

Appendix 4

Ways to Use Schooling at Home to Help Students Practice and Strengthen Executive Skills

Executive Skill	Ideas for Using Schooling at Home to Help Children Develop These Skills
Response Inhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We recommend teaching response inhibition by teaching children to “wait” and “stop.” Build in “wait time” during the day, and alternating between work and play or preferred and non-preferred activities can help build this skill. Games like “Simon Says” and “Red Light Green Light,” for younger children, are fun ways to practice response inhibition.
Working Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use flash cards (or electronic versions such as iFlash for Macs) to practice math facts, spelling words or sight words. If working memory is particularly weak, don’t go overboard with this, but you may want to try a format such as “incremental rehearsal.” Here’s a YouTube video that explains this approach: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUeNVlf7p-8 • Encourage kids with weak working memory to come up with “work-arounds” to help them remember important things—checklists and post-it reminders are common examples. With older kids, prompt them to think about how they can use their smart phones to help them remember (reminders, alarms, taking pictures, etc.).
Emotional Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help kids identify the “triggers” (what sets them off) and help them find replacement behaviors (e.g., leave the room when they realize a sibling is pushing their buttons). Praise/reinforce the child for using the replacement behavior. • For kids with significant problems with emotional control, be prepared for the upsets to be more frequent or more severe in the early days of adjusting to being at home instead of at school. With these kids, easing into a home school schedule and not expecting too much too fast, may be important.
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids who are inflexible tend to do better with structure and routine and they handle closed-ended tasks (i.e., 1 right answer) better than open-ended tasks. Flexibility can be “stretched” by giving kids assignments that involve creativity, but if this is hard for your child, you do the task for them and model your thought process as you do it. Games like “Apples to Apples” encourage flexible thinking. • You can also encourage flexibility by having kids think about ways to mix it up with their daily schedule so that they’re not doing the same thing every day at the same time.

Sustained Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask kids to decide how long they can go on a work task before they need a break. Keep track of the time and see if they can stretch their work sessions after a while. • Ask kids to become aware of when they start "drifting" when they're working, which may be a signal that they need to take a break. Keep the breaks relatively short and, when possible, build movement or exercise into the breaks.
Task Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have kids identify start times for tasks and help them stick to the agreed upon schedule. If this is particularly hard, keep the tasks short and easy, with the understanding that the real goal is to practice the skill of task initiation.
Planning/Prioritizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model planning for younger children so they hear what planning sounds like. With older kids, encourage them to make their own plans for the day and to run them by you for discussion or negotiation. Help kids identify fun activities (when the school work is over for the day) that require planning and help them think through the steps in the plan. • Post the schedule for the day in a prominent place so that everyone can refer to it throughout the day (see Appendix 3 for sample schedules)
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give kids leeway in designing their own workspace. You could call it a "home office," and talk about what office supplies are needed. When the space is organized, take a picture of it, and take 5-10 minutes at the end of the "school day" to make sure the space is tidy and ready for the next day.
Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When kids are making plans for the day, have them estimate how long they think work tasks will take. • As with Planning/Prioritizing, time management is facilitated by following a daily schedule, so post the schedule in a prominent place for easy reference. • Ask kids to think about how they want to use their down time. Parents should encourage their children to engage in a variety of leisure activities --movement, outdoors, educational games, computer games, reading for pleasure, television viewing, social engagement (e.g., through Face Time or online games that include communication options). •
Goal-Directed Persistence and Metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have kids set daily goals and have them reflect at the end of the day how the day went. See the "Exit Ticket" example below. • Help kids use self-monitoring strategies to encourage self-awareness and to improve executive skills in general (see resources below).