Foster Executive Functioning with Environmental, Instructional and Child-specific Scaffolds: Build for Tomorrow

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A Major Source
Enhancing Executive Function in the Early Years: Environment, Instruction and Adaptations for School Readiness

Workshop Objectives
• Increase awareness and understanding of executive functioning (EF) development in young children
• Learn how to build and practice EFs during daily routines and structured activities in young children who have or at risk for developmental delays
  – Gain skills in creating growth-promoting environments and personalized instructional interventions to strengthen EFs in children
  – Increase access, engagement and participation of young children using UDL principles to minimize barriers and reach diverse learners
  – Learn how to craft easy-to-use learner-specific scaffolds and adaptations

Session Overview
• EF and the associated components
• Why focus on EF development in the early years?
• EF growth Supports
  – Environment, Instruction and Personalized Adaptations
  – Depiction of student-specific scenarios
  – Tools and resources
• Integrating child-focused best-practices:
  – Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
  – DEC recommended Practices

Executive Functioning – An Overview
• Executive function skills are foundational building blocks for the early development of both cognitive and social capacities.
  • Children need EFs — able to focus, hold, and work with information in mind, filter distractions, switch gears and exercise self-control — for school readiness and academic success
  • EFs support the process, the how of learning — focusing, remembering, planning—that enables children to effectively and efficiently master the content, the what of learning — reading, writing, computation.

Sarathy’s Publications: Books and Quick Reference Guides

Focus Areas
• Autism: Support Strategies & Interventions, Music CD – Transitions
• Behavior Guide (Preventive and Positive Approaches)
• Early Childhood: Transition, Parent Guide and STEM Teaching Strategies
• Executive Function – Early Years
• Paraeducator Training Guide and DVD
• Severe and Multiple Disabilities
• Significant Disabilities and ESSA

Sarathy’s Publications: Books and Quick Reference Guides

Recent Publications: 12/2018 & 2/2019

Behavior Guide
An Major Source
Enhancing Executive Function in the Early Years: Environment, Instruction and Adaptations for School Readiness

Get a strong foundation of knowledge about executive functioning and corresponding deficits, plus ready-to-use strategies and tools to deliver fun, meaningful and engaging instruction that advances young children’s skills — all easily integrated into typical routines and activities of preschool and kindergaten settings:

✓ Strategies to encourage pretend play with easy-to-use scaffolds and adaptations to nurture cognitive flexibility, creativity and self-control
✓ Descriptions on how to use games, songs and movement activities to continually increase the challenge to strengthen executive functioning skills
✓ Techniques to teach children how to use calming methods to develop self-control and reduce behavioral challenges
✓ Child-specific scenarios depicting a diversity of executive functioning difficulties with personalized interventions
✓ And more!

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Executive Functioning (EFs)

• Executive Functioning skills are not skills that children are born with but develop over time, shaped by experiences.
• Executive Functioning help children as they learn to read and write, remember the steps in performing an arithmetic problem, take part in group activities, and enter into and sustain play with other children.
• Having executive function in the brain is like having an air traffic control system at a busy airport. (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2011).

The Components of Executive Functioning

• EF is broadly categorized into three major cognitive processes:
  - Working Memory (ability to hold information and use it)
  - Self Control/Inhibitory Control (the ability to master thoughts and impulses and to pause and think before acting)
  - Cognitive or Mental Flexibility (the capacity to shift gears and adjust to changing demands)

• Each type of Executive Function skill draws on the elements of the other.

The Critical Early Years

• The brain grows at a rapid pace in the early years.
  - A child’s brain develops at the fastest rate and in the most extraordinary ways in the first 2000 days.
  - Neural connections, called synapses develop very rapidly at a rate of 1 million synapses per second (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, developingchild.harvard.edu).
• Brain’s plasticity or the ability to recognize and adapt is greatest during the early years.
• “Brain architecture is established early in life and supports lifelong learning, behavior, and health.”

How Do Children Manifest Executive Functioning?

