Cooper-Kahn, Joyce and Laurie C. Dietzel.  Late, Lost, and Unprepared:  A Parent's Guide to Helping Children with Executive Functioning.  Woodbine House, 2008.

**WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING?**

* Formal definition:  "The executive functions are a set of processes that all have to do with managing oneself and one's resources in order to achieve a goal.  It is an umbrella term for the neurologically-based skills involving mental control and self-regulation" (10).

**LIST OF EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS (PAGES 12-13)**

1. **INHIBITION**:  "The ability to stop one's own behavior at the appropriate time, including stopping actions and thoughts."
2. **SHIFT**:  "The ability to move freely from one situation to another and to think flexibly in order to respond appropriately to the situation."
3. **EMOTIONAL CONTROL**:  "The ability to modulate emotional responses by bringing rational thought to bear on feelings."
4. **INITIATION**:  "The ability to begin a task or activity and to independently generate ideas, responses, or problem-solving strategies."
5. **WORKING MEMORY**:  "The capacity to hold information in mind for the purpose of completing a task."
6. **PLANNING/ORGANIZATION**:  "The ability to manage current and future-oriented task demands"
7. **ORGANIZATION OF MATERIALS**:  "The ability to impose order on work, play, and storage spaces."
8. **SELF-MONITORING**:  "The ability to monitor one's own performance and to measure it against some standard of what is needed or expected."

Consider how many of the executive skills a student needs to master to be able to simply complete a homework assignment.  In most situations, I would argue that they need ALL EIGHT! A deficiency in any one area could be a reason why students don't complete work.

What can we do as teachers to help teach some of these skills?

**CAUSES OF EXECUTIVE SKILL DEFICIENCIES**

"For most kids who experience executive function delays, these weaknesses are likely due to inefficient communication among brain regions rather than any overt, localized problems, such as damage in one specific area.  We do know that exposure to alcohol, certain drugs, or toxins during pregnancy, as well as premature birth are all risk factors for delays in cognitive development.  Kids who experienced early abuse, neglect, or other traumatic experiences are also vulnerable to delays in development.  We also know that exwctuive weaknesses (related to AD-HD and learning disabilities) run in families, although we do not yet understand exactly how genetic transmission works...  We also know that a disease process or injurty to the brain may result in *acquired* exectuive dysfunction in kids who were previously developing typically" (17).

* Executive skills are still developing into a person's twenties -- sometimes their thirties.

**WHAT CAN BE DONE FOR KIDS W/ EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING DEFICIENCIES**

* "Prosthetic environment" -- put supports in place for kids' specific deficiencies.  If a student has issues with self-monitoring, provide opportunities for metacognitive reflection at regular intervals and **teach/model** how to be metacognitive.  If a student is struggling with planning/organization, make a calendar of due dates and keep it visible in the classroom."
* Supports are hopefully only necessary for a while, but may be needed for years
* Supports are not "crutches" -- allowing the student to feel successful, to see what is possible with better executive functioning capabilities may provide motivation for change
* The best way to affect long-term improvement is **DEVELOPING HABITS AND ROUTINES**.  This means repeating processes over and over, but "[o]nce you no longer have to think about doing something you largely bypass the executive system" (78).