

Executive Function in Adults: Evaluation and Treatment

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TAKE THE EXECUTIVE SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE

Executive Skills: Definitions

- **Response Inhibition:** The capacity to think before you act – this ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it.
- **Working Memory:** The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future.
- **Emotional Control:** The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.
- **Flexibility:** The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information or mistakes. It relates to an adaptability to changing conditions.

Executive Skills: Definitions

- **Sustained Attention:** The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.
- **Task Initiation:** The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.
- **Planning/Prioritization:** The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important.
- **Organization:** The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials.

4

Executive Skills: Definitions

- **Time Management:** The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important. Ok so what does this mean?
- **Goal-directed persistence:** The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal and not be put off or distracted by competing interests.
- **Metacognition:** The ability to stand back and take a birds-eye view of oneself in a situation. It is an ability to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self-monitoring and self-evaluative skills (e.g., asking yourself, "How am I doing? or How did I do?").
- **Stress Tolerance:** The ability to thrive in stressful situations and to cope with uncertainty, change, and performance demands.

5

How do we describe people with ADHD?

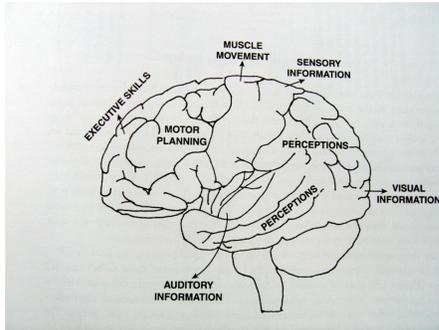
Instead of calling them this:

- Lazy
- Unmotivated
- Not working to potential
- Disruptive
- Oppositional
- Messy
- Tardy
- Forgetful
- Absent-minded
- Lacking a work ethic

Describe them as having challenges in this:

- Task initiation
- Sustained attention
- Response inhibition
- Emotional control
- Flexibility
- Organization
- Time management
- Working memory
- Goal-directed persistence

Where in the brain are executive skills located?
In the frontal lobes (just behind the forehead)



Biological underpinnings of ADHD

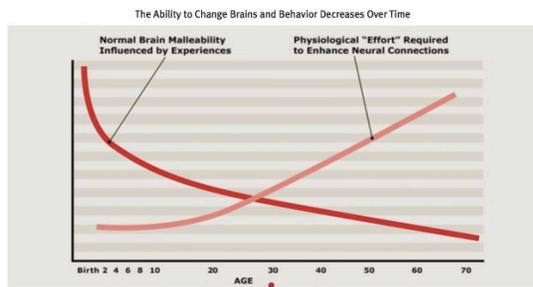
A study published by the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) has found differences in dopamine processing in the reward pathways in the brains of subjects with ADHD compared to non-ADHD controls. The study focused on the nucleus accumbens (a brain structure involved with reinforcement and reward) and suggests that people with ADHD may release dopamine at a lower rate compared to normal controls or might have a net dopamine deficit.

Biological underpinnings

Because dopamine enhances the level of interest a person attaches to a stimulus, people who release dopamine at a lower rate might find it more difficult to work up the enthusiasm to act on stimuli they don't find naturally appealing.

Implication: individuals with ADHD find it much more difficult to apply themselves to tasks that are not intrinsically interesting to them.

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2008/09/15/health/20080915-brain-development.html?_r=0

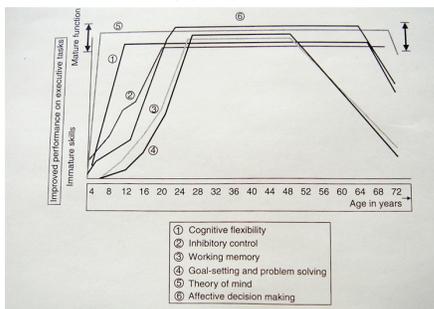


7 As the maturing brain becomes more specialized to assume more complex functions, it is less capable of reorganizing and adapting. For example, by the first year, the parts of the brain that differentiate vocal sounds are becoming specialized to the language the baby has been exposed to and are already starting to lose the ability to recognize important sound distinctions found in other languages. As the brain prunes away the circuits that are not used, those that are used become stronger and increasingly difficult to alter over time. Declining plasticity means it's easier and more effective to influence a baby's developing brain architecture than it is to rewire parts of its circuitry in the adult years. In other words, we can "pay now" by ensuring positive conditions for healthy development, or "pay more later" in the form of costly remediation, health care, mental health services, and increased rates of incarceration. Graph Source: P. Levitt (2009)

www.developingchild.harvard.edu Center on the Developing Child HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Frontal lobe development across the lifespan

[from Anderson, V.A., Jacobs, P., & Anderson, P. (Eds.). (2008). *Executive functions and the frontal lobes: A lifespan perspective.*



What's the Relationship Between ADHD and Executive Skills?

