

# Everyday Executive Functional Tools

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ORGANIZATIONAL HELP FOR HOMEWORK & BEYOND

BY JENNIFER LEIMAN M.S. OTR/L

# About Me

- Certified Occupational Therapist
- Have been working with children for almost 20 years
- Masters of Science in Occupational Therapy from Ithaca College
- A certified Executive Function Coach
- Passionate about helping children find their way, knowing each child has something special to offer.
- Work to integrate concrete tools that are child-specific yet appropriate for the entire family dynamic.

# Who



Who is this workshop intended for?

# Overview

- The goal of this workshop is to help you help your child connect their backpack to homework time and beyond.
- You will gain a greater understanding of executive function (EF) components, strategies as well as implementation tools
- You will come away from this workshop with dynamic and fluid in-the-moment learning tools that can be used immediately.

# Laughing through the EF pain

Omg! I have so much homework and studying to do... let me see what's happening on facebook.



someecards  
user card

Motherhood:  
When finding a no homework pass in your child's backpack is better than winning the f#\*king lottery.

facebook.com/wheresthefkingmoneyman?ref=share  
someecards  
user card



Sometimes I think Mommy is happier than me when I don't have homework.



youreecards  
someecards.com

You could give me 67 years to do my homework & I wouldn't do it until the night before.



someecards  
user card

Welcome to being a parent of a teenager. Prepare for a large amount of eye rolling, emotional outbursts, and thoughts of running away. And that's just the parents.



FACEBOOK.COM/MOTHERHOOD.ORG

# What

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The breakdown of Executive Function skills

# What is Executive Function?

Executive function (EF) refers to the brain-based, cognitive processes that help us to:

**Regulate  
our behavior**

**Make  
decisions**

**Set and  
achieve goals**

EF is important because it teaches students to develop intrinsic motivation to be independent and successful.

Me	My Child	<h1>Executive Function Components</h1>
		<b>Inhibition of impulses</b> - the ability to stop, think, plan, and then act (self control)
		<b>Sustaining attention</b> - the need to keep focus on one task
		<b>Shifting attention</b> the ability to easily move attention or concentration between tasks
		<b>Emotional control</b> - the ability to self-regulate (during times of stress)
		<b>Initiating activity</b> - the ability to begin a task in a timely fashion without procrastination
		<b>Working memory</b> - temporarily storing and managing information required to carry out complex cognitive tasks such as learning, reasoning, & comprehension.
		<b>Planning</b> - the ability to manage current/future tasks by setting goals and developing appropriate steps to complete
		<b>Organization of material</b> - the ability to make and maintain a system for arranging/keeping track of items
		<b>Self-monitoring</b> - the ability to see one's own behavior and learn to respond to situations appropriately
		<b>Time management</b> - ability to understand how long it takes to to complete a task



# Executive Function Tools and Strategies

## Inhibition of impulses

- Have child repeat the question out loud
- Count to 5 before answering
- Acknowledge actions in a non-judgmental way

## Sustaining attention

- Highlighters help mark important words/phrases
- Crossing out items on the to-do list
- Chew gum
- Natural light
- Reader's guided strip

## Shifting attention

- Draw a dark line down the centerfold of a folder (a visual cue to prevent papers from folding)

## Emotional control

- Ask for a movement break
- Help to redirect their energy
- Talk about the day (peaks and valleys)
- Breathe
- Change up the position - read laying on the floor
- When your child is in shutdown, try written communication

# Executive Function Tools and Strategies

## Working memory

- A checklist for different tasks and listing the materials needed for each task can help plan ahead (e.g., list of materials needed for homework or project planning)
- If your child is better at giving the answer out loud, then:
  - Write their answer down on a separate piece of paper. They can then copy it onto the homework sheet
  - Voice memo their answer and they can replay it to copy it - Auditory learner
  - Talk to text and they can see their answer (in a Notes app) - Visual learner

## Initiating activity

- Break down large assignments/tasks into smaller steps with attainable goals
- Organize materials (located in a consistent work space)

## Planning

- Talk about the day's activities (specials at school, lunch menu, pick-up plan and transition plan to homework time)
- Post a daily schedule (AM, after school, PM)
- Make 'To Do' lists, for daily and weekly tasks/assignments (including practicing instrument, chores, homework)

