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Job Accommodation Network
Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

Learn More about Accommodations for Executive Functioning


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ODEP
Office of Disability Employment Policy

JAN is a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.


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Executive Functioning



Executive Functioning Includes:

- Thinking
- Paying attention
- Remembering
- Planning and Organizing



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Executive Functioning



Executive Functioning Important For:

- Multi-tasking
- Adapting and performing activities of daily living
- Behaving appropriately

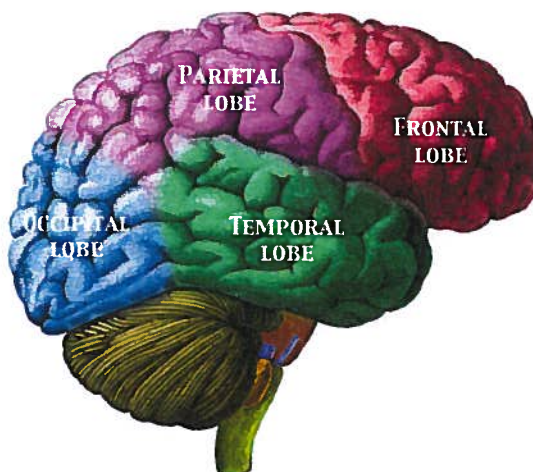


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Executive Functioning



Frontal Lobes



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Executive Functioning



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Executive Functioning



Executive Functioning Problems May Cause an Inability to:

- Plan, organize, and strategize
- Pay attention to and remember details
- Start and stop actions
- Monitor and change behavior as needed
- Plan future behavior when faced with new tasks and situations
- Anticipate outcomes and adapt to changing situations
- Connect past experience with present action
- Form concepts and think abstractly



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Executive Functioning



Impairments that Cause Difficulty in Executive Functioning

- Depression
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- ADD/ADHD
- Learning Disabilities
- Autism
- Brain Injuries
- PTSD
- Fibromyalgia
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Anxiety Disorders



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Executive Functioning



In the Workplace:

- Multi-tasking
- Adapting and performing activities of daily living
- Behaving appropriately




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Executive Functioning

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**Accommodating People with
Executive Functioning
Difficulties**

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Time Management:

- Divide large assignments into several smaller tasks
- Use a timer
- Provide a checklist
- Plan and structure time
- Supply an electronic or handheld organizer
- Use wall calendar to emphasize due dates

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Memory:

- Provide written instructions and checklists
- Allow use of a recorder
- Allow additional training time and offer refreshers
- Provide minutes of meetings and trainings
- Use flow-charts
- Provide verbal or pictorial cues
- Use a color coding scheme
- Use notebooks or planners
- Use sticky notes
- Provide labels or bulletin board cues



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Executive Functioning



Concentration:

To reduce auditory distractions:

- Purchase a noise canceling headset
- Hang sound absorption panels
- Provide a white noise machine
- Relocate employee's office space away from audible distractions
- Redesign employee's office space to minimize audible distractions



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Executive Functioning



Concentration: (continued)

To reduce visual distractions:

- Install space enclosures (cubicle walls)
- Reduce clutter in the employee's work environment
- Redesign employee's office space to minimize visual distractions
- Relocate employee's office space away from visual distractions



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Organization and Prioritization

- Use a job coach
- Assign a mentor
- Allow supervisor to assign prioritization of tasks
- Use electronic organizers, mobile devices, e-mail
- Assign new project when previous project is complete
- Provide a "cheat sheet"
- Organize work space to reduce clutter
- Provide separate work areas
- Schedule a time to clean / organize work space
- Take time at the end of each day to organize



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Executive Functioning



Multi-tasking:

- Separate tasks
- Create a flow-chart
- Provide individualized/specialized training
- Identify tasks
- Provide feedback
- Remove or reduce distractions
- Supply ergonomic equipment
- Clearly represent performance standards



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Executive Functioning



Completing Paperwork:

- Automate paperwork
- Use speech recognition software
- Use pre-filled forms or adhering pre-printed stickers
- Use checklists
- Provide templates
- Color-code forms
- Re-design commonly used forms



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Executive Functioning



Exhibit Appropriate Social Skills:

- Provide a job coach, mentor, or work buddy
- Identify areas of improvement
- Use training videos
- Encourage employees to minimize or move personal conversations
- Provide sensitivity training
- Encourage all employees to model appropriate social skills
- Adjust the supervisory method
- Adjust method of communication
- Allow the employee to work from home



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Executive Functioning



Getting to Work on Time:

- Have a routine
- Prepare for the next day's work the night before
- Create a checklist for yourself and others
- Place sticky notes on the door, dashboard, or wherever you will see them
- Turn off distractions – including cell phones
- Set a timer or a programmable watch to pace yourself




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Situations and Solutions


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Situation

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A mail clerk with an intellectual disability belonged to several coffee clubs in his workplace, so he would collect mail first thing in the morning and have a cup of coffee with each department of the building. He would get involved in conversation and forget what he was doing. By the time he was finished with the first round of mail, it was lunch time. The same thing was occurring during his afternoon mail run.

