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***When LAZY Doesn't Make Sense:
Look to Executive Functions***

"Executive function is actually a better predictor of academic success than IQ."
--John Medina, author of *Brain Rules*

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Definitions of Concepts

Executive Function

The interweaving of a person's interpersonal, intrapersonal, symbolic and environmental worlds with the neurological management skills and awareness needed to access memories, retrieve relevant information, react to stimuli, and direct production. Executive Function effects the dynamic between cuing and active neurological functioning.

Asynchronous Development

Because of their intellectual, physical, or creative abilities which are far above their typical peers, a gifted child's typical behaviors in other areas may seem immature. In addition, some areas of their lives may be delayed, such as social maturity, motor skills organization or self regulation. Discrepancies between different abilities often intensify when a student's intellectual ability is on the extreme end of the I.Q. spectrum. When you note that the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed until the mid to late 20's, a delay in these skills can be a barrier to achievement for our gifted children.

Over-Excitabilities: Intensities

Over-Excitabilities refers to "a heightened neurological state which is manifested in physical, emotional, and intellectual reactions to stimuli" (Dabrowski). Intensities and temperament are more pronounced in individuals at the far ends of the intellectual spectrum. The five areas of intensive reactivity, as defined by Dabrowski are psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional.

Process Achieves Product

Students with EF challenges often have a need to understand the process of a task before they can attempt to be successful completing it. They often need to see the big picture and how it relates to the details. The process of organizing a complex task needs to be explicitly taught, and new habits and strategies become an integrated piece of that process.

Coping Strategies

Begin

- Demystify the processes of the brain and assist students to be self aware
- Help students to use their strengths to support their EF challenges.
- Develop and practice Self Advocacy
- Give students concrete tools, and strategies to amend their lifestyle.
- Keep it VISUAL
- Help them conceptualize and visualize TIME

Become a partner and coach to the child/student

- View the process as a creative, enriching adventure that fully involves the child.
- Embrace the child's gifts and intensities and help the child understand them;
- Embrace patience. This is a long process, so settle in for the long haul;
- Understand that the child may not quickly transfer strategies from one situation to a new one. Part of growth is applying old strategies to new situations in unforeseen ways.
- Encourage effort over product, especially when starting.

Attention takes practice, patience and understanding

- When does the child learn best? What time is best for test taking, intense study and homework
- Develop cueing systems to remind a child to reconnect and attend, whether verbal, tactile or a special signal you devise together;
- Before giving instructions, check that you have the person's full attention.
- Check that the task was heard and that the child/adult is not mindlessly repeating your words, but attending to what you are saying;
- Turn away or move away from distractions, such as television, books, or games, before trying to communicate;
- Sometimes a child needs to move to remain engaged: allow a child to use a squishy ball, "fidget" or "wiggle seat" to help keep them focused.

Time!

- Place analog clocks everywhere and teach the child how to use this visual reference.
- Keep track of time on task, time complaining, time thinking, and time procrastinating: Become aware of the true time needed for a task.
- Work with teachers/parents to develop a homework plan that will support the child as they work to improve their production skills (i.e. time limit for completion; fewer problems but better results, etc).

Coping Strategies (cont.)

Sustaining attention during homework

- Plan breaks.
- Observe and note when and how long it takes before a child's attention or frustration increases. With that knowledge, plan how long the child can work before taking a stretch break. Try 10 **second** stretch breaks every 5, 10, or 15 minutes as needed.
- Increase the length of sustained effort by 1-2 minutes each week.
- Plan and decide on an activity for a 10-15 minute break after 30 minutes or so of active engagement: Be sure that this break is an activity that is active, different, enjoyable, but easy to shift away from (not a computer game or other highly involved task). It might be the time to help with dinner, complete a chore, or play with the dog
- What awaits the child if all tasks are completed with time before bed? What will they miss out on if they don't finish?

Memory is supported when you study multiple times in multiple places

- Location variety produces more opportunities to access the memory using sensory information.
- Link the information to something the child already knows.
- Have the child practice for short periods in multiple ways (writing, listening, speaking, reading).
- Working intensively for 5-10 minutes and then taking a short break can be more efficient than trying to remember too many facts at once.
- Use visual cues such as drawings or mental imagery.
- Make it a game and have fun!

Plan it!

