Smart Kids and Executive Functioning Traps That Block Homework, Chores & Focus Transcript

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Why Bright Kids Freeze

Have you ever looked at your incredibly smart child and wondered, probably you know so much, but never finish anything? Well, you're not imagining it and it's not laziness either.

There's a real reason why bright kids freeze. Parents of gifted, high-acute, like yours and mine, often feel confused because there's the gap between their ability and their execution, and it can be huge.

And that gap isn't disobedience, it's not lack of motivation, its executive functioning or lack-of. It's one of the most misunderstood skills, parts of the brain, of anything that I work with.

And it's often a reason why kids get mislabeled, but it is really something that can be learned and develops over time. I had this mom, Haley, and she told me, my son, he can explain everything related to black holes, but he cant get his shoes on.

Why? And really what the problem was he was just this really super creative kid. He really could not do. he couldn't when she would ask him to start his homework or clean his room or empty his backpack.

Executive Function and Task Initiation

Like he would just freeze. He would much rather have like a full on mold experiment in his room than get started. And you know, she tried everything you could think of.

She tried the incentive. she Tried the punishment, the removal of everything, you can think up and nothing seemed to matter. In fact, She really was like, does he actually even care?

Because we can misinterpret freeze as lack of caring. And that's a big, big mistake. She really started to think, okay, something is going on. Like, I know he cares because when things come more naturally for him, he really can do well.

It's just in all the other areas. So she started because he didn't want to do it, something was really going on and that the capacity for him wasn't there.

We learned that there really was something going. And so task initiation is the first executive skill to break down when a child is dysregulated or over And here's the part where parents go right into, or people lead you down this path, okay?

Maybe it's your grandparent, grandpa, maybe it is a pediatrician, it may be a teacher. They don't learn that executive functioning, what is it, right?

At its most base level, its something called future thinking. And it said a brain's ability to actually picture and see the end goal and break it down.

Working Backward From the End Goal

So when you are, I always use cooking because I love cooking and I loved to teach kids through cooking. It's so many great things that come out. But like when I go to cook, I see the end result.

I don't just go to the grocery store. Maybe I'm making a shrimp tie soup. So I can see it, I smell it and then I work

backwards. This is what people with good executive functioning do.

They break the steps down in the sequence and they actually see. When we start really struggling with executive function, these are skills that kids just are missing.

Guess what? You can learn to break things down in steps. You CAN learn, to sequence those steps and stay on task and understand what the first one is.

And all kids can do this. So, smart kids often know the content, but they don't see the path to A to Z. Sometimes they shut down, sometimes they over-rely on adults, and scaffolding is not over relying.

If we're putting scaffolding on is permanent, then we are over relying. But without a roadmap, the brain goes into overwhelm or avoidance or shut down or paralysis.

And those are the options, right? This has nothing to do with intelligence. It really is an issue of planning the brain's ability to plan if executive functioning, they're seeing that end result or not.

And again, we can teach us. This is why for me, executive function is always teaching this one core principle. OK. And that is start with the end in mind and work backward.

Most parents and teachers do the opposite. They start what they think is the first step. Get your checklists, sit down, and then they Or a hundred, whatever it is, they got at least normal intelligence and they're like, you should be able to figure it out.

He's studying black holes like Milo. It's just not the way it works. So when you're dysregulated or overwhelmed, the brain can't see invisible steps because this is this gray stuff.

So when I teach kids and parents, the most important thing is I always say, imagine the finish line. Imagine the product at the end. Then walk backwards through the steps until you hit the beginning.

You have to get them to activate the visual centers. And ideally, we're also actually gesturing. We're moving. Because once you add movement to learning, I don't have the official stats on this.

But it amplifies learning, I've heard as much as four times, five times 10 times 20 times.

Scaffolding, Regulation, and Micro-Steps

So it's somewhere between four to 20. Times more amplification. And I think we can feel this. I'm helping. J. C. studied for his test. He always wants me to help him study.

