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**A SUPER-SIZED
ISSUE FROM
SUMMER TO SCHOOL**

Executive Functioning

When Skills Don't Match Expectations

Many parents wonder why their child remembers every detail about a favorite video game, movie, musician, or hobby but struggles with homework, chores, directions, or daily routines. The reason might be their executive functioning skills.



What Is Executive Functioning?

Executive functions are the brain's management skills that help us plan, organize, manage time, remember information, regulate emotions, solve problems, and shift from one idea to another.

These skills develop gradually through childhood, adolescence, and even into early adulthood. While they are developing, a child may know what needs to be done but genuinely have trouble doing it.

What Can Impact Executive Functioning?

Executive functioning is influenced by brain development, life experiences, and individual needs. Some children may need extra support due to neurodevelopmental conditions, mental health diagnoses, learning challenges, anxiety, trauma histories, loss, stress, or early adversity.

Behavior Can Be a Clue

Challenging behavior can be a signal that a child is struggling with regulation, flexibility, working memory, or problem-solving. **Behavior is often the visible part of an invisible skill gap.** Some may assume a child is unmotivated, lazy, or defiant. In reality, the child's brain may be having difficulty organizing the steps, managing emotions, or knowing what to do next.

When behavior comes from a missing skill, punishment can increase shame and stress without teaching the child what to do. Instead of thinking, "Why won't they do this?" it can help to think, "What support do they need right now to do this?" Supports do not lower expectations. They help bridge the gap while skills are still developing.



This can look like



- Forgetting directions quickly
- Misplacing or losing belongings
- Being overwhelmed by multi-step tasks
- Having a hard time getting started
- Starting tasks without finishing them
- Struggling to handle changes
- Reacting strongly when frustrated
- Needing frequent reminders
- Being impatient or giving up quickly
- Losing track of time

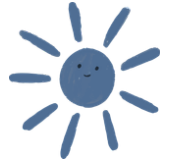
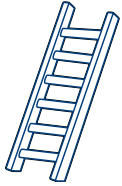
What parents can try



- Use scaffolding parenting strategies
- Create simple routines
- Break tasks into smaller steps
- Use checklists, timers, visual reminders
- Help your child begin a task
- Complete the first step together
- Offer two choices when overwhelmed
- Give extra time for transitions
- Celebrate small progress

Executive Functioning

Scaffolding and Summer Practice



What is Scaffolding?

Scaffolding is a parenting technique that provides temporary support while a child or teen learns a skill. Just like scaffolding supports a building being built, adult support helps children build new abilities. As children gain confidence, your support gradually decreases and their independence grows.



Scaffolding Sounds Like...

- "Let's do the first step together."
- "I'll help you make a plan."
- "You've got this. I'll stay nearby if you need me."

Scaffolding Looks Like...

1

Show the skill. Model what success looks like. Talk through each step so your child can observe and understand the process.

2

Practice together. Work side by side. Offer guidance, feedback, and encouragement while your child tries the skill.

3

Gradually step back. Reduce your support a little at a time. Give your child space to try it on their own, stepping in only if needed.

Remember: the goal isn't to do it for your child. It's to teach the skill so they can eventually do it for themselves.

Summer Skill Builders

Executive functioning develops through everyday experiences. Summer offers many opportunities for youth to practice in real-life situations while also building important life skills. Here are some activities that support planning, working memory, flexible thinking, and self-regulation:

- **Help plan a family outing**, including the budget, route, and schedule.
- **Follow a recipe** from start to finish.
- **Manage a weekly activity or chore** routine using a checklist.
- **Use a calendar or visual schedule** to keep track of activities.
- **Care for a garden, pet, or houseplant.**
- **Make a grocery list** or plan a simple meal.
- **Pack for a day trip**, camp, or vacation.
- **Play board, card, or strategy games.**
- **Work toward a summer goal** and track progress.
- **Practice flexible thinking** when plans change.

What about video games?



Video games can support executive functioning skills like problem-solving, planning, flexible thinking, working memory, teamwork, and communication. Use game time as a chance to connect and reflect. Try asking:

How do you plan to get to the next level?

What challenge are you trying to solve?

What else could you try?

What worked well with your team?

Age doesn't tell the whole story

Understanding uneven development



Children and teens do not always function at the same developmental level in every area. They may seem mature one moment and much younger the next, especially when they are upset, overwhelmed, embarrassed, or scared.

Why uneven development is common

Stress can make developmental differences even more visible. When a child is tired, overwhelmed, embarrassed, disappointed, overstimulated, anxious, or scared, they may seem to “drop down” into younger responses. This is usually not a conscious choice to be difficult. In stressful moments, it can be harder for the brain to use skills the child may be able to access when calm.

Considering the developmental age reflected in how your child acts or responds is not meant to label them. It is meant to remind us to respond differently when a child is not functioning at their chronological age. For example, we would not expect a toddler to calm down simply because we explained why they should. We would slow down, use fewer words, stay close, offer comfort, and help them settle before expecting them to talk things through. An older child or teen may need some of that same patience and support during a hard moment.

