

Planning Skills in Kids



Planning is an executive function that involves formulating, evaluating, selecting, and enacting cognitive strategies. These strategies are infinite and can relate to any aspect of a child's life. Planning skills in kids are closely related to and may be interrupted by impulsivity, poor attention and focus, and poor working memory.

Some examples of how Children are required to use planning are the following tasks:

- when studying for tests
- negotiating social situations
- learning to play an instrument
- playing video and computer games
- packing for a weekend trip
- playing family board or card games
- deciding how to approach various problems and challenges.

A child who has weakness in planning could have difficulty at any stage of planning; a child may have very good ideas (formulations) but may not be able to choose the best one for a situation (selection), or a child may choose to select the right strategy but may be unable to execute the strategy successfully (enacting). This could be the child who has good ideas, but never carries any of them out; the child who works

very hard and has good intentions, but is perpetually disorganized; or the child who is stumped by problems or situations that other same-aged peers are able to navigate with ease. Older children with planning difficulties might struggle with studying, time management, and organization. Younger children with planning difficulties might struggle with learning how to play with new toys, following multi-step directions, and completing more complex tasks such as getting dressed independently. A child with planning difficulties may perform better in environments with repeated structure (such as at home) but may have difficulty in dynamic environments that offer new challenges regularly (such as at school).

The concept of planning is probably the most consistent skill described in the many theories of executive functioning, and is one of the eleven “executive skills” identified by Dawson and Guare. Given that these theories of executive functions primarily focus around the accomplishment of goal-directed behavior; the idea that planning and foresight are necessary for this type of action is a primary issue. Planning is identified by Robbins (1996) “where effective new plans of action must be formulated and appropriate sequences of responses must be selected,” by Burgess (1997) who describes the need for “cognitive estimation,” and by Welsh and Pennington (1988) who described a strategic plan of action sequences.

Neuropsychological test measures of planning include the Rey Complex Figure Test, the Animal Sorting Subtest of the NEPSY-II, and the Tower and Sorting Subtests of the Delis Kaplan Executive Functioning Scales (D-KEFS). Many other neuropsychological testing, such as the Elithorn Mazes Subtest of the WISC-IV Integrated and the Block Design Subtest of the WISC-IV, are very helpful in assessing planning skills.

The Executive Skills Questionnaire primarily focuses on activities and task completion in items that assess planning. The Behavior Rating Inventory for Executive Functions has a

Plan/Organize scale that assesses one's approach to tasks and strategies for completion of assignments and work. The Brown ADD Scales measures planning on the organizing, prioritizing, and activating to work scale. The Barkley Deficits in Executive Functions Scale assess planning primarily on the self-organization/problem solving items.

To Learn More About Planning, Please Visit the Following Websites:

[LearningWorks for Kids](#): The premier resource for executive function information, offering a detailed explanation of planning, tips for parents, and activities to improve this skill.

[PBS](#): This site offers a short but informative list of techniques parents can use to help instill successful daily planning skills in their children.

[Cozi](#): The site provides the opportunity to create a free family calendar online, with different color tags for each family member, grocery lists, and a reminder function.

[ADDitude](#): This site offers organizational and planning tips that can be used to help children at both home and school.