



# COLLEGE BOUND: CHADD PRESENTS ON EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

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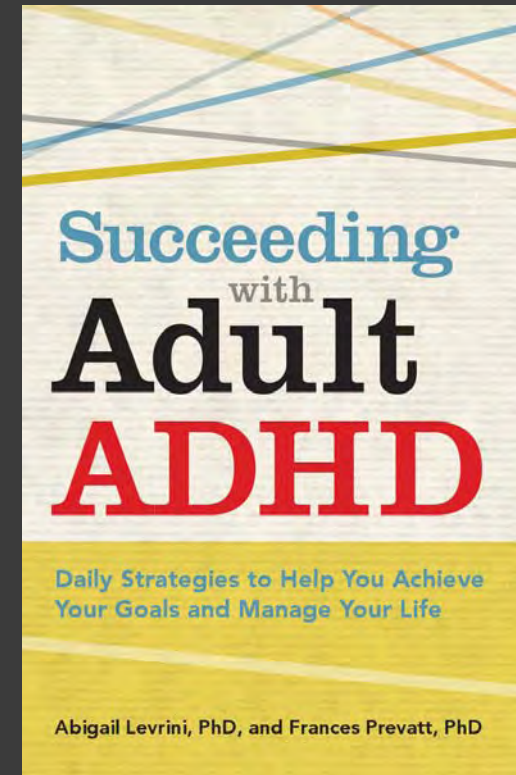
CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) is the nation's leading non-profit organization serving individuals with AD/HD and their families. CHADD has over 16,000 members in 200 local chapters throughout the U.S. Chapters offer support for individuals, parents, teachers, professionals, and others.

Many of the ideas presented today are from CHADD's *Attention* magazine.

**Psych Ed Coaches** is the premier Washington, DC metro area AD/HD coaching and assessment practice.

Operated by Ph.D. and Master's level clinicians, Psych Ed Coaches offers the following services to clients struggling with ADD and AD/HD or similar problems in executive functioning:

- **AD/HD coaching** for individuals using a practical, structured and empirically supported coaching approach.
- **Parent/Family coaching** to help educate parents and families about what they can do to navigate life with ADHD.
- **AD/HD Testing and Psychological Assessment** for children and adults who have interest in learning of a possible mental health diagnosis.



Dr. Levrini's book includes many of today's strategies for improving EF (APA, 2012).



## EXECUTIVE FUNCTION:

Those "actions we perform to ourselves and direct at ourselves so as to accomplish self-control, goal-directed behavior, and the maximization of future outcomes."

- Russell Barkley, M.D., PhD



## Who Has Executive Function Problems?

Individuals with the following issues commonly have problems with executive function:

- ADHD
- Autism Spectrum Disorders (Asperger's, PDD)
- Learning Disabilities (written expression, working memory, etc.)
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- OCD
- Depression
- Schizophrenia
- Tourette's Disorder
- Drug/Alcohol Abuse
- Dementia



## SPECIFIC EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS:

Practically speaking, problems with the "brain's CEO" contribute to several problems: disorganization, difficulty getting started and finishing work, remembering homework, plus difficulty memorizing facts, writing essays or reports, working complex math problems, remembering what is read, completing long-term projects, being on time, controlling emotions, and planning for the future.



**Working memory and recall** (holding facts in mind while manipulating information; accessing facts stored in long-term memory.)

**Activation, arousal, and effort** (getting started; paying attention; finishing work)

**Controlling emotions** (ability to tolerate frustration; thinking before acting or speaking)

**Internalizing language** (using "self-talk" to control one's behavior and direct future actions)

**Taking an issue apart, analyzing the pieces, reconstituting and organizing it** into new ideas (complex problem solving).

**Shifting, inhibiting** (changing activities, stopping existing activity, stopping and thinking before acting or speaking)

**Organizing/planning ahead** (organizing time, projects, materials, and possessions)

**Monitoring** (self-monitoring and prompting)

## REAL WORLD IMPACT:



Although our son Alex successfully struggled through the early school years, he finally hit the proverbial "ADHD brick wall" in middle school. Belatedly I realized that the demands for executive skills increase exponentially in middle school (working independently, organizing oneself, getting started, remembering multiple assignments). As a former teacher and school psychologist, I'm also embarrassed to say I failed for many years to recognize that a high IQ score alone was not enough to make good grades. It wasn't until Dr. Barkley identified the central role executive function plays in school success, that I finally understood why school was so difficult for my son. Teachers would say, "Alex is very bright; he could make better grades if he would just try harder." In truth, our children often do try harder, but even then, cannot make good grades without proper treatment and academic supports. Bottom line--the executive function deficits were the primary cause of Alex's academic struggles, not the symptoms of his ADHD.



