

CHAPLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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From the Principal...

K. Chavez

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

Another calendar year has come and gone, and while it may seem that future events are far off, time passes so fast that we constantly ask ourselves how we got here. I am confident that most of you feel as though your children were just learning to crawl or walk not all that long ago, and now, they are in a particular grade learning to read, work with fractions, and gaining an understanding of the natural phenomena around us all the time.

Probably like my wife and me, you start wondering if you are preparing your children well enough for what's ahead of them. You may find yourself asking how well you have helped them to develop the life skills each one of us needs to be happy and self-sufficient. Developing these skills in our children is not always easy, but it does not have to be difficult either. We just need to understand how to support growth in different areas and how to work with our children in such a fashion that we do not intensify their dependence on others when learning is difficult or when things do not go their way.

I am going to take this month's issue to introduce what are known as Executive Function Skills. I will give you examples of these skills as well as some tips and suggestions for what you can do to assist your child in developing the skills. While my pieces will be short, CES can always offer more information or resources if you would like to take it upon yourself to learn more.

K Chavez

At Chaplin School, we strive to cultivate a strong, collaborative school climate and culture that is focused on high academic development and achievement for all students. – High standards for curriculum implementation and student learning.

Important Dates

- Feb 9– PTO Someone Special Dance 6-8 PM
- February 16– No school – staff professional development
- Feb 19 & 20- No School Winter break
- March 2– G6 Pasta Dinner and Auction



Executive Function Skills = Life Skills

We all want the best for our children, but how do we help them thrive today and in the future? Our efforts must go beyond helping our children to learn facts, concepts, and processes. We need to nurture Executive Function Skills (skills defined as the power to do something effectively and readily with competence) that will allow them to meet challenges and accomplish goals through conscious effort. Executive Function predicts children's achievements as well as IQ tests because the skills go beyond what we know as the skills tap into our ability to use what we know.

Did you ever think about what you do in order to make decisions about which activities or tasks you will give attention to and which you will put on the back burner or even out of your mind? Do you remember when your younger years and figuring out how to organize not only materials but your time? Or was that difficult for you? What about managing emotions and monitoring your thoughts? How many times have you said to your child, "You know better." All of these questions point to the skills necessary to regulate our behaviors and actions.

Executive Function Skills (EFS) help us to work more efficiently and effectively due to the role they play in helping each of us to self-regulate. The skills include:

- ◆ Planning
- ◆ Organization
- ◆ Time management
- ◆ Working memory
- ◆ Metacognition
- ◆ Response inhibition
- ◆ Emotional control
- ◆ Sustained attention
- ◆ Task initiation
- ◆ Flexibility
- ◆ Goal-directed persistence

What follows is a description of what parents and guardians need to know about EFS in order to help their children develop them. The information will offer descriptions, suggestions, and examples. This is not a complete text on EFS, but I hope it is enough to help parents/guardians in understanding their child a little better and how to support their unique needs at home.

Working to Develop Executive Function Skills

When helping children to develop EFS, we must remember that developmental progression moves from external to internal. In other words, it may begin with hand-over-hand help, close supervision, and cues to work toward child independence. The level of adult intervention is dependent on the individual child and/or the environment— for example, cleaning a bedroom will most likely require more supervision than building with Legos. Of course, the ultimate goal is to take something learned in one particular situation and have the skills transfer to another.

If we are to help, we need to understand that the adult may need to change the conditions of the setting to reduce distractions. The layout of the environment is important because it invites children to behave in certain ways whether those are the behaviors we are seeking or not. For example, an open space invites running.

We also need to understand that cues should be used to prompt the child, not just direct them in what to do. A child with working memory deficits needs more reminders especially if the tasks will take extended time (please understand that the amount of time depends on the child's developmental age and stage). This child will also require more monitoring from an adult to stay on task or return to the task (reminding the child to bring their backpack to the bus stop if that is a common issue to prompting the next step after each step in a multi-step task). It may help a child if the adult provides visual cues for daily routines.

