

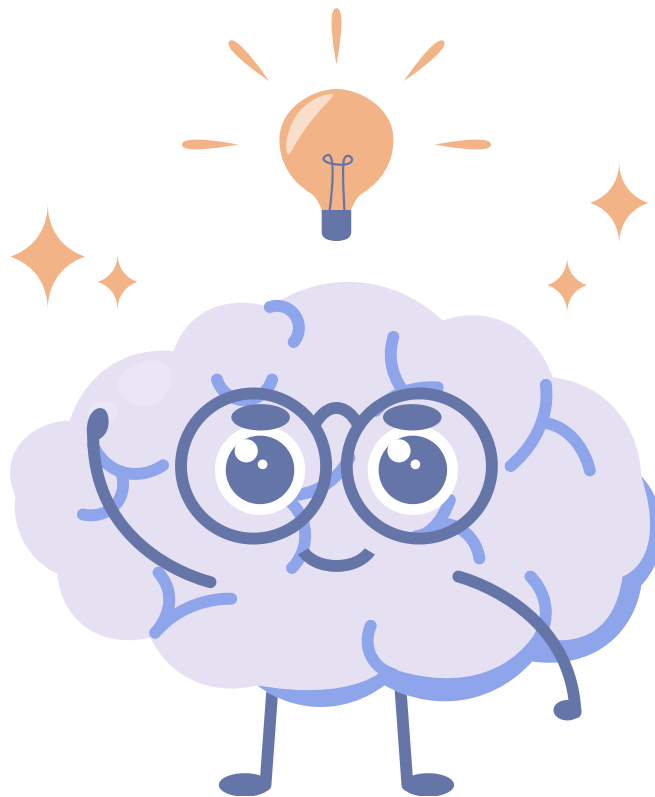


PRODUCTIVE  
AF

focus, achieve, repeat

# Executive Function Guide for Parents

Holiday Edition



[jfriedmanfast.com/productiveaf](http://jfriedmanfast.com/productiveaf)

# Hello!

**You are here because your child:**

- Struggles with school/homework/life.
- Rushes to get places on time.
- Needs constant reminders to do tasks.
- Finishes projects at the very last minute.
- Gets distracted so very easily.

**The list could go on....**

You are in the right place! And you are not alone.

This Holiday guide will offer:

- A little education about Executive Function skills
- Some language to use that supports brains
- Simple activities & tips so you & your child can really celebrate the holidays!

[jfriedmanfast.com/productiveaf](http://jfriedmanfast.com/productiveaf)

## What in the world are Executive Functions?!

They are the brain skills used to **get important things done.**

Things like: planning, organization, time management, focus, flexibility, task initiation, prioritization and self-monitoring.

### Do these look familiar?

Circle or highlight items that apply to your child (or you!)

- Easily distracted
- Difficulty getting started
- Losing important items
- Impulsive behavior
- Difficulty balancing tasks
- Missing assignments
- Staying up too late to finish HW
- Trouble managing emotions
- Excuses for why school isn't going well
- Struggles to learn from past experience

**In what other ways does your child struggle to get things done?**

These are Executive Function issues, which means that they are BRAIN issues!

“The single greatest predictor of academic success is executive function. It even trumps IQ.”

John Medina,

Author of Brain Rules

So what can I do as a parent or caregiver?

The holidays are an IMPORTANT time to focus on Executive Function because the structure of the school day is suddenly gone!

Here are TWO easy activities & FOUR tips for this holiday season - information and support for you and your school-age child.

# EF Activity #1: Strategize the Struggle - Part 1

***Do some digging. Try to find out where the struggles originate.***

First, you must learn about some Executive Function skills in more detail.

I've selected SIX skills that many clients cite as the biggest challenge. This is where your child comes in. Ask them, how good they think their brain is at these skills. This is important: we want to talk about the brain here and not the child. These challenges are not character flaws; they are brain issues. (And parents, don't forget to think about your own brains, too! How good is your brain at these skills?)

Circle or highlight the skills that you and your child believe to be a challenge.

1. **Sustained attention** - staying focused despite distractions
2. **Response inhibition** - self-control; saying "not now" to impulsive behavior
3. **Planning and prioritization** - future thinking; determining the most important tasks
4. **Time management** - making good use of my time; time awareness
5. **Organization** - being able to create and maintain order for my stuff
6. **Task initiation** - getting started on a task, especially a boring one

## **TROUBLESHOOTING:**

If your student is having trouble, you can guide children with "I notice" statements. For example, "I notice that when you are stressed or tired, it is more difficult for your brain to stay focused. Do you agree? What do you notice?"

