

Executive Functioning in Everyday Life

Practical, strengths-based strategies for home, school, and work

What Is Executive Functioning?

Executive functions are the mental skills that help us plan, start tasks, organise information, hold things in mind, manage time, and adapt when plans change. They sit behind everyday activities like getting ready in the morning, completing homework, managing a project, or keeping track of belongings.

A Neuroaffirming Reframe

Difficulty starting a task, staying organised, or shifting between activities is not laziness, defiance, or a lack of trying. Executive function differences are common and are best supported through adjusting tasks and environments, not through willpower alone.

Practical Strategies

- Break tasks into smaller, visible steps rather than one large instruction.
- Use visual schedules, checklists, or timers to support planning and transitions.
- Try 'body doubling', working alongside someone else, to support task initiation.
- Keep frequently needed items in consistent, visible places to reduce memory load.
- Build in buffer time around transitions rather than back-to-back scheduling.

Leaning Into Strengths

Many people with executive function differences bring strong creativity, hyperfocus on areas of interest, or out-of-the-box problem solving. Strategies work best when they support a person's own way of thinking, rather than trying to force a different style altogether.

When to Seek OT Support

If executive functioning challenges are significantly affecting daily routines, school, work, or independence, an occupational therapist can help build a personalised toolkit of strategies and supports.

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