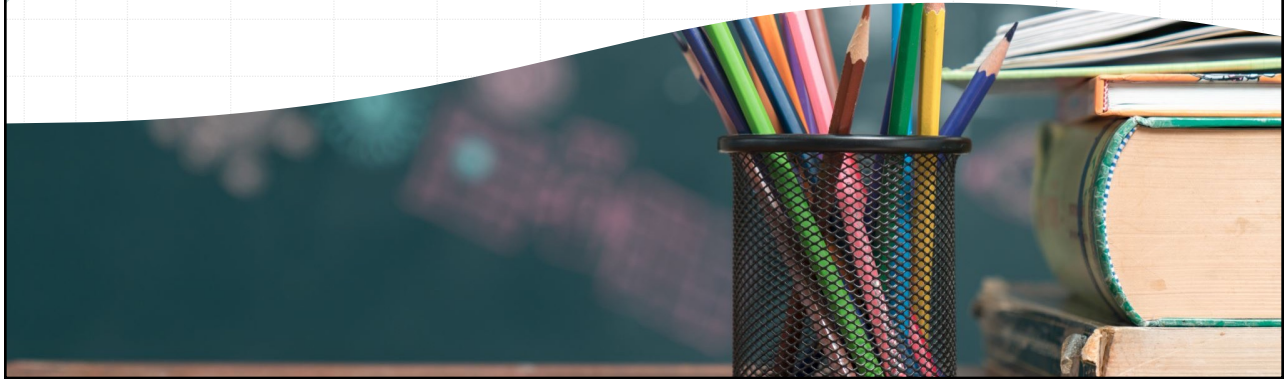


# Mastering the Art of Executive Skill Conversations

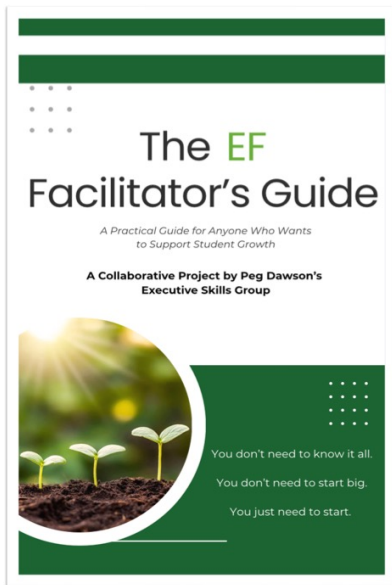
Peg Dawson, Ed.D., NCSP

[dawson.peg@gmail.com](mailto:dawson.peg@gmail.com)

<https://www.smartbutscatteredkids.com>



1



You can obtain a copy of the guide by completing this [form](#)

2

Where do these skills come from?

Are we born with them?

If not, how do we acquire them?

Are we taught them?  
By whom?

3

More food for thought...

Do they just emerge gradually over time according to some internal timetable (the way vision does in infants)?

Are they learned through practice (the way infants learn to walk)?

Are they learned through modeling and shaping (the way language is learned)?

Or are they explicitly taught (the way reading is learned)?

4

## Let's vote



Go to **www.menti.com** use the code



Use the code **2810 2211**

5

## 3 Key Concepts about Executive Skills

- What they are: brain-based skills that take a minimum of 25 years to reach full maturation.
- Until these skills are fully mature, it's the job of parents and teachers (and adults who work with kids) to act as surrogate frontal lobes.
- It is also the job of parents, teachers, etc. to help kids grow their own executive skills.



6

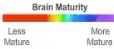
Published: September 15, 2008

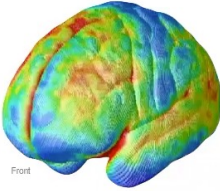
FACEBOOK TWITTER GOOGLE+ EMAIL SHARE

### The Child's Developing Brain

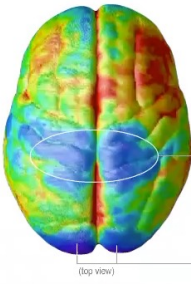
Different areas of the brain mature at different rates, which helps explain many of the intellectual and emotional changes seen in children, teens and young adults. While no two children develop in exactly the same way, scientists have been able to link certain developmental milestones to changes in brain tissue, observed by MRI scans taken repeatedly over years. Move the slider below to see how the brain matures. Red, yellow and orange patterns indicate undeveloped brain tissue, while green, blue and purple indicate a maturing of the brain.

**EARLY DEVELOPMENT**  
 in the first few years of life, areas of the brain devoted to basic function change at a rapid pace. By age 4, primary senses and basic motor skills are almost fully developed. The child can walk, hold a crayon and feed himself.





