



Strategies for Learning

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Helping students overcome hurdles

GETTING TO KNOW GRIT

by Phyllis Koppelman, M.Ed., B.C.E.T.

What is the best predictor of success in school, work and life? Did you guess "intelligence" or "academic achievement" or "accountability?" No, it's grit, defined as "sticking with things over the very long term until you master them," according to Angela Duckworth, Psychology Professor at University of Pennsylvania. And while IQ is relatively fixed, grit, or goal-directed persistence, is something anyone can learn to develop.

"Smarter students actually had less grit than their peers who scored lower on an intelligence test." This finding, based on research by Duckworth, suggests that, among the study participants — all students at an Ivy League school — people who are not as bright as their peers compensate by working harder and with more determination. And their effort pays off. The grittiest students — not the smartest ones — had the highest GPAs.

So, what exactly does it take to have grit? Interestingly, when students with grit are presented with challenging goals, they are more likely to demonstrate perseverance. They are more likely to have a "growth mind-set, or to believe that they can turn failure into success through their own efforts" (Dweck, 2006). In other words, the more students can learn to delay gratification and stay focused on the task before them, the more likely they are to achieve their goal. Educational therapists and psychologists call that self-regulation.

As parents and educators, what are some effective ways we can help our children develop grit?

- **Encourage sticking with it** - Praise your child for sticking with a difficult goal or rising to a new challenge, instead of for being smart or getting good grades.

- **Allow frustration** - Allow your child to work through frustration. Fight the urge to "scoop him up" and rescue him.

- **Develop agency** - High school students were asked to envision the benefits of completing a PSAT practice workbook, to anticipate obstacles and to develop strategies for overcoming them. Students who participated in this exercise completed significantly more of the workbook than did students who did not engage in the exercise. (Duckworth, et al, 2011).

- **Welcome challenge** - Martial arts, sports, music, drama and the arts, can help students develop self-discipline and persistence by challenging themselves and developing grit and resilience through striving, failure and improvement. Participation in such programs has been linked to reduced dropout and substance abuse rates and higher levels of college enrollment (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005).

From an SFL Parent . . .

"Raising test scores is great, but the real payoff is in the self-knowledge and self-confidence my son has gained. That knowledge and confidence will serve him his whole life. Thank you SFL!!"

-Yelp Review Excerpt

As we enter the holiday hustle and bustle, we also reach the academic year's mid-way point. For some, progress reports may be as welcome as a lump of coal. If you know a student who has lost motivation, struggles with academic output, can't seem to get organized, or is frustrated with school and homework, don't wait to seek help. At SFL, we teach students how to learn in a manner that works for them and inspires confidence.



WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION?

by Maria Howard, M.A., M.S.T.

Executive Function(EF)is the umbrella term for the skills which help all of us organize and regulate our behavior over time. Our ability to set goals, initiate the tasks needed to carry out goals, and then see them to completion requires several EF skills, including Sustained Attention, Task Initiation and Goal-Directed Persistence (see opposite Executive Skills list).

EF develops as the brain matures, with contributions from both the environment and genetics. Until children are old enough to complete a task independently, parents and other adults support them in various ways until they reach mid-to-late adolescence. This might mean reminding a student he has a spelling test the next day or ensuring your daughter prioritizes working on a research paper over plans with friends. For some, however, including many students with AD/HD, EF skills are impaired enough to need additional support, direct instruction and practice.

Educational Therapists understand that the assessment of EF skills is not as straightforward as assessments for academic skills such as spelling or reading fluency. Formal assessments can only measure situationally-specific behaviors, like how many words per minute a student can read - but by nature EF is demonstrated (or not) in a student's ability to manage open-ended, more complex, long-term, or spur-of-the-moment tasks. If Executive Function is how a student independently handles challenges without a clear roadmap, assessment for EF deficiencies must have a much wider scope and include interviews of teachers and parents, student

work samples and observations, and direct interactions with the student.

Executive Skills*

Response inhibition
Emotional control
Task initiation
Organization
Flexibility
Goal-directed persistence
Working memory
Sustained attention
Planning/prioritization
Time management
Metacognition

*Source *Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents* by Dawson and Guare

Even after these initial assessments, Educational Therapists are always looking for specific behaviors which demonstrate EF strengths and weaknesses and the root causes of those behaviors. They use this information to decide what they are going to work on with students during their sessions and the best methods to achieve success.

To be the most effective, Executive Functioning goals are kept small and incremental. Work with students will often target one EF area, and, within that area, one specific behavioral goal is identified with a careful description of desired outcomes. Keeping the target small and precise allows for increased chances of success, which can then be built on over time.



HERE COMES 2015!

Goal-setting is great any day of the year, but January 1st prompts reflection and provides a "reset" moment.

This end of year, consider making family resolutions in addition to your own. Discuss them together and opt for goals and plans that challenge each family member and emphasize fun and community.

Some ideas:

- Create a family bucket list for the year
- Participate in a monthly art or building project
- Volunteer together
- Write cards and put together care packages for friends or relatives
- Institute a no electronics hour (cell, TV, and computer off in lieu of other activities or conversation)
- Schedule free time; no planned activities but real down-time for play and relaxation

Q. How is an Educational Therapist different from a tutor?

Answer

A clinician practicing educational therapy has extensive training in learning disabilities and learning differences and uses specific teaching methods to accommodate an individual's learning style. While a tutor focuses on specific subject matter, an educational therapist incorporates psycho-educational and socio-emotional goals along with academic support. To learn more, visit the Association of Educational Therapists website at www.aetonline.org.