success

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According to Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, "executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. ... the brain needs this skill set to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses."

Executive Skills enable your child/adolescent to:

- Set meaningful goals.
- Develop a plan (roadmap) that lays out

the steps to take to complete a goal, materials that will be needed, and how much time each step should take.

- Recall directions.
- Start work right away.
- Organize resources (e.g., papers, assignment sheets, books) that are needed to complete assignments.
- Decide how much time and effort to allot to each assignment.
- Complete work in a logical sequence.
- Monitor their work to ensure that they've completed assignments correctly.

Referring to the following chart, are there weaknesses you can spot in your child/adolescent's executive skills?

EXECUTIVE SKILL	POSSIBLE SIGNS OF EXECUTIVE WEAKNESSES
Goal Setting	Living in the moment, children/adolescents may be "blind" to the future and the need to develop and complete short-term and long-term goals.
Plan	Children/adolescents may start a project without having gathered the materials they will need, they may not be able to break goals into a series of manageable steps, or they don't give themselves sufficient time to complete a project.
Initiate	Children/adolescents may find it difficult to get started, leading parents and teachers to conclude they are just being oppositional.
Organize	Children/adolescents may be disorganized, losing important papers, turning in incomplete work, or creating unrealistic schedules.
Prioritize	Children/adolescents may spend too much time on small projects while neglecting big projects. They may not be able to pick out "key ideas" when note-taking.
Sequence	Children/adolescents may "skip steps" in an assignment, may have difficulty telling a story in chronological order, or they may "jump the gun" socially.
Working Memory	Children/adolescents may find it difficult to recall instructions, juggle multiple tasks, and retrieve relevant information from memory.
Self-Monitor	Children/adolescents may not check to see if they've completed each step of an assignment, they may not pace themselves so they finish a project on time, they may not check an assignment for accuracy before turning it in.

*Adapted from "overview of executive dysfunction," Leslie E. Packer, Ph.D.*

The following table lays out a powerful strategy that you can use to help your child/adolescent strengthen their executive skills. It follows the Goal—Obstacle—Plan—Do—Review format.

Goal: Ask your child or adolescent to think of a short-term or long-term goal they would like to accomplish. The goal may be academic (improving math skills,

writing a book report), social (asking someone to a school dance, making a new friend), or behavioral (sitting quietly while the teacher is talking, raising a hand before speaking).

The next step is to ask your child or adolescent to rewrite their general goal as a smart goal, so that it meets all of the following criteria.

### THE GOAL SHOULD BE:

**SPECIFIC:** Exactly what does your child or adolescent need to do?

**MEASURABLE:** How much needs to be completed before the goal is achieved?

**ATTAINABLE:** The goal should be realistic.

**RELEVANT:** The goal should lead to an improvement in academic, social, or behavioral skills.

**TIME-BOUND:** The goal should be accomplished within a specified amount of time.



## GOAL – OBSTACLE – PLAN – DO – REVIEW

### SMART GOAL:

Ask your child or adolescent to formulate a smart goal.

*Is the goal they selected...*

- *specific?* (I will improve my addition skills)
- *measurable?* (I will complete three math worksheets each day)
- *attainable?* (I can complete worksheets independently)
- *relevant?* (addition facts will help me solve story problems)
- *time-bound?* (I will practice addition skills for three weeks)

Write Smart Goal here:

### IDENTIFY OBSTACLES:

Brainstorm with your child/adolescent what obstacles might keep them from achieving their goal? (e.g., They procrastinate on starting assignments, they get easily distracted).

Write Obstacles Here:

### PLAN OF ATTACK

Brainstorm with your child/adolescent,

- How will they deal with obstacles? \_\_\_\_\_
- What materials and resources will they need to achieve their goal? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is there someone they might need help from? \_\_\_\_\_

Break Goal into a Manageable Number of Steps:

Step #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Time Frame \_\_\_\_\_

Step #2 \_\_\_\_\_

Time Frame \_\_\_\_\_

Step #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Time Frame \_\_\_\_\_

Step #4 \_\_\_\_\_

Time Frame \_\_\_\_\_

### DO

Your child or adolescent should cross out each step as they complete it

### REVIEW

Ask your child,  
Did you achieve your goal?  
What did you find helpful?  
What did you learn from your success?  
Or  
What didn't work and why?  
What would you do differently next time?  
What did you learn from the experience?

## MATH SQUARES

Use the numbers 1 through 16 to complete the equations.  
Each number is only used once.  
Each row is a math equation.  
Each column is a math equation.  
Remember that multiplication and division are performed before addition and subtraction.

	-		x		+		-16
-		-		x		-	
	+		x		/		21
+		+		-		-	
	+		+		-		30
-		-		-		+	
	+		x		-		83
-1	4	20	5				

Use the numbers 1 through 25 to complete the equations.  
Each number is only used once.  
Each row is a math equation.  
Each column is a math equation.  
Remember that multiplication and division are performed before addition and subtraction.

	x		+		+		-		278
+		+		-		-		-	
	x		+		-		+		24
+		x		+		-		-	
	/		-		x		-		-126
-		+		+		+		+	
	x		-		+		+		139
/		+		/		x		-	
	+		/		-		x		-329
44	96	13	362	-6					