

Introduction

Executive function skills have long been recognized as being critical for adults in the workplace, in higher education, and for overall success in achieving life goals. Professionals now recognize that these skills follow a developmental continuum throughout childhood and adolescence. We have come to understand the benefit of addressing the skills related to goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation in treatment and education programs (Singer & Bashir, 1999).

While these skills emerge in childhood, they develop during the preadolescent and adolescent years, and the demand for these developing skills is evident in the academic setting. It is at this age, from about 11 to 16 years old, that cognition has developed adequately to allow children to exercise the metacognitive skills required for implementing executive functions.

Executive functions encompass a large set of skills, and it is difficult to know where to begin when addressing them in a treatment program. These are dynamic skills that evolve over time, and the wide range of skills within the skill set merge with one another as they develop. *Executive Functions Training Adolescent* addresses the primary skills of Self-Talk, Self-Monitoring, Planning, and Setting Goals and Self-Evaluating. These skills provide a framework for learning the secondary skills of Attention Awareness, Listening Awareness, Organization, and Initiation.

Executive Functions Training Adolescent is a step-by-step, explicit and comprehensive approach to teaching executive functions. It employs strategy-based instruction combined with direct instruction techniques — an approach that is effective in cognitive treatment (Sohlberg, Ehlhardt, & Kennedy, 2005). The explicit nature of addressing the target skill is well-suited for students with language-learning deficits or brain injuries, but it could be appropriate for other students who are experiencing difficulty in the academic and social realms of their lives. And, even though *Executive Functions Training Adolescent* is intended for the preadolescent and adolescent populations, it can easily be adapted for adults.

In its entirety, *Executive Functions Training Adolescent* should be considered a long-term plan; however, the units are arranged in a progression of skill acquisition which will allow you to effectively write short-term goals. Multiple exercises at increasing levels of independence or complexity are provided, allowing ample opportunity for the student to practice and review the skills. The student should solidify his use of the skill in each unit before he advances to the next unit.

Metacognition is an important aspect of executive functions. The discrete skill addressed in each unit should be the subject of discussion before, during, and after the student completes the exercises. It is critical that the student can discuss the skill at-hand and participate in determining whether he has acquired that skill at the end of each unit. Your student will have explicit knowledge of the skills he possesses as he progresses toward self-reliance for academic, social, and workplace success.

Lynn

References

- Singer, B.D., & Bashir, A. (1999). What are executive functions and self-regulation and what do they have to do with language learning disorders? *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 30*, 165-273.
- Sohlberg, M.M., Ehlhardt, L., & Kennedy, M. (2005). Instructional techniques in cognitive rehabilitation: A preliminary report. *Seminars in Speech and Language, 26*, 268-279.