

Executive Function Coaching: How To Help Students Be Better Students

Cassandra Estey, MS (She/They)
SAS Coordinator – MAIHE/MAICEI
Student Accessibility Services
Quinsigamond Community College



What makes a student a “good student”?

- Call out your answers (don't be shy!)
- Think about what different faculty/staff might say is a good student.
- Think about what you were like as a student.

Were you a “good student”?

What is something you're procrastinating on right now?

- Idea Exchange
 - Write down something you have been putting off doing. It can be work or home or anything related.
 - Partner with someone near you.
 - You will take turns. One person will read the item that they're procrastinating, the second person will offer ideas.
 - After two minutes, you will switch – the other person will read the item they're procrastinating on, the second person will offer ideas for two minutes.

CONGRATS! You just did the first steps in Executive
Function Coaching!

What is Executive Function Coaching?

- It's helping students to learn strategies so that they can survive in the "land without bells".
- It's working with a student's brain and how they process information, not against it.
- It's focusing on solutions and goals along with the process to get there.
- It's building a rapport with the student so that they trust you.
- Time Management
- Organization
- Self-Advocacy
- Planning
- Prioritization
- Metacognition
- Problem-Solving
- Cognitive Flexibility
- Memory
- Attention
- Self-Regulation

Strategies to Survive the “land without bells”

Covey Quadrants

- Prioritizing items based on importance and urgency.
 - Important & Urgent (Crisis Mode)
 - Important but Not Urgent (Priority Mode)
 - Not Important but Urgent (Busy Work Mode)
 - Not Important and Not Urgent (Fun Mode)

Timers/Countdowns

- Timer: Set a timer for how long you think an activity will take you. See how much you get done in that time.
- Countdown: Start a timer to see how long an activity actually takes.

More Strategies

Habit-Stacking

- Pick one thing to focus on, one habit and put your effort towards that.
- Once that habit feels secure, add another, then another, etc.
- Can be based around school but also day-to-day life
 - Pillars: Nutrition, Movement, Sleep, Self-Care/Relaxation

To-do Lists

- Write down all of your to-do's but BE SPECIFIC.
- Break down larger tasks into smaller increments.
- Encourage to not have to-do's take longer than an hour.
- If it takes longer than an hour, it can be broken down further.

- **Effective vs Efficient**

- People with executive dysfunction are typically able to find strategies for themselves that may be effective but not always the most efficient (AND THAT'S OKAY!)

- **Mindfulness vs Mindlessness**

- Teaching someone to be mindful in their life, including in their downtime, can help them to be more mindful in their study habits and strategies.

- **Motivation vs Dedication**

- You cannot rely on motivation alone. Motivation is fleeting. Motivation will stop eventually.
- Dedication is being committed. There's no questions and no waiting for motivation to happen. You do the thing because you do the thing.

Spoon Theory & Fork Theory

- Spoon Theory by Christine Miserandino
- Fork Theory by Unknown
- **Why do I bring this up? Because we need to remember that we are working with whole people. Not just disabled or neurodivergent people. Not just students. We all have more than one label.**

Contact Information/Q&A

- Cassandra Estey, SAS Coordinator – MAICEI/MAIHE
- E-mail: cestey@qcc.mass.edu

Any Questions?