

# Counseling Corner

## Whiteford Elementary School

### Executive Functioning What is it, and why is it important?

Executive functioning relates to a set of skills that we use every single day to help us learn and work, set goals, and accomplish tasks. People who struggle with executive functioning may have a difficult time planning, meeting goals, showing self-control, following multiple-step directions, prioritizing tasks, and staying focused. They also may become frustrated or overwhelmed when plans or routines change.

Executive functioning skills are crucial all throughout life. Because they are skills we use on a day-to-day basis, it is important that we work on our executive functioning so we can better manage our lives. No one is born already having executive functioning skills, but the good news is that mostly everyone has the ability to learn them. Although genetics play a large role in the development of these skills, experiences and practice are also helpful, and this all begins in infancy. Continue reading to learn how caregivers can support the development and practice of executive functioning skills.



#### 1 Incorporate Brain Breaks

Everyone requires brain breaks in life, but children especially. Some ways to incorporate brain breaks at home include stretching exercises, GoNoodle's, dancing breaks, The Floor is Lava, practicing mindfulness, or going for a quick bike ride! This allows children to release some of their energy and refocus on the given task.

#### 2 Start Each Day Calmly

Mornings are tough. Try to start each morning by gently easing your child into their daily routine. One good way to do this is by starting a Mindful Morning ritual. Guide your child through taking 5 slow deep breaths, describing 4 things they notice around them, listing 3 things they are grateful for, saying 2 positive affirmations, and naming 1 thing they are looking forward to for that day. This encourages children to begin each day with a positive mindset and can help them think clearly.

#### 3 Utilize Appropriate Pauses

After asking a question, be sure to pause to allow your child to process the information that they just took in. For many children, questions can be overwhelming for a variety of reasons. They may not understand the question asked, they may need time to think about their answer, or they just may need extra time to process what was said.

#### 4 Give Clear & Concise Directions

Simply eliminating extra words from your directions and getting straight to the point can help children understand the message much more clearly and have a better chance to understand what it is that you are expecting from them.

#### 5 Practice Planning, Flexibility, & Perseverance

Children who struggle with executive functioning often lack skills related to or struggle with planning ahead, being flexible, and persevering when things get hard. Try building in time during your day to play board games, such as Jenga, chess, or Battleship, to practice strategizing and being flexible while strengthening their working memory. You can also work on these skills by estimating the time it'll take to complete a task. This also allows children to learn to persevere and to be flexible when things change!

#### 6 Practice Problem-Solving

Turn problem-solving into a dinner conversation! Try discussing real-life scenarios and ask your child what they would do and why. This helps children identify what they would do if they were to ever experience that situation.