

How a Lack of Executive Functioning Manifests in 'Getting Ready For School'

Executive functions are higher level functions such as planning, reasoning, problem solving, multi-tasking, attention span, inhibition, flexibility, self monitoring, self-initiation and self guidance.

Getting ready for school may seem like a single task but it is actually an objective made up of many different tasks.

A parent of a child with good executive functioning might expect to be able to say "Get yourself ready for school" or even have their child realise that because it's Tuesday, they need to get ready and wear their sports uniform. This would imply self initiation of tasks.



The getting ready for school task includes sub-tasks such as;

1. Getting your pyjamas off
2. Putting your pyjamas under the pillow ready for "after school"
3. Putting underpants on
4. Deciding whether to wear a sports or normal uniform
5. Putting pants on
6. Putting a shirt on
7. Putting a tie, headband, ribbons etc on
8. Putting socks on
9. Washing Hands
10. Having Breakfast
11. Washing hands and face
12. Brushing Teeth
13. Putting Lunch in the school bag
14. Putting Books/Diary in the school bag
15. Putting Shoes on
16. Getting outside on time.

A child with poor executive functioning will see these all as entirely separate tasks. They know that "going to school" is part of the big picture but they won't be able to sequence the tasks and they won't self-start or self-monitor. If there are any distractions available they will quickly become distracted and will fail to complete the task. If anything changes, for example, if their favourite breakfast cereal isn't available, then they may not have the flexibility to be able to cope with change. They may not be able to do tasks out of order; for example getting their bags packed before breakfast – therefore the entire "getting ready for school" process will stop. The inflexibility may even trigger a meltdown.

Then there is the matter of lack of inhibition. You might feel that this simply refers to states of undress, and in this example it could. The lack of Inhibition however refers to a much wider issue. In particular, it refers to a control mechanism which tells us when "enough is enough" or when certain behavior is unwarranted. For example, a child lacking in inhibition may not realise when a parent is dangerously overwhelmed and may continue to "push buttons" way past a point of safety.

Take any sequence of tasks or anything for which good planning and "common sense" is required and you'll spot the executive functioning issues