



Supporting executive functioning skills in KS4 pupils

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Are you ready for Key Stage 4?

When young people begin to study for their GCSE or Vocational examinations, in Key Stage 4, good executive functions become critical for success. There is an expectation, in schools, that students will be able to cope with the executive functioning challenges.



Executive functioning skills are those elements of how we think, that allow for the self-regulation and self-direction of our day to day and longer-term functioning. They determine how we manage our thinking and behaviour, to achieve a desired outcome.



Setting goals

One of the main reasons for people not achieving goals is that they aren't set properly in the first place – they may be too much, take too long to achieve, or too generalised.

If young people are to achieve, then helping them to set realistic goals is a starting point and comes with many advantages.

Top tips include:

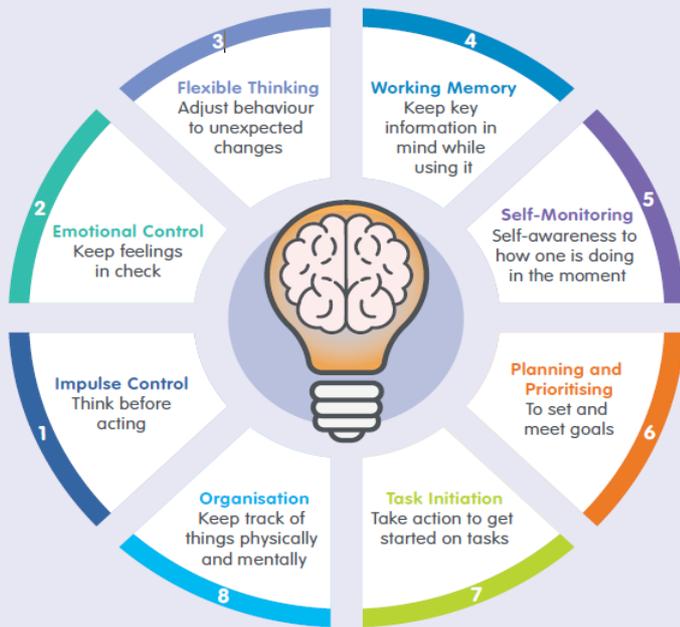
1. **Clarity** – it is important for young people to establish goals that are meaningful to them
2. **Motivation** – having a choice of goals should increase the motivation for teens to succeed. Any goal should include the ability to self-monitor their progress which will improve executive functioning
3. **Start with small, achievable goals** for example – saving money for a game. This can help a young person to work up to bigger and longer-term goals, such as an application for college or a job.
4. **Action planning** – this is a key executive function. For example, setting time constraints which include time for school work, leisure, general wellbeing, and relationships.



What else do you do?

Developing interests, other than school work, can improve mental health. This can then increase a young persons' ability to self-regulate their emotions, and improve goal-directed behaviour. Examples of mental wellbeing activities can include yoga, meditation, mindfulness, sport and exercise, the arts, or games of strategy and logic.

Executive Functioning



Organisational and study skills.

The need for sound organisational skills significantly increase throughout Key Stage 4. These executive functioning skills can maximise output and achievement.

Look for opportunities to reward and reflect when tasks are completed.

Staying positive and earning little rewards when completing tasks helps young people to stay motivated to achieve. As part of this, reflecting helps to see how far someone has come and how much has been learnt.

1. Establish a functional working environment. Is there access to resources (computer, books, stationary for example)? Are there peripheral distractions that need to be removed, in order to help improve focus? E.g. games console or mobile phone. Is there access to healthy foods and water to stay hydrated and energetic?
2. Break down a task so that it is not one big piece of work to be completed. Instead, use smaller and more manageable tasks that will lead up to completion.
3. Plan time sensibly. Set limits on work completion, factoring in regular breaks and time to review work completed. This might involve the use of timers, or regular 'check-ins' with someone; if the use of timer is more likely to cause further anxiety. Think about time frames for completion – for instance, do you have one subject exam/homework due in a few days and another the following week? This can be priorities accordingly.
4. Know where to go to for help, if stuck on something or unsure. This could be email addresses of teachers, study support groups, or recognised subject websites. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Look up revision techniques and find one that suits you...remember that everyone learns differently.