

HMS and Executive Functioning

Haddonfield Middle School is dedicated to fostering the development of students' executive functioning skills.

What are “executive functions?”

In a general sense, executive functions (often abbreviated as EFs) are the “student skills” and “social skills” needed to navigate the world with independence. Often, our executive systems are involved in stopping ourselves from doing/saying something (called “inhibiting control”), noticing when to use valuable brain resources on stimuli (called “attention sense”), responding with the appropriate mood to a situation (called “emotional regulation”), and judging when we should increase/decrease our effort (called “monitoring”).

Evidence shows that these are mostly linked to the front of the brain, which is not fully developed until approximately 30 years of age. It's the most disrupted in adolescence, starting around 9 or 10 for girls and around 12 or 13 for boys because that's when the front of the brain is being refined.

How does HMS foster development of executive functions?

Guided by research, Haddonfield Middle School emphasizes developing the skills most likely to be in need. That means there is considerable effort put into developing the skills that are more foundational and placing less emphasis on areas that research indicates won't develop until later in adolescence.

Universal Strategies and Supports

All students receive the following strategies to help them refine their executive functioning.

- Agendas for all students
- Time during each class to record homework and to-do items
- Regular classroom lessons on good student work habits and other self-management skills
- Use of “homework boards” in 6th grade to serve as a reference
- Opt-in screening of executive function skills (available in the Parent Portal upon completion)
- Trainings for faculty on how to integrate executive functioning into their lessons

Targeted Strategies and Supports

Few students require strategies or supports beyond the universal approaches. If they require additional strategies based on teacher feedback and/or screening results, those include:

- Teacher or counselor check-ins
- Home-school communication
- Small-group interventions

Parent Resources on Executive Functioning

- **Opt-In to Executive Functioning Screening:** If you are interested in receiving information on how your student's executive functioning skills are faring, you may opt in to our screening. Once results are analyzed, your child's individualized report will be available in the Parent Portal.
- **Create Routines and Expectations:** During a pivotal developmental time like adolescence, creating routines makes for fewer arguments at home and less stress for families and students alike. Set expectations that you will review your child's agenda with them. You can also take a "trust, but verify" approach by reviewing their materials. If you find it helpful, sign off on each day's entries and communicate with your child's teacher if you find that there are subjects where assignments are regularly missing, as they might be able to check and sign off on the accuracy of the agenda entries.

While it seems counterintuitive, placing time limits can also help. Especially in adolescence, things tend to get put off or procrastinated when they seem too big to handle or if they feel endless. By having set times when work is happening at home, there's less pressure to rush and get things done for fear of missing out.

- **Address Emotions:** While it's easy to think of executive functioning as simply planning and problem solving, the missing piece before all of that is being in the right headspace. Even adults don't do their best thinking when stressed or overwhelmed. That's especially true when many of the brain circuits aren't finished developing. Using calming techniques can be very helpful.

Adopt the practice of "name it to tame it" by asking two simple questions: "How much energy do you have?" and "How pleasant does it feel?" With those two questions, most moods can be named, allowing your child to begin regulating.

- **Books and More:** There are many resources out there to help with developing executive functioning skills. A few of the resources below have commonly been recommended:
 - [The Organized Child](#)
 - [Smart but Scattered](#)
 - [Smart but Scattered TEENS](#)
 - [Screen-Smart Parenting](#)
 - [Raising a Secure Child](#)
- **Reach Out:** If after reading all of this, you still need assistance, reach out to your child's counselor or school psychologist. They have worked with thousands of students over the

years and can help you with problem solving some home strategies. Your child's counselor or school psychologist can also help with emotional regulation concerns that may be interfering or provide recommendations for private providers, as well.