**EXECUTIVE FUNCTION – WHAT IS IT AND HOW DO YOU GET IT?**

**Executive function:** good executive functioning allows people to plan, organize and complete tasks. The following components make up executive function:

* **Impulse control** – helps children think before acting
* **Emotional control** – helps child keep his/her emotions in check
* **Flexible thinking** – allows child adjust to the unexpected; easily transition from one thing to the next
* **Working memory** – helps child keep key information in mind – ability to remember directions
* **Self-monitoring** – allows child to evaluate how she’s/he’s doing
* **Planning and prioritizing** – allows your child to decide on a goal and a plan to meet it. It helps her/him know which parts of a project are the most important
* **Task initiation** – helps your child get started. A child with weak TI may have no idea where or how to begin
* **Organization** – lets your child keep track of things physically and mentally – kids with weak OS, lose train of thought, homework, beginning of the day tasks, etc.

The better a child’s executive function, the more comfortable he/she will be in school and the able she/he will be to adapt, learn and succeed.

How can you help your child develop good executive function? Parenting style plays an important part.

Not everyone parents in the same way. Some parents let children figure things out on their own, even if it means kids struggle and don’t accomplish the goal. These parents are pretty laid-back, sometimes to the point of not being present enough. For example, these parents might be on a smartphone while their child works on homework.

Some parents want kids to accomplish goals correctly and quickly, even if it means they end up doing most of the work for their kids. These parents often seem rushed. They may tell their child the correct answer to a homework problem, or even do the problem for their child while the child looks

Other parents let kids accomplish the task at their own pace, and step in to help only as needed. They’re watchful and sensitive to their kids’ need for help, but will allow them to feel challenged. For instance, when a child does a puzzle, these parents may give hints or gently nudge the correct puzzle piece closer to the child, until the child sees and grabs the piece, and feels, “I did it!” It is also a good thing to let your child fail at a task. Often, we learn best by failing. It gives us the opportunity to try again a different way and ultimately be successful. Sometimes that creates an even better feeling of accomplishment.

Research shows that the parents who let children work at their own pace and support them when necessary have children with better executive functioning.

Free play opportunities also contribute to the development of good executive functioning. As children figure out rules necessary to play a “made-up” game; as they must problem solve when building a structure; as they transition from one activity to another; as they use language describe an engaging play scenario in order to keep their friends interested in continuing to play; as they follow directions – and much, much more – they are developing all the skills they need to be successful in school and in life.