

Developing Executive Functions
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Executive functions are a set of mental processes that help us connect past experiences with present day actions. They enable us to carry out our daily lives. People with executive function weaknesses have difficulty planning, paying attention to and remembering details, organizing, strategizing, and managing time and space. They show weakness with **working memory**, which is information we hold temporarily in our brains helping us reason and guiding our daily decision-making and choices. Neurodiverse individuals, including people with brain injuries often are challenged by executive functions. Here are some ways to help.

1. Repeat a memorized list of words. E.g., numbers, months, names. At first use short lists (3-4 words), then gradually expand.
2. Create mnemonic devices for a list of words. E.g., rice-oranges-carrots-kale. Take the first letter of each word = r-o-c-k. Rock becomes the mnemonic device.
3. Given a list of words, try to find a common thread. E.g., radishes-tomatoes-cranberries. The common thread is red.
4. Name members of a category for one minute. Make it more specific. E.g., Name animals that begin with 'm'.
5. Play direction following games—short 1-2 steps at first, then gradually expand.
6. Describe a person, place or thing and have a partner guess who, what or where it is.
7. Present synonyms and antonyms for given words.
8. Describe and discuss similarities and differences between two items, people, or places
9. Complete a pair of words. E.g., salt and _____. Or first and _____.
10. Practice summarizing something that has been said or something read silently or aloud.
11. Discuss memories from shared pasts. Helps with autobiographical memory.
12. Talk about sequential events or activities. E.g., what steps are needed to go to the grocery store?
13. Each evening, share and discuss what was done during the day.
14. Learn a new word each day. Practice using that word in a sentence.

*Providing positive feedback
during constructive times
builds self-confidence.*

