

sa

Homeschooling

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LIVING & LEARNING – TOGETHER

Why animals are so good for children

IS YOUR CHILD 'LAZY'?

Choosing the right curriculum

+PLUS:

Being a learning family

Pizza pot planting

Creative writing competition winners!

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Ed's note

Happy spring, dear readers! In this issue of *SAH* we're giving you a boost of homeschooling power before we all start winding down towards summer. Enjoy reading about the magic that happens between children and animals; what to consider when deciding which curriculum is best for your child; how to create a pizza pot garden – and a whole lot more.

Shelagh
Editor

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Is your child lazy?



If your child seems to be distracted or unmotivated all the time, it might be time to learn more about executive functioning skills, writes **Dalena van der Westhuizen** of BrainAbility

Executive function challenges are almost always interpreted as laziness – but although laziness might play a role in a small percentage of children, for most of them it's usually weak executive functioning skills that are the problem.

Most kids want to succeed, but just don't know how.

Here are a few examples of executive functioning weaknesses:



What I would see	Why it happens	Skill needed for this task
Refuses to do homework or always struggles to get started on most tasks	Doesn't know how to get started; finds it difficult to get starting points in processes	Initiation
Easily distracted	Lacks the strategies to maintain focus and resist distractions	Sustained attention
Always late, usually hands in/ finishes work past the due date	Doesn't have the strategies for being aware of time	Time management
Regularly forgets or loses personal belongings	Doesn't have the systems to keep track of items like books, shoes, keys, pens, etc	Organisation
Procrastinates, has panic/anxiety at the last minute	Doesn't know how to break tasks into smaller, manageable tasks/ chunks and sequence the work that needs to be done	Planning



What is executive function and why is it important?

Executive functioning skills are a set of abilities essential for thinking through and completing tasks. They're the skills that allow us to problem-solve, initiate and complete tasks, and sustain our attention through the completion of a task.

Executive function is essentially our ability to 'get things done'. They guide everything we do and are necessary for tasks such as getting dressed and ready for the day, starting and completing homework, or making sandwiches for lunch. They're needed for every

multi-step activity we do, every day of our lives.

Executive functioning is initiating a task, adjusting to problems and negotiating obstacles, while organising and prioritising all the steps and details.

The following are cognitive processes that generally make up our executive functioning skills. These skills are essential for learning, behaviour and development:

- ✓ **Attention**
- ✓ **Impulse control**
- ✓ **Emotional control**
- ✓ **Flexible thinking**
- ✓ **Working memory**
- ✓ **Self-monitoring**
- ✓ **Planning and prioritising**
- ✓ **Task initiation**
- ✓ **Organisation**

All these skills work together and impact each other.

Aspects of executive functioning skills are developed from a very young age, then extended and further developed throughout childhood and into the teen years, even into adulthood. And the good news is that they can be strengthened. Try the following strategies:

To help with task initiation

- Break down tasks
- Identify the task
- Set mini-goals
- Use a timer
- Use a schedule (try a picture schedule for younger kids)
- Use time-boxing (eg blocking out a specific time for certain tasks)
- Use a checklist



To help with working memory

- Take notes
- Use mnemonics
- Practise through rehearsal
- To-do lists
- Task sequencing lists

To help with organisation

- Develop routines and stick to them
- Break long-term tasks into smaller tasks with deadlines
- Colour-code books, folders, workbooks, etc
- Use a calendar to keep track of appointments, assignments, tests, events, etc



To help with impulse control

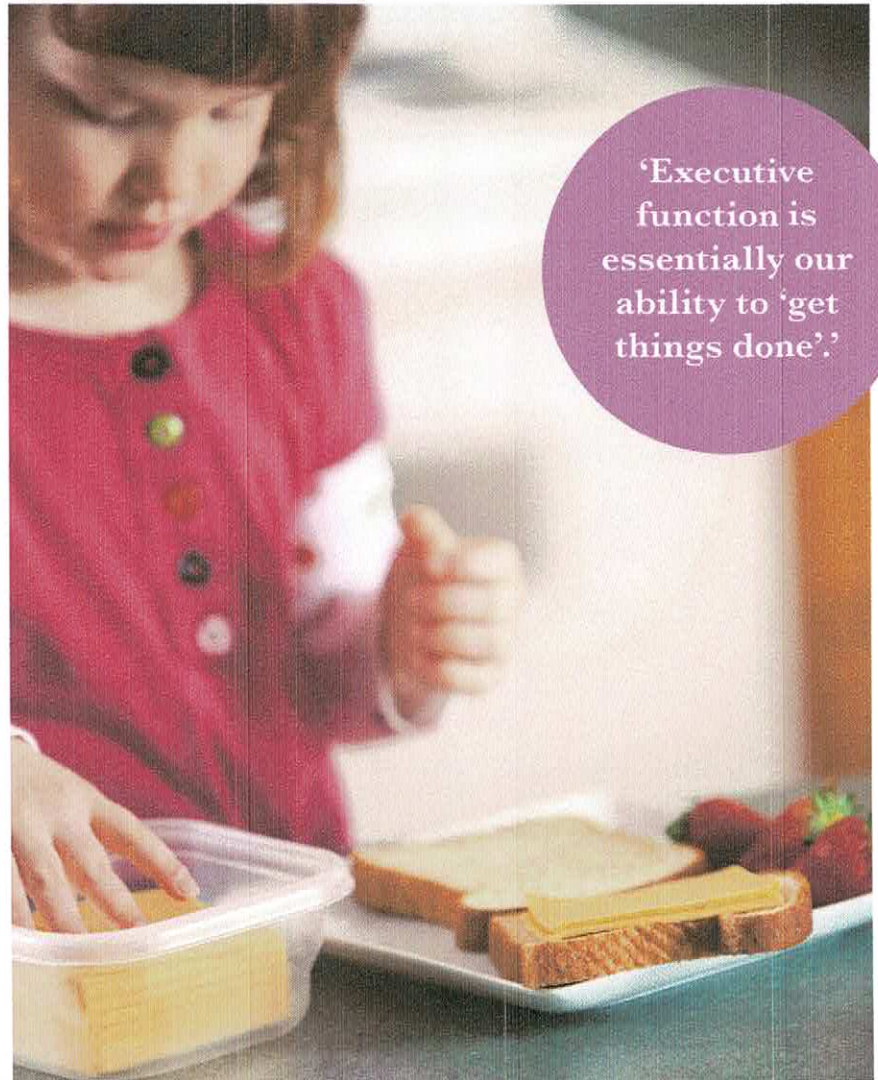
- Reduce clutter
- Reduce or increase time to complete tasks
- Act out situations beforehand (role-play)
- Use a visual schedule
- Break projects into smaller tasks

To help with planning and prioritising

- Allow opportunities to plan simple tasks (getting dressed, making a birthday card, making a bed, making a sandwich, etc)
- Talk about the most important steps of a task – what should be done before the next step can be taken
- Draw/Doodle the steps to be followed for a specific task
- Create a mental map of a multiple-step task/project

When strategies alone aren't enough, or the number of strategies required is overwhelming, it's time to dig deeper. You might want to consider a cognitive assessment to pinpoint strengths, weaknesses and specific learning needs. Your child's individual cognitive profile will highlight what needs to be done to permanently strengthen weak skills.

Happy reading until the next issue!



'Executive function is essentially our ability to 'get things done'.'

