

## PLANNING/PRIORITISING

The ability to decide what needs to be done and in what order

### TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

- Starts tasks quickly without a clear plan
- Skips or misses steps within a process
- Finds it difficult to decide what to do first
- Feels overwhelmed by open-ended activities

### STRATEGIES

#### Proactive Support

- Simple planning templates
- Clear success criteria
- Worked examples
- Teacher check-ins

#### Explicit Teaching

- Teach planning before starting
- Practise ordering steps
- Teach “what comes first?”
- Plan tasks together

## ORGANISATION

The ability to keep materials, information, and spaces in order

### TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

- Disorganised desk or school bag
- Frequently loses books, pencils, or equipment
- Homework not submitted
- Difficulty keeping track of multiple resources

### STRATEGIES

#### Proactive Support

- Colour-coded resources
- Clear storage systems
- Daily pack-up routines
- Labels and visuals

#### Explicit Teaching

- Teach how to organise desks, and bags
- Practise pack-up routines
- Teach where work belongs
- Model organisation skills

## TIME MANAGEMENT

The ability to understand time and use it effectively

### TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

- Difficulty completing work within timeframes
- Needs reminders about remaining time
- Rushes to finish work at the last minute
- Difficulty managing transitions between tasks

### STRATEGIES

#### Proactive Support

- Visual timers
- Time warnings
- Chunked tasks
- Predictable routines

#### Explicit Teaching

- Teach how long tasks take
- Practise estimating time
- Teach pacing of work
- Reflect on time use

## GOAL SETTING

The ability to set a target and work towards it

### TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

- Unclear about the purpose of tasks
- Difficulty knowing when work is “finished”
- Limited awareness of their progress
- Dependence on guidance or direction

### STRATEGIES

#### Proactive Support

- Clear learning intentions
- Short, achievable goals
- Visual progress tracking
- Frequent feedback

#### Explicit Teaching

- Teach what a goal is
- Practise setting simple goals
- Teach checking progress
- Reflect on success

AKO PANUKU  
*Inspiring Learning*



# EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING Primary



# What is Executive Functioning?

Executive Functioning (EF) is the brain's management system. It helps students plan, organise, manage time, and finish tasks. These skills develop slowly and aren't fully in place until the mid-20s, so every student in your classroom is still learning how to manage themselves. Differences in EF are linked to how the prefrontal cortex and brain chemicals work, can be genetic or acquired, are often connected with ADHD, dyslexia, autism, injury, foetal alcohol exposure, anxiety, or trauma, and are not a sign of low intelligence. Most students with learning and thinking differences have average or above-average IQ.

## RESPONSE INHIBITION

The ability to stop and think before acting or speaking

### TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

- Calls out or speaking over others
- Gets out of their seat without permission
- Handles others or classroom materials inappropriately
- Begins actions before instructions are completed

### STRATEGIES

#### Proactive Support

- Clear visual behaviour expectations
- Structured routines and transitions
- Movement breaks built into learning
- Strategic seating and space

#### Explicit Teaching

- Teach "Stop-Think-Do" strategy
- Practise waiting and turn-taking
- Role-play expected behaviours
- Teach calming strategies

## WORKING MEMORY

The ability to hold information in mind while using it

### TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

- Forgets directions soon after they are given
- Requires instructions to be broken into steps
- Loses track of where they are during a task
- Frequently asks "What do I do next?"

### STRATEGIES

#### Proactive Support

- Visual instructions and picture cues
- Providing one step at a time
- Modelling each step
- Task checklists

#### Explicit Teaching

- Teach how to listen and repeat instructions
- Practise remembering short sequences
- Teach use of visual supports
- Teach checking back to task

## COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

The ability to shift thinking, adapt, and cope with change

### TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

- Becomes unsettled when routines change
- Finds it difficult to accept alternative ways of completing a task
- Shows rigid or rule-bound thinking
- Struggles to move past errors or mistakes

### STRATEGIES

#### Proactive Support

- Visual schedules
- Warnings before changes
- Choice in tasks
- Normalise mistakes

#### Explicit Teaching

- Teach flexible thinking language
- Practise coping with small changes
- Model learning from mistakes
- Teach problem-solving steps

## TASK INITIATION

The ability to start a task without undue delay

### TYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

- Remains seated and waiting rather than working
- Watches others begin before attempting the task
- Requires adult prompts to get started
- Uses avoidance behaviours (e.g., sharpening pencils, asking to leave the room)

### STRATEGIES

#### Proactive Support

- Clear start-of-task routines
- "First-then" visuals
- Tasks broken into chunks
- Visual timers

#### Explicit Teaching

- Teach how to start with the first step
- Practise using checklists
- Teach self-talk for starting
- Model how to begin tasks