- ALL individuals with ADHD have executive function challenges, BUT
- Not all individuals with executive function challenges have ADHD

DSM-5® DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR ADHD IN ADULTS¹

All criteria must be met for a diagnosis of ADHD in adults¹:

- 1 Five or more symptoms of inattention and/or ≥5 symptoms of hyperactivity/impulsivity must have persisted for ≥6 months to a degree that is inconsistent with the developmental level and negatively impacts social and academic/occupational activities.
- 2 Several symptoms (inattentive or hyperactive/impulsive) were present before the age of 12 years.
- 3 Several symptoms (inattentive or hyperactive/impulsive) must be present in ≥2 settings (eg, at home, school, or work; with friends or relatives; in other activities).
- 4 There is clear evidence that the symptoms interfere with or reduce the quality of social, academic, or occupational functioning.
- 5 Symptoms do not occur exclusively during the course of schizophrenia or another psychotic disorder, and are not better explained by another mental disorder (eg, mood disorder, anxiety disorder, dissociative disorder, personality disorder, substance intoxication, or withdrawal).

Diagnosis should be based on a complete history and evaluation of the patient.

ADHD SYMPTOMS OF INATTENTION

- Makes careless mistakes/lacks attention to detail
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- Fails to follow through on tasks and instructions
- Exhibits poor organization
- Avoids/dislikes tasks requiring sustained mental effort
- Loses things necessary for tasks/activities
- Easily distracted (including unrelated thoughts)
- Is forgetful in daily activities

ADHD SYMPTOMS OF HYPERACTIVITY/IMPULSIVITY

- Fidgets with or taps hands or feet, squirms in seat
- Leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected
- Experiences feelings of restlessness
- Has difficulty engaging in quiet, leisurely activities
- Is "on-the-go" or acts as if "driven by a motor"
- Talks excessively
- Blurts out answers
- Has difficulty waiting their turn
- Interrupts or intrudes on others

Assessing ADHD/Executive Skills in Adults

ALWAYS

- Clinical interview
- Rating Scales

SOMETIMES

- Clinic tests of attention or executive functioning

Behavior Rating Scales

- Barkley Deficits in Executive Functioning (BDEFS)—Guilford Press (guilford.com)
- Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Functioning-Adults (BRIEF-A)—PAR (parinc.com)
- Brown ADD/Executive Functions Scales (pearsonclinical.com)

Typical Profiles of ADHD Adults

Executive Skill Strengths

- Flexibility
- Metacognition
- (Stress tolerance)

Executive Skill Weaknesses

- Task initiation
- Sustained attention
- Time management
- (Response inhibition)

3 Key Strategies for Managing Executive Skill Weaknesses

- Intervene at the level of the environment
- Intervene at the level of the individual by—
 1. Teaching the weak skill (via coaching)
 2. Finding ways to motivate the individual to practice the weak skill to increase proficiency.

The Difference Between Working with Adults with ADHD and Working with Kids

We believe the same three strategies will work with both kids and adults—but the emphasis may be different.

Peg's Take on the "Perfect" Intervention for Executive Skills

- The perfect intervention to support executive skill development is one
- that takes no more than 5-10 minutes a day
 - and that you're willing to do *forever* (or as long as it takes).

Working with ADHD Adults

Building a Change Plan Using a Coaching Model

Coaching

An intervention strategy in which a coach works with a person to set goals (long-term, short-term, or daily) designed to enhance executive skills, lead to improved self-regulation and result in goal attainment.

The Coach's Approach in the Client's Goal-Setting

Working with clients in a way that is *collaborative* rather than prescriptive, honors the person's autonomy and self-direction, and is more about evoking than installing. This involves at least a willingness to suspend an authoritarian role, and to explore client capacity rather than incapacity, with a genuine interest in the client's experience and perspective.
(Stephen Andrew re: MI, 2015)

The Coach's Communication Style in the Goal-Setting Process

- Open-ended questions: The kind of questions that open the door to more words from the client than from you, as opposed to yes-no questions used to collect information or data
- Affirmation: Affirmations comment favorably on a specific positive trait, attribute, or strength of the person that endures over time
- Reflection: Accurate empathic reflections involve listening not only to what the person *says*, but also for what the person *means*.
- Summarizing: A special form of empathic reflection where you collect statements from a part of or the whole of the conversation. (Stephen Andrew re: MI, 2015)

Key components of coaching for executive skills and behavior change

- Goal-setting and goodness-of-fit.
- Regular coaching sessions to make short-term, specific plans to achieve goals.
- Helping people develop and practice self assessment and management strategies to compensate for weaknesses associated with executive skills or use strategies to improve those skills.
- Correspondence training.
- Implementation intentions, mental contrasting, mental simulations to enhance self-management and overcome obstacles.

Why Goal-Setting?

Extensive empirical research has documented the value of goal-setting in promoting high levels of performance—in both adults and children.

Goals serve 4 primary purposes
(Gollwitzer?)

- They *direct behavior* (toward task-relevant and away from task-irrelevant, immediate gratification behavior)
- They *energize*
- They encourage *persistence*
- They *motivate* people to discover and use task-relevant knowledge and skills

Impact of ADHD on Goal Achievement

- Reduced capacity for self-regulation of behavior
- Behavior is more determined by immediate environment and its demands – that is, behavior becomes “context dependent”
- Result is being “locked in the present” with reduced capacity for future, goal-oriented behavior and increased susceptibility to gratification of immediate needs and wants

How Executive Skill Weaknesses Affect Goal-Directed Actions (Barkley, 2012)

- Using executive skills, especially those that are weak, requires significant effort.
- This results in rapid energy depletion and susceptibility to context-dependent behavior.
- Fatigue and stress weaken executive skills.

