



EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

*for executive
dysfunction*

@NeuroGlastic

When you need to plan

People without executive functioning disability can see the path to most everyday things and how to get the brain and body there.



When they need to plan

People with executive functioning disability cannot access the stairs. They do not have the same journey as everyone else. They need help to get over the wall.



Emotional Support for Executive Dysfunction

@NeuroClastic

Never take it personally.

Understand that they are not trying to argue or ruin the mood if they bring up a million and one reasons they are resistant to doing something.

What they are looking for is help with processing. It may feel invalidating or like they are making excuses, but what they are really doing is trying to force their brain to plan.

They are not arguing with you. They are trying to get their brains to the point where they can see the beginning, middle, and end of something.

A major fear they have is that because of their executive functioning deficits, they will be a burden or cause stress to others or ruin their good time.

What they have

They see an insurmountable task with no way to scale the wall.

They feel broken, negative, and insecure because no one else is struggling. Everyone else is excited about the destination, but they don't know how to get there.

Whatever they say can often be translated to, "I just need to know that if I try, I won't make things worse."



What they need

They need you to provide them with a structure they can mount.

They need you to build grips and footholds in the wall. They need a harness and a rope and leverage.

The first step to being a source of emotional support is to stop seeing yourself as a sparring partner and start seeing yourself as a spotter!

Just that small perceptive switch will be a huge relationship booster.



Give their thoughts a structure



Sometimes, a person with poor executive functioning seems to be nitpicking or getting in a back-and-forth that is going nowhere.



What is really happening is they are borrowing your structure in order to process their own thoughts. You are giving them the step for their next thoughts.



Responding to the most recent point will become an unproductive spiral if they aren't actually able to see a path. Instead, try to move the discussion to the next steps in planning and organizing thoughts.



If they say, "I don't have the right shoes," they may really be saying, "I don't know what clothes I have, if I will be able to find them, or if they're socially appropriate for the occasion."



Try, "Oh, you have that black linen suit, and those boots with the red stitching would be perfect. I'll help you get your outfit ready and make sure everything is together a few days early!"

MetaCognition

HOW TO BE AN EF SPOTTER



1



✓ Think out loud! Use metacognition!

If you model executive functioning by narrating how you think out loud, it helps the other person to get an “inside” look into how to structure thoughts and work through anxiety.

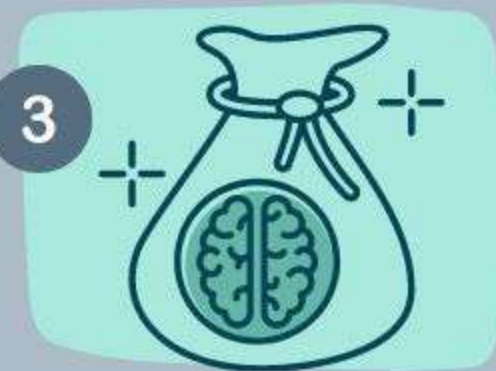
2



✓ Narrate the steps

Talk with them about each step they will need to go through, reassuring them that as they climb that wall, you will help them know where to put their feet and will have the rope if they slip.

3



✓ Think like a partner, not a coach

A person with asthma needs an inhaler, not a pep talk about persevering through gym class. It will be demoralizing if you try to motivate someone to do something that needs accommodating. Let them know it is not a burden. Gift them your brain.

Lower the demands on their

Overtaxed Processing

“

We have a meeting in five minutes. Just reminding you.

“

I made this grocery list for these five easy recipes. Want a copy?

“

I am going to the store. Need anything? Want to come?

“

We can skip the birthday party and just send a gift.

“

I can help you with these forms by addressing the envelopes and taking them to the post office.

“

Let's just keep an extra set of supplies at home so you don't have to remember to bring these every day!