As you work to improve skills with your child, take notice of when skills are being employed, and be sure to offer feedback to reinforce the successful use of those skills. As you move toward more independence, shift from prompting to asking questions that promote awareness within the child (internal) of what needs to be done. You may need to begin with questions and choices before offering open-ended questions. Choices would be as simple as would you like to do "this" or "that" first. Would you like to try strategy A before strategy B?

Below are some examples of open-ended questions.

- ◆ What can you tell yourself to keep from...?
- ◆ Can you think of a reminder that might work for you?
- ◆ Getting upset during...can make it hard to remember what you need to do. Would you like me to work on a relaxation strategy with you?
- ◆ Tell me three things you can do if you start...and realize you can't remember exactly how to...?
- ◆ Let's make a list of distractions and then brainstorm ways to manage them better.
- ◆ It's hard to get started on...because there are so many other fun things to do. Let's come up with ways to get the work done first.
- ◆ You have three things you have to do tonight; what's your plan? (Will you do A, B, or C first?)
- ◆ Let's work together to come up with a system for organizing your...
- ◆ How long do you think it will take to finish...Let's make a list of "have-tos" and "want-tos" and decide how much time we can spend on each group.
- ◆ Good question; tell me how we could figure out the answer.

Please keep two things in mind: inadequate support from adults and overreliance on adults can delay development of EFS and prohibit independence. Stepping in to help should be thought of as a way to affect a child's capacity for using his or her own skills. Help your child to fine-tune the use of the skills and to motivate the child to use EFS independently in order for them to realize they are capable of so much.

Skills at a Glance

Planning– the power to break down a task into steps and decide what needs to be done along each step.

Organization– the power to build and maintain a system for tracking information and materials.

Time management– the capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate time, how to stay within a given time frame, and to know when the end of a period has arrived.

Working memory– the power to hold multiple thoughts in mind while performing or executing a multi-step task; the power to draw on knowledge banks and past experiences and apply that information to the task at hand.

Metacognition– the power to monitor one’s understanding of a situation and to self-evaluate oneself in the big picture.

Response inhibition– the power to think before one acts and to resist the impulse to say or do something in order to think about how the behavior will impact the situation.

Emotional control– the power to control and direct behavior in order to achieve a goal or complete a task.

Sustained attention– the power to attend to a situation or task in spite of distractions, fatigue, or boredom.

Task initiation– the power to begin a task in a timely manner (without undue procrastination)

Flexibility- The power to change plans with little to no forewarning because of an obstacle, a setback, new information, or the realization a mistake was made.

Goal-directed persistence– the power to follow through to the completion of a goal rather than giving up OR into competing interests.

***When teaching or strengthening a routine connected to the EFS, be sure to tell your child the reason for developing that strategy. It is important to link the skill to the task and behaviors needed to reach the goal of the task.

Developmental Tasks Requiring EFS

Preschool Run simple errands (“Get your shoes from the bedroom.”)
Tidy bedroom/playroom with assistance
Perform simple chores and self-help tasks with reminders (clear dishes from the table, get dressed, brush teeth)
Inhibit behaviors: don’t touch a hot stove, run from caregiver/into street, grab a toy

From another child, hit, push)

Kindergarten Run errands (two– to three–step directions)

Grade 2 Tidy bedroom/playroom

Perform simple chores and self-help tasks with reminders when needed (make bed)
(move silverware from dishwasher to drawer)

Bring materials to and from school

Complete work assignments (nightly independent reading)

Decide how to spend money that has been saved

Inhibit behaviors: follow safety rules, don't use inappropriate words, keep hands to self

Grades 3-5 Run errands (may involve time delay– remember to do when finished with a separate task or going further distances)

Tidy bedroom/playroom (includes vacuuming, dusting, etc.)

Perform chores that take 15-30 minutes to complete (clean up the table after dinner, rake the leaves)

Bring materials to and from school

Keep track of belongings

Complete multiple work assignments (nightly reading, math task...)

