

EXECUTIVE FU

A Personal Trainer for Your Child's Brain

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EXECUTION COACH

GOT A KID who can't seem to focus, finish tasks, or manage time? Don't worry. Your student isn't lazy. They likely have weak executive functioning, which is a fancy term for your child's inability to get all the gears in their brain in motion to get stuff done.

For students with ADHD, these skills can be tough to build. They may struggle with everything from remembering to turn in their algebra assignment to getting started on an essay about the American Revolution to resisting the urge to scroll through YouTube when they should be studying for Tuesday's spelling test. An execution function coach can help them break down these challenges into manageable steps and develop personalized strategies for staying on track.

Just like people trying to reach fitness goals benefit from the additional accountability and individualized instruction from a personal trainer, think of an executive function coach as a personal trainer, of sorts, for your child's brain. Instead of meal plans and custom exercise circuits, executive function (EF) coaches come to sessions armed with organizational strategies and tactics to teach students to learn how to learn.

So what exactly will your child do during an executive function coaching session?

At my practice, our one-to-one EF coaches follow a research-based curriculum to teach goal setting, cognitive flexibility, organizing, prioritizing, memorizing, self-checking, and monitoring. And while all sessions are customized based on each child's needs, we always include these four steps during the school year.

Step 1: Together, the executive function coach and child check the student's homework portal or LMS for upcoming or overdue assignments and tests. They discuss what the student needs to do to prepare for each, including any resources they'll need and when to set aside time to complete it.

Step 2: To help students externalize their school responsibilities and plan ahead, the coach then has the student write down each assignment and test in their planner, on a whiteboard, or in their digital calendar. Through this process, the child learns that planning for a day is too short-sighted, planning for a month is unrealistic, but planning out one week at a time is just right.

Step 3: The coach caters this step to the student's particular challenges. The coach helps the child complete a difficult as-

ignment or their most dreaded homework. This part of the session is especially beneficial for students struggling to get started on their own.

Step 4: At the end of the session, the coach helps the student reflect on what they've learned and how they plan to use those strategies at school and home. Over time, students build a toolbox of strategies to better troubleshoot issues that have caused academic frustration.

EF sessions look a little different in the summer months. The summer break provides an excellent opportunity for students to focus on building executive function skills without the distractions and pressures of the school year. During long school breaks, students are often less stressed, have fewer deadlines to meet, and have more flexible schedules.

Our EF coaches follow a research-based summer curriculum that's designed to keep students engaged during online sessions. This gives families flexibility and allows the coach to focus on the areas that cause the student the most stress during the school year. By addressing certain executive function challenges during the summer, students can return to school in the fall with improved skills and strategies to succeed in the next grade.

The added value of working with an experienced execution function coach is that they're not just teaching your child how to get things done at school. They teach skills that will serve your child well for the rest of their life. Whether they're trying to succeed in college, in a career, or in daily life, knowing how to plan, prioritize, and follow through on tasks is essential. And with the help of a caring execution function coach, students with ADHD can learn to train their brains in a meaningful, fun, and supportive way. **A**



As a former teacher, author, and speaker, **Ann Dolin, MEd**, is committed to equipping parents and students to succeed academically and enjoy the K-12 journey together. Since 1998, her team at Educational Connections (www.ectutoring.com) has helped thousands of kids overcome obstacles and achieve goals through one-to-one tutoring, test prep, executive function coaching, and college consulting. Dolin is an expert on academics and ADHD. She was a board member of the former Washington, DC, chapter of CHADD, has spoken several times at the annual CHADD conference, and has been featured in the Washington Post and Parents Magazine. She serves on the editorial advisory board of CHADD's Attention magazine and on the board of the International Dyslexia Association.