The Role of Effort in Executive Skills Interventions

Factors that can replenish the resource pool

- Physical exercise
- Relaxing, meditating following a few minutes of ES exertion
- Visualizing the good outcomes/rewards as a result of successful execution
- Periodic, small rewards throughout the ES task.
- Self-efficacy statements prior to and during task
- Generating positive emotions

Goal Setting and Implementation: Solutions to These Prerequisite Considerations

- Minimize the focus on the long-term goal, especially in the early phases of the process. Short time horizons and small steps that require only limited time and effort are critical.
- Try to insure the person has the skill set to attain the initial goals.

Goal Setting and Implementation: Solutions to These Prerequisite Considerations

For the best chance of success, the ADHD adult needs to succeed in the early stages. Success builds behavioral momentum and confidence, establishes realistic expectations, and builds a working memory of successful problem solving for future reference.

The Coaching Process with ADHD Adults

- Collect background information
- Identify tentative long-term goal
- Assess executive skills
- Determine if coaching is appropriate
- Consider goodness-of-fit
- Identify potential obstacles to goal attainment
- Revise long-term goal
- Create mini-goals (SMART) goals
- Identify strategies for supporting SMART goal attainment
- Write and carry out the action plan
- Meet, review, revise, continue....

Part 1 Initial interview

What brought you here?

What are your biggest sources of frustration?

At work

At home

In your personal relationships

What are some things you think are going well?

At work

At home

In your personal relationships

How do you like to spend your leisure time?

If you were going to try to change one thing or improve at one thing in any of these contexts (work, home, relationships), what would you want to tackle?

Are you willing to create a goal around this and work towards it? What's a first pass at describing the goal?

The Coaching Process with ADHD Adults

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Executive Skills Questionnaire

Read each item below and then rate that item based on the extent to which you agree or disagree with how well it describes you. Use the rating scale below to choose the appropriate score. Then add the three scores in each section. Use the key at the end of the questionnaire to determine your executive skill strengths (two to three highest scores) and weaknesses (two to three lowest scores).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Strongly	Disagree	Tend to	Tend to	Agree	Strongly	
	disagree		disagree	agree		agree	
Item							Your score
1. I don't jump to conclusions.							___
2. I think before I speak.							___
3. I make sure I have all the facts before I take action.							___
							TOTAL ___
4. I have a good memory for facts, dates, and details.							___
5. I am very good at remembering the things I have committed to do.							___
6. I seldom need reminders to complete tasks.							___
							TOTAL ___
7. My emotions seldom get in the way of my job performance.							___
8. Little things do not affect me emotionally or distract me from the task at hand.							___
9. When frustrated or angry, I keep my cool.							___
							TOTAL ___
10. No matter what the task, I believe in getting started as soon as possible.							___
11. Procrastination is usually not a problem for me.							___
12. I seldom leave tasks to the last minute.							___
							TOTAL ___

Part II Assess Executive Skills

Step 1: Complete the ESQ

Step 2: Identify strengths and weaknesses

Executive Skill Strengths

Executive Skill Weaknesses

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Executive Skills Assessment
in Specific Contexts**

- Work: compare job demands with executive skills profile to determine "goodness of fit."

WORKSHEET 1
Executive Skills in the Workplace

Step 1. Using the Executive Skills Questionnaire you completed in Chapter 2, check off your three executive skill strengths and your three executive skill weaknesses. If you had a lot of "tie scores," make a decision about which three skills you most want to focus on as strengths and weaknesses.

<p>Executive skill strengths</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Response inhibition <input type="checkbox"/> Working memory <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional control <input type="checkbox"/> Task initiation <input type="checkbox"/> Sustained attention <input type="checkbox"/> Planning/prioritizing <input type="checkbox"/> Organization <input type="checkbox"/> Time management <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility <input type="checkbox"/> Metacognition <input type="checkbox"/> Goal-directed persistence <input type="checkbox"/> Stress tolerance	<p>Executive skill weaknesses</p> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Step 2. Think about your job requirements. What aspects of your job do you find easiest or most pleasurable and what do you find hardest or most aversive?

What aspects of your job do you find easiest to do (that is, least likely to put off or most efficient at)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What aspects of your job do you find require the most effort (that is, most likely to procrastinate on or least efficient at)?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Step 3. Look at the easy and hard parts of your work. Do they align with your executive skill strengths and weaknesses? We've found this is often the case. You may use this information with subsequent worksheets, or this knowledge may simply serve to produce an aha moment (for example, *That's why I hate returning phone calls—because I'm weak in emotional control and flexibility and I'm afraid the person I will be calling will be mad at me for something I didn't do well).*

WORKSHEET 3
Executive Skill Weaknesses

Executive skill weakness	How do you use this skill in your work?	Are there ways you can adjust your job to allow you to minimize your need to use this skill?	If you were going to focus on one task or one situation in which you need to use this skill and would like to get better at it, what would you choose?	What might you do?
1.				
2.				
3.				

