

## Executive Function And Children

By Judith S. Bloch

Executive function is an important skill we all need in order to deal with the basics of daily living. For children, this means anticipating and coping with morning readiness tasks, such as dressing, preparing for school and meeting the bus on time. Unfortunately, everyday routines for some children are compromised by their forgetfulness and distractibility. They lose or misplace materials and forget their mother's or teacher's instructions. As a result, chores and class assignments may be late or not get done and grades may be poor. Yet, this very same child has a great memory for computer games and other unimportant trivia. Since this child seems to have the ability to do better, it's easy to mistakenly conclude that he's just lazy, irresponsible or disrespectful, and his behavior reflects a lack of effort or motivation.

So, what is a parent to do with a school-aged child who seems smart enough but doesn't remember or complete age-appropriate tasks without constant reminders?

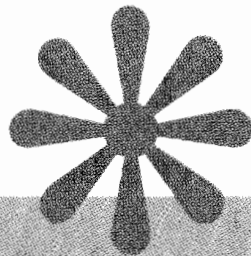
**How can we help the child regulate his behavior and ignore distractions?**



While it isn't a simple matter to teach a child how to plan, organize, remember and complete tasks in a timely way, some improvements are possible. It takes a knowledgeable, patient, some say saintly parent to set priorities, establish effective routines for the morning hours and for after-school homework, and reward and reinforce appropriate behavior. For older children, reminder lists can be useful as well as self-

monitoring and self-evaluation habits. Most parents will benefit from professional consult, especially if they think their child's behavior isn't simply part of an age or stage but instead a sign of ADHD. Counseling may also help adults remain more encouraging rather than critical; and as a result continue to help their child become more independent and reliable.

— **Bloch**



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Understanding and planning are important because these patterns contribute to parent-child conflict and poor school performance. While a child like this may indeed be bright, he may also be affected by a condition called ADHD (Attention-Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder) and problems with executive function. If he does have this problem (more boys than girls have this diagnosis), it's difficult for him to focus and pay attention. He's easily distracted, impulsive and may or may not be hyperactive. Often these difficulties are due to an impaired ability to behave appropriately and not necessarily a lack of knowledge or an understanding of expectations.

*Judith S. Bloch is founder/CEO of Variety Child Learning Center in Syosset.*