

Teaching task initiation

Task initiation is a powerful skill. The ability to tell oneself that a project or job needs to be started is a big part of getting anything done. Task initiation is essential for making friends and trying new things, beginning homework, or cleaning a bedroom. Sometimes, it can be overwhelming to see the big picture and break down big jobs into smaller pieces. Task initiation is part of that process, to first portion out pieces of a process and then start on those smaller action items.

Initiation is a skill that can become more difficult as children age. However, there is a point when procrastination is normal for kids and when it becomes a problem that influences functional skills. Below is more information on task initiation related to children and playful ways to build this skill.

What is Task Initiation?

Task initiation is an executive functioning skill. It is influenced by other executive functions such as impulse control, perseverance, and cognitive flexibility. Sustained attention and problem solving deeply impact task initiation. Planning and prioritization are executive functioning skills that are closely related to task initiation.

Task Initiation Requires a Few Key Abilities:

- Organization
- Refrain from distractions
- Sustained attention
- Perseverance
- Impulsive control
- Cognitive flexibility
- Problem solving

HOW TO TEACH TASK INITIATION

The best part of these activities is that children and students will not realize they are “working” on developing a skill. Many times, kids with executive functioning struggles know they have difficulties that impact their function. It is important to discuss these needs and subsequent goal areas with kids, but constantly working on skills can have a negative and overwhelming impact on self-esteem. Making interventions fun and creative can help!

ACTIVITIES TO TEACH TASK INITIATION

1. Play follow the leader games.
2. Play a game of Simon Says.
3. Idea Storm- Brainstorm ideas for a day’s activity or a family project. Make goals together and break out the parts of the activity. Then, start together.
4. Create a Command Center for homework and family activities.
5. Play Red Light, Green Light.
6. Look for shapes in the clouds. Make up stories about the clouds then write them down. Pull out the story the next day and write more to the story.
7. Set up an invitation to create art station.
8. Create an invitation to write journaling center, complete with fun pens and paper, stationery, stickers, and highlighters. Try using the Impulse Control Journal.

9. Nature hunt creation- go on a walk through a park or the backyard. Collect interesting pieces of nature and use what you found to create a collage. Write a story based on the pieces you found. Make it a group activity for the whole family or classroom, with each person adding their piece.
10. Grocery store ideas- Pick a new fruit or vegetable and use it in a recipe. Look up new recipes and find one that looks interesting. Make it and eat together.

USE A TIMER TO HELP KIDS WITH TASK INITIATION

With your child, **identify the task that needs to be done**. This may be a big project like cleaning a bedroom or a smaller job like tackling the homework folder.

Next, **break down the tasks**. You can write them out in list form or write them on post-it notes that can be pulled off and crumbled up as each job is completed.

Once you've identified the list of tasks, **make a mini-goal** to get started. This might be as simple as just reading through the instructions or starting to clean up toys on the floor.

For this mini-goal, your child can work with the game timer until the sand has all fallen to the bottom. By working until the intended time has passed, your child has started the job and tackled the biggest issue with procrastination: getting started!

There are many game timers on the market that are perfect for addressing task initiation: Experiment with different timers: 30-seconds, 1-minute, 2-minute, 3-minute, 5-minute, and 10-minute increments.

Try a visual timer with a warning light and optional auditory timer.