

**Executive Functioning**

**Executive functioning is the name for the things your brain does to help you be organised make good decisions, and get things done.**

Executive functioning skills are the skills that enable us to organise everyday tasks and set goals to get things done. They help us to manage our thoughts, actions and emotions in order to complete tasks and stay safe. The frontal lobe of the brain is responsible for our executive functioning skills. However, our pre-frontal systems are among the last areas of the brain to fully develop, often not until late adolescence or early adulthood, and therefore most children and young people will still be developing their executive functioning skills.

Executive function skills broadly sit in one of two categories - organisation and regulation - although there is cross-over between the two:

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| **Organisational Skills** | **Regulation Skills** |
| **Planning and Prioritising:** Making decisions to work towards achieving a goal, identifying relevant information and discarding irrelevant distractions. Time management. | **Response Inhibition (Impulse Control):** Thinking before speaking or acting, assessing a situation before responding.  |
| **Working Memory:** Holding onto information in our brain whilst actively processing and working on a task. Drawing on past experiences to apply to the here and now. | **Flexible Thinking:** Adapting and responding to changes, new information or obstacles. |
| **Task Initiation:** Starting a task without procrastination despite distractions, identifying what needs to be done initially. | **Emotional Control:** The ability to manage emotions to enable a task to be completed. Managing thoughts and feelings to make good choices. |
| **Organisation:** Keeping track of personal equipment, resources, identifying what is required to complete a task. Developing and maintaining systems. |  |

 Executive function is not the same as intelligence. Someone with a high IQ can encounter challenges applying their knowledge if they have executive function differences. Executive function skills impact on a person socially and emotionally, as well as practically. Dysregulation and anxiety are likely to reduce an autistic young person’s ability to use their executive function skills.

The executive function skills are very closely linked with the Three Areas of Difference we think about when working with autistic children and young people. Therefore, autistic young people are also likely to experience differences in their executive functioning.

 

***(How do I support autistic pupils with executive functioning differences, A Practitioners Guide - AET, 2024)***