I feel pretty lucky, actually. Wants me and help them study, I think, because he knows like that I'm like, OK, let's let us come up with an acronym. Let's get up and move around.

And his brain gets it. It gets in his When we start with the end in mind and we work backwards, it removes the overwhelm. That's the first thing it does.

It makes a very concrete path. it also creates a consistent path if we're doing it all the time. If reduces pressure and it gives the brain something to really grab onto.

And this is the single most effective strategy. starting with the end in mind that I've taught thousands of people. If you want to know more about it, you can go to drrosanne.com forward slash EF toolkit and I have a great inexpensive E F toolkit.

Everybody who does it including teachers are like, why aren't we taught this? I'm like I haven't talked about this for a long time. Let's rewrite all these assumptions we have about our smart kids.

Oh, that they're not motivated, or they can't see the step, but they are unwilling, are they just being difficult, I need to be low demand. That's the hot one now too.

Gentle parenting and low-demand. I'm not saying some of it's not valid, we got to start with the science of the brain. We know how to hack into executive functioning, and I've seen the most impaired kids improve.

So I don't want to hear it if you think that's your kid, because that is baloney and cheese. When we start teaching with executive functioning, we really, really think, how is that brain?

How is an executive-functioning job manager going to get off his coffee break and start doing the work? Teach with the end in mind. So what does this look like in real life?

Number one, We're going say, let's picture when it's done. Gotta activate those visual centers at a gesture if you can. Now, you have to help them. You're not going to be doing this forever, people, but they need your scaffolding.

Let's picture that in three to five steps. Not 20, don't over break it down, try to cluster things, just a few. Because again, they're getting this. And especially my super high executive functioning parents, They're like, I just see it, okay?

No, we have to show them. It's a skill, you're not born with it. Hope that's an aha moment for you. Then we say, what step comes before that or what stuff comes after?

Because we gotta get them to think, here's the end product, What are the steps? And then you just keep working backwards. Keep it small. What's micro steps here?

Is it opening the laptop? is it putting their name on the paper? What is that? diorama look like that just came to my mind. That first step always has to be a doable action.

And kids, by the way, when I do this with kids and I've been using this for probably 20 years When you do this with kids, they're going to be like, you're gonna get that Bruce Banner turning into the Hulk.

Reframing Behavior and Teaching the Skill

Don't let it happen. Just say, okay, yeah, we're doing something different. I find this helps me. Mommy's always making those recipes or dad's, always out there doing this project and talk out loud when you are doing things.

So that is incredibly important. And then you have, before starting any of this, You've got to cue the nervous system to regulate. Don't skip that, because then the Hulk's going to come out instead of Bruce Banner.

And a regulated body unlocks the brain. OK, yours and their people. And if you're feeling annoyed, you are going to pause and you will walk away. Do not be there annoyed.

Put your big girl and boy panties on and knock it off. Be regulated. They didn't ask to be born. You are their parents. So you have permission to dysregulate, but you got to let them know you need to pause and pull it together.

And that what a great learning lesson for them to say, hey, I'm an adult and I make mistakes and i can regulate. So sit with them for a minute or two.

Don't talk too much. And then their nervous system is going to start to regulate and this is we do this, whether they're regulated or not. In our house, you know we use humor.

What can you do? So why don't you really start thinking differently? That your kid isn't lazy, unmotivated, they're being disrespectful, defiant, oppositional.

You have to start to think their nervous system is frozen. How can I unfreeze it? What skill do I need to teach? And executive functioning is the first one to go offline.

So don't jump to some freaking ADD medications, oh marana mia. Think about what do they need? How we can regulate and then break down that skill. And teaching with the end in mind, it's actually super enjoyable.

Like I love I teach adults this because it's a skill that can be learned. So reverse engineer every task. Don't assume this kid that's super smart knows what they're doing and give them a chance.

If you want more ways to show your kids how to do executive function and grab my EF Toolkit, I hope you enjoyed this saucy episode today and I. Hope you're feeling inspired that your to start, get through, and complete a task because guess what?

They can. Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our Disregulation Insider and it will show up in your inbox every week.