

11 Key Behavior Ideas for Executive Function Struggles

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SPEAKERS

Seth Perler

S Seth Perler 00:01
Hey parents and teachers, what's up? And Happy Mother's Day to those of you parents and teachers who are mothers, thank you so much for what you do and how awesome you are. We appreciate you, your kids appreciate you, even if it doesn't always seem like it. Thank you for what you do. So today I'm going to talk a little bit about behavior, disrespectful defiance, and probably going to approach this in a way that might be a little bit unusual or surprising, or I might not take the perspective that you're expecting somebody to take in this, but I think you're going to get a lot out of this. I got this email from a parent and I thought, wow, this is a good one. I really want to address this. I think it's the end of the school year, I think this will help all of you right now. It says this.

S Seth Perler 00:46
"Hi, Seth, I've been advocating like crazy and I got some nice 504 accommodations." First of all, good for you for advocating like crazy, because sometimes that's what you have to do. Sometimes it's really difficult. I hear all the time parents who are trying so hard to be heard and you just have to keep going. So that's great. "First of all, I've made demands of his teachers, and they have stepped up. Awesome. But he's just crapping on them in the way of classroom behavior, disrespectful defiance, and resistance. Even after all they and I have done to make school accessible for him. It makes me so sad. I'm a patient person. I

tell him he's damaging himself with his behavior." Yeah, he's probably not hearing that. How do we get heard and that sort of situation? Is that landing? "I wish I knew how to frame or reframe this, so I'm reaching out to you for your perspective."

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Seth Perler 01:44

Alright, so I'm gonna give you my perspective. The first thing that I want to mention to you parents and teachers out there is, what would you do in a similar situation? You've been in a situation for years, and I'm not sure how old this this kiddo is, but you've been in a situation for years. Let's say it's with a job, or a relationship, or a store that you go to, or a restaurant that you go to, or a school that you go to as an adult. But I want to use the example really of a restaurant. Let's say there's one restaurant in town and that's the only one you can go to. Let's say that you have to go to it five days a week for at least a meal a day, you have to go. But let's say that when you go, you don't feel like they hear you, you don't feel like you're getting what you're asking for, you don't feel like you're being seen, you don't feel like they care about how different you are with your needs for food or your preferences. They're just telling you that you have no ownership in what you choose to order, no choice, you know, you just have to go with the flow. How would that feel and what would you do? Now, what if you could get out of that situation? What about a job? What if you go to a job where they're not listening to you, they're not asking you what you think, they're just telling you all these things to do. Then when you try to do them, they're saying it's not good enough, or you get an F, or do it over or finish it. It's not good. So what will we do in a similar situation? What if we were in a class or we went to an adult class for something, and it wasn't engaging, and it wasn't fun, and we were asked to do all this busy work? I'm not saying everything in school lacks value or anything like that, but that your child has had a lot of experiences where they've tried, and it's just not been engaging, it's just not been rewarding and they have to go again, again, again, year after year after year. So how would that feel? And then if they said, "Hey, we change things for you. Viola! Welcome back. Everything has been changed. Now we know how to give you the service of this restaurant, the food that you're asking for. We're ready." Would you trust that?

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So why is this child in this situation? Why are they so resistant and defiant? Well, the child doesn't trust. And why should they? Their experience has taught them that it feels bad. Now, does that mean that what y'all are doing isn't great? No, absolutely not. I'm sure that all these great things have been in place but his nervous system has learned "This is not safe for me." So that's what we got to understand.

