### What are Executive Function Skills?

Students with Attention Disorders or who are on the Autism Spectrum often lack Executive Function Skills. These skills help us plan, organize, make decisions, shift between situations or thoughts, control our emotions and impulsivity, and learn from past mistakes. That means a student without good executive function skills struggles with tasks that involve analyzing, planning and organizing, among others. Following are some definitions associated with executive function:

**Response Inhibition**  The capacity to think before you act – the ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it.

**Working Memory**  The ability to hold information in memory while carrying out complex tasks. It combines the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the current situation or to project into the future.

**Emotional Control**  The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.

**Flexibility**  The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information or mistakes. It relates to being able to adapt to changing conditions.

**Sustained Attention**  The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.

**Task Initiation**  The ability to begin projects without procrastination, in a timely fashion.

**Organization**  The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials.

**Time Management**  The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important.

**Goal-Directed Persistence**  The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of it and not be put off or distracted by competing interests.

**Metacognition**  The ability to stand back and take a birds-eye view of oneself in a situation. It is an ability to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self-monitoring/evaluative skills (Asking yourself, “How am I doing?” or “How did I do?”).

### What does Executive Function Skill Weakness Look Like in Students?

- Forgets directions
- Forgets to bring back materials back and forth between home and school
- Runs out of steam before finishing work
- Leaves trail of belongings wherever they go
Executive Function Skills continued...

- Sloppy work
- Loses or misplaces things (books, permission slips, cell phone, lunch money, etc.)
- Messy desk/cubby areas/ backpack/room
- Acts without thinking, Interrupts others
- Overreacts to small problems
- Upset by changes in plans
- Low tolerance for frustration
- Does not see their behavior as part of the issue

3 Key Strategies for Managing Executive Function Skill Weakness
Intervene at the level of the environment:

1) Change the physical or social environment (seating arrangements, fewer kids- more adults, class helpers, fewer distractions).

2) Modify the tasks we expect the child to preform (shorter tasks, break task down into smaller steps, more breaks, visual schedule, give choices of topic, turn in date, change the order, give a start and end point).

3) Change the way adults interact with the child (role-play situations and their response, use verbal prompts, use checklists, effective praise - 4 positives for each corrective feedback).

Teach Executive Skills
Example 1) Clean room: Parents act as an external organizational system to help the child perform the following functions and gradually turns control over to the child as he/she demonstrates readiness:

1) Develop a plan, an organizational scheme, and a specific set of directions (clean clothes are folded in drawer, toys in toy box, shoes in closet, dirty clothes in hamper, etc.)

2) Provide the same information without being the direct agent; create a list, picture cues, audio tape, checklist to cue child.

3) Parent begins to transfer responsibility to child

4) (Parent asks “Where do you want to start in picking up your room? Toys? Clothes?”)

5) Positive re-enforcement when emerging skills are used.

6) How to know transfer is complete. (Child can ask himself, “What do I need to do? Check my list.”)

Example 2) Teaching student how to pay attention.

1) Explain that paying attention is the most important skill for doing well in school because unless what is expected is heard, it will not be understood, acted upon or remembered.

2) Talk about how the teacher can tell that a student is paying attention (eyes on teacher, raises hand if has a question or knows an answer, takes notes when something important is shared with class verbally/ written on board).

3) Talk about what appropriate behavior during class looks like: hands & feet to self, raises hand to answer questions, does not blurt out answers, waits for teacher to acknowledge them, uses an indoor voice.

4) Give the student a checklist and ask him or her randomly to self-monitor and indicate if the items on list were present or not.

5) Practice and debrief: set a goal and add a reinforcer to increase motivation to practice the skill.

Example 3) Teaching children to make homework plans.

1) Write down homework subjects/assignments.

2) Put on the top of the desk everything that needs to go home to complete the assignments.

3) Put materials in backpack, and use a checklist.

4) Note to parents: having a set time to complete homework and someone available for questions is important for supporting the success of your child.

Using Incentives to Encourage Practice

- Make incentives simple.
- Give the child something to look forward to doing when the hard task is done.
- Alternate between preferred and non-preferred activities (use simple language: First...then, e.g., first work, then play).
- Build in frequent, short breaks (depending on attention span, breaks could come every 10 minutes and last 5 minutes).
• Use specific praise to reinforce the use of executive skills (4 positives for each corrective feedback).

