How to Help a Teen Improve Executive Functions



Do you know a high schooler or college student who just can't get it together? Maybe they struggle to "reach potential," want to do well, but are overwhelmed by the demands of school and extracurricular activities. Maybe this teenager is your child or a student in your classroom, one who seems immature or a step behind peers. There is a good chance that this young person needs to improve their executive functioning skills. So, how do you talk to a teen or young adult about executive functions? How can you help them improve?

Many highly intelligent and capable teens and young adults struggle with executive functioning skills—things like planning, focus, organization, time management, and flexibility. These young people may have difficulties with prioritizing schoolwork, keeping track of time, staying organized, or working to the best of their ability. Recognizing struggles with executive functions can be a powerful first step towards improving academic performance and increasing a sense of self esteem. But helping these young people learn more about executive functions can be difficult because they are at an age where they are asserting their independence and often resist labels, advice, and instruction. If you can give them some tools to use where and when they choose, however, you may have more success.

The following list provides young people with a set of resources they can explore by themselves. These readings and videos will help them understand and improve executive

functions all on their own.

Executive Functions Bibliography for Teens and College Students

Welcome to Your Brain: Why You Lose Your Car Keys but Never Forget How to Drive and Other Puzzles of Everyday Life by Sandra Aamodt and Sam Wang (2008)

Train Your Mind for Peak Performance: A Science-Based Approach for Achieving Your Goals Lyle Bourne & Alice Healy (2014)

Exercises for the Whole Brain Allen D. Bragdon and David Gamon (2004)

Change the Way You See Everything Through Asset-Based Thinking for Teens Kathryn Cramer & Hank Wasiak (2009)

Helping Students Remember Exercises and Strategies to Strengthen Memory Includes interactive CD Milton Dehn (2011)

Moonwalking with Einstein: The art and science of remembering everything Joshua Foer (2011)

Smart but Scattered Teens: The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential Richard Guare, Peg Dawson & Colin Guare (2012)

The Executive Functioning Workbook for Teens: Help for Unprepared, Late, and Scattered Teens (Instant Help Solutions) Sharon Hansen (2013)

The CEO of Self: An Executive Functioning Workbook Jan Johnston-Tyler (2014)

Train Your Brain For Success: A Teenager's Guide To Executive Functions Randy Kulman (2012)

School made easier: A Kid's Guide to Study Strategies and Anxiety-Busting Tools Wendy Moss & Robin Acconi (2014)

Executive Functioning Workbook Melissa Mullin & Karen Fried (2013)

Videos

Teen Brain Provides an explanation of the teenage brain and the development of certain executive functions, designed to help parents understand their children. This “insider” angle may pique a teen’s interest in understanding executive functions.

Let Me Be Your Camera – Understanding ADHD A video, created with young people in mind, that provides a detailed explanation of ADHD and the executive functions affected by it.

What is Executive Function Teens and adults alike will appreciate this video produced by Cogmed Working Memory Training, a system backed by peer-reviewed research and clinical studies, in which a practitioner explains and gives examples of executive functions.

What is Executive Function? An easy-to-understand video with great visuals that provides a brief introduction on executive functions and defines a variety of skills. Appropriate for tweens and teens.

Why Executive Functions Are So Important In this video, education expert Ann Dolin explains the importance of executive functions to teens and adults.

InBrief: Executive Function A video produced by Harvard for adults and teens that explains what executive functions are and detailed examples on how they are used.

Executive Function Skills Education expert Georgia Bozeday talks about deficits in executive functions and how to effectively use different skills and strategies. For older

teens and adults.

Executive Functioning: Definition and Strategies for Success A video that provides tips and strategies on how to help children who struggle with executive functions. For teens and adults.

11 Executive Skills This short animated video on executive functions uses the model of 11 executive functions from Peg Dawson and Richard Guare, authors of *Smart but Scattered Teens*. For kids, tweens and teens.