

Executive Function Strategies

SELF-REGULATION AND FOCUS

- **Determine your optimum environment.**
Do you work best with music, a certain scent, or during a certain time of day? Do you need to take care of all common excuses, like wanting a snack or something to drink? Do you need to put your cell phone in airplane mode? Predict what will distract you and take care of it before you try to focus.
- **Do a brain dump.**
Acknowledge all things vying for your attention, even the little thoughts, to take away some of their power. Write them down to get them out of your head and assure you won't forget them. Then prioritize the urgent tasks.
- **Do just one thing.**
On your brain dump list, circle the ONE thing that you intend to give your attention. Create a visual image or a phrase to say to yourself to keep that ONE thing in the forefront of your mind.
- **BREATHE!**
Whether it is through exercise, meditation, or just a big belly breath, get oxygen to your brain. It activates the pre-frontal cortex and fuels other executive functions.

TIME AWARENESS AND TIME MANAGEMENT

- **Practice estimating time.**
How long does it actually take to shower? Put on clothes? Eat your salad? Time yourself and see how accurate your estimations are.
- **Make time visual.**
We live in a digital world, but using a old-fashioned, analogue clock is one way to literally watch time pass. What does 15 minutes FEEL like? Understanding the feeling of the passage of time can greatly improve the accuracy of time estimation.
- **Use timers.**
Use a timer to keep on track. Just like a green light at an intersection, pushing the start button on a time can provide a clear start for a task and help with getting the ball rolling.



TASK PLANNING, INITIATION, AND COMPLETION

- **Plan backwards.**
Draw out the end result, break it down into the steps required to achieve the end, and anticipate the resources you need to make it all happen. Only start the task after completing the backwards plan.
- **Utilize low tech and high tech tools.**
Find something to provide structure for a plan, whether a phone app, an online calendar, a bullet journal, or a simple spiral notebook. Go with what has provided success in the past and fits in with natural preferences.
- **Get the ball rolling.**
Start with the simplest task, the quickest task, or the one you really want to do. Often just getting started will provide the momentum to keep on going.

ORGANIZATION

- **Think in categories.**
Sort items by type, function, or another category. Make sure one category is for items you do not need and can trash or give away.
- **Start small.**
Organizing the whole house is overwhelming. Maybe start by organizing the sock drawer, the spice rack, or the top drawer of the file cabinet.
- **Leave nothing homeless.**
Where do medical records live? Where can spare office supplies be stored? Find a place for everything and pause before leaving things where they don't belong.

McLean, Diane L. "Executive Functioning Coaching: Getting Things Done." *Guide to ADHD Coaching: How to Find an ADHD Coach and What to Do When You Get One*. Ed. Alan R. Graham. Motivational Press, Inc, 2018