

**Executive Functions – Helping clients focus**  
**Presented by Cindy Edwards – MCDA Careers Conference 4/29/2016**  
**Handout for Round Table Discussion**

Executive Function and Definition	How it may present	Coaching Questions	Strategies for the Client
1. <b>Activation:</b> <i>organizing tasks and materials, estimating time, prioritizing tasks, and getting started on work tasks (initiation)</i>	Difficulty with excessive procrastination. Put off getting started on a task, even a task they recognized as important, until the very last minute. Cannot get started until the point where they perceive the task as an acute emergency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is present when you've started something successfully?</li> <li>• Let's work from the end to the beginning, what do you experience when you finish a task or project?</li> </ul>	Signs, White Boards, Buddy System, Alarm applications, Calendaring, Organizing systems, Backwards planning, Thinking Maps, Diet, Exercise
2. <b>Focus:</b> <i>focusing, sustaining focus, and shifting focus to tasks.</i>	Some describe their difficulty in sustaining focus as similar to trying to listen to the car radio when you drive too far away from the station and the signal begins fading in and out: you get some of it and lose some of it. Distracted easily not only by things that are going on around them, but also by thoughts in their own minds. In addition, focus on reading poses difficulties for many. Words are generally understood as they are read, but often have to be read over and over again in order for the meaning to be fully grasped and remembered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some things that distract you?</li> <li>• What occurs when you lose focus?</li> <li>• What are some things that motivate you?</li> <li>• What tasks are the most difficult for you?</li> <li>• What tasks are the easiest for you?</li> <li>• What tasks are most interesting to you?</li> </ul>	Pause strategies to reframe, Understanding triggers and managing them, Rewards systems that motivate, Time blocking, Limit task switching activities like checking email twice a day only, Music - timed play lists, Timers, Audio books, Voice to text, Diet, Exercise, Attaching Task to Meaning.
3. <b>Effort:</b> <i>regulating alertness, sustaining effort, and processing speed.</i>	Many report they can perform short-term projects well, but have much more difficulty with sustained effort over longer periods of time. They also find it difficult to complete tasks on time, especially when required to do expository writing. Many also experience chronic difficulty regulating sleep and alertness. Often they stay up too late because they can't shut their head off. Once asleep, they often sleep like dead people and have a big problem getting up in the morning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happens when you task switch?</li> <li>• What types of tasks are effortless?</li> <li>• What types of task do you find yourself dreading?</li> <li>• What resources do you have to help you stay engaged along the way?</li> <li>• What emotions do you experience when you complete tasks on time?</li> </ul>	Thinking Maps to help break work up in small tasks, Identify ways to "finish strong", Diet, Exercise, Journaling, Voice to text. Fidget to focus, Diet, Exercise

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<p>4. <b>Emotion:</b> <i>managing frustration and modulating emotions (regulating emotions).</i></p>	<p>Many describe chronic difficulties managing frustration, anger, worry, disappointment, desire, and other emotions. They speak as though these emotions, when experienced, take over their thinking as a computer virus invades a computer, making it impossible for them to give attention to anything else. They find it very difficult to get the emotion into perspective, to put it to the back of their mind, and to get on with what they need to do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are appropriate ways to express your emotion?</li> <li>• What events lead to stress?</li> <li>• What steps have you taken in the past for managing your emotions in the past?</li> <li>• What resources do you available to you when you are stuck, frustrated or angry?</li> </ul>	<p>Counseling, Journaling, Pause strategies, (think before speaking) Physical Time Outs, Environment change, Exercise, Safe buddy to vent to. Social Stories adapted for adults. Diet, Exercise</p>
<p>5. <b>Memory:</b> <i>utilizing working memory and accessing recall.</i></p>	<p>Very often, people will report that they have adequate or exceptional memory for things that happened long ago, but great difficulty in being able to remember where they just put something, what someone just said to them, or what they were about to say. They may describe difficulty holding one or several things “on line” while attending to other tasks. In addition, they may often complain that they cannot pull out of memory information they have learned when they need it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of things do you tend to remember?</li> <li>• What are some ways you can clear your mind?</li> <li>• What steps can you take when you find yourself forgetting details?</li> <li>• What are some ways in which you can be more organized with information, things...?</li> </ul>	<p>Routines, Signs, Pause strategies, Organization systems, Meditation to clear the mind, Exercise, Diet, Sleep, (sticky notes may not help as they become clutter), Audio and Video recordings, Play the role of secretary ‘note taker’. Word/Color Association games, Diet, Exercise</p>
<p>6. <b>Action:</b> <i>monitoring and regulating self-action.</i></p>	<p>Many people report chronic problems in regulating their actions. They often are too impulsive in what they say or do, and in the way they think, jumping too quickly to inaccurate conclusions (missing filters). They fail to notice when other people are puzzled, or hurt or annoyed by what they have just said or done and thus fail to modify their behavior in response to specific circumstances. Often they also report chronic difficulty in regulating the pace of their actions, in slowing self and/or speeding up as needed for specific tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some actions that others do to you that you don’t like?</li> <li>• What are some ways that you can slow yourself down?</li> <li>• What are some places that are safe for you?</li> <li>• Who are some people that can support you?</li> <li>• What methods do you use to track time while performing activities?</li> </ul>	<p>Routines, Pause strategies, using a Physical timer, Listen first, Buddy system (safe person to provide feedback in the moment), Fidget to focus, Time blocking, Timed play lists, Thinking Maps, Diet, Exercise</p>

