

Executive Functioning & Gifted Children



A guide for parents



What is Executive Functioning?

- Brain skills that help us plan, organise, and complete tasks
- Includes time management, focus, motivation, and self-regulation
- Crucial for success in school, college, and life
- Think of it as the brain's 'task manager'

Executive Function

Prefrontal Cortex

9 Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex

1. Empathy
2. Insight
3. Response Flexibility
4. Emotion Regulation
5. Body Regulation
6. Morality
7. Intuition



Limbic Brain

1. Fight, flight, freeze stress response
2. Thinks, "Am I safe? Do people want me?"
3. Emotions live here

What is Executive Functioning?

- According to [Harvard's Center on the Developing Child](#), the three dimensions of executive functioning that are most explored are Working Memory, Inhibitory Control, and Mental Flexibility because "in most real-life situations, these three functions are not entirely distinct, but, rather, they work together to produce competent executive functioning."



🤔 Why Do Gifted Kids Struggle?

- New research into the gifted brain might shed light on another possible explanation for why executive function challenges feature prominently in the gifted community. In neurotypical children, the brain begins “pruning” excess information around the age of 8, which in turn allows for further development of the prefrontal cortex – the center of many executive functioning skills. In highly gifted children, this synaptic pruning process may not start until around age 12 because they have a prolonged “sponge phase” as their brain continues to take in information. Thus, further development of the prefrontal cortex—and advanced executive functioning—may be on a three- or four-year delay.

How your brain learns new things



Why Do Gifted Kids Struggle?



School Challenges



Multistep
assignments feel
overwhelming



Forget to turn in
homework



Procrastination and
emotional outbursts



Struggles with
asking for help



Home Challenges

- Homework and chores = chaos!
- Tasks like 'clean your room' are multi-step puzzles
- Avoidance and resistance build over time
- Parents may unintentionally shame or guilt



Emotional Impacts



Difficulty managing
frustration and
emotions



Struggles with social
skills and self-
reflection



Long-term risks:
anxiety, low self-
esteem, apathy



Feeling
misunderstood and
unsupported



How Parents Can Help



Identify specific
executive skill gaps



Use exploration
questions: 'How
long will this take?'



Celebrate small
wins and progress



Provide scaffolding
and positive
reinforcement



Final Thoughts

- Executive skills take time to grow
 - Your relationship matters most
 - Be patient, flexible, and encouraging
 - Celebrate effort, not just results!
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