

# Executive Function Infused with the Habits of Mind

Utilise Both to Improve Chances for Success



Some days the classroom depicts and feels like the picture above. What is the teacher to do? May we suggest working on Executive Functioning?

## What is Executive Functioning?

Executive Functioning (EF) is an umbrella term for the processes that serve as a supervisory role in thinking and behaviour. Serving as an overseer to oneself in any task or assignment is critical for success. Take for example the role of a project manager. This individual must be able to analyse, plan, develop, adjust, organise and prepare, all while maintaining the responsibility of others to accomplish the goals for the job. As educators, we have a similar role to ensure that we engage students in purposeful, goal-directed and future oriented behaviours. We are the project managers, guiding our students toward developing the EF skills they need to successfully navigate and complete tasks with success. In order for this to occur, it is important to understand the

core executive functioning skills beneath this umbrella:

### **Planning and Organising:**

Breaking down a task into smaller steps in order to reach a goal.

### **Working Memory:**

Holding onto relevant information long enough, in order to remember and use it.

### **Initiation:**

Beginning a task and generating ideas without procrastination.

### **Task Monitoring:**

Monitoring performance toward a goal.

### **Self-Monitoring:**

Observing behaviour in relation to behavioural expectations.

**Inhibition:**

Monitoring your impulsivity.

**Emotional Control:**

Understanding and reflecting on your feelings.

**Shifting Thinking and Behaviours:**

Transitioning from one activity to another.

**Habits of Mind Connection**

Imagine a long-term project that requires reading a 300-page novel, producing a poster on thematic ideas, writing a two page analysis, and presenting in front of the class. You have three weeks to complete it. What executive skills above do you feel are important? If you said all of them, you are right! Now, throw in the Habits of Mind. What habits do you believe successfully combine with EF skills to enhance this process? Here are two that come to mind:

**Managing Impulsivity:**

Think before acting, remain calm and thoughtful. As stress, anxiety and procrastination play a role in many things we do in life, it is imperative to place yourself in a positive state of mind and focus, while eliminating negative actions that deplete thinking.

**Persisting:**

Persevere through the task, remain focused and don't give up. Pushing through distractions and obstacles is key here. It is easy to set a schedule and say you are going to follow it, but actually going through with those actions is another piece.

**Classroom Strategies**

It is important to bring EF skills and Habits of Mind together in order for students to grasp the supervisory role of their thinking and behaviours in connection to the mindfulness of habits that reinforce productive actions they should be putting into practice. So, try these two simple strategies in your classroom:

**4-Corner Focus Groups**

Within the first five minutes of class students will select a corner of the room that best fits their needs for supervising their thinking and behaviours in reference to a writing assignment. One corner will focus on questions they have about the assignment, another corner for getting organised for the writing assignment, another corner for sharing ideas and suggestions with peers, and another corner for students who are confused with what needs to be completed. In addition, students will be able to engage in these Habits of Mind: thinking interdependently, questioning and problem posing and thinking about thinking (metacognition).

**Three Minute Build-In**

When all students are in their seats, a build-in statement may sound like this: "Within the next three minutes, be mindful of how you are going to persist in building initiation with activities in class today, how you are going to plan and organise yourself in order to manage your impulsivity, and be metacognitive in the transitions we make from one activity to another." A simple statement like this sets the tone, builds common language, and models the connection between the habits and EF skills.

With consistency and daily practice with EF skills and Habits of Mind within the classroom, you can transform behaviours and develop the structure desired for success. 

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Daniel Vollrath, Ed.D. is a special educator and United States Professional Development Trainer for the Institute for Habits of Mind. A current educational leader within the classroom, Daniel's best practices strategies and interactions with students with a learning disability are centered around Habits of Mind. He can be contacted via email at [danvollrath44@gmail.com](mailto:danvollrath44@gmail.com).