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Solution



His employer decided to accompany the employee and time him as he picked up the mail with no coffee stops so they would have an idea how long to allow for his mail run each morning and afternoon. His supervisor set a timer, showed him how to pace himself, and indicated where he should be halfway through the pick-up. By helping him to manage his time better, the supervisor was able to get several more tasks completed by this employee throughout the day instead of just the two mail collections.



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Situation



A benefits specialist had to review claims and determine which ones were covered and to what extent. After a review of information, the employee had difficulty wording and writing a letter to inform the clients of the determination.



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Solution



The employer provided templates of the different types of letters for the employee to use so he only had to plug in the personalized information.



Situation



A retail employee with AD/HD often forgot the closing and cash-out procedures, which resulted in missed printouts of daily sale reports.



Solution



The employer created a numbered checklist that identified each step for proper closing procedures and identified which reports to run from cash registers. This accommodation benefited all employees.

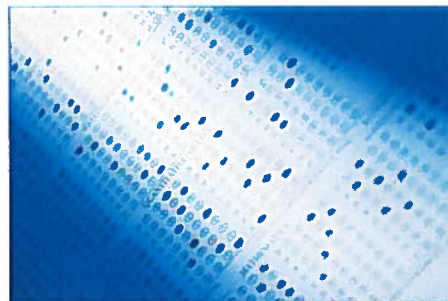


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Situation



A special education aide with a learning disability couldn't pass a newly required state test for all paraprofessionals. She had excellent evaluations and no performance problems.



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Solution



Instead of terminating her for not meeting the standard of the new policy, the school board asked the state to accommodate her. By changing the policy that would allow them to evaluate her skills and abilities through other means, she was able to show competence through interviews, past work experience, and job demonstrations based on observations by the principal.



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Situation



A newly hired financial aid counselor at a college felt she could perform the essential functions of the job with no problems. The difficulty came in the training. Due to deficits in her short-term memory associated with a traumatic brain injury, this employee had difficulty moving through the modules at the pace the college had scheduled.



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Solution



She was accommodated with extended training and a more relaxed schedule for completion of the training. She was provided extra time with the trainer, as well as materials to take home to study, and an extended time frame for completion of each module.



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Situation



A teacher at an elementary school had been diagnosed with both ADD and OCD. She had great difficulty getting to work on time. She had asked for an accommodation of a flexible schedule. On the days that she couldn't get to school by the time the children arrived to the classroom, she had asked that the principal come into her classroom and get her day started.



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Solution



That accommodation was denied. Eventually, the teacher was convinced to make lists of what needed to be done at night (getting her clothing, lunch, school items, etc. ready) and using a watch with multiple settings to help her better pace herself in the mornings. She also devised a checklist system so that she did not do multiple checks of locked doors, the oven, iron, and other things that concerned her and held her up in the mornings.

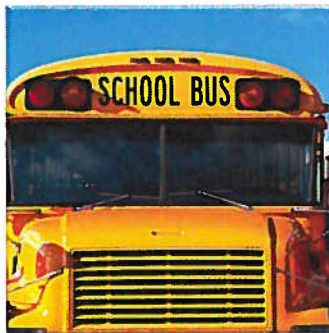


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Situation



A preschool teacher with OCD couldn't get to work early enough to do the early bus schedule, but had no problems doing the after-school duty.



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Solution



She was accommodated by exchanging her early duties with another teacher's after-school duty. This accommodation allowed her to do the after-school duty for both her turn and the other teacher's turn, but no morning duty.

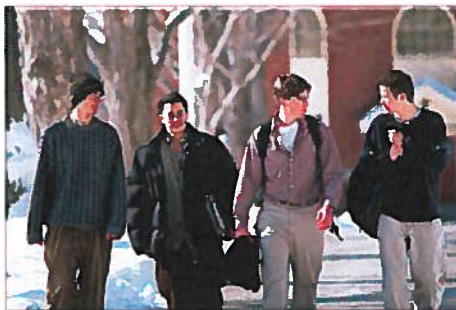


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Situation



A high school guidance counselor, with ADD, was having problems with concentration due to the noise outside the office.