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Executive Skills Assessment in Specific Contexts

- **Work:** compare job demands with executive skills profile to determine "goodness of fit."
- **Home:** match specific home maintenance tasks with executive skill strengths.

Your List of Low- and High-Effort Chores

Low-effort chores, tasks, activities	High-effort chores, tasks, activities

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Your Coping Strategies

Effortful chores, tasks, activities	Possible coping strategy

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**Executive Skills Assessment
in Specific Contexts**

- Work: compare job demands with executive skills profile to determine “goodness of fit.”
- Home: match specific home maintenance tasks with executive skill strengths.
- Relationships: compare partners’ profile to identify “tension points” due to profile differences.

The Coaching Process with ADHD Adults

- Collect background information
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- Identify potential obstacles to goal attainment
- Revise long-term goal
- **Create mini-goals (SMART) goals**
- Identify strategies for supporting SMART goal attainment
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Part IV Write a SMART Goal

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Bound

Rules for writing goal statements:

1. Use clear, specific language.
2. Start your goal statement with TO + a VERB
3. Write your goal statement using SMART Goal Criteria
4. Avoid using negative language. Think positive!

An example of a goal statement:

- *To run the mini marathon in May and complete the 10 mile race in under 1 hour to beat my personal best time.*

SMART Goal Statement:

SMART Goal Example 1

By the end of two weeks from today I will have enrolled in a GED preparation program within commuting distance from my apartment and go to class one night per week. I will arrange for my neighbor to take care of the children on that night. During week three I will go to the first preparation class.

SMART Goal Example 2

I will search online for Personal Care Attendant jobs and by Friday of this week, identify four possible jobs that I am interested in, and apply for those jobs by Monday of next week.

SMART Goal Example 3

SMART Goal Statement:

By Sunday May 7th at 8 PM will have three things: 1) a one-page write up of the main points and causal arguments for my talk; 2) I will also have 5-7 post-its or mini pictures to illustrate key moments in the talk; 3) a run sheet delineating the time for each section.

The Coaching Process with ADHD Adults

- Collect background information
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3 Key Strategies to Compensate for Weaknesses in Executive Skill Behaviors, or to Enhance Skills to Enable Goal Achievement

1. Environmental Modifications

- 1. Short-term incentives for motivation
- 2. Skill Enhancement

Part V Identify Strategies to Support Goal Attainment	
Strategy	Examples (check off choices)
	Environmental Modifications
Change the physical or social environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Remove distractions (e.g., turn off social media) <input type="checkbox"/> Create visual reminders <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid settings with temptations <input type="checkbox"/> Seek out people who support your goal; avoid people who don't <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Modify the task	<input type="checkbox"/> Make task shorter/build in breaks <input type="checkbox"/> Use 1-10 scale to adjust effort <input type="checkbox"/> Pair unpleasant task with something pleasant <input type="checkbox"/> Kill 2 birds with one stone (pair unpleasant task with another obligation) <input type="checkbox"/> Break task into very small pieces and turn into a to-do checklist <input type="checkbox"/> Use technology <input type="checkbox"/> Turn open-ended tasks into closed-ended tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Build in variety or choice (or turn into a game) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Enlist the help of others	<input type="checkbox"/> Someone to cue you: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Someone to report to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Someone who will be a cheerleader: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Post goal/progress on social media <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

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	Environmental Modifications
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3 Key Strategies to Compensate for Weaknesses in Executive Skill Behaviors, or to Enhance Skills to Enable Goal Achievement

1. Environmental Modifications

1. Short-term incentives for motivation

2. Skill Enhancement

Short-term Incentives for Motivation

- A preferred activity to do once the work is done: _____
- Choose something from a reward menu: _____
- Other: _____
-

REWARD MENU CATEGORIES

Food/snacks	Beverages	Entertainment
Hobbies	Exercises	Social
Shopping	Sightseeing	Travel

3 Key Strategies to Compensate for Weaknesses in Executive Skill Behaviors, or to Enhance Skills to Enable Goal Achievement

- 1. Environmental Modifications
 - 1. Short-term incentives for motivation
 - 2. Skill Enhancement

Practice the Skill						
What will you practice?						
When will you practice?						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
How long will the practice session last?						
What is your start time? Date:		Time:	Back-up date:		Time:	
What cues will you use to remind yourself to follow your plan?						

Practice the Skill	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mental contrasting: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Think about several positive aspects associated with goal attainment: 2. Identify the <i>most positive</i> aspects and visualize the benefits (with as much detail as possible) 3. Think about several obstacles that might get in the way of goal attainment. 4. Hone in on the biggest obstacles and take a few moments to visualize those obstacles.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Implementation Intentions: FORMULA: When [trigger], I will [action]
<input type="checkbox"/>	Process visualization: Visualize, with as much sensory detail as possible, encountering the obstacles to goal attainment and then successfully overcoming them.

Practice Strategies: Mental Contrasting

This is a visualization technique created by Gabriele Oettingen (2000) to enhance the likelihood that implementations will be successful.