Chronological age is not the whole picture

A child’s chronological age tells us how many birthdays they have had, but it does not always reflect how they are functioning in every area of life. Development is rarely even. A teen might read at a high school level, but still need help calming down when things don’t go their way. A middle schooler may manage daily routines yet not know how to make friends. It’s normal and expected for skills to develop at different rates. Understanding and remembering this can help us respond with patience and support instead of frustration.

One child’s development might look like this



Area	Age
 Chronological age	15
 Academic, learning, and executive functioning skills	14
 Social skills	12
 Emotional regulation	8
 Daily living skills and independence readiness	10

What this can mean for parents



Remembering to see the whole child can help parents set realistic expectations. Supporting the developmental age showing up right now does not encourage immature behavior or reinforce negative choices. It means meeting your child where they are, so they can feel safe enough to learn, grow, and try again.

Your child may not be able to respond at their chronological age right now, but with patience, structure, connection, and practice, they can continue to grow.

Check In Before You Step In

Pause, notice, and then respond

Many parents hear “meet your child where they are.” It’s wise advice, especially when emotions run high or skills are still catching up. It helps to notice where you are as the adult, too. When you’re stressed, your responses can come from your own emotional age.



Pause, take a breath, and ask yourself:



- What’s my emotional age right now?
- Am I regulated enough to help my child regulate?
- What do I need to do to regain my calm in this moment?

When you are ready to respond, consider what your child may need:

- Use fewer words and a calm tone.
- Co-regulate to reinforce safety and connection.
- Lower the demand briefly to support regulation.
- Respond to the skills your child can access now.
- Support without shaming or talking down.
- Allow a do-over once your child is regulated.
- Teach later, when everyone is calm.

Guiding Thoughts



Regulate yourself

You can’t co-regulate from a dysregulated state. Your steadiness is part of the intervention.



Connection first

How you respond in hard moments can strengthen safety, trust, and connection with your child.



Progress over perfection

Every repair builds trust. You don’t have to get it right every time—just keep showing up and trying.

Co-regulation begins with you

When we care for our own emotional needs—through rest, support, movement, or connection—we are better able to provide the calm, connection, and guidance children need. You can’t pour from an empty cup. Take care of you, so you can take care of them. ❤️

A respectful reminder

Supporting a child at their developmental level does not mean talking down to them or treating them as younger in every area. A teen may need help with big emotions or impulse control and also still need privacy, choices, and age-appropriate opportunities.

Sensory-Friendly Summer

Planning ahead for calmer days

Summer brings excitement and new experiences. It also brings changes in routine, crowded events, unfamiliar places, vacations, hot weather, and long car rides. All of this can add stress to a child's sensory system.



Recognizing signs of overload

For youth with sensory sensitivities, the added stimulation of summer can make their brains and bodies work harder. Irritability, emotional outbursts, withdrawal, restlessness, or trouble focusing may signal nervous-system overload. These behaviors are not necessarily misbehavior or a sign that they are not having fun. They may be your child's way of showing that their brain and body are working hard to process everything around them.

Support before dysregulation

The best way to help is to offer support before your child reaches their limit. Simple strategies can make a big difference: regular water breaks, snack breaks, movement opportunities, and access to cool or quiet spaces. Planning ahead and building these supports into your day can reduce stress and help your child feel more comfortable.

Do body check-ins

Encourage your child to notice what their body is telling them. Ask simple questions such as, "How does your body feel?" You can model this by saying, "My throat feels dry. I think I'm thirsty." Recognizing early signs—such as a racing heart, tight muscles, or a tense stomach—can help children take a break before they feel overwhelmed.

Summertime Sensory Tips

- Keep routines as consistent as possible.
- Use visual schedules or social stories to prepare for new or changeable plans.
- Build quiet breaks into busy days.
- Pack sensory supports like sunglasses, fidgets, noise-cancelling headphones, cooling towels, gum or crunchy snacks.
- Allow time to recover after busy events.
- Preview new activities and places whenever possible.
- Pay attention to hunger, thirst, and fatigue; they can increase sensitivity.
- Look online for local sensory-friendly activities and events.



Did you know?



Movie theaters, including AMC Theaters, Emagine Entertainment, and Celebration Cinema, offer sensory-friendly showings at select locations. These screenings offer a relaxed atmosphere that may feature lower sound, adjusted lighting, fewer previews, and a flexible environment where talking, singing, and movement are welcome.

Check with your theater for details.

Back-to-School Success Starts Early

Planning now can make the transition smoother



Although summer is in full swing, preparing for the upcoming school year can start long before the first day of class. Many children benefit from a gradual transition back into school routines, especially if changes in schedule, expectations, or environment tend to be difficult for them. A little preparation now helps reduce stress later.

Consider using the latter weeks of summer to slowly reintroduce routines, preview upcoming changes, and help your child feel more confident and prepared for the school year ahead. Small steps now can help set the stage for a positive start to the school year.



