

## More about ... Executive Functions

### What are planning and organization and what do problems with them look like?

Planning and organization are involved from the instant you decide to do something.

You need to look at what you intend to do and figure out how to accomplish it. You need to decide what the final product should look like, what steps are needed to get there and what tools are needed. Your plan also has to allow for unexpected events and circumstances.

You can see the need for other executive functions to help out with this process. Selective and sustained attention

are important for focusing on the goal and steps needed, shunning irrelevant information and monitoring your performance. Inhibitory control comes into play so you don't just jump ahead and forget some important steps. Working memory will help you keep your goal and steps in mind while you work through the steps. Self-monitoring will be crucial to your following your plan, correcting any mistakes and evaluating each step, switching to an alternate plan as needed. Cognit-

ive flexibility will be needed for deviations from your original plan if things don't work out.

Children who have problems with planning and organization are likely to be the ones who don't finish tasks. Time-management is poor or inconsistent. They miss steps, keep trying the same (unsuccessful) action again and again or get side-tracked by unimportant things. Life is like a series of snapshots that just don't come together into consistent actions directed toward a goal.

### How to improve planning & organization?

In order to develop planning and organization skills, children need to be helped to understand that it's okay to **take your time** to figure out what you want to do or are supposed to do. We tend to hurry ourselves and hurry our

children. When your child is learning to use good planning and organizational skills, it's not a time to rush. You can prompt faster action later when your child shows solid learning.

Next, prompt your child

to **look for models** of what he's supposed to do. Are there pictures of the finished product (like photos in a recipe book)? Are there step-by-step instructions (like with flat-pack furniture)? If your child has done this before, prompt him to

# Planning & organization

## How to improve planning & organization (cont'd)

make a picture in his head of what it's supposed to look like?

**Think ahead** through each step. Have your child read the instructions or read them to him. Have him check to

make sure he has all the materials and skills needed to accomplish the task. You might prompt him to make a list of things he needs and the main steps he has to take if there are no written instructions. Sometimes, writing things down can help you remember better.

Help him **figure out if he has enough time** to complete the task. This requires estimating (guessing) about how long the task

will take to finish. Ask him to think about another time he did this task—how long did it take? Have him ask someone else who's done this before—they might have an idea about how

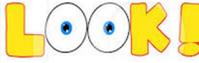
long it takes. Your child's ability to estimate time may not be strong but have him give it a try. Prompt him to think about what he might do if he can't finish something he started. For certain tasks, it's better not to start if you can't finish. For example, if you're baking a cake, once you've added the liquids, you can't stop or the cake won't rise. Other things you can complete partway and finish up later, like

painting, you can put your brushes in a plastic bag and seal your paint

until you can work at your project again.

Help your child **follow the plan** he made or the one that was already in place (like a recipe or instructions to assemble something). Be sure he follows the plan step-by-step, not missing any parts. Have him check back with the plan and with the time to see how he's doing. If he needs to speed up, if he's doing okay or if he'll have to finish later. He can ask for help if he needs it.

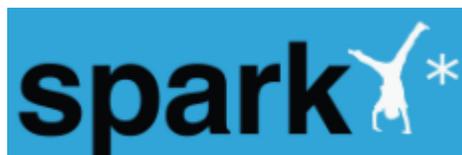
When he's finished, prompt him to **look back and evaluate** how he did. Does his work look like the model? Does it look like what he had in mind? If not, what could he do differently next time? Review how his time estimate worked out. What took longer than he thought? What took less time? This is the crucial learning phase. Take time to do it so your child's skills improve.


Take your time to check things out

Look for models

Think ahead

Figure out if you have time

Check your work



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