



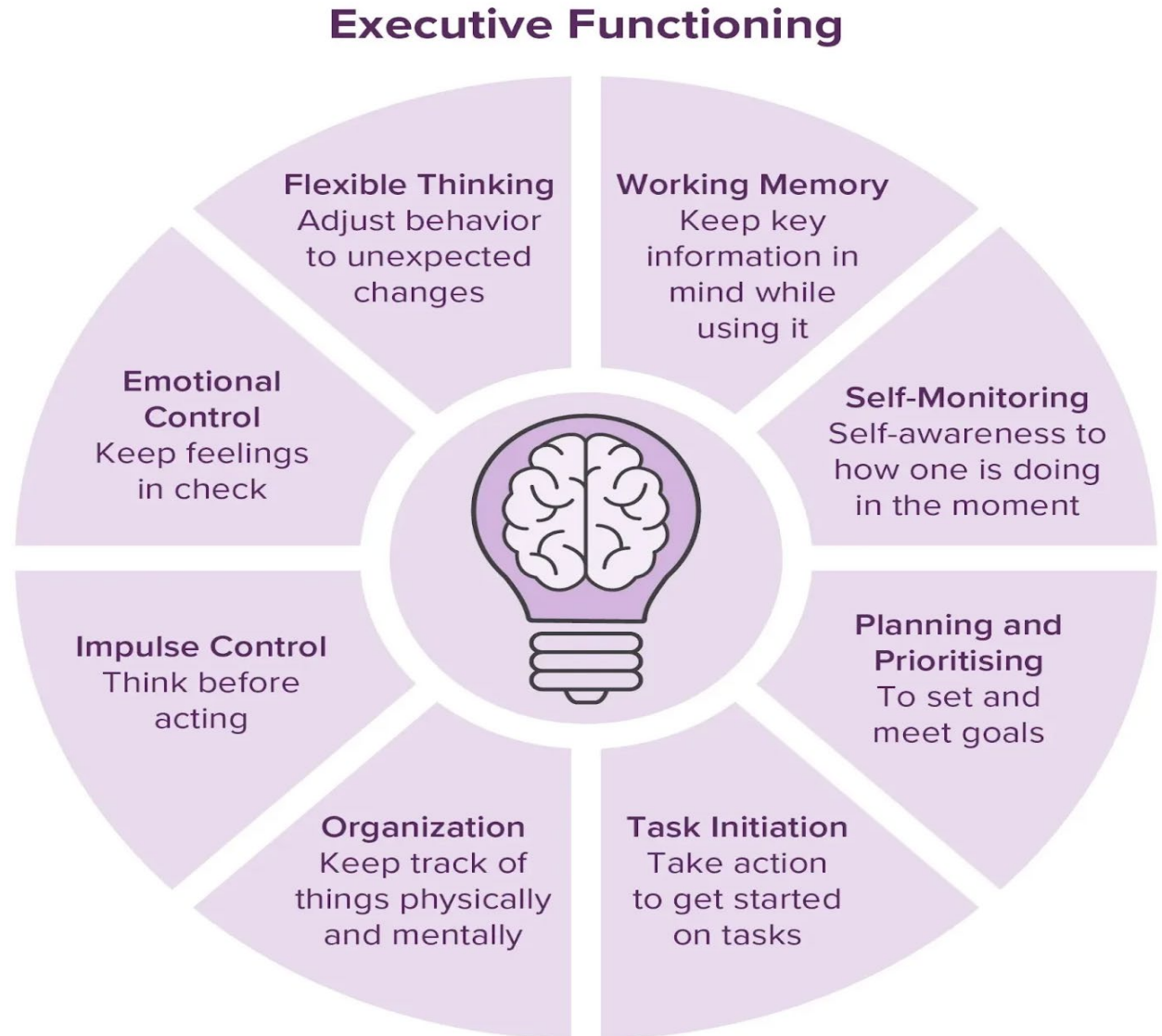
# UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

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Student Psychological Services  
October 24, 2024

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# AGENDA

- What is Executive Functioning
- Executive Skills Questionnaire
  - Strengths and Weaknesses
- Improving Skills

