

# Thinking Skills for Learning and Life: Executive Functioning

## What is Executive Functioning?

These are thinking skills that help people to keep track of many different pieces of information at the same time. It's like an air traffic control system that has to keep track of incoming and outgoing planes.

Every day, people use executive functioning skills to:

- ✓ *pay attention and ignore distractions*
- ✓ *remember details*
- ✓ *make sense of and reflect on information*
- ✓ *organize and plan*
- ✓ *manage time*



## How Do Teens Use These Thinking Skills at School?

In junior high and high school, students use these skills to:

- ✓ *pay attention to and remember important information*
- ✓ *ask for help or to have something explained*
- ✓ *use past experiences to help understand classroom lectures and discussions*
- ✓ *share thoughts in an organized way (through talking or writing)*
- ✓ *think about and correct work*
- ✓ *reflect on and evaluate their own work or behaviour*
- ✓ *make plans and decisions*
- ✓ *do more than one task at a time*
- ✓ *work well in groups*
- ✓ *plan how to use time well and meet deadlines*
- ✓ *organize time, objects, and actions to do classroom tasks, homework, and studying*

## Self Talk to Build Better Thinking Skills

### Self-Talk or Thoughts...

"talking to yourself in your head without saying the words out loud"

- ✓ *We have many thoughts and often don't even know we're having them.*
- ✓ *Other people may have different thoughts about a topic or something that happened.*
- ✓ *Our thoughts can affect how we feel.*
- ✓ *Our thoughts can also help us focus on a task or motivate us to keep going.*

## How Can Teens Use Self Talk to Build Better Thinking Skills?

- Use positive self-talk during the day:
  - ✓ *I can get through this!*
  - ✓ *If I get started now, I'll feel less stressed later.*
  - ✓ *I'm getting a lot done on this paper.*
  - ✓ *What's the first thing I have to do tonight?*
- Use steps or lists when planning. For example, *To write a paper I need to:*
  - ✓ *make an outline,*
  - ✓ *write the paragraphs,*
  - ✓ *proof read my work.*
- Set goals to finish tasks.
  - ✓ *I need to make a list of what needs to be done.*
  - ✓ *I need to set dates for each task (e.g. To have my paper finished by Friday; an outline must be ready by Monday; paragraphs written by Wednesday; and proof-reading finished on Thursday.)*
- Evaluate results
  - ✓ *Was my homework done on time? Why or why not?*
- Pay attention and listen
  - ✓ *It's important for me to listen.*
  - ✓ *What distracts me when I try to focus?*
  - ✓ *What can I do to avoid these distractions?*
  - ✓ *Did I listen, understand and remember what the teacher talked about?*
  - ✓ *Did I ask the teacher for help when I didn't understand?*
- Get organized
  - ✓ *I need to remember to put due dates and special days in my calendar. Then, I have to look at my calendar every day to plan my time.*
  - ✓ *I keep losing my homework. How can I organize my binder, locker, and room so I can find things easily?*
  - ✓ *It's hard to remember everything I need to do. I need to write a to-do list of my homework, chores, and sports.*
  - ✓ *I need to make a list of the information and equipment I'll need to do the task.*
  - ✓ *I'm ready. Now I need to get started.*

## How can parents help their teens to learn these skills?

You help your teen learn about his or her thinking skills when you:

- ✓ **Explain self- talk and why it's important.**
- ✓ **Talk with your teen about how to make these skills become habits.**
- ✓ **Talk about how you think and remember to do things.**
- ✓ **Show your teen what you use to help yourself get organized.**
- ✓ **Know when to ask for help, If you have questions or concerns about your teen's use of executive functioning, contact Health Link **811****