- Recognize that organization takes time.
- Play a game to see how many steps a task takes and then see how long it takes to accomplish it. What may seem like a simple task to you may be more complex to the child.
- Use a monthly calendar, along with a weekly calendar showing the "regular routine" along with special due dates and adventures (static vs. dynamic events).
- Before bedtime and again at breakfast, discuss tasks for the day ahead.
- Make a list of the day and the week and post it where the entire family sees it.
- How much time will each task take? Guess, and then record real times for future reference.

Coping Strategies (cont.)

Planning Details:

Take note of Priorities

- Consider the child's and family's existing routine. Which activities are optional during the course of a week or season, and may need to be dropped?
- Look at the monthly calendar, the tasks for the week, and then the tasks for the day and what they entail.
 - What are static events that are the same every time? Include chores, music lessons, sports, snacks, dinner and bedtime, etc;
 - What is dynamic and needs to be assessed for task breakdown and time estimation, such as homework and projects
 - When is the child most alert and open to learning?
- How much time will each task take?
- When is bed-time; dinner time? How much time is needed to get ready for each?

Prioritize the Day's Tasks

- What *must* be done tonight (Include chores, homework, meals and bedtime)?
- Which weekly assignment chunks need to be completed?
- What are the "break" plans for the day?
- What are the "rewards" for finishing the tasks with time to spare, and the consequences for running out of time?
- What other activities are planned?

Project Planning and Backward Hints

- Draw out all the directions before you begin a project.
- Use sticky notes to break a project into steps.
- Take the sticky steps and stack them backwards from end to beginning
- Estimate the time for each step and note it on the sticky (include transportation time!)
- Use a month calendar and the sticky notes to find the time to work on the project.
- Expect the unexpected and plan for it.

Remember that everyone has stronger and weaker functions on a given day due to exhaustion, stress, and energy levels: the question to consider is if a function impairs a child's day-to day coping abilities or academic success on a consistent basis.

Change takes **Courage, Practice and TIME**

RESOURCES

Find out more about Gifted Students and Executive Functioning

- 📖 Daniels, S., PhD and Piechowski, M.M., PhD. ***Living with Intensity***, (2009) Scottsdale, AZ, Great Potential Press.
 - This book is filled with multiple perspectives that describe the intense learning differences of exceptional children and offers strategies to support and enrich their lives while mitigating some of the frustrations often associated with the gifts.
- 📖 Dawson, P. (2009). ***Smart but Scattered***. New York: Guilford Press.
 - This book was designed for parents. It has questionnaires for parents to analyze their own executive skills as well as their children's. It offers many suggestions for supporting children who struggle.
- 📖 Kulman, R. (2011) ***Train Your Brain for Success: A Teenager's Guide to Executive Functions*** Florida: Specialty Press, Inc.;
 - An excellent book with clear and concise language that is very accessible for teens and parents.
- 📖 Medina, J. (2008). ***Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home and School***. Seattle: Pear Press.
 - This book comes with a very entertaining and informative DVD that covers each of the 12 principles. This book is a down to earth look into current brain research. Very thought provoking. John claims "Executive function is actually a better predictor of academic success than IQ."
- 📖 ***Neuroscience for Kids***. <http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/chmemory.html>
 - Contains links to memory games in various modalities. Also a good resource for demystifying brain processes
- 📖 Sklar, Marydee. ***Seeing My Time: Visual Tools for Executive Functioning Success. Instructor's Manual*** (2010) Portland, OR. Aguanga Publishing www.ExecutiveFunctioningSuccess.com
 - This book was a gold medal winner in the Education/Academic category of the 2011 Next Generation Indie Book Awards. It provides the directions for teaching the Sklar Process™ using the *Seeing My Time-Course Notes* (below).
- 📖 Sklar, Marydee. ***Seeing My Time: Visual Tools for Executive Functioning Success. Course Notes*** (2010) Portland, OR. Aguanga Publishing www.ExecutiveFunctioningSuccess.com
- 📖 ***Uniquely Gifted*** <http://www.uniquelygifted.org/intro.htm>
 - This is a website for twice exceptional kids, with support and informational resources.
- 📖 Webb, J.T., Gore, J. L., Amend, E.R. & DeVries, A.R. (2007) ***A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children***. Scottsdale, AZ Great Potential Press.
 - This is a comprehensive text for parents and teachers to explore various aspects of raising and teaching gifted and talented children. It is the text used in SENG (Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted) parent support groups.
- 📖 Webb, J.T., Amend, E.R, etc. (2005) ***Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis of Gifted Children and Adults***. Scottsdale, AZ Great Potential Press.
 - This is a comprehensive text covering common learning and behavioral diagnoses, and compares them to gifted traits.