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Why is this happening? One, he lost trust and his nervous system is having an experience. And two, he has maladaptive choices or dysfunctional mindsets or cognitive distortions, or whatever you want to think. What that means is that one, his nervous system is saying this isn't safe. But two, his story and his narrative has come up with ways to justify not taking action and not trusting this. So these things called cognitive distortions, for example, might include things like black-and-white thinking, playing the victim, blame, things like this. So we have these maladaptives. We all do, adults and kids alike, but to a greater or lesser extent. As we mature, we learn that these are not working for us and ideally we change. So anyhow, that's why. First, I wanted to start with why. Then I wanted to say, why, why, why, why is he having these maladaptive behaviors and these feelings? Number 1: His nervous system is uncomfortable, it's dysregulated. And it feels bad, very simple. Number 2: Fear. He's afraid it's not gonna work, it seems easier to him to stay stuck. So there's fear there, that this can't work. Number 3: Maturity. He just doesn't have life experience to understand how to move forward and how to use like executive function in this case. Number 4: Short-term thinking. With executive function, a lot of times kids who struggle with executive function, lack future thinking, good future thinking. They're not connecting dots well. So the short term thinking is, well, in the short term, it's easier just to stay stuck and play the victim and have excuses and procrastinate and not accept help and be defiant, and things like that. I'm going to give you 11 really, really good thoughts that might help regarding what can work. What helps? What's going to work with this kiddo?

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Number 1: Well, sadly, the number one thing that I'm going to mention here that's going to work is that you're in a marathon, you're not in a sprint. There's no quick fix to this. This is not overnight, there's no silver bullet, this is going to take time. So number one, what works knowing that you're in the long game?

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Number 2: What works. Don't give up, be patient with your child's timeline, not the school's timeline. It's not yours, be patient, and be persistent. Keep trying, you'll get there.

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Number 3: Baby steps are everything in this game. So small wins, what I call micro-successes. So my program that I do with all these families towards the end of the

semester, we're seeing that a lot of these tiny little micro-successes that the kids had over and over and over. Little successes. Finally, by this time in the semester we're saying, "Okay, now there's some bigger successes. Now they're getting momentum, things are really starting to turn around." It's all about small wins and baby steps. So if you're going to write anything down for number three, just write down micro-successes, you want your child to experience micro-successes.

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Number 4: Very important. Connection, connection, connection. Research attachment theory, your child needs to feel emotionally safe, connected to you, connected to the teachers, connected to the tutors, connected to the support staff. Having heart-to-hearts with this kid, being compassionate and empathetic with his child. The connection is everything.

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Number 5: Be proactive with, be proactive with, keeping an eye out for serious mental health needs. Sometimes kids have very serious, legitimate mental health needs that are not noticed or taken seriously. I have so many parents of high schoolers or college kids or even older kids who are really struggling to get their life together, where they say, "I wish I'd started sooner. Why didn't I start sooner?" And they'll often blame themselves and feel guilty. But, just the sooner you can start the better. But keep an eye out. Keep an eye out. Don't just and wait. What happens is we see a red flag and we are in denial. Well, I'm telling you right now, if you see red flag, explore it. be proactive about keeping an eye out for serious mental health issues that need to be addressed. Now don't wait. It's better to address it now and find out that you don't have anything to worry about, then not adjust anything now and later on find out you wish you had.

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Number 6: Do your own deep inner work, and this is for parents and teachers. We all have baggage, all of us. 100% of human beings have some sort of baggage, we all have dysfunction, we all have maladaptive patterns, but obviously some more than others. But the problem with these patterns is when we're not conscious of them. When teachers are not conscious of them, obviously they can impact kids and they do impact certain kids in their classes. When parents are not aware of them, obviously they they impact kids, so do your own deep inner work. When we don't do our own deep inner work, we tend to stay stuck in enabling or over-parenting, sort of encouraging kid to develop more 'learned helplessness,' which is not what we want, or we don't give enough of the right support.

We're giving support, but it's not really working, it's not the right kind of support. What happens is that, and teachers can do this too, we can do something called 'co-regulation.' We can be co-disregulating. Our worry, our fear, our anger, our emotions, can co-disregulate with our kid where they get more and more shut down, more and more withdrawn, more and more excuses, more and more distance, not connection. So that's number six, your own deep inner work.

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Number 7: If you are a couple, do couples counseling. This is a part of your own deep inner work. But our dynamics and our things that we're not aware of, I mean, people have studied to become couples counselors for years. Take advantage of it. This is what they do, this is what they studied. People are good at this, like use it. You know, there are amazing people out there that can be really game changers. But I when I say this to parents, a lot of parents are like, "Couples counseling?" Yeah, it's not just your kid. It's the whole dynamic. We're all connected. Try it.

