



Welcome to 'Harbucks' Virtual Coffee House

**What is Executive Functioning and
How Does it Relate to Child
Development? Part II**

April 8, 2021



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Ask the Experts...

- **Info from Center on the Developing Child**
 - **Harvard University**
 - **Answer questions:**
 - **What is Executive Functioning?**
 - **Why is it important?**
 - **What if our children need help with this?**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



What is Executive Functioning?



Executive Functioning is like being an air traffic controller...



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



What is Executive Functioning?



- **Learned/Looks like this:**
 - **Adults:** making dinner, helping kids with HW, making notes about tomorrow, thinking about schedules...
 - **Children:** working on a project, in a busy classroom, with the door open, and the teacher is talking...



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning in Young Children



Working cooperatively with others... (not multitasking)



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



What is Executive Functioning in Children?



- Set of skills related to self-regulation, planning, being organize, making decisions, shifting between thoughts, emotions
- Control impulsivity, learn from mistakes
- Helps us to make friends and to be successful



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



What is Executive Functioning in Children?

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION? AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

The phrase "executive function" refers to a set of skills. These skills underlie the capacity to plan ahead and meet goals, display self-control, follow multiple-step directions even when interrupted, and stay focused despite distractions, among others.



- Helps to manage information, avoid distractions
- Helps to work effectively with others
- Helps to stay organized, on-task



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



What is Executive Functioning?



- A learned skill
- Critical to healthy development into adulthood



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



What is Executive Functioning?



- Research on the developing brain shows that early childhood experiences build the foundation for
 - A skilled workforce
 - A responsible community
 - A thriving economy



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning in Young Children



- **Characterized this way when young**
- **Not simply multitasking**
- **You are landing aircraft one at a time using these skills at the same time:**
 - **Working memory**
 - **Inhibitory control**
 - **Mental flexibility**





Executive Functioning in Young Children



Working cooperatively with others... (not multitasking)



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning in Young Children



Paying attention to what is supposed to be happening right now and modifying your behavior to match that...



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning in Older Children



- One way to picture it...
- “Integrated systems work together in the brain” (learning)
- Doing this constantly and simultaneously:
 - Working memory
 - Inhibitory control
 - Mental flexibility



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning in Older Children



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning In Older Children



- We have a sense that it
 - Relates to greater success in life
- Question: Is it inborn or learned?
 - Answer: learned through practice



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning In Older Children



- **Two questions:**
 - **How do we help children learn this skills?**
 - **How have children been able to practice this during lockdown or COVID-19 restrictions?**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How Can I Help My Child Do this Well?



- As parents, we want to provide growth experiences that prepare our children for the future
- Work on these skills with children
- Happy
- Successful



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning



- **Teachers ask:**
- **“How do I help my students grow in this way?”**
- **Harbor teachers work on this every day with students**
- **More important than ever**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Executive Functioning Skills

A video from Harvard's Center on the Developing Child

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-executive-function-skills-for-life-and-learning/>



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



A Recap: Executive Functioning in 3 Parts

- **Executive Functioning:**
 - **Working memory**
 - **Inhibitory control**
 - **Mental flexibility**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



“Working Memory”



- A term developed by cognitive psychologists
 - iPad/desk top/table top
 - “Etch-a-sketch”
- **Hold info: concentrate, focus, remembering and do something with the info when needed Helps to prioritize tasks**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Inhibitory Controls



- When a child is able to stop what she is doing to let the other person have a turn
- Useful when making new friends, sharing thoughts, building trust in peers
- Control impulses



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Mental Flexibility



- If the other children change what they are doing and you must too - that requires mental flexibility
- Adaptability...

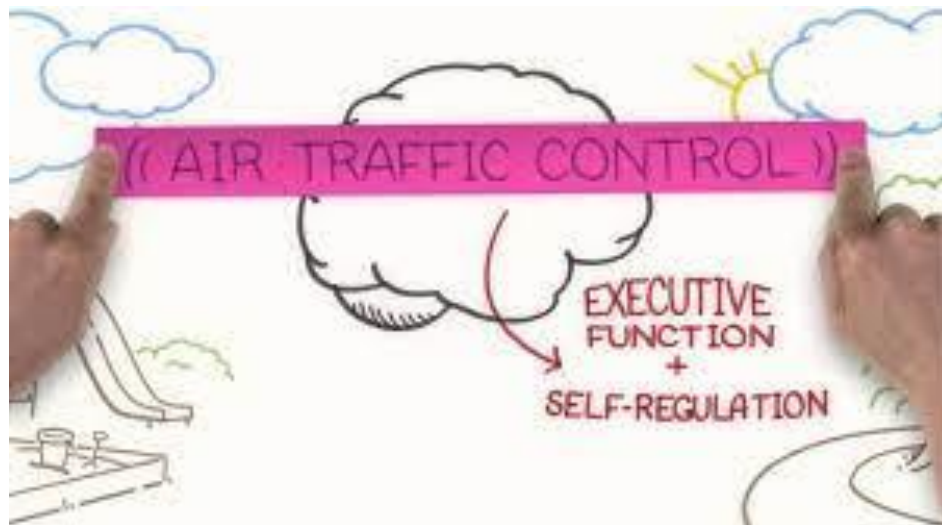


Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Part II: How Do We Support this growth?



