



Building Executive Function Skills Over the Summer

Prevent the “summer slide” using the resources provided in this packet:

- Build and stick to healthy routines
- Develop goal-setting and follow-through skills
- Use movement to boost brain function

What are executive function skills?

Executive function skills are the complex set of cognitive processes that allow you to achieve your goals. These skills include planning, task initiation, time management, focused attention, organization, impulse control, and self-reflection. These are the “soft skills” necessary for your student to succeed in school and life. While many students develop executive function skills naturally over time, others need support and accountability to develop them.

Use It or Lose It: the “Summer Slide”

The average student loses 17-34% of their learning progress over the summer.

Students with executive function deficits lose nearly three times as many learning gains as the average student due to the “summer slide.”

Well-structured, consistent work over the summer prevents learning loss and helps your student prepare for the next school year.



Some Signs of Executive Function Deficits

In school, students...

- Struggle to start schoolwork
- Have many missing assignments
- Procrastinate or avoid work
- Are surprised by tests, quizzes, and project due dates
- Find it difficult to plan ahead
- Have trouble prioritizing work

In life, students...

- Have cluttered, messy, and disorganized personal spaces
- Often misplace or lose important items like their keys
- Become easily distracted by their environment
- Have trouble predicting the consequences of actions

Routines

Routines allow our brains to switch from manual to autopilot. Setting clear routines over the summer allows your students to complete necessary tasks in their day, like completing their chores, while still having plenty of free time to do what they enjoy. Additionally, setting summer routines can ensure your student maintains healthy habits like getting enough sleep, exercising, and eating nutritious meals.

How to build a successful routine:

1. **One at a time.** Trying to tackle too many routines at once will leave your student feeling overwhelmed and unable to stick to any of them. While there may be many different areas of your student's life that could be improved upon, choose the most important area to tackle first.
2. **Make it small.** Some routines fail because they are too lengthy or complex. Break a longer routine, like cleaning the entire house throughout the week, into a more manageable routine, like clearing the kitchen on Mondays.
3. **Develop accountability systems.** Learning to stick to a routine is challenging. Tools like visual checklists work well for most students to hold them accountable to their routines.

Sample Morning Routine:

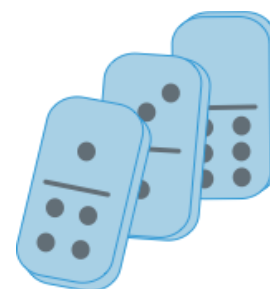
- Wake up by 10am
- Shower
- Get dressed (clothes laid out the night before)
- Do hair and makeup (set timer for 30-minute time limit)
- Eat breakfast
- Take dog on walk to get moving and get outside

Sample Evening Routine:

- Set alarm as reminder to start getting ready for bed by 11pm
- Set out clothes for the next day
- Brush teeth and wash face
- Change into pajamas
- Turn off devices
- Read for 30 minutes to 1 hour to wind down

Lead Domino Routine

The “lead domino” is the *one* routine your student can adjust that would have the most significant positive effect on multiple areas of their life. Their lead domino could be getting enough sleep each night, keeping personal and academic materials organized, or regularly getting exercise.



Identify Pain Points

What causes your student the most stress in each of these areas?

**Academic
Pain Points:**

**Personal
Pain Points:**

**Interpersonal
Pain Points:**

Determine the Lead Domino

If your students could effectively address each of the above pain points, which would have the greatest, most positive impact on their lives?

Create a Routine:

Generate a few realistic ways to approach the lead domino in your home. Choose the solution that could best fit into an existing routine or one that could be incorporated into a new, simple routine.

Brainstorm:

Accountability Steps:

Goal Setting

Goal setting is crucial for developing executive function skills, especially during the unstructured summer months. Research shows that goal-oriented persistence improves academic performance, self-efficacy, and other executive function skills.

Tips for Effective Goal Setting:

- Find a method that resonates with your child
- Set time-bound, measurable goals with clear baselines and outcomes
- Focus on two summer goals: one academic, one nonacademic
- Choose meaningful, achievable goals
- Break goals into smaller objectives and daily actions.

Overcoming Goal-Setting Resistance:

Students may resist goal setting due to fear of failure or feeling restricted. With guidance, they can learn to invest in the process by focusing on their interests.

Goal-Setting Activity:

Use this activity to help your students stay accountable to their goals and serve as a visual reminder of what they should be working on.

Goal:		
Daily Action Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	Weekly Action Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	Monthly Action Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •
Accountability:	Accountability:	Accountability:

Movement and Meeting Basic Needs

Regular exercise significantly improves brain function. Research shows that just 30 minutes of exercise a day has the power to:

- **Increase attention and focus.** If your student struggles to maintain attention while completing tasks they don't enjoy, try adding a movement activity into their routine before they need to sit down and focus.
- **Reduce stress.** Movement will reduce stress and anxiety. While your students may have less overall stress during the summer, learning to incorporate movement into their lives now will set them up for success during the school year.
- **Improve information retention.** Taking time to move before your student has to study or learn a concept will save them hours of repetition. Try adding movement to the beginning of your student's academic routine to help them increase their efficiency as learners.

Summer is the perfect time to focus on basic needs with your student. Without the ability to meet their basic needs, your student cannot improve other, more complicated executive function skills.

Movement is the most commonly forgotten basic need, but it's essential to a student's ability to learn.

Adding Structure: Time Blocking

Students without structure in their day have trouble getting through their to-do lists or even doing activities they enjoy. While your student shouldn't have an activity planned for every minute of the day, having designated free time will help them maximize their summer. To fill out the time-blocking sheet on the next page, follow these steps:

1. Block off time for routines, like morning and bedtime routines.
2. Make a note of planned activities like summer camps or work schedules.
3. Add in structured time to complete chores or work toward goals.
4. Clearly label blocks of free time. (Some students may benefit from a list of activities to choose from to prevent them from sitting on their phones for all of their designated free time.)

My Routine and Schedule							
Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
8:00 am							
9:00 am							
10:00 am							
11:00 am							
12:00 pm							
1:00 pm							
2:00 pm							
3:00 pm							
4:00 pm							
5:00 pm							
6:00 pm							
7:00 pm							
8:00 pm							



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