

AN OVERVIEW

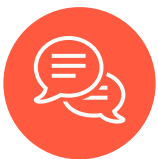
Executive Functioning

As humans, many of our actions occur effortlessly and without awareness. Breathing, for example, happens automatically, and our hand will pull away from heat without thinking. However, when it comes to daily tasks and responsibilities, we depend on something called executive function to guide us through everyday life.

Executive function refers to the mental process that allows people to receive, store and use information to better understand the world around them. This includes actions such as planning, attention, reasoning, adjusting your thinking and solving problems.

It's important to understand that not all individuals experience challenges in every area of executive function. For example, someone may have the ability to plan but struggle with getting an activity started. They might be able to problem-solve once they recognize an issue, but may have difficulty verbalizing the problem.

Some of the ways executive functioning can impact those with autism include:



Communication

Executive function can affect communication, especially if someone struggles to hold onto information during a conversation, such as remembering details that were shared with them to reference later or follow the flow of the conversation and respond thoughtfully to what the other person has said. It can also impact communication if there's a lack of control over impulses, leading to saying inappropriate things.



Planning

People with autism may find it hard to create a plan, as they can become overwhelmed and have trouble breaking down tasks into manageable steps or organize the steps needed to reach a larger goal.



Daily Tasks

Working memory is information that you hold in your mind and use to do tasks, such as remembering a phone number long enough to dial it. Working memory is important for everyday tasks like getting dressed, making breakfast, and doing housework. While many people with autism have great memory for facts, they may find it difficult to handle activities that rely on working memory.

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Impulse Control

Impulse control is the ability to resist urges and pause to think about the consequences before acting. People with autism may find it hard to control these urges.



Attention

People with autism can often focus well, but may struggle to direct their attention appropriately. For example, sensory issues might make them focus on things like a ticking clock or bright lights, while making it hard to pay attention to someone speaking or other important information.



Verbal Reasoning

Some may find it difficult to understand and process spoken information.



Rigid Thinking

People with autism may find it hard to change their way of thinking, which can make it difficult to adapt to new situations and lead to fixed opinions.



Executive function challenges can make daily life incredibly difficult for people with autism, regardless of where they fall on the spectrum. However, both children and adults can develop strategies to support their executive function.

For example, creating "to-do" lists, breaking tasks into smaller, manageable steps, and using visual aids or flowcharts can be helpful. Establishing routines and systems can also reduce stress, ensuring tasks are addressed before they become overwhelming.

RESOURCES & TOOLS

Executive Functioning

Executive function challenges can make daily life incredibly difficult for people with autism, regardless of where they fall on the spectrum. These digital resources and tools can help ease those challenges and make them feel a little less overwhelming.

Tiimo: Visual daily planner app that helps with time blindness, reminders for routines and tasks, and is compatible with an Apple Watch.

Habitica: App that helps gamify life by turning daily routines, tasks, and habit tracking into a game where you take care of yourself by taking care of your character in the game. You can play with friends or others online to battle bosses in the game and hold each other accountable.

Finch: Finch makes self-care finally feel rewarding, lightweight, and fun. Complete quick self-care exercises to grow your pet, earn rewards, and improve mental health! People who struggle with mental health, goals, meditation, and journaling found it easier to be mindful with their self-care pet in the Finch app.

Sweepy: App that you can schedule for keeping up with household cleaning by reminding you of the last time you cleaned a space or item.

Goblin Tools: A collection of small, simple, single-task tools, mostly designed to help neurodivergent people with tasks they find overwhelming or difficult.

Alexa Reminders & Notifications: This article explains the different functions available for using an Alexa device for reminders and additional support options.

Apple Reminders App: This article explains all the functions available in the reminders app so you can use the app to its full potential.

