

## 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 you
- Looking at the important information in text
  - 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 predictable 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 ([visual support](#)) for the student during independent work times or other times, as identified through data, that the student struggles to stay on task
  - 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 [visual](#) 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 [visual list](#) of tasks/activities to do and pair with a set time for completion, due date or time frame
  - Pair on time completion with reinforcement
- Prime/pre-teach lessons or activities: [\(antecedent based intervention\)](#)
  - Provide an outline of the lesson prior to class
  - Provide an example of the finished product for assignments or tasks
  - 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
  - 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
  - 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)
  - I need more time . . .
  - Can you come back to me . . .
  - Could you say that again please . . .
  - Can you give me a clue/hint . . .
  - I don’t understand the question . . .
  - Please show me an example . . .
  - 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
-  [Shadow Puppet – \(Free\)](#) – 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
-  [Wake N Shake \(\\$0.99\)](#) – this app is an alarm that you have you shake the device for it to turn off.
-  [Lumosity \(free – upgrades with subscriptions\)](#) – 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.*
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