Sources: Peg Dawson, Ed D. “Smart, but Scattered” Training: Casper, WY 2014  www.childmind.org

How do Executive Skills Develop?
Executive function skills develop through a process called myelination. Myelin acts as insulation, increasing the speed with which nerve impulses are transmitted. The faster the impulse, the better the skill. All skills, including executive skills, improve with practice. Parents—Be Patient! The brain doesn’t become fully mature until children are in their mid-20’s.

Evaluation
No child struggles or fails on purpose. There is always a reason. Parents who suspect their child is having trouble learning should take notes on the types of errors their child makes, keep copies of their child’s work, and talk with their child’s teacher to find out how the child is doing in the classroom. Parents who want their child evaluated should make the request in writing to the local school district. See PIC Disability Brochure “Initial Evaluations,” and this article as a disability brochure available for downloading at www.wpic.org.

2015 Early Intervention and Education:
Strategies for Developing Quality Individual Goals and Outcomes, for Children ages Birth through 5 years old
Parent Session: June 8 –9, 2015 Holiday Inn, Cody WY
Monday 1:00PM to Tuesday 5:00PM

Registration Costs: ** No registration costs for parents & family members of infants and toddlers with disabilities ages birth thru 5

Monday June 8th
1:00 - 1:30 Welcome and Introductions
1:30 - 2:30 Setting the Context: Goals and Outcomes for an IEP
2:45 - 4:45 The Emotional Roller Coaster of Grief-You Don’t Have to Ride it Alone! - PIC Staff

Tuesday June 9th
8:00 - 9:30 What Families Need to Know about Early Intervention/Spec. Ed Process – Terri Dawson
9:45 - 11:30 Making it a Win-Win– How to Advocate for Your Child - Angela Lindig
11:45 - 1:00 Lunch & Keynote Angela Lindig Having High Expectations When you Don’t Know What to Expect!
1:15 - 3:30 Sensory Disorder and Your Child
3:45 - 4:45 Panel of State Resources

Providers, view full conference schedule at www.wpic.org

Kathi Gillaspy, M.Ed., works at the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center as a technical assistance specialist, working with states’ Part C and Section 619 systems to improve capacity to support effective practices and to effectively measure child outcomes. Kathi is also a TA specialist for the Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems (DaSy). She holds a Master of Education in Early Intervention and Family Support from UNC Chapel Hill.

Angela Lindig: Executive Director, Idaho Parents Unlimited (IPUL): Angela has been with IPUL since 2009, starting as parent education coordinator and working up to Executive Director. Angela and her husband of 22 years are the parents of three children, a 19 year old daughter, who has atypical Rett Syndrome, and a 15 year old daughter, who they adopted at age three from Romania, and who is diagnosed with multiple mental health disorders. Their son is 18, and is twice exceptional as a “gifted” student with a diagnosis of ADHD. Angela is the past Chair of the State Independent Living Council. Angela is currently pursuing a degree in Human Services through the University of Phoenix, where her personal experiences with children with disabilities, her strong advocacy and communication skills, and community involvement have her at the head of her class.
Growingreaders!

Brought to you by Reading Rockets, Colorín Colorado and LD OnLine

Summer Literacy Challenge!

For most parents, it’s a challenge to keep kids reading and writing all summer. Suddenly 10 weeks of summer can feel like a very long time! We’ve got a summer literacy challenge for you and your child. It’s modest enough to be manageable—pick just one thing a week to kick start your week’s literacy adventures. But it’s also challenging enough to include a wide range of literacy fun for the whole family.

- **Investigate your public library’s summer reading program.** Most libraries offer a special program or two during the summer, including puppet shows, book authors and children’s storytellers. Most are free of charge.

- **Extend your reading circle.** We often find ourselves checking out the same types of books over and over again. This week’s challenge is to bring a new type of book into the house. Consider fantasy or science fiction, historical fiction, poetry, biography, or an informational book.

- **Listen up!** Audiobooks are a great way to engage readers and can introduce students to books above their reading level. Many libraries have audiobooks available for check out, and an Internet search can turn up several sites, including Speakaboos.com, that offer free audio books for children.

- **Make your own audio book!** Most phones and computers have simple recording apps on them which are perfect for making homemade audio books! Have your child make up a story, or reread a favorite loved book. The recordings will be priceless!

- **Go wordless.** Wordless picture books are told entirely through their illustrations—they are books without words, or sometimes just a few words. Grab a few wordless books the next time you’re at the library and have fun “reading” different versions of the same story. The language and the conversation will inspire you!

