A collection of abstract, organic shapes in various shades of teal and dark blue, scattered across the white background. Some shapes are solid circles, while others are elongated, rounded forms.

A TEACHERS GUIDE:

The Power of Routines in the Classroom

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The Significance of Executive Functions in Daily Routines

Understanding Executive Functions

- Executive functions are cognitive processes that aid individuals in managing and regulating their thoughts, actions, and emotions.
- One way to support the development of these skills in children is through implementing routines, which involve the goal-directed regulation of attention and behaviour.
- Teachers can promote healthy executive function development by incorporating daily routines in the classroom, which can help reduce the cognitive load required to perform tasks.

Three Big Components of Executive Functions

1. Working memory - how we process, use, and remember information.
 2. Cognitive Flexibility - how we adapt to new changing or unplanned events.
 3. Inhibition - how we control our attention, behaviour thoughts, and emotions to override an internal predisposition and do what is appropriate.
- *Other examples of executive functions:* planning and organizing, time management, initiation and motivation, self-monitoring, and emotional control

What is A Routine?

- A predictable and consistent task that sets clear expectations for students' behaviour.
- Routines can be implemented at any point during the school day. The goal is to reduce distractions and interruptions that can hinder instruction and disrupt students' focus in the classroom.

Skills Needed To Follow A Routine

- being able to track time, organize and plan, memorize steps in the correct sequence, stay on task, and adhere to rules.

Executive Functions in Daily Tasks

Preparing for School: Unravelling the Role of Executive Functions

Planning and Organizing: To ensure that you are ready for school, you must plan and organize your tasks such as getting dressed, preparing breakfast, and packing a lunch in a particular sequence.

Time Management: You have a limited amount of time to complete your morning routine, so you must allocate the right amount of time to each task, ensuring that you leave the house on time.

Working Memory: You must remember where you put your keys/bag, what you need to pack for the day, and what appointments or activities are scheduled.

Inhibition: You must resist distractions or temptations that may disrupt your morning routine, such as checking your phone or watching TV.

Cognitive Flexibility: You need to adjust and adapt your plan if something unexpected happens, such as spilling coffee.

Initiation and Motivation: You must motivate yourself to start each task, even when you may feel tired or would rather stay in bed.

Self-monitoring: You need to continually assess your progress in daily routines, making sure you're on track to leave on time and have all your belongings. If you notice that you're falling behind, you might need to alter your routine.

Emotional Control: You need to manage any frustration or stress that may arise during your morning routine, ensuring that your emotions don't interfere with your tasks.

The Importance of Routines in the Classroom

Routines in the classroom allow for more consistency and organization. Routines provide structure and reduce the cognitive load required to engage in executive functioning. With routines in place, students can easily understand what is expected of them without having to think extensively about what their next steps should be.

Routines benefit all students, regardless of their executive function abilities. Familiarity with daily routines helps students feel more comfortable in the classroom. When students know what is expected of them, they will feel more confident in their daily activities. Not to mention, with fewer cognitive demands, students will be able to perform more highly in their academics.

It is important to consider the demands on executive functions when creating routines. High demands on executive functions can impact social and academic skills and have been shown to predict school readiness, success, and even job success later in life. By prioritizing executive function demands in the classroom, students will benefit from long-term impacts on their development.



Teaching Routines

Define Behavioural Expectations: ensure routines are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, positively stated, specific, and observable.

Teach Routines Explicitly: It is important to teach routines explicitly. Keep them simple and ensure they are predictable in terms of when they occur throughout the school day and at what time. Make sure to talk through all the steps, develop a checklist, and set timelines.

Provide Assistance with the Routine: utilize visual cues of steps in the routine either for all students or for students who are struggling the most following the routine. Similarly, provide prompts (either verbal or nonverbal) throughout the routine to ensure all students are following along.