## SPECIFIC STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME DIFFICULTIES WITH:

- Goal Setting/Planning
  - Organization
- Time Management/Prioritization
  - Study Strategies

# STRATEGY 1: SET GOALS (USING REWARDS AND CONSEQUENCES)

## Quiz Yourself - Does This Sound Like You?

- Do you have abstract ideas of what you would like to accomplish such as, “I would like to be better organized”?
- Are you the antithesis of the old Nike slogan, “just do it!”?
- Do you alternate between going full force toward a goal (i.e. crash dieting and losing several pounds in one week) and undoing everything you set in motion (i.e. devouring a large pizza in one sitting)?
- Is your home littered with old to-do lists or notes meant to inspire you but that ended up serving as coasters?
- Do you get down on yourself because everyone else seems to be reaching their goals except for you?

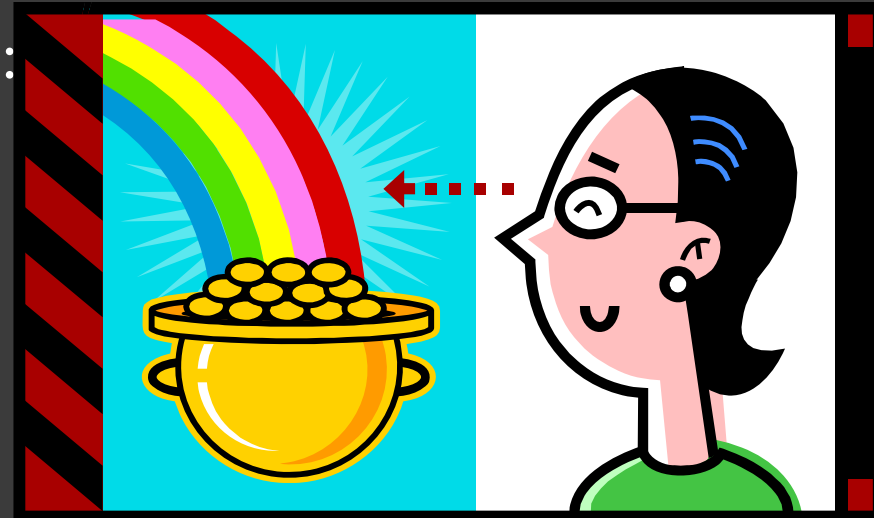
# GETTING ON TRACK

- 1) Create long term goals (step 1)
- 2) Break them down into smaller weekly objectives (step 2)
- 3) Rewards and consequences (step 3) is essential to the goal reaching process
- 4) Metacognition (step 4) can help you better control future behavior

# THE 3 “GOLDEN RULES”

We’ve created three rules for what makes an effective **Long Term Goal**. The three golden rules are:

1. Make it measurable
2. Make it process based
3. Keep it time sensitive



# SAMPLE LTG'S

## Without Using the 3GR's

- I want to be better organized
- I want to manage my time better
- I want to be less distracted
- I want to be a better spouse/friend/parent

## Using the 3GR's

- I want to create and maintain a system of organization for my home office over the next three months
- I want to utilize an agenda to record my schedule on a weekly basis, then follow through with that schedule for the next eight weeks
- I want to research and attempt one new skill per week to help increase my ability to focus, for the next five weeks
- I want to dedicate one hour per evening to bond with my spouse/help my friend/play with my kids for the next two months

# REWARDS & CONSEQUENCES

## *Factors to Consider:*

- Be complimentary
- The sooner the better
- Get creative
- Try both and then use what works
- This isn't a bribe

# METACOGNITION = “THINKING ABOUT THINKING”

- First, review the previous weeks' goals and whether or not they were met.
  - If goals were not met think about why you were unable to meet them, and whether or not consequences were carried out.
  - If goals were not met, and consequences were not carried out, think about why this occurred and what needs to be changed so that it will not happen again.
  - If goals were met think about why you were able to do this, and whether or not rewards were carried out.
  - If goals were met, and rewards were carried out, think about why this occurred and what needs to happen so that you can continue to be successful.
  - If goals were met but rewards were not carried out, think about why this occurred and what needs to be changed so that you can carry through on rewards.
- After thinking about the previous weeks' goals, decide on the following week's goals, as well as the rewards and consequences for meeting or not meeting each goal. (See supplemental exercises).