- **Visit a museum, online!** You’ll be surprised by how much you can explore without leaving your house. One example is the Smithsonian Institution Kids site. It’s complete with offerings from Art to Zoo, for kids and students of all ages.

- **Pack in a whole adventure!** Find FREE themed reading adventure packs that encourage hands-on fun and learning, centered around paired fiction and nonfiction books. Visit Reading Rockets and search Adventure Pack.

- **Point, shoot, and write.** Most families have access to a digital camera, iPad or camera phone. Snap some photos and then encourage your child to write a silly caption for each photo. Not feeling that ambitious? Cut out some pictures from a magazine or the newspaper and have your child write original captions for those.

- **Mix up the media.** Your child has read every Clifford book on the shelf. But has she heard Clifford author Normal Bridwell talk about writing? Explore author interviews from over 100 authors on Reading Rockets Author Interview page. We’ll bet you can’t watch just one.

- **Write it down.** Encourage your child to keep a simple journal or summer diary. Track interesting things like the number of fireflies seen in one minute, the number of mosquito bites on a leg, or the different types of food that can go on the grill. Each entry is a chance to be creative!

Reading Rockets, Colorín Colorado, and LD OnLine are national education services of WETA, the flagship public broadcasting station in Washington, D.C.
New Training Options at PIC

The Parent Information Center will be offering new training opportunities for families and youth this summer. The first: “Promoting Self-Determination: Tips for Families” is coming to a computer/smartphone near you!

This webinar, available at no cost, a collaborative effort between PIC and Dr. Liz Simpson, was developed to help our kids learn how to advocate and make goals and decisions for themselves. It will be offered this summer, and then will be archived for additional viewing online at a later date. Additional resources on self-determination and self-advocacy will be provided with the webinar. Stay Tuned for the Date and Time at our Calendar at www.wpic.org/

News from CPIR - Center for Parent Information & Resources www.parentcenterhub.org

Info brief on autism spectrum disorder.
The IRIS Center has a new information brief comparing the diagnostic criteria of the DSM-5 to those of the DSM-IV-TR and to the definition of autism found in IDEA. The brief also summarizes research findings regarding changes in the number of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders when the DSM-5 criteria were used, compared to those same numbers under the DSM-IV-TR.

Social Security benefits for children with disabilities.
A child with a disability who is younger than 18 years of age may be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Have a look at SSA’s Child Disability Starter Kit, which includes a fact sheet on the application process, a child disability interview preparation checklist and a Medical and School Worksheet. Available in English and in Spanish.

Overview of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
WIOA is designed to help job seekers (including youth with disabilities) access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need.

PIC Lending Library

PIC has an extensive lending library of books, videos and CD’s available to parents and professionals. Resources on specific disabilities, education, parenting, behavior management, siblings, transition and various other disability issues are available. The only cost to those borrowing materials from the library is the return postage.

Call PIC to check out these Paula Kluth books on Autism. Ms Kluth will be one of our featured speakers at PIC’s parent conference on disabilities in Casper Feb 26-28, 2016!
Choice in Books May Help Kids' Reading Score Over Summer

By Andrew M Seaman (Reuters Health) - Allowing young children to choose books they'd like to read over the summer break from school may hone their reading skills and prevent “summer slide” in reading scores, suggests new research.

Kids who were allowed to select books to take home at the end of the spring term had better reading scores when they returned to school in the fall, compared to kids who received books they had not chosen, researchers found.

"We're starting to get the message out there that reading is a key determinant of health," said Dr. Erin Kelly, the study's lead author from the University of Rochester in New York.

Past research suggests kids' long term health is better if they can read, she said. "This is more than a problem for the school system that kids aren’t doing well. It’s a problem for all of us."

Kelly and her colleague Dr. C. Andrew Aligne aimed to reproduce a successful experiment conducted among Florida elementary schools with high levels of poverty.

In 2013, Kelly and Aligne held a book fair for 18 second-graders in Rochester City Schools. Students chose 13 free books. Another class of 20 kids was used as a comparison group; these kids received a few books over the summer that they had not chosen.

Based on reading assessments before and after summer break, the researchers found that reading scores significantly improved among children who selected books before break. There was no change among students who received unselected books in the mail.

The researchers expanded the program the following year to four classes of students in kindergarten through second grades.