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Solution



His school provided him with sound proofing and a floor fan for white noise. The accommodation was very successful.



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Situation



An IT consultant who was very good at finding solutions to problems, had difficulty with organization and remembering multiple tasks and information gained in meetings.



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Solution



He was accommodated with an advanced organizer that would help him get the information from the meeting down in a more organized and meaningful way. He was also permitted to record the meetings so he could go back over the information he may have missed. His supervisor also agreed to send information about tasks and assignments through e-mail.



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Situation



An employee who had difficulty with a few of his least preferred tasks was leaving them until the last minute. This method of task completion was causing him to miss deadlines.



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Solution



His supervisor worked with him to structure his day so that he worked on the tasks he had the most trouble with first thing in the morning when his focus was at its best. He was then able to complete more enjoyable tasks after that, enabling him to meet deadlines.



Situation



A social worker with AD/HD had difficulty completing handwritten paperwork in a neat and timely fashion.



Solution



The employer created electronic forms for the employee, which allowed him to type responses. The employer arranged computer files labeled by the month to help the employee prioritize open cases. The employer also sent email reminders of deadlines.



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Situation



A college professor who had incurred a traumatic brain injury needed to do office work in the mornings when she was most alert and best able to concentrate.



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Solution



She was accommodated by scheduling departmental meetings and classes she taught after 11:00 am so that she could have uninterrupted morning hours to get her planning, studying, and administrative duties done.



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Situation



An employee who works outside landscaping has trouble with time management and staying focused on the tasks he needs to complete. He works for a smaller employer who cannot provide the direct supervision he needs. He was using his phone to assist him, but the employer felt it made him look like he was off task.



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Solution



A JAN consultant recommended a daily written list of tasks, and purchasing a watch with multiple settings that can be programmed to varying amounts of time. The watch was set to vibrate or alarm, and the task needing to be completed or started appeared on the face of the watch. The employee was trained to set the watch for the tasks he has to complete daily.



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Situation



A new warehouse custodial employee is working successfully with a job coach. The job coach spoke with the manager about getting the employee into a routine as quickly as possible, but the manager kept changing the directions he had given the employee.



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Solution



JAN suggested that the job coach help the employee make an ordered list of tasks the employee needs to complete before leaving each room and ask the manager to okay the order of the list. Since variations in the routine were going to be the biggest challenge for the employee, the job coach has asked that she stay with the employee until the routine has been set, and gradually reduce her time with him. The manager agreed to accommodate the employee in this way.



Situation



A hotel employee with autism worked in the basement of a very large hotel. He was great at performing the tasks of his position, but had great difficulty finding his way to the worksite location because of the twists and turns in the old hotel.



Solution



The employer put up colored slips of paper with arrows at certain intervals where the twists were occurring to direct the employee. Once he got off of the elevator at the basement level, the employee followed the arrows with no problems.



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Situation



A retail employee with an intellectual disability had difficulty remembering when to take his breaks and lunch, and when to return to his position.



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Solution



Using a programmable watch, the job coach helped set the times for his lunch and breaks, and when it was time to return to work. The watch was set to vibrate so the employee knew exactly when it was time to leave for breaks and lunch and when to return to the sales floor.



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Situation



An administrative aide with PTSD had difficulty taking notes in meetings while trying to focus on what was being said at the same time.



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Solution



She was provided with a smart pen that recorded the meeting as she took brief notes. This accommodation enabled her to focus on listening to what was being presented in the meetings, while at the same time getting down the important information.



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Situation



A receptionist in a large office had difficulty remembering faces/names and keeping track of the in/out status of the various case managers on staff.



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Solution



A Velcro in/out board was provided with the photo and name of each case manager. When entering or leaving the building, the staff members would prompt the receptionist as to their status and he would then move their photo from the "in" to the "out" column, or vice versa, thereby allowing him to keep track of the status of the case managers and better serve clients who were trying to contact them.



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Resources






Executive Function from Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders at <http://www.minddisorders.com/>
LD Online at <http://www.ldonline.org/article/29122/>
National Center for Learning Disabilities at <http://www.nclid.org/types-learning-disabilities/executive-function-disorders/what-is-executive-function>
WebMD at <http://www.webmd.com/add-adhd/executive-function>




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Questions?




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Contact JAN



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