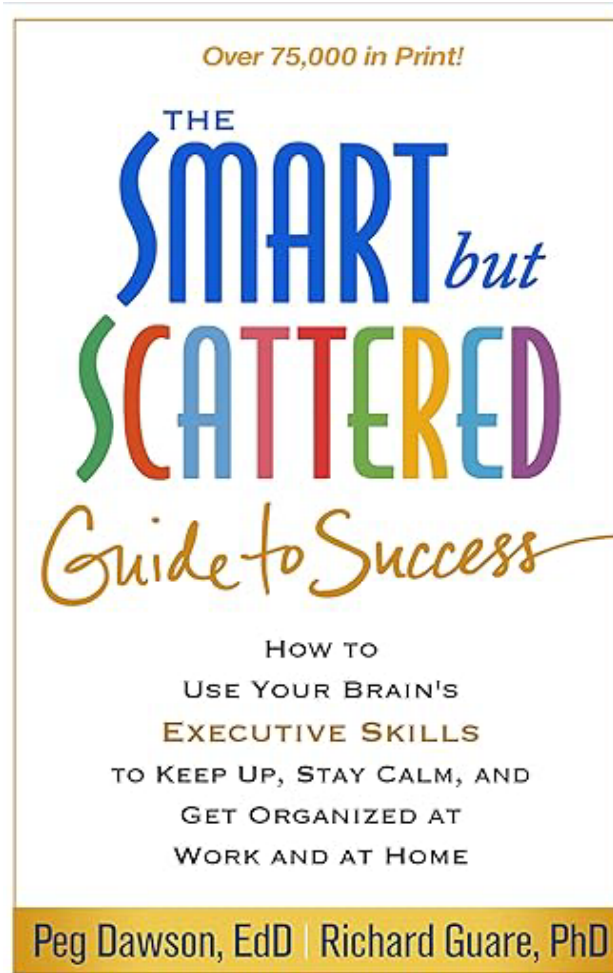


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# WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING?

- Abstract constructs that are categorized in different ways
- Part of brain that manages complexity and execute tasks
- Helps you set and work towards goals
- Requires mental flexibility to be able to assess and switch approach if needed
- Responsible for self-regulation





# EXECUTIVE SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE

THE SMART BUT SCATTERED GUIDE TO SUCCESS  
BY PEG DAWSON, EDD & RICHARD GUARE, PHD

## Executive Skills Questionnaire

Read each item below and then rate that item based on the extent to which you agree or disagree with how well it describes you. Use the rating scale below to choose the appropriate score. Then add the three scores in each section. Use the key at the end of the questionnaire to determine your executive skill strengths (two to three highest scores) and weaknesses (two to three lowest scores).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Tend to disagree	Tend to agree	Agree	Strongly agree

Item	Your score
1. I don't jump to conclusions.	_____
2. I think before I speak.	_____
3. I make sure I have all the facts before I take action.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
4. I have a good memory for facts, dates, and details.	_____
5. I am very good at remembering the things I have committed to do.	_____
6. I seldom need reminders to complete tasks.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
7. My emotions seldom get in the way of my job performance.	_____
8. Little things do not affect me emotionally or distract me from the task at hand.	_____
9. When frustrated or angry, I keep my cool.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
10. No matter what the task, I believe in getting started as soon as possible.	_____
11. Procrastination is usually not a problem for me.	_____
12. I seldom leave tasks to the last minute.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
13. I find it easy to stay focused on my work.	_____
14. Once I start an assignment, I work diligently until it's completed.	_____
15. Even when interrupted, I find it easy to get back and complete the job at hand.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
16. When I start my day, I have a clear plan in mind for what I hope to accomplish.	_____
17. When I have a lot to do, I can easily focus on the most important things.	_____
18. I typically break big tasks down into subtasks and timelines.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____

*(continued)*

## Executive Skills Questionnaire (continued)

19. I am an organized person.	_____
20. It is natural for me to keep my work area neat and organized.	_____
21. I am good at maintaining systems for organizing my work.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
22. At the end of the day, I've usually finished what I set out to do.	_____
23. I am good at estimating how long it takes to do something.	_____
24. I am usually on time for appointments and activities.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
25. I take unexpected events in stride.	_____
26. I easily adjust to changes in plans and priorities.	_____
27. I consider myself to be flexible and adaptive to change.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
28. I routinely evaluate my performance and devise methods for personal improvement.	_____
29. I am able to step back from a situation to make objective decisions.	_____
30. I am a "big-picture" thinker and enjoy the problem solving that goes with that.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
31. I think of myself as being driven to meet my goals.	_____
32. I easily give up immediate pleasures to work on long-term goals.	_____
33. I believe in setting and achieving high levels of performance.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____
34. I enjoy working in a highly demanding, fast-paced environment.	_____
35. A certain amount of pressure helps me perform at my best.	_____
36. Jobs that include a fair degree of unpredictability appeal to me.	_____
<b>TOTAL</b>	_____

