

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION CLASSROOM SUPPORTS

An Executive Function Express™ Quick Reference for School Teams

Body-First • Participation-Focused • Neurodiversity-Affirming



Before We Ask the Train to Move...

When a student struggles with initiation, attention, organization, transitions, working memory, flexibility, or task completion, it can be tempting to immediately teach another strategy or increase prompting. This often leads to more frustration.

The Executive Function Express™ model reminds us that executive function doesn't operate in isolation.

The child is the train, but the train cannot move effectively without supportive track conditions.

Regulation, interoception, relationships, sensory and environmental conditions, task demands, fatigue, predictability, and available supports can all influence whether executive function skills are accessible in a particular moment.

Before asking:

“What executive function skill does this student need to learn right now?”

Also ask:

“What conditions and supports might help this student participate more successfully?”

♥ — Don't Forget the Tracks — ♥

Sometimes the train has the skill — but the conditions make it harder to access.

Child = Train



The student brings their strengths, needs, and experiences.

Environment & Regulation = Tracks

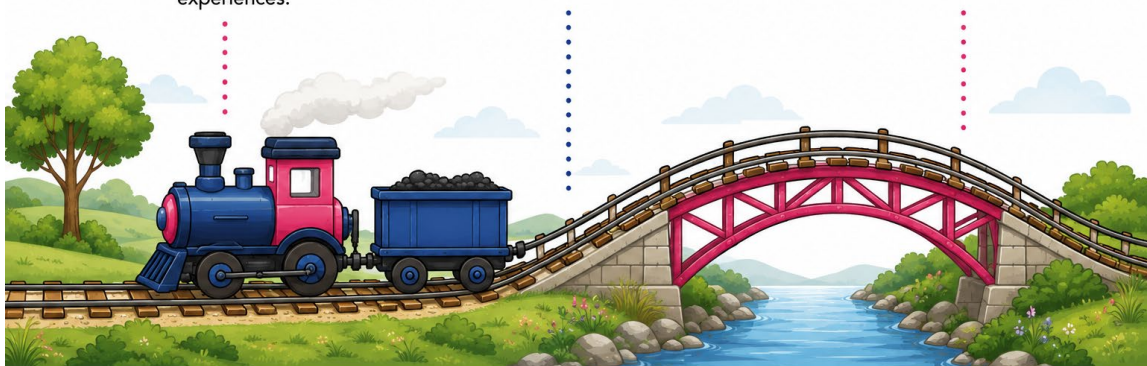


The conditions influence access to executive function skills in each moment.

Supports = Bridges



Bridges help the train move forward more successfully.



When the tracks are strong and the bridges are in place, the train can reach its destination.

Supports That Help the Train Move

Accommodations act as bridges and scaffolds along the route. They support the student when parts of the journey are difficult, creating access and supporting participation while executive function skills are being learned, practiced, and strengthened. In the Executive Function Express Program, we use train-themed terminology to make the invisible concepts of EF into a visible, visual support, a known strengths-based teaching technique.

ENGINE START | Task Initiation

- ☐ Provide a clear first step
- ☐ Show what “started” looks like
- ☐ Break large assignments into smaller entry points
- ☐ Reduce unnecessary choices at task initiation
- ☐ Use brief visual or verbal cues rather than repeated prompting

MAP | Planning

- ☐ Make the task sequence visible
- ☐ Preview what will happen next
- ☐ Break complex tasks into manageable stages
- ☐ Provide models or examples of completed work
- ☐ Help identify materials before beginning

SCHEDULE BOARD | Time

- ☐ Make time visible with timers, clocks, or visual schedules
- ☐ Provide advance notice before transitions
- ☐ Build transition time into routines
- ☐ Does the child understand what 5 minutes means?
- ☐ Use cues at the desk, locker, or actual area where the child needs to remember the step.

TICKET | Working Memory

- ☐ Pair verbal directions with visual information
- ☐ Keep important information visible during the task
- ☐ Break multi-step directions into manageable parts
- ☐ Provide checklists for recurring routines
- ☐ Allow students to refer back to directions rather than relying on recall

CARGO | Organization

- ☐ Provide predictable locations for materials
- ☐ Use visual organization systems
- ☐ Keep frequently used materials accessible
- ☐ Reduce unnecessary materials in the workspace
- ☐ Build organization into classroom routines

Don't Forget the Tracks

Sometimes the train has the skill, but the conditions make it harder to access. A student may know what to do, but regulation, environment, task demands, or other conditions can affect whether they can use that skill in the moment.

TRACK CONDITIONS | Environment & Regulation

- ☐ Consider sensory demands within the environment
- ☐ Provide movement opportunities throughout the day
- ☐ Reduce unnecessary visual or auditory distractions
- ☐ Consider seating and workspace needs
- ☐ Adjust demands when signs of overload appear
- ☐ Build predictability into classroom routines

SHARED TRACKS | Relationships & Support

- ☐ Use calm, clear communication
- ☐ Provide support before frustration escalates
- ☐ Maintain predictable adult responses
- ☐ Check understanding rather than assuming noncompliance
- ☐ Notice which relationships and supports increase participation

STATION | Interoception

- ☐ Build brief body check-ins into familiar classroom routines
- ☐ Use simple visuals to help make body signals easier to notice
- ☐ Model noticing body signals without expecting the student to identify or label their own
- ☐ Make regulation supports available proactively
- ☐ Allow time to recognize and communicate changing needs

COUPLING | Flexibility

- ☐ Preview unexpected changes when possible
- ☐ Provide more than one acceptable way to complete a task
- ☐ Use visual supports when plans change
- ☐ Recognize that uncertainty may require additional effort/cause fatigue
- ☐ Support problem-solving rather than expecting immediate flexibility

Behavior is often the part we can see, but it does not tell us the whole story. Before interpreting a child's behavior as refusal, avoidance, or noncompliance, consider their regulation, body signals, sensory needs, environment, relationships, and the demands of the task. Understanding what may be influencing participation helps us choose supports that address the child's needs while continuing to teach the skills needed for greater independence. All forms of communication deserve to be respected, and because behavior can be a form of communication, it is important to remain curious about what the child may be communicating through their actions.

Before Adding Another Strategy...

- What is making this part of the journey hard?
- Does the student know what's expected?
- Have we added visuals or models?
- What changes in the environment can we make?
- Have we used the child's strengths and interests to support their learning?

Sometimes supporting executive function isn't about changing the train. It's about creating better conditions for the train to move.

READY TO LOOK BEYOND INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTS?

Classroom strategies are only one part of executive function support. The **Executive Function MTSS™ Toolkit** helps school teams think systematically across Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 from universal environmental supports to increasingly individualized intervention.

[**Explore the Executive Function MTSS™ Toolkit →**](#)