Effective School Solutions

Addressing Stress and Its Impact on Learning: A Parent/Caregivers Guide
Participants Guide

OBJECTIVES

1. **Signs of Stress**
2. **How does Stress Impede Academic Performance**
3. **Stress and Executive Functioning**
4. **Strategies to Structure and Support your Child's Academic Performance**

☑ **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS IN STUDENTS**

- Excessive Worry
- Guilt/Shame
- No Motivation
- Disengagement
- Sleeping/Eating
- Isolation
- Clinginess
- Poor attention/focus
- Ruminations
- Procrastination
- Irritability
- Poor Emotion Regulation

☑ **EFFECTS OF STRESS ON THE BRAIN**

- Persistent Stress changes brain architecture
- When in survival state it is physiologically impossible to access executive states.
- Stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues become actual barriers to academic performance.
- These barriers must be addressed before any learning can be expected

Brain's Stress Response

Survival State   Emotional State   Executive State
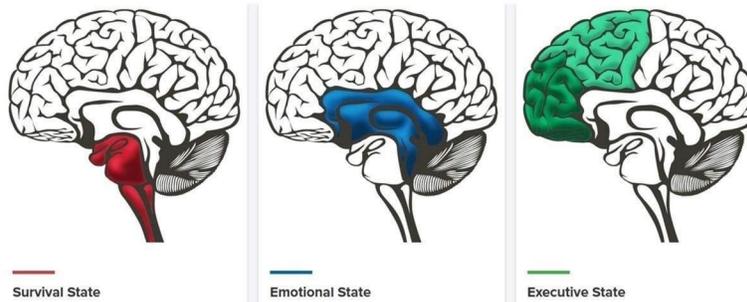
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☑ **EXECUTIVE FUNTIONING**

What is Executive Functioning?	Why Does Executive Functioning Matter?

• An umbrella term that refers to a heterogenous grouping of top-down processes that allow individuals to regulate thought sand behaviors, as well as to successfully engage in purposeful, goal directed, and future oriented actions.
 	
• A set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, self-control, and planning. We use these skills everyday to learn, work, and manage our daily life.
	• Difficulty with Executive functioning ca make it hard for students to focus, follow directions, and handle their emotions.
	• Executive functioning is directly connected to
	  ▪ School success
	  ▪ Work success
	  ▪ Interpersonal relationship success
	  ▪ Physical health
	  ▪ Independent adult living

☑ **TYPES OF EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING**

Inhibition	

Flexible Thinking	
Emotional control	
Task initiation	
Organize	
Monitor	
Working memory	
Plan/Prioritize	

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Where to start?
The three best questions to ask:
- What do you need?
- Help me to understand?
- How can I help?

MENTAL HEALTH WARNING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Strategy	What you can do?
Find your calm Take your own pulse, stay calm. While it is natural to be upset when your child is upset, but we can not help in that state. Practice your own regulation and self care and model your usage to your children.	Choose times of the day when your child is calm and relaxed to introduce and/or practice new coping skills. Create concrete, clearly understood, visual schedule/routine to support the ongoing use of skills throughout the day. Ensure that your child has full access to their skills throughout the day.
Address the problem It is best to address problems head on, avoid avoidance, and don't fear conversations that need to be had. Using developmentally appropriate language, talk with your child about issues. Get their input and ask that they help to be part of the problem resolution.	Choose times of the day when your child is calm and relaxed to introduce and/or practice new coping skills. Create concrete, clearly understood, visual schedule/routine to support the ongoing use of skills throughout the day. Ensure that your child has full access to their skills throughout the day.
Plan, plan, and plan some more Brainstorm ways to prevent future virtual learning mishaps. Discuss what barriers there may be and strategize ways to overcome those barriers. Proactive Prevention: Save a backup file of big projects or take a picture before sending them Create a daily schedule with login information for each class	Choose times of the day when your child is calm and relaxed to introduce and/or practice new coping skills. Create concrete, clearly understood, visual schedule/routine to support the ongoing use of skills throughout the day. Ensure that your child has full access to their skills throughout the day.

Set alarms for class start times, breaks or other important times Keep a list of each teacher's name and contact info handy.	

Routines
• Routines provide increased comfort and are of even more importance during times of stress.
• Routines are one of the best tools for combatting anxiety and worry.
• Examples:
  ▪ Sleep/wake times and routines
  ▪ Hygiene routines
  ▪ Household chore routines
  ▪ Mealtimes and routines
  ▪ Entertainment routines
  ▪ Academic routines
	Daily schedules: Structuring the child's day ahead of time is a highly effective way to help reduce anxiety associated with ambiguity. This is even more important when changes beyond our control continue to shift each day. Structure provides the child with a sense of boundary and control.
	
	Start and end times
	
	Academic and task completion lists
	
	Visuals

Validation Avoid toxic positivity. It is natural for us to want to reframe and refocus on the positive, however doing so without truly hearing what your child is communicating can invalidate their feelings and exacerbate feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation.	• Acknowledge that things are not fair, that they are experiencing losses, and that things are difficult.

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