



## Tips to share with parents of students with executive functioning deficits

The lack of organization and self-regulation a student with executive functioning deficits may exhibit at home may make parents feel helpless about supporting their child's education during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Students with EF deficits who are not receiving online instruction at set times during the day need to have a schedule or they may not follow through with their learning, according to Ann Dolin, a former public school teacher and founder of Educational Connections in Fairfax, Va.

"The number one thing parents want to do is create a routine," Dolin said. "With routine, life is just a little bit easier. It's like you go on autopilot."

Encourage parents to determine with their child when she is going to get up in the morning; eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner; and go to bed at night, Dolin said. Then, parents should discuss how to fit learning into that schedule. It may take some trial and error to figure out the student's best way of learning at home, but one way is to create hour-and-a-half or two-hour blocks of time in the morning and afternoon for learning, dividing the block into shorter increments, such as 25 minutes each, with 5-minute breaks in between.

"This is the hardest part for parents," she said. They have to create the schedule with their child so that the child takes ownership of it.

Parents and students may want to use a timer to help differentiate study time and break time, Dolin said. "Students with ADHD are not going to be able to sustain two hours of study unless they segment it or chunk it," she said. Keep in mind that a student may prefer to chunk learning time by task, such as, "I'll read this chapter, then I'll take a break," she said. Or a student may prefer to work as hard as she can in a set amount of time, such as 25 minutes, then take a break when the timer goes off.

Once the student has a schedule, parents and students must determine the "Ws" of "When, Where, and What," Dolin said. Share the information below.

✓ **When.** Recognize that students, just like adults, experience peaks and valleys throughout the day when it comes to attention and energy, Dolin said. Except for those students who are night owls, it may make sense for students to tackle their toughest subjects, such as writing assignments in language arts, in the morning. Then, students may complete more preferred work in the afternoon.

A student may say he wants to do all his assignments on a Tuesday, Dolin said. He may be capable of doing that, but he may not retain the information he learns for long. For a student, particularly with EF deficits, to retain the information long enough to succeed on a test at the end of the month, have him do a small amount each day of the week.

✓ **Where.** Elementary school students may not be able to sit in one seat for long to do their work, Dolin said. Parents may want to set up stations in different parts of the house for blocks, letters, and other manipulatives for younger elementary school students, and math, reading, science, and other stations for older elementary school students. Older students may not need stations, but they need a couple of quiet locations to work. "They should not work alone in their bedroom," she said. "They are going to be spending a lot of time alone, so letting them stay in their bedrooms all day long is not a good idea," she said. This is especially true of students who are extroverts and thrive on social relationships, Dolin said. Maybe they can spend the morning working on the first floor of the house, then the afternoon working in their room on the second floor.

✓ **What.** If the student doesn't have online lessons to log on to at a specific time required by her school, parents and students will have to go over all the material assigned and determine what to tackle first, Dolin said. Start by developing a to-do list that breaks down what needs to be done that week. Students can fill out a centrally located whiteboard or piece of paper. They may include the need to read to Chapter 7 of a novel by Friday. Then use that information to create a daily to-do list next to the weekly list. This might include that the student will read Chapters 4 and 5 of the novel on Monday.

Remind parents to ensure students set aside time to stay in touch with peers, Dolin said. They can create virtual study groups and use videoconferencing software to talk about a chapter of a book after they have read it. "It's providing a level of personal interaction and motivation to keep them going," she said.

Also make sure that students with EF deficits have a binder with files, or an accordion binder if students dislike punching holes and filing, to keep track of all their work in print, Dolin said. Or students can use a file storage app, such as Google Drive, on a device.

*Dolin spoke about this during an ADDitude webinar.*



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