Plan simple projects for home or school (read problem, plan strategies to solve the problem, written evidence of application of strategy with outcome; need to fix something: diagnose issue, plan a way to fix, collect needed tools, attempt and revise)

Keep track of daily changing schedules

Save money for a desired object, plan how to earn and save money

Inhibit/self-regulate: behave when no adults are present, refrain from mean behaviors– temper tantrums– bad manners

Grades 6-8 Help with chores around the house, including daily responsibilities and occasional tasks (empty dishwasher, mowing, shoveling snow) tasks may take 60-90 minutes

Devise and use a system for organizing daily work and routines

Follow complex schedules that involve changes

Plan and carry out long-term projects; make a reasonable timeline with benchmarks; full completion of tasks may require multiple projects simultaneously

Plan independent time; estimate how long it will take to complete a task and adjust schedule to fit

Inhibit rule breaking in the absence of a visible authority

Creating Strategies

Children need to take ownership rather than adults imposing their will. In actively participating to come up with strategies to develop the EFS in troubled areas, children are using their own EFS (planning, metacognition, time management, goal-directed persistence) as they work with an adult to develop their own intervention.

1. Identify a problem situation that involves EFS.
2. Determine which EFS needs strengthening.
3. Work out the observed behaviors with the child (without emotion) that have kept the child from achievement.
4. Discuss the positive outcomes that may come from changing behaviors.
5. Ask the child if they have observed anyone successfully handle a similar situation and what that person did/does to succeed (do not compare).
6. Brainstorm strategies with cause and effect that benefits the child (If I use organization boxes for the toys, I can clean faster. Then I have extra time to...). This also tells the child when and where the strategy will be implemented.
7. Make a reasonable goal with your child and a possible reward.
8. Just before the situation described above, ask the child what the plan is.
9. Offer prompts if needed. Remember, prompts are questions not “telling statements” (what did you plan to use when it is time to clean the K’Nex)
10. Talk with the child afterwards. How did it make them feel to accomplish the task?
11. Continue as long as necessary, slowly releasing responsibility to the child.
12. If a problem arises, help the child to troubleshoot.

A Wish

I wish there was more time and space to discuss EFS, but I could never give enough information in just one monthly newsletter. Working with the children to develop the skills needed to be successful takes focus from all parties involved. Just because a child appears to have it put together one day, does not mean they do not need regular support with the skills. They and you will become overwhelmed at times; this is when you need to step back with your child and ask which skill is needed in this moment and determine how to best employ it.

Talking with your child is key. Ask them what they had to plan out and how they did with the plan. Ask if they needed to revise their plan and why? Keep your child thinking, even when playing games. Do not allow them to go “autopilot.”

Promote working memory by playing games with rules or by asking questions unrelated to a task but keeping your child working on the task without pausing. Turn off distractions while working on tasks or conversing with your child. This can double the amount of time a child spends in conversation or play. Select shows or games that promote focused attention (ex. The game Rummy Kube, logic puzzles).

Please ask us questions if you are looking for help or for resources you can read to learn more.

Honesty is being truthful in what we say and do. It is more than not lying— honesty is using integrity. It is about going out of your way to do what is right. A Martin Luther King Jr. quote was shared with the students about honesty. It goes, “How would you feel if this were printed on the front page of the newspaper? How would that help keep you honest?” The students who display the characteristics of honesty have been awarded an Honesty spirit stick. They are:

PK— Cole & Grant; G2— Kaiden, Aayden, & Avery;
G4— Matt & Adam; B;G5— Carley & Drew; G6— Megan, Jeanna, & Ani

The following students have been chosen as a Soaring Eagle during the month of January:

(G1) Ivy & Timothy (G2) Elise, Carson, Aayden, Noah, Ava, & Ethan (G3) Kalina & Ella (G4) Max & Nora (G5) Drew, Carley, & Olivia (G6) Andrew, Nora, & Jahnvi

Congratulations!