Addressing Executive Function Disorder in Students who have ADHD, Asperger, & Bipolar Disorder
Executive Function Described

• Dr. Russell Barkley describes executive function as those "actions we perform to ourselves and direct at ourselves so as to accomplish self-control, goal-directed behavior, and the maximization of future outcomes."
Executive Function Described continued

• Dr. Brown gives us a helpful visual image by comparing executive function to the conductor's role in an orchestra. The conductor organizes various instruments to begin playing singularly or in combination, integrates the music by bringing in and fading certain actions, and controls the pace and intensity of the music.
Executive Function Assessment

Two Primary Assessments

• Brown ADD Scales

• Brief – Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function
Brown ADD Scale

Six Global Areas Measured

- **Activation**: Organizing tasks and materials, estimating time, prioritizing tasks, and getting started on work tasks.
- **Focus**: Focusing, sustaining focus, and shifting focus to tasks.
- **Effort**: Regulating alertness, sustaining effort, and processing speed.
- **Emotion**: Managing frustration and modulating emotions.
- **Memory**: Utilizing working memory and accessing recall.
- **Action**: Monitoring and regulating self-action.
Behavior Rating Scale of Executive Function

BRIEF

Domains Assessed by the Brief
Ages 5-18 years

Eight Clinical Scales

- **Inhibit**: Control impulses; stop behavior
- **Shift**: Move freely from one activity/situation to another; transition; problem-solve flexibly (Cognitive or Behavior)
- **Emotional Control**: Modulate emotional responses appropriately
- **Initiate**: Begin activity; generate ideas
- **Working Memory**: Hold information in mind for purpose of completing a task
- **Plan/Organize**: Anticipate future events; set goals; develop steps; grasp main ideas
- **Organization of Materials**: Ability to organize, keep track of, and/or clean up
- **Monitor**: Check work; assess own performance
Behavior Rating Scale of Executive Function

BRIEF

Domains Assessed by the Brief

Ages 5-18 years

- Two Indexes
  - **Behavioral Regulation**: Ability to shift cognitive set and modulate emotions and behavior via appropriate inhibitory control. It is comprised of the Inhibit, the Shift, and the Emotional Control scales.
  - **Metacognition**: Ability to initiate, plan, organize, self-monitor, and sustain working memory. It is composed of the Initiate, Working Memory, Plan/Organize, Organization of Materials, and Monitor scales.
Some Problems Produced

- Getting started and finishing work
- Remembering homework
- Memorizing facts
- Writing essays or reports
- Working math problems
- Being on time
- Controlling emotions
- Completing long-term projects
- Planning for the future.
Uses for Executive Function Assessments

• Useful in evaluating children with a wide spectrum of developmental and acquired neurological conditions, such as:
  • Learning disabilities
  • Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
  • Tourette's disorder
  • Traumatic brain injury
  • Pervasive developmental disorders/autism
  • Bipolar disorder
Interpreting the Executive Function Assessments

• All results should be viewed in the context of a complete evaluation

• High scores do not indicate “A Disorder of Executive Function”

• Problems may be developmental or acquired and, thus, are suggestive of differing treatment approaches
Interpretation Continued

• WISC-IV: Two Scores of Executive Function
  - Processing Speed Score
  - Working Memory Score
• Unlike ADD and BRIEF
Punishment and Executive Functions

Students should not be punished for having executive function deficits such as lack of organizational and memory skills that interfere with their ability to bring home the correct homework assignments and books.
Problems with Planning

Strategies for Planning

• Once he has thought about what he must do to complete a task, structure planning and organization efforts around it.
• Assign a peer study buddy who can model appropriate behavior.
  - A good student who can help ‘teach’.
  - Someone who knows how to plan.
• Teach the student to accurately predict how much time it will take to complete a task or project. You can start doing this by asking the student how long a shorter task might take if he really focused on it. Use a reward to help the student maintain on task behavior. E
• Give this student helper ‘cards’ that have steps for common routines or assignments. This can be used for math formulas, approaches to specific types of writing, etc. S
Problems with Organization

