Executive Function Skills: Focusing, Sustaining and Shifting Attention

Struggles:

Focusing Attention:

- Knowing on who are what you should focus / Controlling Distractibility
 - The conversation next to you or the teacher during instruction
 - Filtering out background noise, random thoughts, and other movement around vou
- Looking at the important information in text
 - o Distinguishing between what is relevant and irrelevant
 - Keeping the relevant in the foreground and the irrelevant in the background

Sustaining/Maintaining Attention:

- Staying on topic, filtering out other thoughts and ideas
- Managing disinterest boredom not zoning out
- Listening without interruption
- Screening out sensory distractions or stimulus

Shifting Attention – or Redirecting Focus

- Changing the current topic of discussion, especially if it is an area of interest
- Moving on from a preferred activity, assignment or "special interest area"
- Transitioning from one assignment to the next (especially if the first is not complete)
- Actual physical movement from one area/activity to the next

Intervention options:

- Provide student with a structured learning environment (visual support)
 - Tight physical structure and organization helps reduce distraction and transition time helping students stay on track
 - Physical structure also reduces distraction and anxiety because activities are located in predicable settings and locations
- Have visual expectations for the different activities in the classroom and prime these expectations BEFORE the different activities (antecedent based intervention & visual support)
- Develop a work system (<u>visual support</u>) for the student during independent work times or other times, as identified through data, that the student struggles to say on task
 - o Identify, what work, how much work, and what do I do when I am finished
- Stabilize materials for independent work times: structured file folders or structured tasks with visual instructions, clarity and organization
- Develop a color coded system (with highlighters or post its) establish specific colors for what to do first, second and so on . . . (visual support) and number them

- Set a goal for mid-way when working during class, then using a <u>visual</u> timer complete a check in at the mid-way point for a student to check their progress:
 - Reinforcement for meeting goal
 - Identification of "time robbers" if behind
- Break down larger assignments and develop a <u>visual list</u> of tasks/activities to do and pair with a set time for completion, due date or time frame
 - o Pair on time completion with reinforcement
- Prime/pre-teach lessons or activities: (antecedent based intervention)
 - o Provide an outline of the lesson prior to class
 - Provide an example of the finished product for assignments or tasks
 - o Pre-teach new or difficult vocabulary that may intimidate or confuse the student
- Use graphic organizers to assist with organization of thought and keeping on topic
- Get Ready , Do, Done Model
 - o Provide a sample of the final product (antecedent based intervention & visual support)
 - Create the list of things to "DO"
 - Create the list of materials needed
 - For self-regulation pair with clock when working
 - Set mid-point check in and final completion time
 - Reinforce for on track work/behavior (preferably visually)
- Provide student with organizational support so that time is not lost due to missing items or distraction by organizing materials. Teach, coach and practice taught organizational skills (See Executive Functioning Skills: Organization handout)
- Establish a reinforcement system based on areas of interest and set goals to earn that time
 - This can address the student's obsession or focused interest on specific topics
 - o Increases motivation if reinforcement is based on student interest
 - Premack Principle First/Then
- Teach self- regulation for students to either calm down or wake up to help with focus and sustained attention
 - Zones of Regulation
 - My Sensory Book identifies how their "engine runs"
 - Consult with OT for specific sensory strategies to meet students' individual needs (antecedent based intervention)
 - Proprioceptive calming strategies
 - Vestibular altering strategies
- Teach social scripts for self-advocacy (Don't just create one and give it to the student)
 - o I need more time . . .
 - Can you come back to me . . .
 - o Could you say that again please . . .
 - Can you give me a clue/hint . . .
 - I don't understand the question . . .
 - Please show me an example . . .
 - o I apologize, I was not listening for the instructions . . .
- Model, teach, coach and REINFORCE think aloud procedural steps

- Use mnemonic devices
- Use motor movement or motions
- Positive self-talk

Resources:

- SSJCSS Links to graphic organizers arranged by subject/category
- Online Visual Timers
- How to use post-it notes on your windows desktop for lists
- SSJCSS sensory resources
- PBIS World Breaking Down assignments
- PBIS World Reinforcement/Reward Systems
- PBIS World Data tracking resources
- Forced Choice Reinforcement Survey
- GoNoodle.com encourages movement and exercise to assist attention and focus
- JAM (Just a Minute) one minute exercises
- Rescue Time is an app for your computer that tracks what you are doing on the computer so you can see if your student is spending too much time on other activities

Apps:



Story Creator (\$1.99) – social narratives/scripts



<u>Shadow Puppet – (Free)</u> – Create quick social narratives/scripts



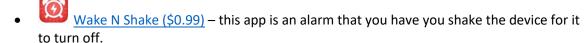
R+Remind – (\$0.99) – Reinforcement



This for That (free) – visual schedules



 Dance Party Zoo (\$2.99) – app that gets kids moving and imitating movement of others



• <u>Lumosity (free – upgrades with subscriptions)</u> – touted as a brain training app with data collection to show individual progress.



Mindfulness App (free) – guided meditation to help with calming and relaxation

References:

Smith-Myles, B. (2016) Individuals with ASD who present with behavior and executive function challenges: practical solutions. [training handout]. *Indiana Resource Center for Autism: Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. Bloomington, IN.*Kelly, K. (2015). Processing speed: What you need to know. Retrieved 4/25/2016 from: https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/information-processing-issues/processing-speed-what-you-need-to-know

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (n.d.) Processing Speed. Retrieved 4/25/2016 from: http://www.etfo.ca/Multimedia/Webcasts/SpecialEducation/Pages/Processing%20Speed.aspx