4 years old



Age 21: Executive Functions

**SENSATION**  
 Areas responsible for sensations like touch are almost as developed as they ever will be.

**VISION**  
 The part of the brain governing vision has already matured.


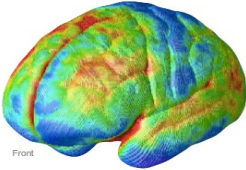
Birth Age 4 Age 9 Age 15 Age 21 [Go to Age 9](#)

Brain images courtesy of Dr. Paul Thompson, University of California, Los Angeles. Source information provided by Dr. Jay Giedd, National Institutes of Mental Health. Produced by Tara Parker-Pope, Jon Huang, and Mike Mason/The New York Times

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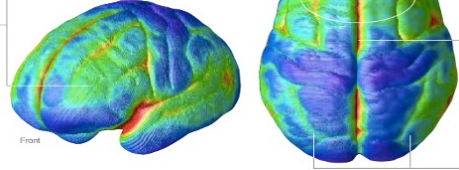
7

## What can the 13-year-old brain do?

4 years old

4 Age 9 Age 15 Age 21

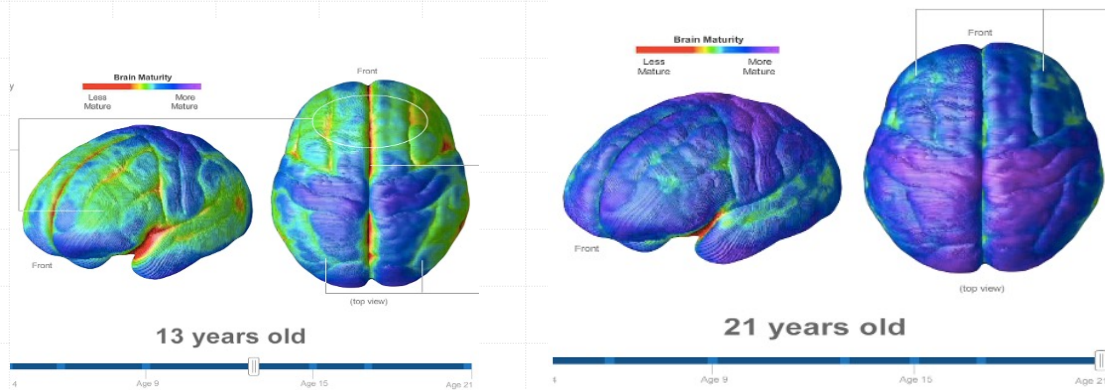



13 years old

4 Age 9 Age 15 Age 21

8

## What can the 13-year-old brain do?



9

## Executive Skills that Underlie School Success

### Foundational Skills

- Response Inhibition
- Working Memory
- Emotional Control
- Flexibility
- Sustained Attention
- Task Initiation

### Advanced Skills

- Planning/Prioritizing
- Organization
- Time Management
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Metacognition

10

## What's Executive Function—and Why Does It Matter?

The skills that make up executive function are better predictors of success than test scores, IQ, or socioeconomic status.

August 15, 2019

Edutopia

11

## To bring executive skills into your school follow these 3 “easy” steps

1. Understand what executive skills are and how they impact learning.
2. Learn to apply the executive skill terminology to student learning and behavior.
3. Introduce to students the vocabulary and concepts of executive skills.

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## Steps to Follow

1. Familiarize yourself with what executive skills are and how they impact learning.

14

## 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.

Key Strategy: **Teach Wait/Stop**

15

## 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.

Key Strategy: Pair verbal with **VISUAL**

16



## Emotional Control



The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.

Key Strategy: **Start by acknowledging how the student feels**

17

## Flexibility



The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information or mistakes. It relates to an adaptability to changing conditions.

Key Strategy: **Help kids find multiple pathways (Plan B)**

18

## Sustained Attention



The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.

Key Strategy: **Teach kids to monitor their attention.**

19

## Task Initiation



The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.

Key Strategy: **Have student make a plan with a start time**

20

# Planning/Prioritizing



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.

Key Strategy: **Plan with kids rather than for kids**

21

## A Template for Planning Long-term Projects

**Long-Term-Project Planning Form** Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 1: Select a Topic**

What are possible topics?	What I like about this choice:	What I don't like:
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Final topic choice: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 2: Identify Necessary Materials**

What materials or resources do I need?	Where will I get them?	When will I get them?
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

**Step 3: Identify Project Tasks and Due Dates (cont.)**

What do I need to do? (List each step in order)	When will I do it?	Check off when done
Step 1:		
Step 2:		
Step 3:		
Step 4:		
Step 5:		
Step 6:		
Step 7:		
Step 8:		
Step 9:		
Step 10:		

**Reminder List:** Include here any additional tasks or details you need to keep in mind as you work on the project. Cross out or check each one off as you take care of it.

