

## Executive Functions

Click on a topic below to go directly to that section.

[Definition of Executive Functions](#)

[Executive Functions are Fundamental to a CBA](#)

[Additional Resources Related to Executive Functions](#)

### Definition of Executive Functions

The following definition of executive functions was retrieved from:

[http://www.smartkidswithld.org/first-steps/what-are-learning-disabilities/executive-function-overview-2/?gclid=CIeRke\\_h7McCFQMHkQod81sIIQ](http://www.smartkidswithld.org/first-steps/what-are-learning-disabilities/executive-function-overview-2/?gclid=CIeRke_h7McCFQMHkQod81sIIQ).

### Executive Functions

- **“Executive functions are the cognitive abilities that control and regulate most of what we do in day-to-day life.**
- **Executive functions include the ability to initiate, plan and organize, set goals, solve problems, regulate emotions, and monitor behavior.”**

Much of the executive functions (EF) literature is focused on executive function disorders (learning disabilities) such as ADHD, but this field of inquiry is relevant to all students as they attempt to manage their lives and learning. All students should receive instruction in executive

functions. Students with EF deficiencies require even more explicit instruction to help them develop the EF skills which can help them progress academically, socially and emotionally.

## Executive Functions are Fundamental to a CBA

When you stop to consider how much our mental processes need to control and effectively manage every second and that these functions are associated with every task in which we are involved, the fact that our minds are capable of accomplishing this on a consistent basis and to do it well is astonishing. It is also easy to understand why low executive functioning can be so disruptive and destructive to students' ability to become proficient learners.

Just to give you a sense of how much our minds must control and manage in an integrated manner, the graphic below is a compilation of many of the discrete functions which are controlled by our minds and are related to our executive functioning capabilities.



The graphic is a grid titled "Executive Function Control Center" with a light green background. It contains 20 yellow boxes arranged in 5 rows and 4 columns, each containing a specific executive function skill.

| Executive Function Control Center |                                    |   |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Define Problems/<br>Assess Need   | Self-Motivate/<br>Self-Direct      | Monitor<br>Progress                     | Regulate Emotions<br>and Behavior |
| Apply Prior<br>Knowledge          | Initiate Action/<br>Implement Plan | Exhibit<br>Flexibility                  | Sustain<br>Effort                 |
| Set<br>Goals                      | Concentrate/<br>Stay Focused       | Make Decisions/<br>Solve Problems       | Complete Tasks/<br>Achieve Goals  |
| Organize/<br>Prioritize           | Manage<br>Time                     | Make Adjustments/<br>Corrective Actions | Evaluate<br>Results               |
| Develop<br>Plan                   | Manage<br>Resources                | Ask for<br>Help                         | Plan to<br>Improve                |

School counselors can have a significant impact on students improving their executive functioning skills by helping them reflect on the unique functions their mind is trying to control and finding ways to improve their level of functioning. Strategies for improving students' executive functions can be taught by school counselors as part of the CBA school counseling curriculum.

## Additional Resources Related to Executive Functions

The Internet is a wonderful tool for accessing information on just about any topic. It has been invaluable in helping us to identify what research has demonstrated to be strongly related to students' academic achievement and well-being, and evidence-based practices that provide concrete examples of how to translate the research findings into meaningful learning opportunities that support student development.



Staying informed about what works and does not work to help students achieve and succeed is one of the defining characteristics of a professional school counselor. Internet search engines can be used to develop a deeper understanding of the topics discussed on the CBA Website. To get you started, here are some additional resources you may find helpful. These resources, however, only scratch the surface of what is available on the Internet or in published books and articles. We encourage you to use search engines to find more resources that will increase your understanding and build your capacity to apply these ideas in your work as school counselors.

## Videos

A video by Erica Warren that defines executive functions and provides strategies for improving one's executive functioning.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7h11COAhtE>

Early research on executive functions focused on issues such as ADHD but now is seen as an important way to understand our daily lives. This video by Dr. Jonas Brombert discusses how executive functions are a set of brain-based processes for managing one's self to achieve a goal, and that they have a significant impact on the learning process.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xc4a2o6rHc>

This webpage from the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child is an excellent resource with an embedded video on EF.

[http://developingchild.harvard.edu/key\\_concepts/executive\\_function/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/key_concepts/executive_function/)

## Websites

This site contains a wealth of information about Executive Functions (EF). EF issues are discussed, along with how EF works, the causes and symptoms of EF, skills that are affected by

EF issues, how to diagnose EF issues, and what can be done by professionals and parents to address EF issues. Also provides a good list of references related to EF.

<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/understanding-executive-functioning-issues?gclid=CI7BtYjm7McCFUoIkQodDj4ABQ>

An article by Dr. Peg Dawson on executive functions which Identifies key strategies for helping children improve their executive functioning. The article also contains links to an overview of EF and evaluating children's level of EF.

<http://www.smartkidswithld.org/getting-help/executive-function-disorder/principles-for-improving-executive-skills/>

This is an Edutopia webpage entitled "Three Brain-Based Teaching Strategies to Build Executive Function in Students." It shows that "students need to be explicitly taught and given opportunities to practice using executive functions such as how to learn, study, organize, prioritize, review, and actively participate in class."

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/brain-based-teaching-strategies-judy-willis>

An EF Fact Sheet by the National Center for Learning Disabilities that provides information on how EF affects learning, how to identify problems with EF and strategies to use in addressing EF.

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/24880/>

This site by The Center on Brain Injury Research & Training provides interventions for EF that can be used in the classroom such as changes in the environment, changes in interactions, specific skill teaching, quality checking, and whole class interventions. This site also contains multiple links to related EF topics to help you embed EF interventions into your classroom.

<http://cbirt.org/tbi-education/executive-functions/classroom-interventions-executive-functions/>

## Books

*Smart but Scattered Teens: The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential* (2016). Guilford Press. This book, by Richard Guare, Peg Dawson and Colin Guare, is an excellent resource that school counselors can use to identify problems and solutions related to executive skills.