

Improve Task Initiation



Photo Credit: [Marie](#)

Task initiation refers to the ability to efficiently begin a task or activity and to then independently generate ideas, responses, and problem-solving strategies. Successful application of this ability allows one to initiate a task without procrastination. This skill is demonstrated when one starts directly on a task, such as doing homework or completing chores. In order to improve task initiation involves having an understanding of what is expected, the wherewithal to ask appropriate questions if there are misunderstandings, and the skills to redirect one's attention from a previous involvement.

Home and School Situations Requiring Task Initiation

- Getting started on homework or an assignment
- Taking a test
- Preparing for the school day
- Writing a paper or book report
- Completing chores around the home
- Prioritizing the importance of different tasks
- Contacting peers for homework help or to make social plans

- Starting a puzzle, Lego model, or art project

Hints and Strategies to Improve Task Initiation

1. Provide external supports for your child when (s)he starts doing homework, chores, and other activities. Then allow these supports to taper off over time. This could be coaching your child through the first few homework problems or prompting him/her to start a chore at home. Support could also be provided by helping to formulate a list of what smaller tasks each larger task entails and then to assist your child in identifying which of these tasks should be worked on first.

2. Use your child's hands-on, experimental approach to new digital technologies as an opportunity to discuss getting started on tasks. Many parents want to read the directions for a new gadget before they start using it. Digital-age children however, recognize that a good gadget teaches you how to use it as you try things out. Parents can learn from their child how toying with a gadget can be an important part of the learning process. Use this as an opportunity to let your child to teach you a new approach to getting started on tasks. Discuss how other activities, such as the following: studying for a test, learning how to do complicated mathematics, or preparing a science project, may require that one knows where and how to start rather than the "let's try it out" approach.

3. Model getting started on a project for your child. Verbalize what it is you want to do, demonstrate the process of brainstorming what you will need to do, and then organize your brainstorming ideas. When you are done with this process, be sure to make statements such as "Okay, this is what I need to do to get started" and then proceed to do so immediately.

4. Provide your child with structure, such as time limits, for designated tasks. Use a visible kitchen timer or alarm clock to remind your child when to start a task, to remain aware of the time remaining, and as an alert for when it is time to cease working on the task. Promoting the awareness of time is helpful for a child who struggles to get started.

5. Encourage your child to work with peers or in small groups. This will hopefully allow your child to observe the appropriate cues of when to start a task and the value of working through a complete task.

6. Encourage your child to use self-talk to initiate tasks. If your child can use self-talk during tedious steps of a project, then (s)he will be less apt to grow bored or irritated during the process.

7. Make starting a task fun! By making finishing a task a competition or game, your child may be more motivated to accomplish it. For example, challenge your child to finish cleaning their room before a timer goes off or race to complete a household chore.

Games and Activities That Can Practice Task Initiation

“Rayman: Raving Rabbids” & “The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess” – Having your child engage in games which require following directions and learning the basics will allow him/her to learn the importance of beginning a task. Questioning your child about what needs to be done to move onto the next level, or having your child teach you the basics of the game can also be beneficial.

Make unpleasant tasks (e.g. cleaning room, doing chores) into a game or competition – Embedding a task into the format of a game or competition may provide your child with

the motivation to accomplish the undesirable task.

Use a “token economy” where your child receives tokens that can be redeemed for rewards for completing chores or homework – A token economy can be an effective means of reinforcing the child’s task initiation behaviors when there is a reward (token) incentive for starting and completing a task.

Give your child the responsibility for setting up a game or activity that they want to do (e.g. arts and crafts, sport, board game)– Ensuring that your child is given the responsibility of preparing for a desired game or activity will force your child to initiate the steps. The reward for setting up the game is that your child is now able to play it.

Play games which use a timer (e.g. “Boggle,” “Taboo”) – The use of a timer will prepare your child for situations where timing and structure are important and allows him/her to practice working within a time limit.

Websites and Articles on Task Initiation

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

CollegeBoard: A compilation of tips on how to build and maintain children’s positive study habits.

[Family Education](#): Author provides descriptions of the different types of procrastination that children can use and tips for parents dealing with each of these types of procrastinators.

[PBS](#): An interactive site that allows children to learn techniques to assess and improve their time management skills.

Books on Task Initiation

[Executive Functioning Skills Printables Workbook: For Students Learning Life Skills](#) S.B. Linton (Pg.25)“For teens and youth with special needs. These are Executive Functioning Skills Printables Worksheets for Students with Autism, Similar Special Needs, ADHD, LD and Executive Functioning Needs.”- Amazon

[Executive Functioning Workbook for Kids: 40 Fun Activities to Build Memory, Flexible Thinking, and Self-Control Skills at Home, in School, and Beyond](#) by Sharon Grand, PhD, BCN.(Ch. 4)“Help kids grow their executive functioning skills with activities for ages 6 to 9!”- Amazon

[Smart but Scattered: The Revolutionary “Executive Skills” Approach to Helping Kids Reach Their Potential](#) by Peg Dawson, EdD, and Richard Guare, PhD (Ch. 15)“Small changes can add up to big improvements–this empowering book shows how.”- Amazon

[The Conscious Parent’s Guide To Executive Functioning Disorder](#) by Rebecca Branstetter, PhD (Ch. 4)“With the strategies and advice in this guide, you and your child will build sustainable bonds, develop positive behaviors, and improve executive functioning skills for life.” – Amazon

[The Everything Parent’s Guide to Children with Executive Functioning Disorder: Strategies to help your child achieve the time-management skills, ... needed to succeed in school and life](#) by Rebecca Bransetter, PhD.(Ch. 5)“The vital skills children need to achieve their full potential!” – Amazon