

## Preface

Familiarity with executive functions has grown significantly in the past decade. And while it may not be a common household idea yet, the term *executive functions* (EFs) is certainly no longer relegated to researchers only. Bolstered by hundreds of scientific studies and subsequent publications in the past decade, public awareness for executive dysfunction has become more widespread. It would appear that EFs have made the transition from a back-burner niche area to a front-and-center driving force, propelling parents, therapists, and educators alike to better understand—and treat—deficits in executive functions.

It is for good reason that the study of EFs has captivated so many. The impact of executive dysfunction upon academic and vocational success is now well documented. Depression, anxiety, addiction, and an array of other mental health disorders are complicated by various forms of executive dysfunction. Add to that the solid evidence we have of executive dysfunction in developmental disorders, learning disabilities, and brain injuries, and we face a problem that clearly cannot be ignored. Furthermore, issues of culpability and executive dysfunction now dot the landscape of legal journals, giving rise to interesting, and necessary, philosophical questions.

It is not uncommon for speech–language pathologists and other professionals to field questions about students’ executive functions. Yet the number and type of questions can be daunting, particularly when the majority of training programs have yet to fully infuse coursework on EFs into their curriculum. The problem is further compounded by the fact that the study of EFs spans numerous disciplines. A cursory glance at EF publications in the past 2 years alone yields studies from psychologists, neuroscientists, educators, rehabilitation professionals, psychiatrists, speech–language pathologists, philosophers, and more.

The million-dollar question, then, is how to treat the practical, day-to-day problems of executive dysfunction. Not surprisingly, the answer is complicated. EFs are entwined with language. Individual EF components follow different developmental trajectories. There is no one cause of an EF problem, and there is no one, particular, EF profile. Evidence-based treatment is still in its infancy. Trying to find a clear answer is a bit like watching a hummingbird sampling the flower garden—fascinating, but exhausting. We need clarity and a framework to scaffold our efforts in therapy. This edition of *The Source*® *Development of Executive Functions* seeks to do just that.