- \_\_\_ 1.
- \_\_\_ 2.
- \_\_\_ 3.
- \_\_\_ 4.
- \_\_\_ 5.
- \_\_\_ 6.
- \_\_\_ 7.
- \_\_\_ 8.
- \_\_\_ 9.
- \_\_\_ 10.

From The Work-Smart Academic Planner, Revised Edition. Copyright 2017 by The Guilford Press.

22

## Organization



The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials.

Key Strategy: **Keep it simple and teach explicitly**

23

## 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.

Key Strategy: **Practice time estimation**

24

## Goal-Directed Persistence

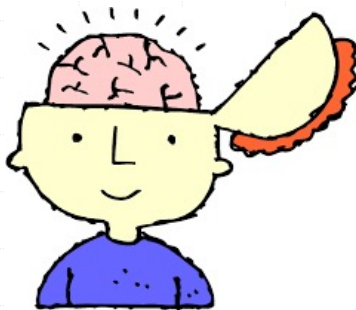


The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal and not be put off or distracted by competing interests.

Key Strategy: **Have the student practice setting small goals**

25

## 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?").

Key Strategy: **Encourage self-reflection following successes**

26

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## How do we describe these kids?

What concerns you most about this pupil?

That he is lazy and not working his potential.

Please describe the best things about this pupil:

He is sweet and has a good sense of humor.

28

## A better way...

Instead of calling students 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

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## What executive skill is this?

Talking over teacher and classmates

30

What executive skill is this?

Chronically late for school

31

What executive skill is this?

Shuts down when criticized by teacher

32



What executive skill is this?

Figures out the steps to follow to get a summer job

33

What executive skill is this?

Student places documents in appropriately labeled files on her computer

34

What executive skill is this?

Struggles with creative writing assignment  
because can't think of anything to write  
about

35

What executive skill is this?

Starts homework without prompting from  
adult

36

What executive skill is this?

Says rude or hurtful things to kids

37

What executive skill is this?

Frequently makes faulty assumptions about assignment directions and doesn't think to check in with teacher before starting the assignment

38

What executive skill is this?

Decides to improve math grade and increases study time for tests/quizzes

39

What executive skill is this?

Takes notes in lecture class and asks relevant questions

40



41

## To bring executive skills into your school follow these 3 “easy” steps

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3. **Introduce to students the vocabulary and concepts of executive skills.**

42

## Ways to do this...

- Explicit Modeling

43

## Ways to do this...

- Lessons [My YouTube channel](#) (Rachael Ramsey)  
[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B4kld0327lZdb3NBaWlrSkxxejQ?resourcekey=0-AsEWT4RrpkDLgAkr8i\\_jw&usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B4kld0327lZdb3NBaWlrSkxxejQ?resourcekey=0-AsEWT4RrpkDLgAkr8i_jw&usp=sharing) (Bedford ES materials)  
[www.efintheclassroom.net](http://www.efintheclassroom.net) (Mountain View)

44

## Ways to Do This: Classroom Posters

**RESPONSE INHIBITION**  
I think before I act, resist peer pressure and make good choices.

**WORKING MEMORY**  
I keep in mind what I need to and remember what worked last time.

**FLEXIBILITY**  
I adapt to change even when it's unexpected because I can find multiple solutions to a problem.

**PLANNING/PRIORITIZATION**  
I focus on what's important and let the little things go. I have a good plan that is my GPS to bring me to my goal.

**ORGANIZATION**  
I have a system for tracking my materials and any important information I will need.

**Executive Functioning: How we think about our thinking**

- WORKING MEMORY:** The ability to hold information in your head while you do something with it.
- RESPONSE INHIBITION:** The ability to think before acting.
- EMOTIONAL CONTROL:** The ability to manage emotions.
- SUSTAINED ATTENTION:** The ability to maintain attention to a task.
- TASK INITIATION:** The ability to begin a task.
- PLANNING:** The ability to see the individual steps in an assignment and sequence them.
- ORGANIZATION:** The ability to keep track of information and materials.
- TIME MANAGEMENT:** The ability to effectively manage your time.
- FLEXIBILITY:** The ability to switch activities or accept different ways to do something.
- METACOGNITION:** The ability to think about your thinking.
- GOAL DIRECTED PERSISTENCE:** The ability to keep working towards a goal.