Practice Strategies: Mental Contrasting

1. Think about several positive aspects associated with goal attainment
2. Identify the *most positive* aspects and visualize the benefits (with as much detail as possible)
3. Think about several obstacles that might get in the way of goal attainment.
4. Hone in on the biggest obstacles and take a few moments to visualize those obstacles.

Practice Strategies: Implementation Intentions

Goal setting research shows that the more precise the goal, the more likely it is to be accomplished—anticipating obstacles increases the likelihood that you will overcome them.

– *If X happens, then I will do Y.* OR when [trigger], I will [action]

Practice Strategies: Process Visualization

In this step, visualize, with as much sensory detail as possible, encountering the obstacles to goal attainment and then successfully overcoming them.

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Part VI
Create an Action Plan

Action Plan for Achieving SMART goal

Steps to Follow To Complete Goal	Target Completion Date	Done!
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

SMART Goal Example 1

By the end of two weeks from today I will have enrolled in a GED preparation program within commuting distance from my apartment and go to class one night per week. I will arrange for my neighbor to take care of the children on that night. During week three I will go to the first preparation class.

Action steps:

1. Contact local adult ed program by this Wednesday and find out closest GED program to me that meets at night.
2. Call the program on Wednesday and enroll.
3. Ask my neighbor tomorrow if she can watch the kids for the same night each week for two hours starting in three weeks.
4. Go to the first preparation class two weeks from Wednesday.

SMART Goal Example 2

I will search online for Personal Care Attendant jobs and by Friday of this week, identify four possible jobs that I am interested in, and apply for those jobs by Monday of next week.

Action steps: (starts on a Tuesday)

1. Start online search for jobs by tomorrow (Wednesday) at 10 am, keep searching until I find two possible jobs and save the applications.
2. Start searching for the other two jobs on Thursday at 10 am, keep searching until I find two more jobs and save the applications.
3. Contact my 3 references for permission to use them by 4 pm Friday.
4. Complete the 4 job applications by Sunday night at 6pm and submit them.

SMART Goal Example 2

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Action Plan for Achieving SMART goal

Steps to Follow To Complete Goal	Target Completion Date	Done!
1. Set 20-minute timer to work on written version	May 2, 11 PM	
2. Set a 10-minute timer to work on written version and 10 min to sketch at least 3 candidate images for the talk.	May 3, 9 AM	
3. Set 10 minutes timer to create draft run sheet for talk; Set 10 minute timer to craft 3 more candidate images for the talk	May 4, 8 PM	
4. Set 20 min timer to revise written draft; 20 min to revise run sheet (w 2-3 key images); 5 min t to send draft ideas to R, J, D	May 5, 9 PM	

The Coaching Process with ADHD Adults

- Collect background information
- Identify tentative long-term goal
- Assess executive skills
- Determine if coaching is appropriate
- Consider goodness-of-fit
- Identify potential obstacles to goal attainment
- Revise long-term goal
- Create mini-goals (SMART) goals
- Identify strategies for supporting SMART goal attainment
- Write and carry out the action plan
- Meet, review, revise, continue....

Part VII
Carry out the Plan
and Evaluate Success

Did you follow the plan?

What worked well?

What didn't work so well?

Next step:

Revise plan

Steps to Follow To Complete Goal	Target Completion Date	Done!
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Make new smart goal and action plan

Putting It All Together

Frank came to see a counselor because he was having all kinds of problems with time and task management both at home and at work. He worked for an IT company where he was a project manager. He had specific projects he was charged with managing, but he also had been with the company for awhile and had an array of technical skills that exceeded most of the people who worked at the company...

Strategies: Response Inhibition

- Remove/sequester temptations
- Create a cueing system as a reminder to use self-control
- Build in "wait time"
- Allow a small reward in exchange for giving up a big one
- Announce your goal to a friend

Strategies: Working Memory

- Create a checklist
- Put visual cues in your environment
- Have a duplicate set (home/work)
- Apps/technology (e.g., Wunderlist, Instapaper, Tile, phone reminders)
- Mentally rehearse what you need to remember

Strategies: Emotional Control

- Practice mindfulness meditation
- Use self-talk
- Avoid situations that trigger poor emotional control
- Use a relaxation strategy in the moment
- Rehearse in advance how you will handle an emotionally charged situation

Strategies: Task Initiation

- Hold off a pleasurable activity until the task is done (or started)
- Suspend access to distractions
- Keep the degree of required effort low (e.g., by limiting the time spent on the aversive task).
- Technology (snooze alarm on phone)

Strategies: Sustained Attention

- Set a "Personal Best" goal (PB)
- Limit access to distractions (e.g., shut down access to time-wasting websites)
- Screen out unpredictable distractions (e.g., by listening to quiet music on an iPod)
- Pair the aversive task with something pleasant

Strategies: Planning/Prioritizing

- Use a planning template
- Use post-it notes to identify steps, so they can be easily re-arranged
- Ask for help from someone who's good at planning
- Practice the skill by starting with something fun to plan

Strategies: Organization

- Do something fun while you're getting organized
- Start VERY SMALL (both in terms of time and space)
- Work off a checklist
- Trade off with someone who's good at organization

Strategies: Time Management

- Make a deal with someone that includes a reward for being on time
- Practice time estimation
- Set your watch ahead to "trick yourself"
- Ask for help (someone to cue you)
- Use smart phone alarms

Strategies: Flexibility

- Preplan to minimize surprises
- Avoid situations that require flexibility
- Learn to recognize the physiological cues and put in place a default strategy
- Create an *If...then* plan.