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth:

Infants/Toddlers:



• Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:

- Respond quickly so they learn trust
- Be reassuring, object permanence
- Provide love objects/teach self-soothing...
- Play games together: peek-a-boo supports memory



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Young Children:



- **Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:**
- **3-5 year olds**
 - **Play games to practicing holding onto info and impulse control**
 - **Delay gratification/work for goals**
 - **Practice saving in a piggy bank**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Young Children:



- **Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:**
 - **Break down tasks into small chunks**
 - **Encouraging imaginative play**
 - **Teaching them self-management by doing things themselves, chores, set-table, backpack, putting things away, responsible**





How to Support this Growth: Young Children:



- **Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:**
 - **Teaching self-regulation:**
 - **How to cope with strong feelings**
 - **How to apologize**
 - **How to invite someone to join in to play, how to join a group**





How to Support this Growth: Young Children:



- **Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:**
 - **A very instructive time of life**
 - **Self-care**
 - **Cleaning up toys**
 - **Healthy eating**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Older Children:



- **Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:**
 - **5-7 year olds: (social/emotional)**
 - **Teach why organization is important for finding things later**
 - **Teach about the importance of keeping your commitments**
 - **Demonstrate and help them with problem-solving, decision-making**





How to Support this Growth: Older Children:



- Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:
 - 5-7 year olds / Games with rules constant challenge, with a wide variety of skill levels
 - Working memory:
Concentration, Go Fish, Old Maid, I Doubt It



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Older Children:



- **Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:**
 - **5-7 year olds / Games with rules constant challenge, with a wide variety of skill levels**
 - **Cognitive flexibility: Uno, Crazy Eights, Blink, Spoons**
 - **Inhibition: Snap, Perfection, Battleship**





How to Support this Growth: Older Children:



- Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:
 - 5-7 year olds /Physical Activities/Games
 - Attention/inhibition: freeze dance, red light/green light, Duck Duck Goose,
 - Monitoring: Foursquare
 - Logic puzzles





How to Support this Growth: Older Children:



- Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:
 - 5-7 year olds /Physical Activities
 - Spend time together
 - Reduce screen time



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this growth: Tweens, Pre-teens:



- **Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory mental flexibility: (Social/emotional control)**
 - **Teach about decision-making, problem-solving, building world knowledge**
 - **Teach about online safety**
 - **Spend time with them**
 - **Play games, share activities together**
 - **Chores build responsibility**





How to Support this Growth: Tweens and Pre-teens:



- Work backwards from working memory/inhibitory control/mental flexibility:
 - 7-12 year olds/Physical Activities
 - Music, singing, dancing
 - Working memory: playing an instrument, singing in a chorus, dance
 - Brainteasers: crossword puzzles, Sudoku, Rubik's cube



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Part III: How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- **Some children have more difficulty developing Executive Functioning Skills**
- **Some children have trouble with EF**
 - **Schoolwork**
 - **Homework**
 - **Chores**
 - **Picking out clothes**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- **Teach strategies for things that don't come naturally**
 - **Checklists**
 - **Set limits with timers**
 - **Use a planner**
 - **Spell out the rationale**
 - **Explore different ways of learning**
 - **Establish a routine**
 - **Use rewards**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- **Checklists:**
 - **For nearly everything**
 - **How to get out of the house**
 - **Morning routine listed**
 - **Doing things the night before clothes, lunch, backpack**
 - **Helps them stay on track**
 - **Avoids starts/stops**
 - **Keeps them going forward**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- **Set time limits**
 - Time limits with each step helps to keep things going
 - Breaking down assignments into short term goals
 - Thinking of the steps a project needs to be ready by a deadline
 - Book report



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- **Use a planner**
 - Supports working memory
 - Write everything down as you go along during the day
- **Google Classroom**
 - For HW, assignments, tests dates



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- **Spell out the rationale**
 - **Sometimes, when something is hard or unfamiliar, we say: “This is a waste of time”**
 - **We make a choice to cut out a step or activity when hard or unfamiliar**
 - **“Neuro-economical” decision**
 - **This is the way it works for me**
 - **Explaining leads to compliance**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- Explore different ways of learning
 - Try for two weeks:
 - Social stories lowers anxiety
 - Self-talk success narratives
 - Tutoring
 - Movement
 - Mnemonic devices
 - Graphic organizers
 - (hamburger paragraph model)



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- **Establish routines**
 - **E.g. Start HW same time every day**
 - **Snack, unpack, get started**
 - **Quiet, well lit area**
 - **Supplies handy**
 - **No distractions**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- **Use rewards**
 - **Younger kids: star chart**
 - **Older kids: be encouraging**
 - **Ask how you can help**
 - **Makes the connection between practicing skills and working towards an award**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



How to Support this Growth: Scaffolding



- Remember school can be really hard for some children
- It shouldn't be a given that learning these things is easy.
- Be sure to tell kids you appreciate how hard they are working



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



Resources

- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-executive-function-skills-for-life-and-learning/>
- <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-5-to-7-year-olds.pdf>
- <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-5-to-7-year-olds.pdf>
- <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-7-to-12-year-olds.pdf>





Resources

- <https://www.edutopia.org/article/8-ways-bolster-executive-function-teens-and-tweens>
- <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Executive-Function-Activities-for-7-to-12-year-olds.pdf>
- <https://childmind.org/article/helping-kids-who-struggle-with-executive-functions/>



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



‘Harbucks’ Virtual Coffee House

**Executive Functioning and How it
Relates to Child Development
Questions & Discussion**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™



‘Harbucks’ Virtual Coffee House

**THANK YOU
FOR JOINING US!**



Harbor Country Day School

Embracing the extraordinary in every child.™