Tips to Help with the Transition

- ✓ Gradually adjust sleep and wake times.
- ✓ Re-establish morning and bedtime routines.
- ✓ Visit the school, bus stop, playground, or classroom if possible.
- ✓ Talk about worries and what may feel different.
- ✓ Practice school-related routines like packing a backpack or using a lunchbox.
- ✓ Plan for sensory needs such as headphones, fidgets, clothing preferences, or quiet breaks.
- ✓ Create visual schedules or simple checklists.
- ✓ Review IEP, 504, or support plans before school begins.
- ✓ Reach out to teachers or school staff early.
- ✓ Remember connection before correction during the first few weeks back.



Transitions take time. Preparing early does not mean rushing summer away. It simply gives children more time to adjust, practice, and feel ready for what comes next.

A Helpful Tool: The Student Snapshot



Consider creating a one-page profile for your child to share with teachers and school staff. Think of it as a child-centered resume: a quick, easy-to-read snapshot of your child's strengths, interests, needs, and helpful strategies for supporting them.

You can also include information about triggers, calming strategies, coping skills, sensory needs, diagnoses, accommodations, and the best way to contact you.

Including a favorite photo of your child can help personalize the snapshot and remind staff of the child behind the information.

A Student Snapshot can help start the school year with greater understanding and give school staff practical information they can use to better support your child.

Additional educational resources are on page 10.



Best Wishes to Somer!

After 18 years with Judson Center, most of which were spent with PARC Region 6, Supervisor Somer Vickery is starting her next chapter.

We want to thank Somer for the countless families she has helped over the years. She will be missed by families and co-workers alike.



Michigan Educational Advocacy Organizations

Student Advocacy Center studentadvocacycenter.org

The Student Advocacy Center helps families navigate educational challenges, understand rights, and access support when barriers arise at school. Families facing attendance concerns, disciplinary issues, special education questions, or other school-related challenges may benefit from advocacy support.



855-688-1916



helpline@studentadvocacycenter.org

Michigan Alliance for Families michiganallianceforfamilies.org

Michigan Alliance for Families provides free information, education, and support to families of children and young adults who receive, or may be eligible to receive, special education services. Families with questions about evaluations, eligibility, IEPs, related services, parent rights, or navigating the special education system may benefit from connecting with them or one of their regional Parent Mentors.



800-552-4812



info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org

Recommended Resources

Additional Reading on This Month's Newsletter Topics

Executive Functioning

- [What is Executive Function?](#)
- [What are Executive Function Skills? Why Do They Matter?*](#)
*Foster and adoption specific website
- [Executive Functioning Resources](#)
- [Helping Kids Who Struggle with Executive Functions](#)

Education Information

- [Michigan Family Matters](#)
- [Understood.org](#)
- [A Day in Our Shoes](#)
- [What Kids with Trauma Need in School](#)
- [IEP Accommodations for Students with Trauma and ACES](#)
- [Wrightslaw Special Education and Advocacy](#)

Statewide Resources and Supports

Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Office

Adoption assistance and adoption medical subsidy information.

michigan.gov/agao

Phone: 517-335-7801

Community Mental Health

Locate your county's provider, contact details, and 24-hour crisis phone number.

[Provider Map](#)

[Provider Phone Numbers](#)

Adoptive Family Support Network

Community, education, and support for families. Events held statewide.

[AFSN Website](#)

[AFSN Facebook Page](#)

24/7 Warmline: 855-642-4727

Mich. Dept. of Health and Human Services

Assistance, resources, and health information.

michigan.gov/mdhhs

[County Office Locator](#)

Phone: 517-241-3740

[Hotline and Warmline
Phone Numbers](#)

Assistance Programs

MI Bridges

[MIBridges Website](#)

Phone: 844-799-9876

MI Medicaid Help

Phone: 800-642-3195

MI Healthcare Help Line

Phone: 855-789-5610

Michigan 2-1-1

Get help paying bills, finding food, and locating a variety of resources near you. Confidential.

mi211.org

[Local Assistance Locator](#)

Phone: 211

[Text or Chat](#)

What are people saying about PARC?

"I never felt judged, only supported."

"My experience was wonderful; our worker was
a huge help to us. We truly appreciate all of
the support!"

"Our PARC worker has been a true blessing
to our family. Their kindred spirit helped me
through a difficult time."

For a complete list of events, resources,
and more, visit www.parc-judson.org



Region 5 Phone

734-794-2988

Counties Served:

Barry, Branch, Calhoun,
Eaton, Hillsdale,
Ingham, Jackson,
Kalamazoo, Lenawee,
Livingston, Monroe, St.
Joseph, Washtenaw

Region 6 Phone

810-732-8510

Counties Served:

Genesee, Huron,
Lapeer, Sanilac,
St. Clair, Tuscola

MONTHLY SUPPORT GROUPS



BETTER TOGETHER

First Monday of every month
6:30 - 7:30 pm on Zoom

ADOPTIVE FAMILY CONNECTIONS

First Thursday of every month
7:30-8:30 pm on Zoom

ANN ARBOR LUNCH AND LEARN

Second Monday of every month
12:00 - 1:30 pm
In-person in Ann Arbor

PARENTING TEENS

Third Wednesday of every month
12:00 - 1:00 pm on Zoom
*Participants are welcome to
leave early, if needed*

To register or for questions,
contact Kyle Stevenson at
Kyle_Stevenson@judsoncenter.org