## STRATEGY 2: GET ORGANIZED

### Quiz Yourself – Does this sound like you?

- Are you constantly losing or misplacing everyday items such as your keys, cell phone, ipod, or wallet?
- Do you forget what color your desktop or kitchen table are because they are constantly covered in clutter?
- Is your briefcase or backpack full of crumpled bits of paper, candy wrappers, and possibly those lost keys?
- Do you insist something was never given to you only to find it weeks or months later?
- Do your closets look “like a bomb went off”?
- Do you start to organize your home only to become overwhelmed and/or distracted?

## STRATEGY 2: GET ORGANIZED

- Three Steps to Organization:
  - Before
  - During
  - After (maintenance)
- It's progress - not perfection.
- Goal should be to *create and maintain a system that you can manage with relative ease to simplify your space.*
- The more planning and preparation you do, the less time and stress the task will take.

# “BEFORE” GETTING ORGANIZED CHECKLIST

- ❑ Relinquish your fears. Write them all down. For each one, write a corresponding “challenge thought”. Take the perspective of what you might tell a friend who expressed such a concern.
- ❑ Think in terms of improving the organization of your space, not perfecting it. Keep a note with the phrase “*progress not perfection*” taped to the wall as you work.
- ❑ Resist the urge to try to organize everything at once. It has been there this long; what is the harm in it being there a bit longer? Use a planner and a timer to keep to small chunks of time.
- ❑ Create a list of the areas you would like to organize and then number them from the most important to least important areas. Complete one project at a time.
- ❑ Decide on how you will organize each space before diving in.
- ❑ Figure out what motivates you to organize your space. If organization in and of itself is not motivating to you (which it most likely is not) create another incentive. Maybe you will sell old items for money. Maybe you are creating a fun area for your kids to play, or you just want to see the look on your boss’ face. Review Chapter on setting goals using rewards and consequences for more ideas about motivational strategies

# “DURING” ORGANIZATION

1. Keep, Throw, or Donate
2. Divide and Conquer
3. Photographs
4. Pick a Spot
5. In Sight, In Mind



# “AFTER” ORGANIZATION

## *Ideas to help you to stay organized:*

- Do a quick clean up at the end of each day. Take 10 – 15 minutes to do a sweep of your home or office.
- For more time consuming organizational tasks such as sorting mail and bills, or filing papers, schedule a set day and time each week to complete the task. Make it a rule. For example, “Every Thursday night before dinner I do laundry”.
- For each new item you bring into your home, get rid of one item.
- Follow the “Handle It Once” rule for sorting mail or papers. When it is time to do your weekly sorting, do not create more piles to go through later.
- Keep small containers in several rooms of your house or one in your office that you can use to collect items that are out of place. Then (immediately) take a second walk around putting the items back where they belong.