## EF Activity #1: Strategize the Struggle - Part 2

*Great work! You've discussed and identified some areas for improvement.*

*Now it's time to learn about some broad strategies that help brains, especially during the holidays.*

***Circle or highlight any that stand out to you (or your child)!***

### **Sustained attention:**

- Discuss the biggest distractions
- Remove distractions from the area
- White noise, instrumental music or noise-cancelling headphones
- Stress ball/fidget toy
- Take brain breaks

### **Response inhibition:**

- Stress ball/fidget toy
- Take movement breaks
- Manage transitions, so kids know what to expect

### **Planning and prioritization:**

- Visual daily/weekly schedules
- Plan for special event clothes now!
- Lay out these clothes the day before
- Discuss which holiday traditions are most important; prioritize them

# EF Activity #1: Strategize the Struggle - Part 2 (continued)

## **Time management:**

- Practice using analog clocks
- Keep clocks, timers, calendars IN SIGHT
- Use timers for transitions, getting started and self-monitoring

## **Organization:**

- Create a "home" for special holiday items
- Create a temporary gift-wrapping/holiday card area
- Regular resets for bedroom/ bathroom during the break
- Post a photo of what a clean space looks like for reference

## **Task initiation:**

- Use short timers to just.get.started
- Start small (really, really small)

***Try a strategy (or 2) with your family this holiday season. BUT  
please know: progress is measured in baby steps.***

## EF Activity #2: Time Analysis

Many challenges with Executive Function are related to time.

Things like: What does 15 minutes feel like? How long will it take me to complete this task? When do we need to leave for school?

***This exercise is a great first step toward time awareness. First, write down the estimate: how long do you think this will take? Then actually time it, and write it down!***

Stop the guessing, and collect some data. Use my suggestions below, or choose your own.

| <i>Task/Activity</i>    | <i>Estimated Time</i> | <i>Actual Time</i> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Take a shower</i>    |                       |                    |
| <i>Empty dishwasher</i> |                       |                    |
| <i>Walk the dog</i>     |                       |                    |
|                         |                       |                    |
|                         |                       |                    |
|                         |                       |                    |
|                         |                       |                    |

*Now that you have this data, you can start using it for future planning. Maybe for something during the holidays?*

# EF Holiday Tips

## #1 - Create & stick to a schedule

And give yourself permission to deviate from it when necessary.

Brains need structure, routine and consistency, even if they don't particularly like them. And many brains with EF challenges are not super flexible. That means that they need structure, even during the holidays.

How can you do that? It's likely impossible to create a schedule for the entire day during these no-school times. So with your child, **choose one time of day to focus on**. Since late nights at the cousins' house are inevitable, maybe you don't focus on the bedtime routine. However, maybe it's a morning routine? Or just from noon - 3:00? Create some predictable structure to rely on during the holiday break.

## #2 - Create a visual holiday calendar

Without the structure of a school day, the days start to blend together. ***Help your child know what day it is and what's coming next*** by creating a visual. Include things like: no-school days, travel days, how many days will Grandma be visiting, etc.

It doesn't have to be fancy. You can make your own calendar. I recommend crossing off days, so your child can see the passing of time. (Better yet, ask them to cross off the days.) Or make a paper chain with the exact number of no-school days and rip off one link each day. Perhaps use different colors to signify special days. Find a way to make the school vacation more visible.

### #3 - Don't overdo it

It's OK to say no. The holidays are FULL of enticing invitations and super fun events, but brains with EF challenges need downtime. Schedule some downtime every day. Maybe it's a lazy morning whenever possible. Or quiet time each afternoon. And, yes, it might mean saying no to a fun outing because your family needs a break. ***It's OK. In fact, I recommend it!***

### #4 - Get curious about sleep, exercise & nutrition

Sleep, exercise and nutrition are keys to Executive Function success, but you and I both know that the holidays are not often filled with them. However, when your child is having a hard time, it's a great time to get curious. ***Could it make sense to prioritize these things today?***

# Jenn Fast

## Executive Function Coach & Educator

Jenn Fast is the creator of Productive AF, where she helps overwhelmed, neurodivergent-leaning humans build practical, shame-free systems that work in real life. With an MBA, Mensa membership, and a 30-year career spanning executive assistant leadership, HR program management, and franchise operations, she's spent decades turning complex problems into simple, repeatable systems—exactly the skill set parents need when executive function gets messy at home.

As the mom of neurodivergent daughters, Jenn understands the real-world pressure of supporting school-age kids through busy seasons, when routines slip and everyone's bandwidth is stretched. Her approach blends evidence-informed tools with compassionate, no-fluff guidance so families can reduce daily friction, build steadier rhythms, and create calmer days—without turning home into a productivity bootcamp.

[www.jfriedmanfast.com/productiveaf](http://www.jfriedmanfast.com/productiveaf)  
[jenn@jfriedmanfast.com](mailto:jenn@jfriedmanfast.com)