# Executive Function Tools and Strategies

## Organization of material

- Write down homework in an agenda or check online
- Bookmark date in the daily agenda (paper clip, binder clip, sticky note, fold edges)
- Color-code folders, binders, notebooks (check with the teacher)
- Put name and date on all assignments
- Organize folders on Google Drive/Chromebooks
- Nightly organization and readiness for clean room, homework space, book bag
- Have a defined workspace
- Everything has a home/Caddy of tools

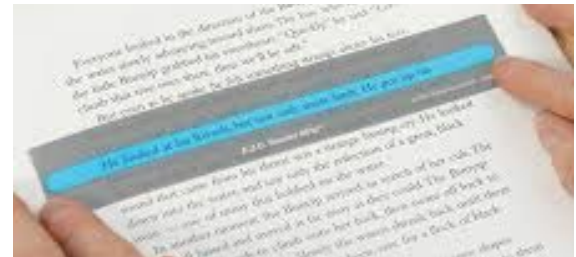
## Self-monitoring

- Utilize pre-established tools - know what your child's stopping point is, or when she/he needs a break
- Learning contract

## Time management

- Use a timer (phone, microwave, etc.)
- Set alarms
- Wear a watch

# Tools



# How



How can I make these tools work for me?

# AM To Do

- + Go to the bathroom
- + Brush Teeth
- + Get dressed
- + Eat breakfast
- + Take vitamins
- + Get bookbag
- + Put on shoes
- + Put on coat
- + Get in car

# PM To Do

- + Unpack bag
- + Empty Folder
- + Set up work space
- + Do Homework
- + Practice Instrument
- + Repack book bag and put by shoes
- =====
- + Eat Dinner
- + Bath/Shower
- + Put on Pajamas
- + Brush teeth
- + Pick out clothes for tomorrow
- + Reading

# A Checklist to Check Your Work

Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● All parts of the question are answered</li><li>● Include evidence when needed</li><li>● Include page numbers</li><li>● Explain your thinking (answer the how/why)</li></ul>
C.O.P.S.	<p>For every complete sentence, check your</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>C</b>apitalization of first words, pronouns</li><li>● <b>O</b>rganization - <b>O</b>rders of words (Does it make sense?). Follow graphic organizer.</li><li>● <b>P</b>unctuation</li><li>● <b>S</b>pelling</li></ul>

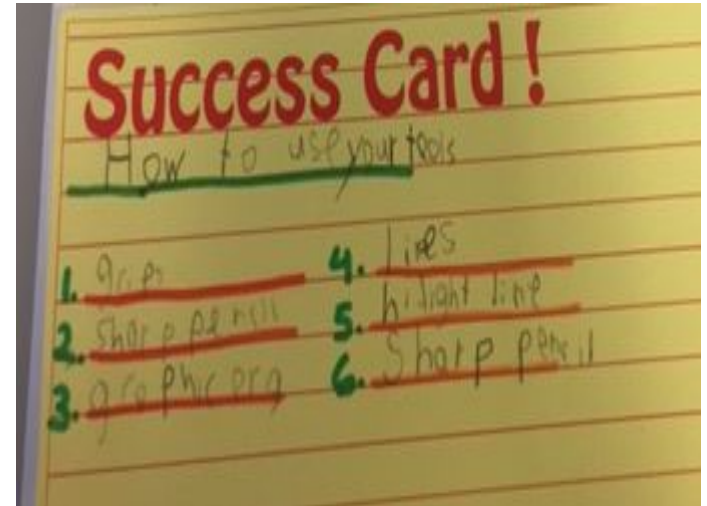
Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Check operations (add, subtract, multiply, divide)</li><li>● Check and recheck math facts</li><li>● Label all word problems</li><li>● Underline important details in word problems</li></ul>
Papers	<p>Are all papers in a 'home'?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Homework and notes in home</li><li>● Binder - notes 3 hole punch</li><li>● Recycle/Garbage - do not keep papers that aren't needed (check w/ your teacher if you aren't sure)</li></ul>
Read <b>2x</b>	<p>Read out loud at least once, looking for correct order of words and thoughts make sense</p>

# Learning Contract

When I get home from school, I (insert child's name) will do the following before I get to (insert reward: e.g., 20 minutes of media).