• Working memory - typical examples:
  - Follow teacher instructions to complete the task.
  - Recall relevant information to respond to questions.
  - Stay focused and pay attention during group instruction.
• Inhibitory control - typical examples:
  - Wait and not blurt out the answer
  - React without agitation: resolve conflicts harmoniously during play and accept losing in the game calmly; request permission before taking another child’s item
• Cognitive flexibility - typical examples:
  - Apply different rules in different settings
  - Able to shift gears and adapt to different environments, activities and personnel

Working Memory Difficulties: What Do They Look Like?

• Early intervention reduces the impact of poverty. EF deficits, relative to other cognitive skills, show up in kindergarten children who are at-risk because of economic disadvantages. (Diamond et al. 2007)
• EFs are amenable to remediation. (Anderson & Reidy, 2012)
• Children who most need improvement in EFs benefit the most. (Diamond, 2012)
• Executive Function may be delayed or compromised in some children and therefore, need to be addressed early. (Anderson & Reidy, 2012; Schuemaker and colleagues, 2011)

Why Focus on EFs in the Early Years?

• EFs are essential for academic success and also crucial for success beyond school, for better life outcomes. (Diamond, 2012; Moffitt, et al., 2011)
• Early intervention reduces the impact of poverty. EF deficits, relative to other cognitive skills, show up in kindergarten children who are at-risk because of economic disadvantages. (Diamond et al. 2007)
• EFs are amenable to remediation. (Anderson & Reidy, 2012)
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Working Memory Difficulties: What Do They Look Like?

• Being able to attend, focus on a task and complete it with minimal support
• Responding to questions requiring recall of previously learned information
• Processing complex information/concepts and may frequently require reteaching
• Following directions involving multiple steps
• Remembering to follow daily routines and practices
• Planning and prioritizing
**EF Difficulties in Children with Special Needs**

- Students with intellectual disabilities may have difficulty recalling information and applying it to complete a task.
- Students with the diagnosis of ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Emotional Disturbance may experience problems with exercising self-control and mental flexibility (shifting gears). (Anderson & Reidy, 2012; Schonmaker and colleagues, 2011)
- Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) have executive function differences, impaired cognitive flexibility and self-regulation difficulties (Aspy, 2012).
- Adjusting to changes in strategies, shifting focus from one task to another, transitioning to different environments and personnel, changes in routine, etc. is challenging for them.

**Working Memory – A Nurturing Environment**

- Consider each child's strengths, needs and preferences at the initial planning stage of the instructional process.
- Increase knowledge and understanding of the developmental stages of children and the associated characteristics and expectations.
- Ensure application of UDL in your design of the environment and delivery of instruction to foster executive function differences in students with diverse needs.
- Provide multiple, flexible methods of presentation.
- Provide multiple, flexible methods of action and expression.
- Provide multiple, flexible options for engagement.

**DEC Recommended Practices**

- Get familiar with the DEC Recommended Practices (www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices).
- Practitioners work with the family and other adults:
  - To modify and adapt the physical, social, and temporal environments to promote each child's access to and participation in learning experiences.
  - To identify each child's needs for assistive technology to promote access to and participation in learning experiences.
  - To create environments that provide opportunities for movement and regular physical activity to maintain or improve fitness, wellness, and development across domains.

**Building and Strengthening Working Memory**

- Teach story elements with a story map organizer tool to connect abstract concepts with a visual presentation tool.
- Attach photos or representational concrete items to aid children's memory.
- Increase knowledge and understanding of the developmental stages of learners with diverse needs:
  - Provide multiple, flexible methods of presentation.
  -Provide multiple, flexible methods of action and expression.
  -Provide multiple, flexible options for engagement.

**ENVIRONMENTAL NURTURERS FOR GROWING EFs**

- Provide visual boundaries with clearly defined areas for different activities and learning stations.
- Have available and use varied materials and resources for children with diverse needs, skill levels and preferences to be able to manipulate easily.
- Have in place appropriate supports and routines used to increase students' active participation – Visual supports: Individual Activity Schedule.
- Provide designated calming space within the classroom for children to take a break to calm down when feeling restless and agitated.
- Ensure seating available near the desk for children experiencing attention and self-control difficulty.
**Building Working Memory**
Combine verbal presentation with visual elements to assist with remembering and for easier recall.

