

A Day in the Life of a Child With Executive Functioning Issues

By The Understood Team



<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-child-with-executive-functioning-issues>

Meet Josh, a sixth-grader with executive functioning issues. This doesn't mean he isn't smart. It means his brain's self-management system has trouble getting organized and getting things done. Executive functions are an important set of mental skills. To see how trouble with these skills affects kids in school and outside of it too, take a look at a typical day in Josh's life.



7 a.m.

Josh knows he's forgetting something. Ah, that's it—his cleats for today's game. He runs back inside to get them, but he ends up leaving his backpack at home as he races to catch the bus. He sprints past the checklist his mom made to help him remember what he needs for school. But it's too late: The bus is about to pull away. He's going to miss it again....

Challenges related to executive function: Organization, using working memory

11 a.m.

Josh's teacher asks, "Who has a good answer to the first question I gave you yesterday about last night's reading assignment?" Josh squirms, hoping he won't be called on. He didn't write the questions in his planner and has no idea how to answer them.

Challenges related to executive function: Organization, focus



1 p.m.

It's the best part of the school day: lunch! But Josh hogs the conversation, talking way too loud and too much about his video games. He doesn't notice how annoyed his friends are getting.

Challenges related to executive function: Keeping track of what you're doing, self-control



3 p.m.

In soccer, Josh is so focused on getting the ball that he doesn't keep in mind which direction he's supposed to run once he gets it. He quickly heads for the nearest goal and kicks the ball—right into his own team's net.



Challenges related to executive function: Shifting focus, [thinking flexibly](#)

6 p.m.



Josh isn't happy when his mom tells him to turn off the TV and set the dinner table. When he thinks he's done, his little sister tattles that once again he forgot to give each person a cup. Frustrated with his sister and with missing his TV show, Josh loses his cool and screams at her.

Challenges related to executive function: Managing frustration, [keeping emotions in check](#)

8 p.m.

After lots of prodding from his mom, Josh sits down to do his homework. But he doesn't know where to start. Instead of doing the book report or the math problems that are due tomorrow, he surfs the web to find a topic for his science report that's due next week. Then he takes a break to play a video game.



Challenges related to executive function: Setting priorities, [starting tasks](#)

10 p.m.



When Josh finally starts the book report, his mind keeps jumping from one thought to another. He can't figure out what to write and only gets one sentence down on paper before he gives up for the night. He thinks he can do more on the way to school tomorrow—even though he's never gotten anything done while riding the bus with his friends.

Challenges related to executive function: [Paying attention](#), staying on task, organization

Midnight



It's way past his bedtime. Josh is exhausted. He tries to go to sleep, but he can't shut off his brain. He keeps worrying about disappointing the teacher with his book report and getting teased by his teammates for kicking the ball into the wrong goal.

Challenges related to executive function: Anxiety, keeping emotions in check

About Executive Function

Many kids who learn and think differently have trouble with executive function. All kids with [ADHD](#) struggle with it.

These difficulties don't mean kids aren't smart. Brain differences make it hard for kids like Josh to focus, set goals, get started, and stay on task. This includes things like doing homework and daily routines.

These kinds of struggles are often misunderstood. People might think kids are just being lazy or aren't capable of doing more. But with the right support, kids with executive functioning issues can thrive.

There are lots of [ways to help at home](#) and [in school](#). Support can help kids like Josh get organized and stay on top of assignments. It can also help them feel less stressed and more confident.

Adapted from an [NCLD](#) infographic and the work of Thomas E. Brown, PhD.