



Meraki

Institute of Learning

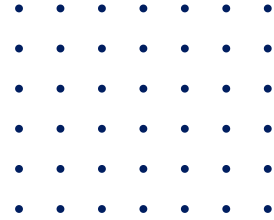
BY TANAGER



Tanager

Inspire. Empower. Heal.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING QUICK GUIDE



What is Executive Functioning?

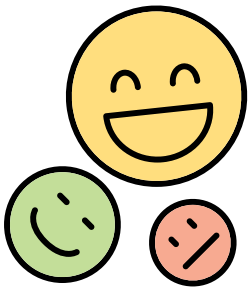


Executive functioning refers to the brain skills that help individuals manage daily life tasks such as:

Impulse control, emotional regulation, task initiation, working memory, flexible thinking, planning and prioritizing and organization.

When executive functioning skills are under stress or underdeveloped, everyday expectations can feel overwhelming.

Behavior vs. Executive Functioning

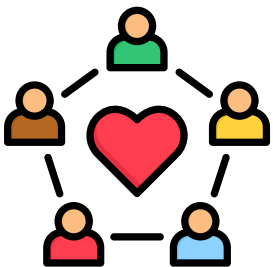


Staff may see: noncompliance, laziness, disrespect, manipulation.

What may actually be happening: task initiation difficulty, emotional flooding, working memory overload, transition anxiety.

Reframing behavior through an executive functioning lens helps reduce power struggles and increase support.

Important Reminder



Behavior often reflects executive overload, not defiance.

Youth succeed when environments provide structure, predictability, and support.

Language That Builds Skills

Supporting Youth Through Executive Functioning Challenges

Language that focuses on support and collaboration helps youth feel safe enough to build regulation and executive functioning skills.

Instead of saying:
"You know better"

Try saying:
"Let's figure out what
made this hard"

Instead of saying:
"You need to calm down"

Try saying:
"I can see your system is
overwhelmed. Let's reset
together."

Instead of saying:
"Why are you doing this?"

Try saying:
"What's feeling difficult
right now?"

Instead of saying:
"Just do it"

Try saying:
"Let's start with the first
step together."



ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS CHECKLIST

Environmental Supports

- Visual schedules posted
- Step-by-step task breakdowns available
- Predictable daily routines
- Transition warnings given
- Clear expectations for tasks

Instruction Supports

- One instruction given at a time
- Reduced verbal overload
- Staff model the first step when needed
- Youth offered support before escalation

PROGRAM DESIGN REFLECTION

Consider:

How many transitions occur in a 2-hour block?

How many directives do youth receive in 30 minutes?

Where do we expect flexibility without preparation?

Small structural adjustments can dramatically reduce behavioral escalation.