- Incorporate multi-sensory elements - interactive demonstrations, story-telling, role play and drama to engage learners
- Provide visual tools – graphic organizers, concept maps, Venn Diagrams, etc. to stimulate memory about the pertinent topic.
- Engage students in a hands-on activity immediately following direct instruction.
- Play games to exercise working memory - increases motivation for learning and rehearse what they have learned.
  - Mental math games, recalling and repeating a number or a word pattern, recalling a sequence in order, etc.
  - Vocabulary games, card games and board games

**Story-Sharing and Story-Telling Strategies**
Build Attention, Focus Recall and Critical Thinking
- Using animated story-reading and story-sharing
  - Predictable text with choral reading
- Using props and masks to enhance story-reading
- Involving children in group story-telling with teacher modeling, and children taking turns to build the story
- Enhancing stories with role play and drama to increase motivation, literacy skills, and learn to take turns.
- Infusing music, and movement activities routinely.

**Learner Scenario - Adaptations**
Adrian (a kindergartner) forgets easily. He experiences difficulty with recalling information to answer questions and struggles to retain information/concepts even for a few seconds during calendar activities, story-time, math lesson, etc.

- Teach concepts enhanced with multi-sensory elements and concrete props
- Provide verbal cues and visual aids.
- Help learner to connect with prior knowledge
- Provide additional wait-time to respond; Support with verbal and visual cues.
- Ensure multiple rehearsals to facilitate retention and transfer to working memory
- Offer “invisible support”
- Monitor prompts given
- Provide encouraging feedback

**Story Map Organizer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story title: ___________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Story Concept Enhanced with Multi-Sensory**

- **The Giving Tree**
  - **Story title:**

**Adapted Tools**
Increase Access and Response with Visuals and Multi-sensory items.

- **A Graduated Number Line**
  - Attach it to desk for student to gain visual understanding of abstract concept and make a response.
  - Fasten with concrete items if needed for tactile input, gain concept knowledge and make a response.

Adapted from Sarathy, 2014
Learner Scenario - 2

Simone has cerebral palsy and her communication and motor difficulties present some challenges to her active participation. Friendly by nature, she smiles a lot. She does not speak and uses a few gestures to communicate.

- She has limited attention span, gets distracted and experiences difficulty with recall.
- A few of the techniques and tools that will help Simone:
  - Use of real concrete items to represent concepts.
  - Use of systematic instruction with prompt fading procedures.
  - Presenting limited text and information at a given time.
  - Multiple opportunities for rehearsal.
  - Lots of hands-on activities, adapted books fastened with picture/object, a choice board with pictures/concrete items to respond.
  - Use of AT for communication and engagement.

Adapted from Sarathy, 2014

Joyful Teaching and Learning Foster Executive Function

Inhibitory Control Difficulties: What Do They Look Like?

Young Children may exhibit problems with...

- Thinking about the consequences before reacting to a situation
- Controlling aggressive behaviors and outbursts
- Understanding the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others
- Resolving conflicts with peers/adults harmoniously
- Letting go of frustration or accepting mistakes
- Resisting distractions and continuing with the task

INSTRUCTIONAL BUILDERS FOR GROWING EFS

- Ensure access, engagement and response opportunities for all learners.
- Activate children’s prior knowledge to assist them in connecting new with the old.
- Use an active hands-on approach to learning – interactive instructional techniques.
- Integrate regularly visual tools and multi-sensory features. Use visual aids, graphic organizers, story boards, manipulatives, etc.
- Use animated story-reading and story-telling activities. Use roleplay & movement.
- Incorporate novelty items routinely to spark children’s curiosity and motivation.
- Instructional flexibility: Provide choices, adjust task complexity and timed breaks.
- Play a variety of individual and group games to learn to apply different rules.
- Use systematic instruction with effective use of prompting.

Children’s Books Suggestions

To Help with Making connections, Recalling, Problem-solving and Critical thinking, etc.