Students in the four classes were allowed to select 15 books before summer break. Two other classes were used as a comparison; those students were also allowed to select a few books, because the first experiment was so successful.

Overall, the reading scores in both groups improved, the researchers reported Saturday at the Pediatric Academic Societies meeting in San Diego, California.

About three quarters of students maintained or improved their reading levels over the break. Prior studies have found that low-income students typically lose a few months of learning over summer break.

Some schools are adopting free choice in reading, said Sheridan Blau, a distinguished senior lecturer and English Education Program Coordinator at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City.

If students are allowed to select from a range of books that are considered appropriate for their reading level, "of course free choice is going to be better," said Blau, who was not involved in the new research.

"They’re going to find something they’re interested in instead of being assigned work," he added.

For in-school learning, however, Blau said teachers would likely want to preselect books to teach students what to do when they encounter a challenging text.

"I think you need both in a well organized classroom with a teacher who knows what she’s doing," he said.

Kelly said the next step for the research is to start working with schools to integrate choice into student programs.

SOURCE: bit.ly/1AaZE9v

Pediatric Academic Societies, April 25, 2015.
Understanding Challenging Behaviors in Children with Down Syndrome

June 12, 2015 Parkway Plaza in Casper WY 8 am to 4:30 pm
Lunch will be provided

Dr. Lina Patel, PsyD from the Sie Center for Down Syndrome at Children’s Hospital Colorado and University of Colorado School of Medicine will share information on:

- Brain development and areas of the brain affected by developmental delays in Down syndrome.
- How these brain differences are expressed in day to day life, especially in the form of challenging behaviors.
- Proactive strategies and tools to address challenging behaviors observed in children with Down syndrome.
- Behavioral assessment to teach professionals how to critically assess behaviors and determine what appropriate proactive strategies should be implemented.

Participants will leave with a more critical, thoughtful way to assess the function of challenging behaviors, as well as tangible tools and strategies that they can implement in a more targeted manner. Dr. Patel’s extensive experience and consultative work with families, providers, and educators will allow participants to feel that they can continue to address challenging behaviors with more confidence in the future.

Contact Joelle Ashley at WY Down Syndrome Association at jashley@arkregionalservices.org or register at www.wydsa.org
Or 307-742-6641 Registration deadline June 5

WDE Leadership Symposium

Riverton, Wyoming June 22-25, 2015
The Central Wyoming College Campus

June 22 - 23, 2015 Monday and Tuesday - Best Practice
Keynote Presenters: David Boulton and Steve Pemberton
Presenting: Dr. Tessie Boiley, Melissa Genoux, M.Ed, Aaron Stabel, Clayton Cook, Patrick Schwarz, Pingoro, and Claire Greer

Best Practice Topics:
What is MTSS and how leaders can support effective implementation; Improving Social Skills and Decreasing Disruptive Classroom Behavior with Kids with High Functioning Autism/Working with Kids with High-Functioning Autism and more.

June 24 - 25, 2015 Wednesday and Thursday - Law Track
Attorney Panel Topics: Behavior and Discipline
Presenting: Lenore Knutson, Julie Weatherly, Mark Mlawer, Jose Martin, Dave Richards, Kathleen Mehfoud, Amy Goetz, and Selene Almazan

Topics: Functional Behavioral Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans; Lessons Learned from Sandy Hook; Exiting Special Education; Overlap of IDEA-504/ ADA; and more.

For further questions regarding the Leadership Symposium please contact Jenny Krause Jennifer.krause@wyo.gov or Rick Hunter rick.hunter@wyo.gov. Registration site is open at http://wde.memberlodge.com

Save the date!
PIC Parent Conference on disAbilities
Feb 26, 27 & 28, 2016 at Parkway Plaza, Casper.
Featuring Paula Kluth
Camp can and should be a time for children to have fun, expand their abilities, and learn more about their potential. Unfortunately, for many children diagnosed with ADHD and other learning disabilities, the camp experience can be fraught with disappointment, anxiety, and frustration. Not at SOAR. SOAR was founded by an adult living with a learning disability who believed that focusing on an individual’s strengths, rather than their deficits, was critical in ensuring success. For over 35 years, SOAR has been giving youth with ADHD and other learning disabilities the summer camp experience they have always needed by helping them build friendships, overcome challenges, develop important life skills, and increase their self-confidence.