# STRATEGY 3: IMPROVE TIME MANAGEMENT

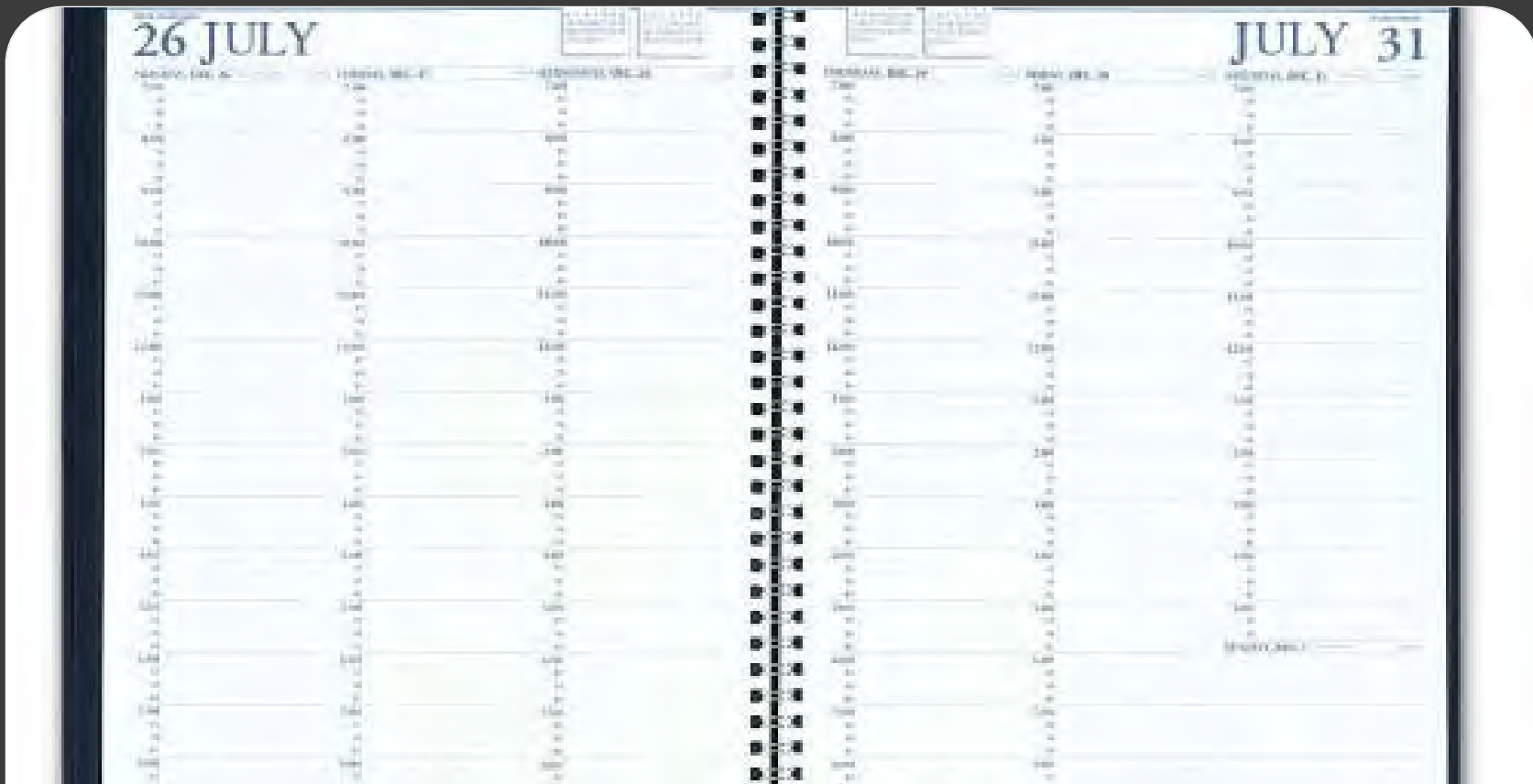
## Quiz Yourself – Does this sound like you?

- Do you put off tasks until an unwanted consequence has you scrambling to get it done, leaving you stressed and regretful?
- Are loved ones often upset with you because you commit to doing something and then find you are “too busy” to follow through?
- Do you create daily to-do lists with several items and only manage to cross one or two off at the end of the day?
- Does your boss or colleague have to hassle you to get work turned in on time?
- Do you find yourself putting off items that should be taken care of immediately such as paying bills to do something unimportant like rearrange your sock drawer?
- Does it feel like everyone around you is getting three times as much done as you in the same amount of time?

# PROCRASTINATION “TYPES”



1. Homer Simpson – The Ineffective Prioritizer
2. Silly ‘Ol Bear – The Forgetful Type
3. Dug the Dog – The Easily Distracted
4. Hi Ho! – The Big Picture Type
5. ABD – The Perfectionist



## QUARTER-HOUR PLANNER

Visual of time in small segments; invites you to break down large tasks into smaller pieces and help you to see where in your busy day a task may take place.