- If You Give Mouse A Cookie by Laura Numeroff
- Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina
- The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
- Seven Blind Mice by Ed Young
- The Doorbell Rang by Pat Hutchins
Inhibitory Control - A Supportive Environment

- Structure and predictability, consistent routines to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Visual boundaries & defined areas for different activities/learning stations.
- A chart of class rules paired with photos to serve as a visual reminder.
- Limiting the amount of visuals displayed around the room.
  - Children more focused, engaged, on task, and demonstrated enhanced learning outcomes when the room was uncluttered & sparsely decorated (Fisher et al., 2014).
  - Too many visual distractions may contribute to impulsive behaviors (Blasco et al., 2014).
- Providing a designated calming space in the classroom for children to take a break when feeling restless or agitated.

Build Emotional Literacy

- Build inhibitory control with intentional and intensive instructional practices. Strengthen social-emotional competence with teaching children to identify, label and how to express feelings safely.

Stories to Build Emotional Literacy

- Use stories (picture books) to build children’s emotional vocabulary. Teach and practice feeling words in the context of stories.
- Get them to reflect and respond using problem solving and critical thinking.
- Book Suggestions:
  - On Monday When it Rained by Cherryl Kachenmeister
  - When Sophie Gets Angry –Really, Really Angry’ by Molly Bang
  - ‘The Grouchy Ladybug’ by Eric Carle
  - Glad Monster Sad Monster by Ed Emberley & Anne Miranda
  - Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day by Judy Viorst
  - Alexander and the Wind-up Mouse by Leo Lionni
  - Swimmy by Leo Lionni
  - Feelings by Aliki

Fostering Inhibitory Control

- Guide children on how to control anger and frustration without resorting to impulsive actions.
- Help children to use rational thought to overcome emotional reactivity.
  - “Children who have a strong foundation in emotional literacy tolerate frustration better, get into fewer fights, and engage in less self-destructive behavior than children who do not have a strong foundation. These children are also healthier, less lonely, less impulsive, more focused, and they have greater academic achievement.” says Center on the Social Emotional Foundations For Early Learning (http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/handout21.pdf)
- Teach, model and encourage problem-solving strategies to develop inhibitory control.
Anger and Impulse Control

- Children need to learn to recognize and regulate their own emotional responses and stress levels.
- The “turtle technique” a CBI strategy, helps children self-manage anger and disappointment. Has been successfully used with preschool and kindergarten age children (Erwin et al. 2015).
- The YogaKids Tools for Schools model for the children how to take deep mindful breaths.

Movement and Mindfulness Activities

- Incorporate movement activities
  - Findings of a study indicate physical activities help children have better self-control (van der Niet et al. 2014).
  - Integrate yoga exercises and mindfulness-based practices into the routine.
  - Evidence emerging on the benefits of incorporating yoga exercises as part of your daily routine (Brown et al. 2015).
  - Using Super Brain Yoga
  - Practice breathing exercises for calming down to increase focus.
  - Model for the children how to take deep mindful breaths - how to breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth (Sarathy, 2017).

Self-Monitoring Tool: A Calming Procedure

- Teaching self-regulation and self-monitoring with the aid of “Color Coded Calming Cards” (C-Four Cards):
  - To help student to calm-down.
  - The primary objective of the C-Four Cards (Sarathy, 2014) is to assist students with ASD to self-regulate their own behavior when a meltdown is threatening.
  - There are four color-coded cards each representing a different emotional state of mind:
    - Crabby
    - Caution
    - Coping
    - Calm

Yoga and Mindfulness Resources

- Kid’s Yoga Deck: 50 Poses and Games by Annie Buckley includes simple pictures and explanations on 50 kid-friendly yoga poses.
- Mindful Schools offers online courses for educators, mental health professionals, and parents to use mindfulness with youth. http://www.mindfulschools.org/
- MindUP(TM) provides training programs for educators and children that teach social and emotional learning skills by linking cognitive neuroscience, positive psychology, and mindfulness in an effort to maximize children’s health, happiness, and academic success. http://theshawnfoundation.org/mindup/mindup-curriculum/
- The YogaKids Tools for Schools Program designs yoga curriculum for educators of all age levels intended to integrate yoga and mindfulness into the classroom and physical education curriculum on a daily basis. http://yogakids.com/tools-for-schools/ (Adapted from Sarathy, 2017. LRP Publications)