Strategies for Organizing Materials

• Have this student keep everything in a specific place. If his desk area becomes untidy, have him clean it up before he leaves that day.
• Students will need assistance in developing and maintaining an organizational system.
• Students will periodically need to be checked to make sure that their organizational system is being used properly. This can be done at the beginning or the end of the day.
• Students will need to have clean out times for their desk, backpack, and locker.
Problems with Activation to Work

Strategies for Activation to Work

- Assist the student in starting the assignment.
- Increasing structure in the environment or in the activity at hand will help the student activate to tasks more quickly.
- Make sure the student understands teacher instructions.
- Place this student around peers that can serve as models to help him get started on tasks.
Problems with Processing Speed

Strategies for Processing Speed

- Have students write down brief notes—not extensive. Allow them to turn in their notes for teacher notes at the end of class.
- Summarize frequently in class to help give the student more time to process and review information.
- The rate of presentation for new material may need to be altered for some students. If too much is given at a time it will overload him and he will learn very little.
- Give this student additional processing time, or time to rehearse the new information before he is asked to share or use it.
- Give this student more time to formulate answers and respond to questions.
Problems with Self-Monitoring

Strategies for Self-Monitoring

• Students who have problems with self-monitoring may not understand the impact of their behavior on those around them. Discuss the behavior and how it impacts others in a private setting away from their peers.

• Encourage the student to self-monitor his own behavior. This helps build responsibility, and will often cause the student to watch his own behavior more closely, thus reducing inappropriate behaviors (see section that has worksheets for self-monitoring).

• Have the student set goals for accuracy rather than speed. This slower speed can help him increase attention to errors and improve his work.
Problems with Sustaining Attention

Strategies for Sustaining Attention

• Make frequent eye contact with the student to assist him in sustaining attention. A simple glance can bring the student back from a daydream.
• Utilize a wink, smile, nod or touch to the shoulder or desk to help redirect a student to the work at hand.
• Verbal redirection to task (preferably a whisper and in close proximity).
• Use visuals, colors to help maintain attention.
• Use a flashlight.
Problems with Flexibility

Strategies with Flexibility (transitioning)

• Provide lots of structure. Post schedules and changes on the board, verbally remind the class what will be happening during the day and put the schedule on the students desk if he has difficulty with transitioning.

• Prepare the student for any change in routine (preferably a day in advance if possible). Announce what is going to happen and give repeat warnings as the time approaches.

• Use cue cards that can be placed on the students desk to aid in transition. The card would have the specific steps you would want to teach. For instance, the title would be, ‘How to Make Transitions’. The three steps to transition efficiently might be:
  - 1. Begin transition as soon as you are told to do so.
  - 2. Put away unnecessary materials
  - 3. Get what you need for the next activity.
Problems with Emotional Control

Strategies for Emotional Control

• Students should be taught response delay techniques. For instance, consider alternatives before you react, practice leaving a situation that is frustrating, counting before responding, etc.
• It is important that you teach this student to think about how people would feel, what they would think, etc., before he reacts emotionally.
• Students would benefit from being able to discuss upcoming situations or events that may provoke an emotional outburst.
• When an outburst occurs help the student process the situation that led up to the event. This should be done in a calm, non-threatening manner. How could you have handled this in a better way? What could you do different next time?
Problems with Utilizing Working Memory

Strategies for Utilizing Working Memory

- Due to working memory issues, the student may have difficulty keeping track of more than one or two steps at a time. He should be provided with a written checklist of steps required to complete a task.
- Allow the use of visual aids, checklists, etc.
- Teach the student to use outlines and underlining to help with learning and memory.
- Frequently change tasks for students in order to alleviate some of the drain on working memory.
Problems with Accessing Recall

Strategies for Accessing Recall

- Allow the use of a visual aids.
- You may teach the student to use a card system for memorizing.
- Many students have difficult assessing recall. It’s not that they don’t have the information in their brain. It’s that they have trouble with retrieval. Use recognition based assessments to obtain a true measure of what the student is learning.
- Have students look up when trying to remember something….not down.
$20.00 for book, $7.00 for shipping. Add digital files for $10.00 (usually $13.95 for digital files). If you order digital files you will receive all the worksheets and the Executive Dysfunction Checklist that is not in the book in word format via e-mail. Please send payment to Russ Crites 106 N. Denton Tap Rd. Ste 210-216 Coppell, Texas 75019

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