Strategies: Metacognition

- Create a system for analyzing mistakes
- Learn to ask for feedback from others
- Use a problem solving template

Strategies: Goal-Directed Persistence

- Use mental contrasting, implementation intention and process visualization
- Identify potential roadblocks and systematically eliminate them
- Build automaticity (do the same thing at the same time every day)
- Post visual reminders of the goal

Strategies: Stress Tolerance

- Create a personalized stress inoculation plan
- Steer clear of stressful situations
- Mentally prepare yourself for anticipated stressful situations
- Build in recovery time

Last Thoughts?

Typical Profiles of ADHD Adults

- Executive Skill Strengths
- Flexibility
 - Metacognition
 - (Stress tolerance)
- Executive Skill Weaknesses
- Task initiation
 - Sustained attention
 - Time management
 - (Response inhibition)

Executive Skills Questionnaire —

Peg Dawson & Richard Guare

Step I: Read each item below and then rate that item based on the extent to which you agree or disagree with how well it describes you. Use the rating scale below to choose the appropriate score. Then add the three scores in each section. Use the Key on page 2 to determine your executive skill strengths (2-3 highest scores) and weaknesses (2-3 lowest scores).

Strongly disagree	1	Tend to agree	5
Disagree	2	Agree	6
Tend to disagree	3	Strongly agree	7
Neutral	4		

Item	Your score
1. I don't jump to conclusions	_____
2. I think before I speak.	_____
3. I don't take action without having all the facts.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
4. I have a good memory for facts, dates, and details.	_____
5. I am very good at remembering the things I have committed to do.	_____
6. I seldom need reminders to complete tasks	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
7. My emotions seldom get in the way when performing on the job.	_____
8. Little things do not affect me emotionally or distract me from the task at hand.	_____
9. I can defer my personal feelings until after a task has been completed	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
10. No matter what the task, I believe in getting started as soon as possible.	_____
11. Procrastination is usually not a problem for me.	_____
12. I seldom leave tasks to the last minute	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
13. I find it easy to stay focused on my work.	_____
14. Once I start an assignment, I work diligently until it's completed.	_____
15. Even when interrupted, I find it easy to get back and complete the job at hand.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
16. When I plan out my day, I identify priorities and stick to them	_____
17. When I have a lot to do, I can easily focus on the most important things	_____
18. I typically break big tasks down into subtasks and timelines.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
19. I am an organized person.	_____
20. It is natural for me to keep my work area neat and organized.	_____
21. I am good at maintaining systems for organizing my work.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____

Strongly disagree	1	Tend to agree	5
Disagree	2	Agree	6
Tend to disagree	3	Strongly agree	7
Neutral	4		

Item	Your score
22. At the end of the day, I've usually finished what I set out to do.	_____
23. I am good at estimating how long it takes to do something.	_____
24. I am usually on time for appointments and activities.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
25. I take unexpected events in stride.	_____
26. I easily adjust to changes in plans and priorities.	_____
27. I consider myself to be flexible and adaptive to change.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
28. I routinely evaluate my performance and devise methods for personal improvement.	_____
29. I am able to step back from a situation in order to make objective decisions.	_____
30. I "read" situations well and can adjust my behavior based on the reactions of others.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
31. I think of myself as being driven to meet my goals.	_____
32. I easily give up immediate pleasures to work on long-term goals.	_____
33. I believe in setting and achieving high levels of performance.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____
34. I enjoy working in a highly demanding, fast-paced environment.	_____
35. A certain amount of pressure helps me to perform at my best.	_____
36. Jobs that include a fair degree of unpredictability appeal to me.	_____
YOUR TOTAL SCORE:	_____

KEY

Items	Executive Skill	Items	Executive Skill
1 - 3	Response Inhibition	4 - 6	Working Memory
7 - 9	Emotional Control	10 - 12	Task Initiation
13 - 15	Sustained Attention	16 - 18	Planning/Prioritization
19 - 21	Organization	22 - 24	Time Management
25 - 27	Flexibility	28 - 30	Metacognition
31 - 33	Goal-Directed Persistence	34-36	Stress tolerance

Strongest Skills

Weakest Skills

Managing ADHD by Targeting Executive Skills

Part I Initial interview

What brought you here?

What are your biggest sources of frustration?

At work

At home

In your personal relationships

What are some things you think are going well?

At work

At home

In your personal relationships

How do you like to spend your leisure time?

If you were going to try to change one thing or improve at one thing in any of these contexts (work, home, relationships), what would you want to tackle?

Are you willing to create a goal around this and work towards it? What's a first pass at describing the goal?