Incorporate Role-play, Drama, Dance and Music

- Use stories, drama and role play story characters to help with self-control, problem-solving, anger management and to calm down.
  - Dramatize the story. Help learner to use problem-solving strategies.
  - Play the ‘Charades’ game.
  - Get children to take turns roleplaying emotions and their peers make a guessing songs featuring feeling words.
  - Make up your own version of “If you are happy and you know it, clap your hands” substituting with other feelings words.
- Use movement activities
  - Do the Freeze Dance.
  - Play Musical Chairs with a twist

Student-specific Adaptations

- Identify the triggers for emotional issues. Help the child to learn these triggers if possible.
- Break the strategy down into manageable and simple steps that the child can follow.
- Pre-teach immediately before situations where child is likely to be impulsive. (e.g., transitions, large crowded areas, cooperative play, etc.)
- Plan and provide for children who may be experiencing communication difficulties.
- Use reminder cards.
**Student Scenario - Impulse Control Issues**

Abdul, a 4-year-old pre-kindergartner, has difficulty staying seated and attending to group activities. He gets up from his seat, wanders around the room and sometimes, hides under the table. During center time activities, he tries to run out of the room.

- Begin the circle time activity with a novel item or a puppet for Abdul to hold.
- Offer him a special role to play during the lesson to engage his attention and sustain his interest.
- Reduce the total time that Abdul has to sit and attend initially. Allow him to have a timed break during the lesson.
- Use Visual Cues and Reminder Cards.
- Incorporate Yoga break as part of the routine to reduce anxiety and stress level – Should benefit all learners.

**Student Scenario (Continued)**

- Give Abdul choices of the centers he could play at with the help of photos.
- Shadow him through transition to the chosen center.
- Limit the number of options to assist with decision-making.
- Have a peer invite him to join in the activity. Cue the peer buddy to show Abdul where to go.
- Post a Stop sign at the door. Use the sign to teach Abdul to stop from running out of the classroom.
- When calm, teach him what he should do when he feels the urge to escape centers and run out of the room. Get him to use a ‘Help Card’ to assist him to ask for help.
- Provide encouraging feedback even if the improvement is incremental.

**Promoting Self-Control**

- Watch what children do to calm themselves down when they are little and doing more of the same.
- Play active games where children have to pay attention and follow the rules, like Simon Says, Red Light/ Green Light, etc.,
- Change the rules and continue playing the game.
- Help children to come up with their own plans for dealing with temptations and distractions.
- Help children set goals and follow through on them.

**Student Scenarios - Impulse Control Issues**

Damaris, a 5-year-old kindergartner, is physically aggressive towards others. When another child accidentally bumps into her or plays with an item that she wants (e.g., a book or a toy or the swing), she gets angry. She will hit, push and pinch the children and also grab the items from them including snacks during snack time.

- Teach Damaris to get in touch with her emotions, label them and to act on them with restraint and composure.
  - Help her understand what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in social interactions with peers and adults.
  - Use social narratives – using visually represented stories to describe social situations and socioculturally appropriate responses or behaviors (Wragge, 2011).
- Get her to move to the calming space on her own to calm down when agitated.
- Involve her in self-regulating her behavior through regular practice of mindfulness.

**Cognitive Flexibility Difficulties**

Young Children may exhibit problems.