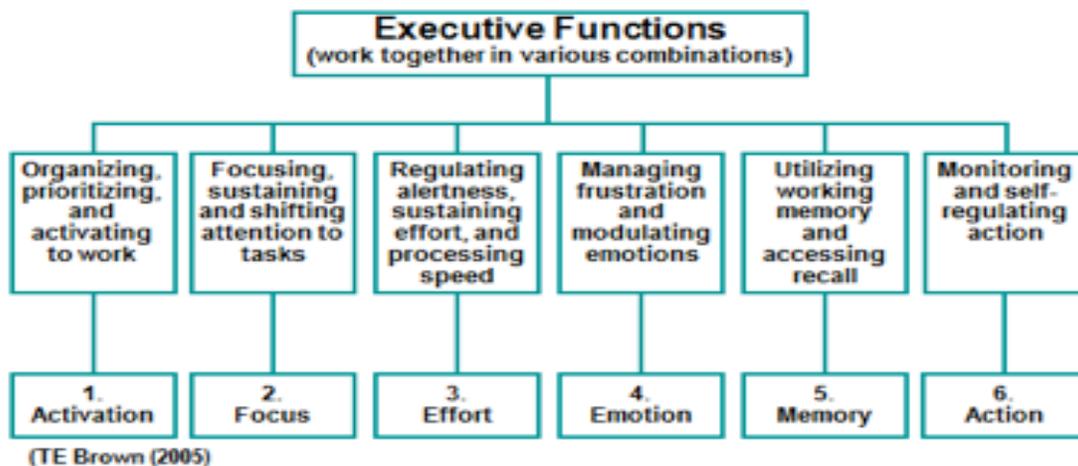
## Understanding Executive Functions – Helping clients focus.

### Executive Functions – Defined

- Executive functions operate out of our pre-frontal cortex. Think of executive function as what the chief executive officer of a company must do — analyze, organize, decide, and execute. Very similarly, the six steps of executive function are: **Analyze a task, plan how to address the task, organize the steps needed to carry out the task, develop timelines for completing the task, adjust or shift the steps as needed to complete the task, complete the task in a timely way.**

### Dr. Brown Model of Executive Functions

<http://www.drthomasebrown.com/add-adhd-model/>



### Tools and Resources

*Thinking Maps Templates:*

<http://cedar-wmu.edenpr.org/rrice/files/2012/03/Thinking-Map-Templates.pdf>

*30 Best Applications for ADD/ADHD Minds*

<http://www.additudemag.com/adhd/article/11135.html>

*More on Executive Function Disorders*

<http://www.additudemag.com/adhd/article/7051.html>

*Eat that Frog*

[http://www.briantracy.com/time\\_management/](http://www.briantracy.com/time_management/)

*Focus at Will – Timed Playlists*

<http://www.focusatwill.com/sign-up-new/>

*Brain Maker, David Perlmutter*

<http://www.drperlmutter.com/>