Part II Assess Executive Skills

Step 1: Complete the ESQ

Step 2: Identify strengths and weaknesses

Executive Skill Strengths

Executive Skill Weaknesses

Part III Refine Long-Term Goal

Step 3: Look at goodness-of-fit: Do you have the executive skills you need to achieve your goal? How can you use your executive skill strengths? Are there ways you can work around the weaknesses or bypass them altogether?

Step 4: Are there barriers or obstacles you need to overcome in order to reach your goal?

Potential obstacle	Ways to overcome the obstacle

Long-Term Goal Statement:

Part IV SMART GOALS

This is an introduction to Smart goals. This is an important piece of the coaching process because they will help you to reach your long-term goal. You and your coach will spend time developing SMART goals over the next few months. This video will help you to understand what we mean when we ask people to set SMART goals.

SMART goals are the steps that help you move from a long-term goal or milestone which will take a while to complete, to an Action Plan which says what you will do tomorrow or this week. It's a way to help you make sure that that plan you come up with matches your long-term goal. It also is specific enough so that both you and your coach know whether you are on track to be successful.

There are five parts to a SMART goal. Each part corresponds to one of the letters, S...M...A...R...T. We'll go through each of the five parts and give you examples of SMART goals to show how the parts work together.

S stands for SPECIFIC. Your SMART goal says exactly what you want to happen. It should answer these five W questions:

- Who is involved? (That's you so your SMART goal starts with the words, "I will....." then tells what you will do).
- What do you want to accomplish? (get a job?, take a course?)
- Where will this happen? (at a store?, at a hospital?, at a community college?)
- When will it happen by? (Two weeks from today?, Before the end of June?)
- Why is this goal important to me? (I'll earn more money?, I'll be learning something that will help me get a job I want?)

M stands for MEASURABLE. If your goal is measurable, it means that you'll be able to know for sure that you have reached your goal (The day that I get the job; The day that I get my passing grade back for the course)

A stands for ATTAINABLE. This means that you know that if you work hard, this is a goal that you know you can reach by the time you said you will reach it. You either already have the skills and resources that your need to reach it or you can create a plan to get the skills and resources.

R stands for REALISTIC and Relevant. My goal is really important to me so I will make a plan and follow it. I want to reach my goal and I have the ability to do it.

T stands for TIMELY. That means you will reach your goal in a specific amount of time and by a specific date. (By my birthday, I will save \$100.00)

Here are a couple of examples of SMART goals that meet all the criteria we've just covered. We'll also list the Action Plan steps that would flow from each SMART goal.

SMART Goal Examples

Smart Goal 1

By the end of two weeks from today I will have enrolled in a GED preparation program within commuting distance from my apartment and go to class one night per week. I will arrange for my neighbor to take care of the children on that night. During week three I will go to the first preparation class.

Action steps:

1. Contact local adult ed program by this Wednesday and find out closest GED program to me that meets at night.
2. Call the program on Wednesday and enroll.
3. Ask my neighbor tomorrow if she can watch the kids for the same night each week for two hours starting in three weeks.
4. Go to the first preparation class two weeks from Wednesday.

Smart Goal 2

I will search online for Personal Care Attendant jobs and by Friday of this week, identify four possible jobs that I am interested in, and apply for those jobs by Monday of next week.

Action steps: (starts on a Tuesday)

1. Start online search for jobs by tomorrow (Wednesday) at 10 am, keep searching until I find two possible jobs and save the applications.
2. Start searching for the other two jobs on Thursday at 10 am, keep searching until I find two more jobs and save the applications.
3. Contact my 3 references for permission to use them by 4 pm Friday.
4. Complete the 4 job applications by Sunday night at 6pm and submit them.

Write a SMART Goal

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Bound

Rules for writing goal statements:

1. Use clear, specific language.
2. Start your goal statement with TO + a VERB
3. Write your goal statement using SMART Goal Criteria
4. Avoid using negative language. Think positive!

SMART Goal Statement:

Part V
Identify Strategies to Support Goal Attainment

Strategy	Examples (check off choices)					
Environmental Modifications						
Change the physical or social environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Remove distractions (e.g., turn off social media) <input type="checkbox"/> Create visual reminders <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid settings with temptations <input type="checkbox"/> Seek out people who support your goal; avoid people who don't <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____					
Modify the task	<input type="checkbox"/> Make task shorter/build in breaks <input type="checkbox"/> Use 1-10 scale to adjust effort <input type="checkbox"/> Pair unpleasant task with something pleasant <input type="checkbox"/> Kill 2 birds with one stone (pair unpleasant task with another obligation) <input type="checkbox"/> Break task into very small pieces and turn into a to-do checklist <input type="checkbox"/> Use technology <input type="checkbox"/> Turn open-ended tasks into closed-ended tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Build in variety or choice (or turn into a game) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____					
Enlist the help of others	<input type="checkbox"/> Someone to cue you: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Someone to report to: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Someone who will be a cheerleader: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Post goal/progress on social media <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____					
Short-term Incentives for Motivation						
<input type="checkbox"/> A preferred activity to do once the work is done: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Choose something from a reward menu: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ <input type="checkbox"/>						
Practice the Skill						
What will you practice?						
When will you practice?						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
How long will the practice session last?						
What is your start time? Date:		Time:	Back-up date:		Time:	
What cues will you use to remind yourself to follow your plan?						