With the goal of success in mind, our program provides challenges that build self-esteem, self-confidence and self-reliance while also giving campers the opportunity to build friendships, be themselves, and have fun. Each student is challenged in a variety of adventure activities and pushed beyond their comfort zone with support and encouragement. These experiences empower campers to make healthy choices, learn more about themselves, overcome challenges, and relate lessons learned from these experiences to other aspects of their lives.

Our understanding of this special population of youth is integrated into everything we do—the way we approach challenges and adventures, the way we structure each day, the way we handle conflicts, and in the way we celebrate success! With summer courses in Wyoming, California, the Florida Keys, North Carolina, New York, and Costa Rica, campers participate in exciting adventure activities such as rock climbing, horseback riding, canoeing, sea kayaking, fishing, SCUBA diving, llama treks, whitewater rafting, surfing, and much more!

View Dates & Rates for all courses and apply today for sessions beginning June 17th in at soarwy.org

Sign up for PIC E-news!

Keep up-to-date on “What’s Happening in Wyoming” and continue to read great and relevant articles by subscribing to our online E-News at www.wpic.org or by subscribing to PICs-N-Pieces newsletter (free to parents of children with disabilities/ $20 professionals, any donations is appreciated)
ABOUT US:

Parent Information Center (PIC):

Outreach Parent Liaisons (OPL) provide information and support to families of children with disabilities, on their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). PIC can attend IEPs with families to help empower them to partner with schools effectively. We also provide workshops on IDEA, IEPs, and specific disabilities such as attention disorders and autism spectrum disorder.

For more info check out our website at www.wpic.org or call PIC at (307) 684-2277:

- **Terri Dawson**, Director, tdawson@wpic.org (307) 217-1321 Serves the entire state
- **Juanita Bybee**, ibybee@wpic.org (307) 684-2277 Serves Buffalo & Sheridan
- **Janet Kinstetter**, jkinstetter@wpic.org (307) 756-9605 Serves Moorcroft, Gillette, Sundance & Newcastle for phone support only. Janet no longer attends IEPs or provides workshops
- **Tammy Wilson**, twilson@wpic.org (307) 217-2244 Serves Green River & Rock Springs

To help you get organized, check out the newly updated, *Packaging Wisdom: A Family Centered Care Coordination Notebook*

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Executive Director & Editor Terri Dawson

Parent Information Center
www.wpic.org
(307) 684-2277

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Materials from this newsletter may be reprinted. We ask only that *Parents Helping Parents of WY, Inc.* and
Parents Helping Parents of WY, Inc. (PHP), because of rising production costs, we must charge a $20/year subscription fee to professionals and other interested individuals.

The newsletter remains free to parents of children with disabilities, however any donation is appreciated.

Please complete and return the form below so that we may update our mailing list:

_____ I am a parent of a child with a disability and a Wyoming resident. Please keep me on/add me to the list.

If your child has a disability, please list disability: __________________________ Child’s age __________

_____ I am a professional, teacher or other interested person. Enclosed is $20 for a one year subscription.

My organization/school name is_____________________________ My role/position is_____________________

_____ I am the parent of a child with disabilities, but do not live in Wyoming. Enclosed is $20 for 1 year subscription.

Name: ________________________________________ Phone: (H) _______________ (W)__________________

Address: ________________________________________________________________ Zip: ________________

Street                  City                  State

This is my:   ___ Home address ___ Work address (Please check one)

E-mail address: ____________________________________________________________

_____ I would like to subscribe to PHP’s new electronic news brief to be distributed 4-6 times/year (Please note; this e-news does not have the same content as the PIC’s n Pieces newsletter).

Additional Donation amount________________. Thank you!

Please Send PHP a Change of Address if You Move. The Post Office Does Not Forward or Return Bulk Mail.

Mail to: Parents Helping Parents of WY, Inc.  For more information:
500 W. Lott St, Suite A  Contact PHP at (307) 684-2277
Buffalo, WY 82834 or e-mail tdawson@wpic.org

Giving up on your goal because of one setback is like slashing the other three tires because of one flat!

Unknown
2015 Early Intervention and Education: Strategies for Developing Quality Individual Goals and Outcomes, for Children ages Birth through 5 years old

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No registration costs for parents & family members of infants and toddlers with disabilities ages birth thru 5. Call PIC for a travel stipend to defray travel expenses

REGISTER AT WWW.WPIC.ORG OR CALL PIC AT (307) 684-2277