KEY					
Items	Executive skill	Items	Executive skill	Items	Executive skill
1-3	Response inhibition	13-15	Sustained attention	25-27	Flexibility
4-6	Working memory	16-18	Planning/prioritizing	28-30	Metacognition
7-9	Emotional control	19-21	Organization	31-33	Goal-directed persistence
10-12	Task initiation	22-24	Time management	34-36	Stress tolerance

Strongest skills (highest scores)

Weakest skills (lowest scores)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# EXECUTIVE SKILLS\*



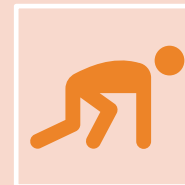
**Response Inhibition:** The capacity to think before you act—this ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it.



**Working memory:** The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future.



**Emotional Control:** The ability to manage emotions to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.



**Task Initiation:** The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.

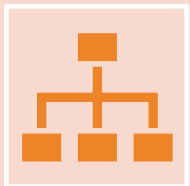
# EXECUTIVE SKILLS\*



**Sustained Attention:** The capacity to keep attention on a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.



**Planning/Prioritizing:** The ability to create a road map to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important.



**Organization:** The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials.



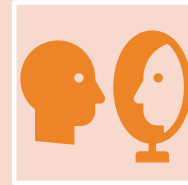
**Time Management:** The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involved a sense that time is important.

\*DAWSON & GUARE, 2016

## EXECUTIVE SKILLS\*



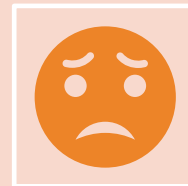
**Flexibility:** The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information, or mistakes. It relates to an adaptability to changing conditions.



**Metacognition:** The ability to stand back and take a bird's-eye view of oneself in a situation. It is an ability to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self-monitoring and self-evaluative.



**Goal-directed Persistence:** The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal, and not be put off by or distracted by competing interests.



**Stress Tolerance:** The ability to thrive in stressful situations and to cope with uncertainty, change, and performance demands.

\*DAWSON & GUARE, 2016



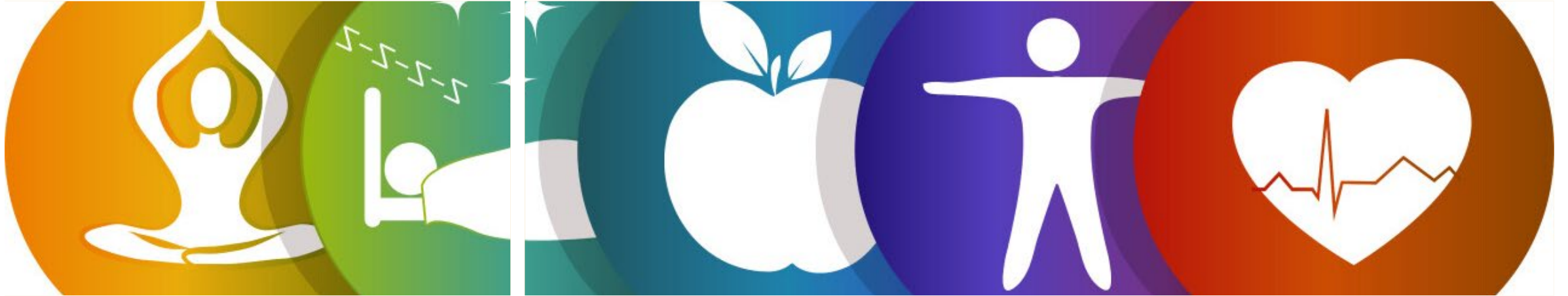
# EXECUTIVE SKILLS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS\*