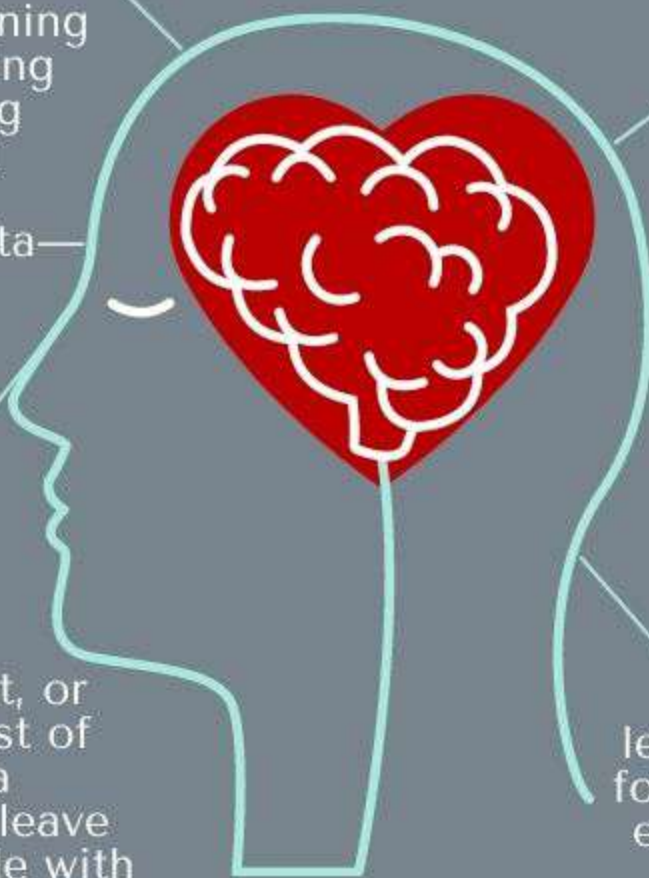
Avoid Vague Emotional Language

Don't talk feelings

A part of executive functioning is recognizing and identifying emotions. If you are leading the conversation, making it about their feelings is like asking them to pray to Santa—it will feel pointless.

Be specific

Instead of vague, emotional language about relaxing, being independent, or trusting you, give them a list of concrete ways you can be a spotter. "I promise we will leave if it rains." Or, "You can ride with me. I can be there early to help make sure everything is ready."



Be reassuring

Reassure with practical language. "I promise it is no trouble." "I love organizing. This is not too much for me." "You are not getting on my nerves."

Be relaxed

Neutralize their anxiety by letting them know it's not hard for you. To someone who finds every task very difficult, being able to do everyday tasks is like magic. Let them know it's not burdening you to spot them.

HOW TO LOGIC AWAY THE STRESS

REMEMBER

REMEMBER!

If they cannot plan or sequence, the chance of everything feels like 50/50.

NARRATE REALISTIC OUTCOMES



Listen to their fears and do not dismiss them, but help them to know there is a backup plan.

CALCULATE THE ODDS



You can help someone put their fears into perspective by helping them calculate the odds of their fear happening.

BE A "GET OUT OF JAIL" CARD



Let them know that you will have their backs if they get stuck, forget something, or get in an awkward social circumstance.

PLAN FOR DISASTER



For them, locking keys in the car, forgetting a wallet, or a massive social blowout is more likely. Just tell them what you would do in each circumstance.

4 Tips for Emotional Safety

@NeuroClastic

1

See the individual

Executive dysfunction impacts everyone differently. There is no magic formula that always works. These tips are ideas to help you see multiple strategies, not universal rules.

2

Don't take control

Your role is to help them have safety and autonomy, not to be a savior or drill sergeant. Their fear is rooted in not having enough control, so give them access to more in the form of available supports.

3

You are not enabling

People often worry their supports are “enabling bad behavior.” Is an asthma inhaler “entitlement”? They cannot do better and thrive without adequate support. You're not their doctor, just the tall friend who can reach the top shelf.

4

Executive functioning can be improved (some)

The longer someone has experienced trauma, rejection, and abuse for invisible disability, the worse EF becomes. Knowing that there is a safety net and system of support in place reduces anxiety, which helps to improve EF and reduce debilitating OCD and demand avoidance/decision paralysis.