1. Wash hands
2. Eat a healthy snack
3. Set up my homework area
4. 30 minutes of homework
5. 5 minute Movement break
6. Rest of homework

Signature of parents, child, babysitter



\*I prefer a video contract



# Emotional Control by “Finding the Grey”

I feel successful and confident in this activity
I need a tool
I need to ask a follow-up question
I need to look for a compromise
I feel “stuck”
“I can’t do this”
“I never...”
“I’m always bad...”
Shut down
Avoidance or Elopement

# Setting up your homework environment

1. Homework Location
  - a. Primary homework area
  - b. Caddy of tools - ready to go
2. What to sit on?
  - a. Seat cushions
  - b. Yoga Ball
  - c. Stools
  - d. Standing at the table/  
kitchen island
  - e. Vertical work surfaces wall
  - f. Laying on the floor
3. Keeping the body physically busy
  - a. Fidget cubes
  - b. Gum chewing
  - c. Wake up the hands - A small  
massager (Shoulders to fingers) or  
a laundry ball
4. Sounds
  - a. Yoga music
  - b. Metronome
  - c. Quiet the other noise from (i.e.,  
give another child headphones to  
watch a show)

# Where in the EF process is your child?

1. How invested is your child in each EF component?
  - a. I want to use EF tools and can use them by myself
  - b. I'm interested in the tools but I need help
  - c. I like using the tools but I keep forgetting
  - d. I don't understand what needs to happen
  - e. I don't want to use these tools and feel "stuck"
  
2. Pick one area to start
  - a. Back Pack
  - b. Planner
  - c. Homework

# But don't let the child dictate the process

1. This is for the long haul - keep your mantra on hand when you have to dig in deep
  - The more they fight you, the more you have to stand there
2. Are you trying to get their buy-in?
  - You are guiding them and may not get their buy-in
  - Buy-in is often retroactive after the child feels the success
3. Sometimes you have to “fake it to make it”!
  - Make the EF tools part of your and your child’s daily routine
  - What is the function of their behavior? Is it related to the task/emotional/social
4. Tactic and task driven - not being emotionally involved
5. The goal is to decrease the “Jack-in-the-box” feeling of being surprised of how did I get so lost? Why don't I know what is happening?

# How to Implement these Tools

- Change up one small element
- Make abstract concepts into concrete - e.g. emotional regulation, “find the grey”
- Visual aids
- Written or video contract
- Don't take away necessary moments of recharging
- Acknowledge your own breaking point to yourself (re: work, child[ren], household responsibilities) and use tools before getting to that point
- It's a marathon not a sprint - locking horns over things they are trying to control will waste your time and energy and deplete your reserves for the rest of the day

# Where



# Flexible Options for Sitting



# A Purposeful Work Space





# When



# Everyday and All day

Think

Identify the problem

Prep

What are some tools that can be used?

Work

Take action! Use the tool and complete the task

Foundational consistency is key

# Beyond the Tools

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How to pivot and shift your own perspective

# Work Breaks

- Moving
  - Carrying their own backpack
  - Going for a walk
  - Running around the outside of the house
  - Snake pulls
  - Spinning in an office chair
  - Taking a bath/shower with clothes on
  - Gum chewing
  - Wall push-ups/Jumping jacks
  - Yoga stretches
  - Getting a snack/drink (seltzer)
- Around the house
  - Mopping the floor
  - Collecting the laundry
  - Unload and load the dishwasher
- Activities
  - Scribbling with crayons on construction paper
  - Legos
  - Play-Dough

# Go-To Statements For Learning

- Let's be a problem solver together
- Pause and shift
- Set up your area for success - sharp pencil, worksheet, computer, chargers, binders
- I can only control my own thoughts, actions and reactions (no one else's)
- Everyone has strengths, struggles and strategies
- How have you participated? (during conflict)

# Go-To Statements For Learning

- Tools are not toys (e.g., fidget spinners and grips)
- How do you feel about it? (When successful or independent with a new or difficult task)
- Find the grey
- I need a tool
- When putting tools away, ensure they are in their home
- Keep your focus - what is your thesis this moment? What are you trying to accomplish?