- Adjusting to changes in routine, activities, and environments (making transitions) can trigger tantrums.
- Coping with unseen/unfamiliar events may present a challenge.
- Shifting focus from one activity to another may be particularly difficult.
- Appreciating different perspectives, and looking at an array of viable alternatives in solving problems may be problematic.
- Adjusting from one set of rules to another can trigger tantrums.
- Initiating and maintaining social interactions may be a challenge

**INDIVIDUALIZED ADAPTATIONS AND BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS FOR GROWING EFS**

- Watch for precursor behaviors to stay ahead of tantrums and meltdowns.
- Teach children to identify and get in touch with feelings.
- Guide children to respond to anger and frustration with self-calming and problem-solving techniques.
  - Teach and use the Turtle Technique! Breathing exercises!
  - Integrate yoga & mindfulness routinely to learn to calm down and attention control.
  - Incorporate physical/music and movement activities routinely to provide breaks.
  - Provide immediate positive, descriptive and behavior specific feedback.
  - Use ‘Social Narratives’ – visually represented stories to describe social situations and socially appropriate responses or behaviors – to improve any deficits in social skills.
  - Prepare children who experience transition difficulties ahead of time.
Cognitive Flexibility: A Supportive Environment

- Easy, safe, and independent access to the various activity areas
  - Assist with having clear visual boundaries to separate classroom areas
- Carefully planned transitions to minimize disruptions to classroom routines - maximize learning times and minimize waiting.
- Prepare in advance for changes in activities, personnel and environment.
- Prepare and provide child-specific visual supports. Some examples are:
  - Verbal directions aided with picture cues
  - Priming using videos to prepare child ahead of time for changes
  - Individual behavior cue cards
  - Timers

Activity Schedule Inside a Folder

The student moves the cards paired with photos from the left to the right side of the folder when it is finished.

Activities to do
- Circle Time
- Movement Time
- Recess Time
- Snack Time
- Music Time

Activities done
- Center Time
- Snack
- Music

Visual Support Examples

Visual Supports

Rule Cue Cards

- Too loud
- Just right
- Too soft

Personal Space

First… (Math) Work
Then … Computer or Feed Fish

Group Story-Telling To Build EFs

- Involve children in a group story-building activity to practice flexible thinking and other EFs components.
  - The teacher starts a story (based on the book 'Are You My Mother' by Eastman), and tells a little bit of it (e.g., "Once upon a time, there was a monkey bird and a baby bird that lived in a nest. The mother bird went looking for food to feed her baby.").
  - Then, the teacher passes it on to one of the children to continue with the story.
  - The story continues with each child adding a bit to the story.
  - As each child adds a word, a phrase or a sentence, the story changes and each one tries to adapt to the evolving story (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2014).
  - Children learn to resist temptations to interrupt or correct others.
  - Provide mouth and ear pictures as additional supports to prevent interruptions (Galinsky, 2010).

Practicing Cognitive Flexibility

- Provide activities that involve children in brainstorming of ideas that are open-ended without judging them as right or wrong.
  - Involve them in thinking flexibly and explore different approaches to solving a problem.
- Get children to learn to apply changing rules using sorting and matching activities.
- Involve children in pretend play - requiring them to assume different roles and view situations from other’s perspectives.
- Promote friendship and cooperation:
  - Strategically set up Centers – building a block structure or group art activity or Housekeeping center – to facilitate children initiating and maintaining communication.
Brainstorming Aided with a Graphic Organizer

Story: Caps for Sale

Ask the monkeys nicely?

What can the peddler do to get his caps back from the monkeys?

Give the monkeys some food?

The Problem:
The monkeys have all the caps. How can we help the peddler get it back?

Practicing Cognitive Flexibility

• Play group games to exercise cognitive flexibility: the Opposites Game (Go-No-Go games) and Simon Says.
• Use activity-specific songs to provide guidance and directions to make transitions between activities.
  – To help children move to the next activity calmly and avoid transition-related tantrums. (Law and Sarathy, 2009)
• Involve children in music and movement activities to adjust to changing rules.
  – Tap rhythm sticks together (Changing the number of taps or loud/soft, etc.)
  – Do the Freeze Dance paired with pictures (performing the action depicted)

Student Scenarios

Ray, a 6-year-old kindergartner, has difficulty shifting focus from one activity to another and make a smooth transition. He usually throws a tantrum, crying, and occasionally scraping adults who are nearby to escape moving to the new activity.