Part VI
Create an Action Plan

Action Plan for Achieving SMART goal

Steps to Follow To Complete Goal	Target Completion Date	Done!
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Part VII
Carry out the Plan
and Evaluate Success

Did you follow the plan?

What worked well?

What didn't work so well?

Next step:

Revise plan

Steps to Follow to Complete Goal	Target Completion Date	Done!
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Make new smart goal and action plan

SMART Goal Statement:

--

Action Plan for Achieving SMART goal

Steps to Follow to Complete Goal	Target Completion Date	Done!
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

Did you follow the plan?

What worked well?

What didn't work so well?

Next step: Revise plan

Make new SMART goal and action plan

Short-term Incentives for Motivation

A preferred activity to do once the work is done: _____

Choose something from a reward menu: _____

Other: _____

Practice the Skill

Mental contrasting:

1. Think about several positive aspects associated with goal attainment:

2. Identify the *most positive* aspects and visualize the benefits (with as much detail as possible)

3. Think about several obstacles that might get in the way of goal attainment.

4. Hone in on the biggest obstacles and take a few moments to visualize those obstacles.

Implementation Intentions:

FORMULA: When [trigger], I will [action]

Process visualization: Visualize, with as much sensory detail as possible, encountering the obstacles to goal attainment and then successfully overcoming them.

Strategies to Improve or Reduce the Impact of Weak Executive Skills

Strategy Options

I. Identify environmental modifications 1. Alter the physical or social environment 2. Modify the task 3. Enlist help from others	II. Find a motivator/incentive III. Practice a strategy for skill enhancement
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Executive Skill	Environmental Modification
Response Inhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove/sequester temptations • Create a cueing system as a reminder to use self-control • Build in “wait time” • Allow a small reward in exchange for giving up a big one • Announce your goal to a friend
Working Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a checklist • Put visual cues in your environment • Have a duplicate set (home/work) • Apps/technology (e.g., Wunderlist, Instapaper, Tile, phone reminders) • Mentally rehearse what you need to remember
Emotional Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice mindfulness meditation • Use self-talk • Avoid situations that trigger poor emotional control • Use a relaxation strategy in the moment • Rehearse in advance how you will handle an emotionally charged situation
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preplan to minimize surprises • Build in “wait time” to adjust to the unexpected • Avoid situations that require flexibility • Learn to recognize the physiological cues and put in place a default strategy • Create an <i>If...then</i> plan.
Task Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold off a pleasurable activity until the task is done (or started) • Suspend access to distractions • Keep the degree of required effort low (e.g., by limiting the time spent on the aversive task). • Technology (snooze alarm on phone)
Sustained Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a “Personal Best” goal (PB) • Limit access to distractions (e.g., shut down access to time-wasting websites) • Screen out unpredictable distractions (e.g., by listening to quiet music on an iPod) • Pair the aversive task with something pleasant

Planning/Prioritizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a planning template • Use post-it notes to identify steps, so they can be easily re-arranged • Ask for help from someone who's good at planning • Practice the skill by starting with something fun to plan
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do something fun <i>while</i> you're getting organized • Start VERY SMALL (both in terms of time and space) • Work off a checklist • Trade off with someone who's good at organization
Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a deal with someone that includes a reward for being on time • Practice time estimation • Set your watch ahead to "trick yourself" • Ask for help (someone to cue you) • Use smart phone alarms
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preplan to minimize surprises • Build in "wait time" to adjust to the unexpected • Avoid situations that require flexibility • Learn to recognize the physiological cues and put in place a default strategy • Create an <i>If...then</i> plan.
Metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a system for analyzing mistakes • Learn to ask for feedback from others • Use a problem-solving template
Goal-Directed Persistence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use mental contrasting, implementation intentions, and process visualization • Identify potential roadblocks and systematically eliminate them • Build automaticity (do the same thing at the same time every day) • Post visual reminders of the goal
Stress Tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a personalized stress inoculation plan • Steer clear of stressful situations • Mentally prepare yourself for anticipated stressful situations • Build in recovery time

Putting It All Together: Let's Practice

Scenario: Frank came to see a counselor because he was having all kinds of problems with time and task management both at home and at work. He worked for an IT company where he was a project manager. He had specific projects he was charged with managing but he also had been with the company for awhile and had an array of technical skills that exceeded most of the people who worked at the company. As a result, people came to him frequently for assistance in solving technical problems, both large and small. He found that even when he was able to prioritize his work load, when someone asked for help, he usually dropped everything to help them, even if he had deadlines looming. As a result, his projects were chronically behind schedule. At home, Frank had two young children and a wife who also worked at a demanding job. Just getting through every day chores and handling child care (tasks he and his wife agreed to share equally), left him no time to do longer term projects. There were household repairs that were being neglected and he had had to file for extensions on his taxes for the last three years because he hadn't completed the IRS forms. In fact, he had yet to finish his taxes from two years ago, let alone this year...and April 15 was looming.

Executive Skill	Specific problem situation to tackle first
Goal behavior	<i>Frank will</i>
Possible environmental modifications/motivators/incentives	