45

## Desktop Strips with Terms and Definitions

- Source: Laurie Faith
- <http://activatedlearning.org>

- PLANNING & PRIORITIZING:** The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. Making decisions about what is important to focus on and what is not.
- EMOTIONAL CONTROL:** The ability to manage feelings so you can be productive and successful.
- TIME MANAGEMENT:** The ability to estimate how much time one has, how to use it and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important.
- GOAL DIRECTED PERSISTENCE:** Following through to the completion of your goal without being distracted by competing interests.
- SUSTAINED ATTENTION:** Keeping attention when it's hard or boring.
- ORGANIZATION:** The ability to create and maintain a system to keep track of information or materials.
- RESPONSE INHIBITION:** Thinking before you act - to resist the urge to say or do things.
- FLEXIBILITY:** Being able to see from one side of an idea or situation. Being able to change and adapt.
- TASK INITIATION:** The ability to begin projects in a timely fashion.
- WORKING MEMORY:** Holding information in memory while performing complex tasks.
- METACOGNITION:** Thinking how you're doing and thinking about how you're thinking.

46

# Ways to do this...

- Self-Assessments

	STRENGTHS (Low)	CHALLENGES (High)
Response Inhibition (Self Control)	★ ★ ★	
Working Memory	★ ★ !	! !
Emotional Control	★	★ ! !
Cognitive Flexibility	★	! !
Sustained Attention	! ★	! ★ ★
Task Initiation		! !
Planning/Prioritizing	! ★	! !
Organization	! ★ ★ ★	! ! !
Time Management	! ★ ★ ★	! !
Goal-Directed Persistence	★ ★ ★ ★	★
Metacognition	! ★ ★	! !

Students, drag the icons! ★ ☆ ! !

Pear Deck Interactive Slide  
Do not remove this bar

**FORM 2.6**  
**Executive Skills Questionnaire for Students**

**Directions:** Read each item and decide how often it's a problem for you. Then add up the three scores in each set and write that number on the **Total score** line. Use the **Key** on page 271 to determine your executive skills strengths (two to three highest scores) and weaknesses (two to three lowest scores).

- I act on impulse.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5
- I get in trouble for talking too much in class.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5
- I say things without thinking.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5  
**Total score, items 1-3:** \_\_\_\_\_
- I say "I'll do it later" and then forget about it.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5
- I forget homework assignments or forget to bring home needed materials.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5
- I lose or misplace belongings such as coats, notebooks, sports equipment, etc.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5  
**Total score, items 4-6:** \_\_\_\_\_
- I get annoyed when homework is too hard or confusing or takes too long to finish.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5
- I have a short fuse, am easily frustrated.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5
- I get upset easily when things don't go as planned.**  
Most of the time 1      Frequently 2      Sometimes 3      Very rarely 4      Never 5  
**Total score, items 7-9:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(continued)

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From *Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents, Third Edition*, by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare. Copyright © 2018 The Guilford Press. Permission to photocopy this form is granted to purchasers of this book for personal use or use with students (see copyright page for details).

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# Ways to Do This: Use Teachable Moments



Connect learning and behavior to executive skills during lessons, when explaining classroom routines, and in private conversations with students.



Call out the positives



Troubleshoot the challenges

48



In the work we've done with schools, we've had the most success in integrating executive skills into the work teachers do with kids when the focus is on helping teachers:

- Understand what executive skills are and how they impact learning and school performance;
- Make a connection between student behavior and specific executive skills so they know what it looks like in the classroom (and so they avoid using words like lazy or disruptive);



49

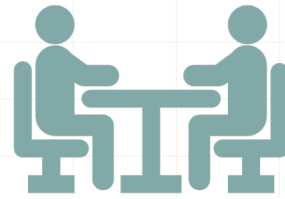
- Learn how to give this same information to students—so that students understand what executive skills are and can look at their own skill set and identify strengths and challenges;
- Work with students to help them recognize the obstacles that are getting in the way of using executive skills successfully and to find just the right strategies that will work for them to help them overcome those obstacles.



50

▶ We think this process looks less like a curriculum, and more like a conversation.

And a conversation that changes from year to year and student to student depending on the developmental level of the child and where that child is on their own path toward executive skill mastery.



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## ▶ RESOURCES

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/whlg4tmcusb1fle/AACpXFuquCJZwkD2PjptABb9a?dl=0>  
(ES Supplementary Materials)

52