• Give him an advance warning signal with cueing him again before transitioning.
• Give him a preferred item (a toy, a puppet, etc.) to hold as he makes transition.
• Include hands-on fun activities in the next activity to engage his attention.
• Consider moving Ray to the next activity before other children.
• Do not try to bring him while he is exhibiting tantrum behaviors: crying, whining, and resisting to move from the present activity (e.g., computer).
• Praise others and if he stops the tantrum and joins the activity, provide immediate feedback with a specific comment.

Student-specific Adaptations

Making Transitions

• Match individual supports tailored to student-specific needs:
  – Use a transition activity, such as, songs, yoga, chants, to make transitions fun, and soothing to help children to calm down before the next activity.
  – A visual countdown, aided with a numbered countdown tool, will help.
  – Have a designated seat with attached photo to assist student.
  – Build-in additional breaks.
  – Assign a peer buddy to assist during classroom transitions to model appropriate social and adaptive responses.
  – Use “Social Narratives” (www.autisminternetmodules.org) to present concepts and social situations in a visual format to increase understanding.

Student Scenario - 2

Nina, a pre-kindergartner, experiences difficulties in seeing things from the perspective of the other children and seeks alternative solutions when she encounters a conflict. Insistent on wanting to play with her favorite toy (a car set) during Centers, she will not allow other children to play with it. Even if they try to touch it, she lets out a loud scream, which scares some of them causing a commotion and disruption of activities.

• Teach Nina to think about, gain awareness and understanding of others’ thoughts and needs. Use Social Narratives to help her.
• Explore other play options – what alternatives with properties similar to the car set are available.
• Encourage her with immediate and specific feedback. Avoid reactive responses.

Other Transition Challenges

Transition to non-routine events – e.g., fire drill or school gathering, etc.

• Prior-on-going preparation and repeated practice needed for fire drill.
  – Show a video depicting step-by-step procedures to follow during a fire drill.
  – Teach and practice the sequence of actions ‘quiet mouth’, lining up to go outside, waiting outside, returning back to the classroom, etc.
  – Invite a fireman to come and make a presentation to the class to learn about fire safety and what firemen do, their jobs.
  – Provide a quick visual signal pointing to a photo during the fire drill.
  – Pre-arrange for additional support.
  – Practice calming techniques.
• Provide child-specific adaptations for transitioning to and responding to special school events.

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Tools to Foster Impulse Control and Cognitive Flexibility

Web-Based Resources To Assist with Cognitive Flexibility

- The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) offers a number of helpful documents in the “What Works Briefs” series.
  - Autism Internet Modules provide a number of professional development training modules to assist educators and others serving individuals with autism. The website address is: http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/.

Books and Music Resources

Picture Book Suggestions to Build Cognitive Flexibility:

- Fish is Fish by Leo Lionni
- Corduroy by Don Freeman
- Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina (A YouTube video of the book is available at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Qpi6SCqrdg)
- It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles G. Shaw (A YouTube video of the book is available at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dg-57yLw)

Music CD to assist with transitions:


Executive Function Promoting Instructional Practices

- Engaging and Motivating Instructional Activities
  - Novelty
  - Hands-on Activities
  - Problem-solving
  - Brainstorming

- Mindfulness Practices
  - Physical exercise and Movement Activities
  - Yoga
  - Music
  - Games

A Major Source

Enhancing Executive Function in the Early Years: Environment, Instruction and Adaptations for School Readiness

Get a strong foundation of knowledge about executive functioning and corresponding deficits, plus ready-to-use strategies and tools to deliver fun, meaningful and engaging instruction that advances young children’s skills — all easily integrated into typical routines and activities of preschool and kindergartens settings:

- Strategies to encourage pretend play with easy-to-use scaffolds and adaptations to nurture cognitive flexibility, creativity and self-control
- Descriptions on how to use games, songs and movement activities to continually increase the challenge to strengthen executive functioning skills
- Techniques to teach children how to use calming methods to develop self-control and reduce behavioral challenges
- Child-specific scenarios depicting a diversity of executive functioning difficulties with personalized interventions

References and Resources
