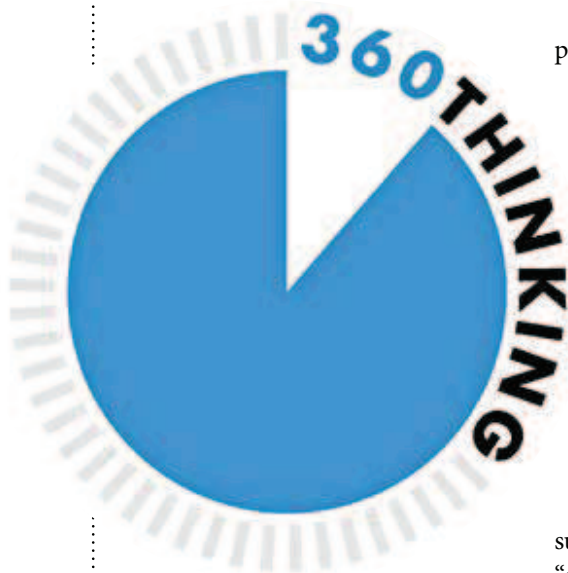


360 Thinking: An Executive Function Model and Program

Thanks to the 360 Thinking executive function model and program, a growing number of children with executive function challenges are enjoying the autonomy, independence, and self-confidence that comes from successfully completing projects and assignments on their own. The model is the brainchild of Kristen Jacobsen, MS, CCC-SLP, and Sarah Ward, MS, CCC-SLP, who are co-directors of Cognitive Connections Executive Function Practice, LLP, in Concord, Massachusetts.



This innovative approach weaves together an array of functional hands-on tools and strategies to strengthen core features of executive control, as described by Dr. Russell Barkley in his theory of executive functioning. Ward and Jacobsen pay particular attention to helping children to “see the future, say the

future, and feel the future.” To accomplish this, they start by showing students how to begin a project or assignment by planning a visual image of the final product.

Start with the question: What will it look like?

Before students can initiate assignments, they use multisensory strategies aimed to elicit the self-imagery and self-speech that support planning. Students slip on their “future glasses” to help them see, say, and feel a future project or assignment successfully completed.

Children learn to sketch the future picture of a project when beginning to plan. Motivation to accomplish the end result can be established when students reflect on the emotional state they anticipate experiencing once their future picture is accomplished.

Children then “work their plan.” They draw from their visualized image to help them “work backwards” and master two other planning stages necessary for completing a project successfully: rehearsing the steps to “do” and organizing the materials to “get ready.”

Three steps to success: “Get ready, do, done”

The planning process is taught as a sequential process with visual tools that fade to mental imagery. Students learn the executive function process of “planning backwards” to “move forwards” for completing tasks.

Using self-talk, the children ask themselves, “What three questions do I ask myself to be a planner?”

1. *What will it look like when I am done?*
2. *What steps do I need to take to match my done image?*
3. *What materials will I need?*

Once the students anticipate what it will look like and feel like to be “done,” they engage in a mental dress rehearsal and practice the steps to “do” the task, and determine what they will need to “get ready.” To help them remember to “plan backwards,” three different colored mats are provided: red for “done,” green for “do,” and yellow for “get ready.” The mats are also laminated, so the children can be “future sketchers” and sketch images of the tasks to be accomplished as part of that particular step.

Once students have sketched out their plan, they are ready to move forward and carry out their plan. The yellow “get ready” mat reminds them to slow down and gather needed materials. Rather than having materials provided beforehand, children practice learning to locate them on their own. The green “do” mat shows how the student decided to divide the project up into specific steps (planning, organizing, and prioritizing).

Step 2 also provides strategies for estimating and keeping track of time (temporal awareness), a skill often lacking in those with executive function challenges. To help master this skill, children are provided with a clock with a glass face. Using a dry erase marker, they first practice sketching directly on the clock their

estimated time for completing their project. Next, they sketch a starting time, a checkpoint, and an ending time.

Children are also provided with a timer so they can practice keeping track of their progress during the checkpoints (self-monitoring). Once they reach their checkpoint, they are then coached on how to identify and navigate around “time robbers.” A list of examples can be provided, which are grouped into specific categories. Examples include: my body (“thirsty,” “hungry,” “sleepy,” “antsy”), my organizer (“I can’t find my assignments and papers,” “I don’t have a plan for how to do this”), my scope (“I don’t know how to start,” “I’m trying to make this perfect”), and my focus (“I’m distracted by the computer or other electronic,” “I’m socializing”).

Children started with step 3 (done) and return back to step 3 after successfully completing their task. They now learn how to “get done” and close out a task by putting materials away, cleaning up their workspace, and placing their completed project or assignment in its appropriate folder. They also review their plan from start to finish to figure out what worked, what didn’t work, and what if any changes to make when tackling a similar project in the future.

This process can be taught to students by teachers, special educators, therapists, and parents who are trained in using the 360 Thinking model. Visit <http://efpractice.com> to learn more about the model, as well as its many other innovative strategies and tools and how they directly target core areas of executive control. Readers are also referred to two

ADDITIONAL READING

Barkley, Russell A. *Executive Functions: What They Are, How They Work, and Why They Evolved*. New York: Guilford, 2012.

Ward, Sarah, and Kristen Jacobsen. “Staying a Beat Ahead,” in *Attention*, August 2014, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 12-15.

Ward, Sarah and Kristen Jacobsen. “A Clinical Model for Developing Executive Function Skills,” in *Perspectives on Language Learning and Education*. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, March 2014, Vol. 21, 72-84. <http://sig1perspectives.pubs.asha.org/article.aspx?articleid=1882672&resultClick=3>

recent articles written by Ward and Jacobsen, both referenced below. 

A clinical and consulting psychologist, **Mark Katz, PhD**, is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and

neuropsychological center in San Diego. He is a contributing editor to *Attention* magazine and a member of its editorial advisory board, a former member of CHADD’s professional advisory board, and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award. His book, *Children Who Fail at School But Succeed at Life* (Norton) is due out in April 2016.



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