# Key Takeaways

- **Know thyself**
  - Be aware of your strengths and struggles, not just your child's
- **Consistency is the key**
  - Every day no matter what
  - Repetition of foundational tools
  - Create predictable routines
- **You are building new skills**
  - This is hard - you are changing how they are wired (and how you are wired!)
  - Ensure workspace is clearly defined and tools are easily accessible

# Contact Information

**Please visit my website**

<https://sites.google.com/a/nvnet.org/mrs-leiman-s-ot-page/>

**Follow me on Twitter**

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**You can email anytime with questions**

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# Useful Resources

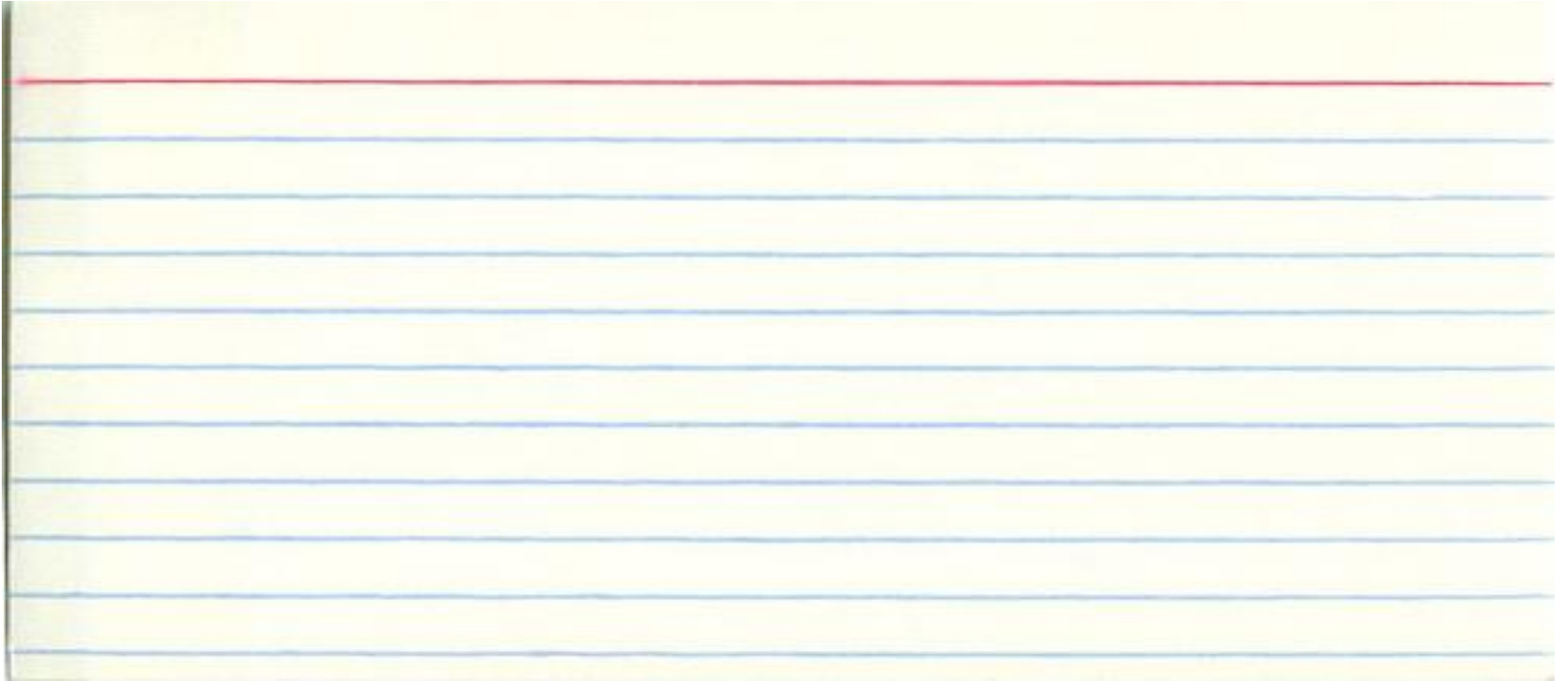
## BOOKS

1. Self Reg by Stuart Shankar
2. Raising a Sensory Smart Child by Lindsey Biel
3. Smart but Scattered by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare
4. Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare
5. See It. Say It. Do It. by Dr. Lynn Hellerstein

## ONLINE

1. Sugar Aunts - <http://www.sugaraunts.com/2016/09/handwriting-executive-function-skill-problems.html>
2. Facebook Groups
  - Executive Functioning Tool Box
  - Beyond Book Smart

**Thank You**



## **Notes To Self**