

WHAT ARE EXECUTIVE SKILLS?

Executive skills are a set of brain-based skills that:

1. Make it possible for us to choose our goals and then guide our behavior in a way that makes it likely that we will reach our goals.
2. Help us to avoid the behaviors that will derail our progress.

These skills help us complete tasks and attain our goals. We focus on 12 skills, but we can think of them in three clusters:

- Skills we use to get things done,
- Skills we use to organize and plan, and
- Skills that determine how we react to things.

Everyone uses these skills on a daily basis, and understanding them will enable you, as a coach, to better understand the strengths of and challenges facing each participant.

THE ES PROFILE

The executive skills profile is intended to help coaches and participants focus on what skills a participant already has, and what could be improved upon to promote self-sufficiency.

Administering this profile can help you get a clearer picture of a participant's functioning and help to set priorities for how to best provide support and promote skill development. If used effectively, the ES profile has the potential to enhance individual goal attainment, and overall program outcomes.

GETTING STARTED

Before you begin administering the profile with participants:

- ❖ Make sure that you fully understand and are comfortable talking about what executive skills are and why they matter, as well as the statements in the profile. Participants are likely to have questions about individual skills and what strengths and challenges mean for them.
- ❖ Three resources for getting comfortable with this material are the following webinars, available at buildingbetterprograms.org under 'executive function, EF Webinars'
 - *Executive Function Skills: What They Are and Why They Matter*- Presented by Silvia Bunge, Ph.D.
 - *Using an Executive Function-Informed Goal Achievement Framework to Redesign Employment and Related Human Service Programs*- Presented by LaDonna Pavetti, Ph.D.
 - *Administering & Using the Adult Executive Skills Profile*- presented by Richard Guare, Ph.D.
- ❖ Be sure to complete the executive skills profile for yourself. This will make it easier to relate to the participant's experience, and you will be able to give your own real-life examples of how these skills impact day-to-day functioning. It may also help to make the participant more comfortable completing the profile, producing better results.

THE ES PROFILE IS DESIGNED TO:

- ❖ Offer clarity about a participant's existing strengths and opportunities for improvement.
- ❖ Help prioritize the time and resources of a coach.
- ❖ Allow coaches and participants to identify appropriate employment and/or education opportunities based on their current skill profile and desired skill development.
- ❖ Provide assistance to coaches in service planning.

THE ES PROFILE IS *NOT* DESIGNED TO:

- ❖ Be a clinical or diagnostic tool.
- ❖ Be a research tool – it does not measure change in executive skills over time.

SCRIPT & TIPS FOR USING THE PROFILE

First, make sure you are familiar with all the statements and comfortable answering questions about the profile. Below is a sample script of how to introduce this to a participant:

Today I want us to talk about something called executive skills. You may not have heard about these before, but we all use them every day and they are critical in helping us become successful. These skills are used to help us organize and plan, react to events, and get things done on a daily basis. We use these for both small and large tasks, from doing laundry to finding a job. The statements we will go over together assess 12 different skills. We all have some of these that we are better at and some that need improvement. By honestly assessing these, you can hopefully get to know yourself better and we can better develop a plan for your continued success. Knowing what you are good at can help inform job searches and education opportunities, and knowing what you can work on can help us create a focused plan to move forward. As we go through this, feel free to ask questions!

As you go through the assessment, keep the following things in mind:

- ❖ Make sure the participant is comfortable with rating the statements. Remind them that we all have strengths and areas we can improve. *Remember, no profile is "better" or "worse" than any other.*
- ❖ It is helpful to discuss your own skills profile to make a participant feel more at ease and also to give examples that highlight different skills.
- ❖ It may be useful to point out your own observations if they are unsure of how to rate an item. You may help them remember situations when they needed to use these skills and discuss the outcome.
- ❖ Make sure to balance your discussion of challenges and strengths. This leads to a more productive plan and a willing participant.

WHAT NEXT?

The executive skills assessment is designed to be mutually beneficial for the coach and participant. It can help to focus and narrow down a job search, or show areas where a participant may want more support as they pursue training or education.

When all items have been rated and each section has been totaled, look at the highest and lowest scores. *The highest scores are the strengths, and the lowest scores are opportunities for growth and improvement.* This should inform your planning and discussions with the participant about their goals and the best ways to meet them.

EMPLOYMENT GOALS & GOODNESS OF FIT

An important aspect of the ES profile is recognizing that not all employment goals will match with someone's profile. Therefore, it is important to think of goodness of fit between the goal and what you know to be the strengths and challenges. Here is a guide for using goodness of fit when working with participants:

- ❖ If a person has strengths in the executive skills most required to meet the goal in the target environment, there is a "good fit" with the goal.
- ❖ On the other hand, if the person has weaknesses in the executive skills required to attain the goal, there is a mismatch, and the weak executive skills may be an obstacle to goal attainment.
- ❖ For example: A participant hoping to work in customer service will likely need strong response inhibition and stress tolerance skills.
- ❖ In cases where you see a mismatch between skill strength and goals, try to offer insight about this to the participant and see if there are other jobs they are interested in that would be more suitable based on their strengths profile.
- ❖ You can offer examples of local jobs that might be a good fit based on your knowledge of their ES profile.