## Executive Skill

## Strength

## Weakness

- |                       |  |  |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| ■ Task initiation     | ■ Can easily begin easy and challenging tasks with little effort | ■ Very challenging to get started, especially a boring task. May procrastinate despite knowing that won't feel good.     |
| ■ Sustained attention | ■ Once you start something, you can easily finish the task       | ■ Boredom or distraction can contribute to pausing task; may or may not get back to it                                   |
| ■ Time management     | ■ Good at allocating right amount of time for tasks              | ■ Hard to estimate time, can put things off or think have adequate time to complete a task when there is not enough time |



## IMPROVING EXECUTIVE SKILLS

- Executive Skills are extremely sensitive to s \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ and s \_ \_ \_ \_
- Take care of physical body
  - Sleep hygiene
  - Regular exercise
  - Nutritious diet
  - Deep breathing



## IMPROVING EXECUTIVE SKILLS

- Offload task
- Modify environment
- Practice the skill

## I ROUTINELY FORGET TO BRING MY LUNCH TO SCHOOL/WORK

Where are the breakdowns occurring?	I make lunch in the morning, put it in the fridge, but forget to grab it when leaving the house
Where is the point of performance?	When gathering my belongings right before walking out of the door
Executive skills needed	working memory, organization

Offload the task	checklist by door, reminder on phone
Modify the environment	put your bag by the refrigerator; place a necessary object in lunch bag (e.g., work badge, house key)
Practice the skill	practice going in and out of the house gathering all the things you need for the day, including lunch

# IMPROVING EXECUTIVE SKILLS



- Connect to your values, your why
- Identify what motivates you
  - novelty, fun, competition, urgency
- Break large tasks into manageable parts – create deadlines
- Commit to short time-frame
  - put away 5 dishes, fold one shirt, write one paragraph
- Give yourself adequate breaks
  - Pomodoro timer

# IMPROVING EXECUTIVE SKILLS

- Set and say goal out loud
- Pause to celebrate successes
- Visualize finished task
  - All 5 senses
  - Ex. Go for walk after assignment is done

Feeling (emotional or tactile)	Accomplished, free, stepping on crisp leaves
Sound	Birds, wind, cars
Imagery	Walking by neighbors, seeing trees
Smell	Flowers
Taste	Water, maybe a snack



# ADHD WORKSHOP

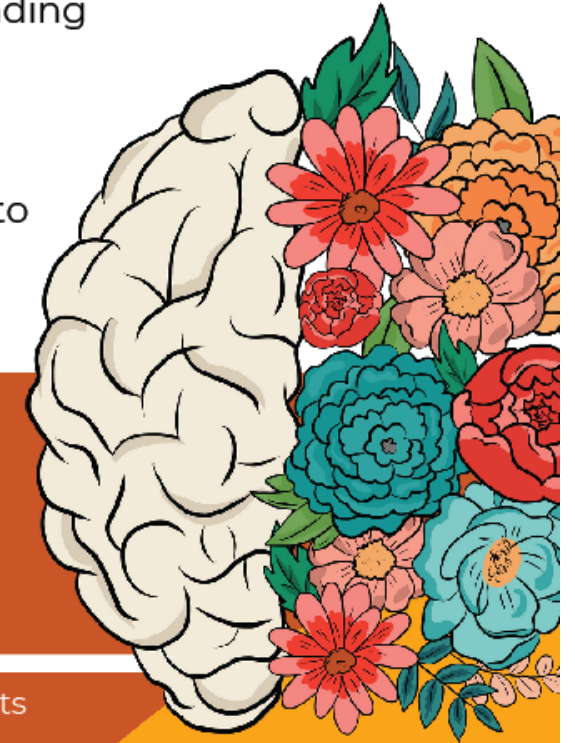
- 3-week workshop
- November 5, 12, and 19
- 3:30pm-4:30pm
- Student Health Center
- For students diagnosed with ADHD
  
- Contact Student Psychological Services to register

# ADHD WORKSHOP

Increase your understanding and knowledge about Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and learn ways to improve executive skills, such as:

- Organization
- Sustained attention
- Task initiation
- Time management
- Emotional control
- Working memory

This workshop is for students who have already been diagnosed with ADHD.



**Meets Tuesdays**  
**Nov. 5, Nov. 12, & Nov. 19**  
**3:30PM-4:30PM**  
**Student Health Center A-129**

**CSUDH** | HEALTH & WELL-BEING  
STUDENT PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

To register, contact Student Psychological Services at (310) 243-3818

QUESTIONS?  
COMMENTS?