# (SOME) TYPICAL WEEKLY DUTIES

- At work (8 hours)
- Driving to work (45 minutes)
- Driving home from work (45 minutes)
- Sleep (7 hours)
- Shower and get ready for work (brush teeth, style hair, put on makeup, get dressed) (1.5 hours)
- Prepare and eat breakfast (30 minutes)
- Prepare lunch to bring to work (15 minutes)
- Have lunch (1 hour)
- Make dinner (30 minutes)
- Eat dinner (30 minutes)
- Get children up and off to school (45 minutes)
- Help children with homework (30 minutes)
- Take an evening walk (30 minutes)
- Take medication (15 minutes)
- Fold laundry (30 minutes)
- Vacuum the house (1 hour)
- Clean the bathrooms (30 minutes)
- Feed the pets breakfast (15 minutes)
- Feed the pets dinner (15 minutes)
- Water the plants (15 minutes)
- Get and go through the mail (15 minutes)
- Take out the trash (15 minutes)
- Pay bills (30 minutes)
- Fill the car with gas (30 minutes)

# HOW TO PRIORITIZE

*When deciding what tasks should come 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> on your list, think of the consequences of not completing each task and whether or not there is a specific “due date” associated with each task. Use numbers, letters, or even colored star stickers to designate around 5 levels of priority then create a legend to keep with your planner.*

*For example,*

- A. Task is “due” in one week or less, or my boss expects me to complete asap. If not complete, I could lose my job.*
- B. Task is “due” in two weeks or less, or a team member has expressed that he would like to see results soon. If not completed, my co-workers will be angry.*
- C. Task is “due” in three weeks or more, or it is something that I would like to get off my plate. If not completed, I will be disappointed.*
- D. Task has no pending “due date” and is something that would be nice to have done at some point. If not completed, it’s okay.*

# STRATEGY 4: DEVELOP LEARNING & STUDY STRATEGIES

## Quiz Yourself - Does this sound like you?

- Are the notes you take in class or meetings not very helpful to you later?
- Do you have a hard time figuring out what to include in your notes?
- Do you read something, and then quickly forget it?
- Can you read a chapter several times without it really sinking in?
- Do you study for tests or prepare for presentations, but then go blank when it's time to recall the information?
- Do you feel overwhelmed when you start to study or complete an assignment and don't know where to start?
- Do you feel you spend way more time than others studying or preparing or none at all because you have given up?

# TOP 5 STUDY STRATEGIES

This study was done by Patricia Kaminski and her colleagues at the University of North Texas. Rather than asking students with ADHD about their problems, they asked them what helped them to succeed. See if the top five strategies surprise you.

1. Working longer and harder than other students.
2. Using some type of social support (getting help from parents, friends, roommates, professors).
3. Being organized, managing their time, and using good study skills.
4. Exercise helped students have the energy to get things done.
5. Keeping a positive mental attitude was important.

The single best predictor of doing well in college classes was whether the student went online the week before class and opened the syllabus. (See supplemental exercises)



## Means of Additional Support:

- ***Medication*** – the most rigorously studied method of controlling EF symptoms. Stimulants and other medications can help to increase focus and self-control.
- ***Non-medication Based Treatment Options:***
  - Counseling/therapy
  - Exercise and Nutrition
  - ADHD/EF Coaching
  - Accommodations
  - Multi-modal Treatment

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# COUNSELING OPTIONS:

- **Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT):**
  - Focuses on changing maladaptive patterns of thinking and the underlying beliefs that guide such thoughts
  - By learning to change these distorted thoughts this can then lead to changes in behavior.
- **Mindfulness Meditation Training:**
  - Relaxation, although often induced during the training, is not the sole goal of the activity; rather, the main activity is a cognitive and intention-based process characterized by self-regulation and attention to the present moment with an open and accepting orientation towards one's experiences
  - 3 basic steps: 1) bringing attention to an “attentional anchor” such as breathing; 2) noting that distraction occurs and letting go of the distraction; and, 3) refocusing back to the “attentional anchor”.

# EXECUTIVE FUNCTION COACHING

- Dr. Levrini's own multiple case study in 2008 was some of the first scientific research to show positive results for ADHD/EF coaching. Since then, several additional studies have revealed that coaching has potential to be a very effective treatment.
- Involves helping you deal with EF-related difficulties such as procrastination, lack of concentration, ineffective self-regulation, poor planning, anxiety, social incompetence, or time management.
- Useful strategies include organizational skills, time-management, and specific study skills.
- Involves setting concrete, realistic goals and can extend to many facets of your life.

# WHERE TO GO NEXT...

- Helpful websites:
- [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org),
- [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com),
- [www.psychedcoaches.com](http://www.psychedcoaches.com)
- Start with referrals – ask friends, colleagues, etc. for recommendations
- Other sources: University counseling centers, doctors, teachers, school psychologists
- Read “*Succeeding with Adult ADHD*” for more tips and strategies.