Monitor Performance During the Routine: as students get used to the implemented routines, maintain prompts for some students and begin to fade them for others. Utilize classroom helpers as needed such as teachers, co-teachers, assistants, or buddy systems, to help support the students who are struggling to keep up with the flow of the routine.

Make the Routine Automatic: when implementing a new routine in the classroom, make sure to spend time practicing routines and offer repeated practice over the long term.

Evaluate Routines: constantly assess routines. If you notice that multiple students are struggling to follow a routine, review the routine and make changes accordingly. If you notice that a single child is struggling with the routine, create a separate plan to help support that child in achieving their goals.

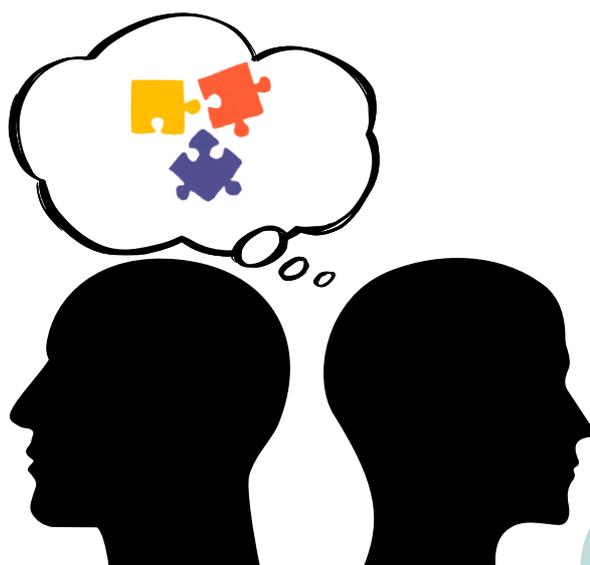
Positive Praise: ensure that children are rewarded for completing a routine. Offer positive attention by using praise or rewards to keep the motivation high so that students will complete routines in the future.

Some Considerations...

Educators need to acknowledge a few considerations when teaching routines in their classrooms. For one, routines are supposed to ease the demands of executive functions, however, during the learning process, demands will be placed on executive functioning for all children. Ensure you know all the student's needs in your classroom and that you are implementing routines appropriately. Remember, routines are implemented to support students, not cause them added stress. With that being said, some students have weaker executive function skills compared to other students. This does not mean that routines cannot be implemented, although it does mean that it may take these particular students longer to achieve routines.

Furthermore, for routines to be effective in the classroom all students must be physically and cognitively engaged with each part of the routine. If students are not both physically and cognitively involved in the routine they will not have the motivation to complete the routine and may not be successful.

As a reminder, all students have different skills and will learn routines at their own pace. Some students may outgrow the support provided and can perform all routines independently. Whereas some students may need ongoing executive functioning support to follow through with routines.



Tips and Tricks: Routines

Below are some tips and tricks for how to increase the effectiveness of routines in the classroom:

- Be sure to introduce classroom routines early in the school so that students can learn classroom expectations right from day one. This can also make the transition back to school easier for some students as they are aware of expectations.
- Make sure to keep expectations brief basic and understandable. By doing so, it will make it easier to include all students in the routine.
- To help solidify routines, have students role-play routines so that the expectations are clear. This would be good to practice early on and might be a tip that would work better for some routines rather than others.
- Don't be afraid to reteach routines frequently if you find that students are still not grasping the routine. Review the expectations and rules, and perhaps simplify the routine.
- To keep motivation high in the classroom, provide praise for students when the routine is complete. It may be worthwhile considering implementing a classroom reinforcement system that would benefit all students and keep motivation high in the classroom.
- Remind students when a routine is going to start/end. Provide countdowns to make transitions easier for students.
- Educate students on the times when routines can be interrupted and encourage flexible thinking around this. This can decrease the number of behaviours in the classroom and ensure that students are well-prepared for changes.
- Keep a tracking system to note students who are not successful in routines. This will allow you to review your data and consider if routines should be retaught, revised, or removed from the schedule.

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