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Number 8: Modeling. What we do you know how they set them Do as I say, not as I do. That's crap. What we do as adults is what our kids see. What we model for them, or regulation or dysregulation, our connection, our relationships, our careers, our effort, our resistance. Our kids see what we do and that's what they're learning from. So, what are we modeling? When you're modeling deep inner work, and a willingness to seek help for yourself, and self care, and taking care of your own life, and things like that. They see that and they learn from that. Super important.

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Number 9: Now, this one's a little more practical. What needs to happen here is teachers can't just say, "Well, the kid needs to advocate for themselves, the kid needs to ask for the accommodation, blah, blah, blah." You need to have teachers who have a heart, and who understand that they can do little things to make the kid feel important. It's so simple. How does the teacher make the kid feel like they matter? And a lot of teachers, I would say most teachers do this really well. It's really hard online right now for teachers to do this, it's really hard with the online stuff. But simply, the teachers that need to do this are probably the ones that resist it. The teachers that are already doing it don't need to be told this, so that's kind of complicated in the situation. But teachers really need to go to your kid and be like, "Hey, I got this accommodation for you. I want to encourage you," or, "Hey, let's do this baby step today." Or, "Hey, I'm going to make a modification for your

assignment today. How does that sound?" Or, "Hey, let's give you some choice, how would you rather do it different!" Where teachers are just actively taking interest. That's it, just taking an interest in pushing your job forward, baby step, by baby step, by baby step. Great teachers do this naturally, they're always pushing your kid. And trust when you have good teachers, trust them, let them do their job. When you have teachers who are disconnected, try to find ways to work with them so that they can take an interest in your kid and get your kid moving forward. Again, it's hard with the online and it's hard when there are some teachers who say, "Oh, well, they have to ask the accommodation," or this crazy stuff we have in the system that prevents kids from getting where they need. Two more.

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Number 10: Ownership and buy-in. You know, we don't design a system that gives kids a lot of ownership and buy-in in the first place in terms of their learning. But how can we have education that gives them ownership and buy-in? Where they're taking ownership of their learning, they're taking ownership of their life, their situations, their choices. We're not giving them advice, and using logic and reason, and punishment and rewards, and all these things to try to motivate them. We're helping them get motivated because they have a stake in it. They have made choices, they own their learning, they own the experience they're in, they have buy-in, they want to do this for their life. Not for you, not for the teachers, not for the tutors, not for whatever, they're doing it for them. We have a lot of work to do as a culture in terms of changing the whole system so that there's more ownership and buy-in. But I'm telling you 11 things that work, and that's something that I work with my families, and we work on how do we get more ownership and buy-in.

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Seth Perler 14:39

Number 11: The last one. Parents and teachers, don't give up on this kid. Never ever, ever give up. I know it's daunting. I know it's scary. I know it seems like, "Will they ever get it? Will they ever engage? Will they ever have decent executive function?" It'll happen. It might happen when they're 30, it might have when they're 25, it might happen when they're 22. It happened for me when I was probably about 22. It might happen tomorrow. But don't give up. Have the heart-to-hearts, tell them you love them, tell them you're there for them, tell them "I'm not perfect, but I will never ever, ever give up on you. I'm here for you. I'm doing the best I can. How can I be helpful? What do you need?" Never ever, ever, ever give up. They'll get there. I know you're not gonna give up anyway, but I just want you to know that your efforts are paying off. It may not seem like it's sinking in, it may seem like it's landing, but it is. Trust yourself. trust the process. Don't give up. Be patient and persistent. That's all I got for you.



Seth Perler 15:45

Again, Happy Mother's Day if you're a mother. My name is Seth Perler at SethPerler.com, we got TEFOS, the executive function online summit, my online summit. ExecutiveFunctionSummit.com, I'll put a link below. At ExecutiveFunctionSummit.com I have my summit coming up. Third year this year, in August. Check it out, register for free, it's amazing. And register for freebies on my website, and give me a thumbs up, and likes, and comments, and share this. If this helps you and you appreciate what I'm doing, please share it with someone. That's how my work gets to other people. Be well. Have an amazing day filled with joy and peace and connection. Some good connection with your kid.