

Needham SEPAC Meeting 11/17/08 Executive Function topic

Announcements:

See calendar on webpage: NeedhamSEPAC.org

Needham parents can join the list serve if they want from the link there or sign up for the email list.

Alex Michaels presenter founder of Milestones

Started Milestones 15 years ago

Had autism diagnosis.

BU Professionals taught her how to do perspective taking after she was unable to succeed in college.

Her 3-year-old was diagnosed with PDD

Exercise – Call out the most important sentence in the jumble

“There is a fire”

- Highlights around the words tell you what’s important and what’s not important
- Kids with EC issues, they can’t discriminate between important and unimportant

Good EC teaching separates what’s important from what’s not important

Why do some kids like things ritualistic

- It’s comforting
- You know what to expect
- Reduces anxiety

Kids act out as a protective mechanism

- They’d rather be the class clown than not know what to do

Goal of Executive Function (see slides)

- Be able to make goals and carry them out

Areas that May Be Affected

(see slide)

Multi-tasking and shifting thoughts back and forth have a lot to do with Executive Function

Movie Clip

- The neurotypical kid rides the roller coaster and immediately looks back at parents – “Look at me!”
- The PDD kid gets to the end of the ride and just sits there waiting for the next thing to happen

Neurocognitive

- Pretend skills, using imagination, making connections:
- Kids symbolize – toy car represents a real car
- Switching back and forth between fantasy and reality
- If kids can't do the switching, their pretend skills become disordered
- If teacher tells the kids to read, they have to switch focus from the teacher to a book – problematic with kids with EC deficits
- Kids with EC deficits tend to spend time either in fantasy or reality, but have difficulty blending the two
- Learning from a past mistake – making connection between past and the future – applying old knowledge to new situation – If you can't do this, then transitions are a big problem – the child wants to stay where they are
- Social implications – Kids who don't learn from the past tend to make the same mistakes over and over again
- Time management – You have to think multidimensionally to understand the concept of time. Vibrating stopwatches, warnings (5 more minutes, 1 more minute, etc.) give people a framework.
- Difficulty changing strategies when a solution doesn't work

What is processing speed?

- How quickly students can react... (see slide)
- It has nothing to do with intelligence
- How much information are you filtering out to get to the information you need, and how quickly you can do that
- Analogy – cars on the highway slow you down, but doesn't make you a poor driver. It's more work for someone who can't discriminate what's important. Life is more work for kids with EC difficulties.
- Decreasing the clutter will help your kids focus – physical and mental clutter – lights, sounds, density of the information on the page
- When kids get overwhelmed with a task, they abandon the task
- Interventions and accommodations:
 - o Double-spacing all printed directions
 - o Reading cards that block the information below your line of sight
 - o Sitting in the front of the class
 - o Pointing to all the words and phrases while you reading on the board
 - o Graph paper for math

Working Memory

- Keeping ideas in your mind and manipulating it as the situation changes
- Ask the child to repeat the directions
- Write directions on the board

Question: What if the kid isn't catching the lesson, even if it's written on the board

- It's reasonable to ask for accommodations such as the teaching writing the assignment on the board, reminding the student, handing out the assignment, working with the kid at the end of the day, etc.

Approaches to Teaching Executive Functioning:

- Compensatory strategies
 - o They are great, but they don't "fix" the problem
 - o It's important to also train and teach the brain. It is a very long process to go through the developmental stages.
 - o Play 2 different games at once. Practicing shifting attention can really help kids long term.
- Question: Can you do this at home? Is there a roadmap?
- o Yes – Alex will send developmental info to Sean to post on the list serv.
- Question – How do you teach joint attention?
- o Example: You can show how pointing works by attaching a string from the person to what they are looking at. The child follows the string to the object to learn how to interpret another person's line of sight

The 1 to 5 Scale

- Traditionally used for sensory processing. Alex uses it for thoughts to help kids learn how emotionally to react to a situation.

Multi-Modal Learning

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinesthetic
- By teaching in all 3 modalities can be very helpful for kids

Setting up the day:

- Setting up the desk for success can be very important. You can do that for all kids.
- Physical boundaries are important
- Being consistent with rules
- Daily schedule
- Oops Boards – Things that you expect to happen that aren't going to happen, or things that aren't supposed to happen that are going to happen.

Graphic Organizers

- The Brady system
- "The Story Grammar Marker"
 - o Main character
 - o Setting
 - o Initiating event
 - o Etc. (see slides)
- Available from Mind Main Concepts

Other tools:

- Mnemonic Devices
- Templates

- Thought boxes – box on child’s desk where child can write down a thought and put it in the box, and make it go away.
- Ignoring points – award the kid for successfully paying attention despite an unexpected distraction
- Transition warning

Decoding questions tool (see slide)

- If the word says... You should...

Parent Questions:

Question about motivating kids who are perseverative

- Alex works at an all sped school where kids earn perseveration time

Question – How do I get my kid to stay engaged with the new approach?

- Kids need a high rate of reinforcement initially to comply with new method

Question – My child has difficulty switching between thoughts and writing, so she has an accommodation for a scribe:

- A scribe is a good accommodation, but when they start getting older, you want them to adapt, e.g. using a voice recorder.

Question – How do you get kids to organize the key elements of a story?

- Have the child develop the graphic organizer with you as you debrief about the story
- Main point can break out by chapter, by paragraph – summarize at lower level, then roll up the summary to the higher level, etc.
- Teach kids key words – red flag for an important point

Comment: Child was unable to read a whole book. “I’d rather get a zero than read this big book.” She broke it up into small sections and read it with him over extended period of time. It took the stress off. He was no longer intimidated, and he completed the assignment and got a good grade.

- Alex: That was a great strategy