

Executive Function

Executive function is an umbrella term for the cognitive processes that help us **regulate**, **control** and **manage** our **thoughts** and **actions**.

Key Components

- planning
- working memory
- attention
- problem solving
- verbal reasoning
- inhibition
- cognitive flexibility
- initiation of actions
- monitoring of actions



Planning includes assessing needs, formulating and evaluating options, and sequencing chosen options to achieve a goal.



People who struggle with planning may find it hard to:

- complete multi-step activities like homework, projects, cooking, driving, laundry, and daily self-care tasks
- learn complex physical movements
- organize their daily or long-term schedules

Problem Solving includes activities related to identifying and overcoming obstacles to reach a predefined goal.



People who struggle with problem solving may find it hard to:

- get "unstuck" in life
- change course when an unexpected event occurs
- try out alternative solutions
- identify when a problem exists
- overcome feelings of doom and disaster

Verbal Reasoning is the ability to understand, analyze and think critically about concepts presented in words.



People who struggle with verbal reasoning may find it hard to:

- answer reading comprehension questions
- follow verbal instructions
- take lecture notes
- analyze text or speech
- paraphrase or retell stories
- solve math word problems

Working Memory is the ability to hold information in your head for a short time as you complete a task.



People who struggle with working memory may find it hard to:

- multitask
- reproduce a drawing from memory
- follow multi-step verbal instructions
- perform tasks without the aid of written notes
- solve complex equations

Attention is the ability to intentionally focus on a task or activity.



People who struggle with attention may find it hard to:

- concentrate, especially on activities that don't interest them
- complete what they start
- focus on one thing at a time
- be on time or do things on schedule
- block out environmental distractions

Inhibition is the ability to block or suppress a thought or action, either consciously or subconsciously.



People who struggle with inhibition often:

- continue speaking, even when the other person is not listening
- fidget, stim, or move around a lot
- are echolalic (repeat sounds/words)
- blurt out thoughts, regardless of appropriateness
- have trouble with word or memory retrieval

Initiation of Actions is the "getting started" phase of an activity.



People who struggle with initiation may find it hard to:

- begin homework, work tasks or independent projects
- prepare meals, do laundry, clean the house, shower, change clothes, or get ready for bed
- stay organized or keep their surroundings neat/clean
- initiate major life activities like applying for college or jobs

Monitoring of Actions is the "troubleshooting" phase of an activity.



People who struggle with monitoring may find it hard to:

- learn new tasks quickly
- perform familiar activities under pressure or when stressed
- spot mistakes in their work
- competently do a familiar task in an unfamiliar environment
- successfully perform multiple activities at the same time

Cognitive Flexibility is the ability to shift thinking or attention in response to changes in the environment or situation.

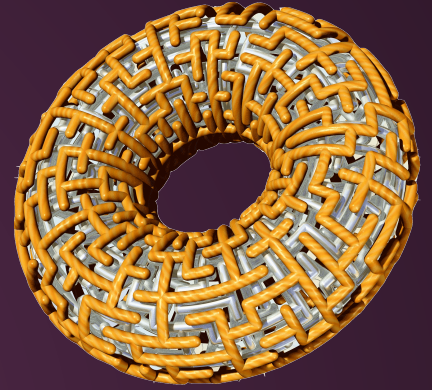


People who struggle with cognitive flexibility may find it hard to:

- cope with change
- adapt to new rules
- change their mind in response to new information about a subject
- easily see another person's point of view
- stop one activity to begin another

Impaired executive function:

- is common in ASD and ADHD
- affects each person differently
- doesn't have an easy solution
- requires the development of a unique set of coping strategies



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