Executive Function Scripts

Practical Phrases to Support Organization and Planning

Situation	What NOT to Say	Try Saying Instead	Why It Works
Student forgets materials	"How could you forget again?"	"Let's check your backpack list together so we can remember for next time."	Builds routine and visual memory.
Student struggles to start work	"You're wasting time."	"Let's figure out the first step together, then you can try it on your own."	Breaks down initiation into small, doable actions.
Student loses focus mid-task	"Stay on task!"	"What's the next step on your list? Let's get back to that one."	Redirects using structure, not reprimand.
Student forgets directions	"Weren't you listening?"	"Let's look at the direction card again to remember what to do."	Promotes independence through visual supports.
Student forgets to turn in work	"You never remember anything."	"Let's make a turn-in spot so it's easy to remember every time."	Uses environmental cues to reduce working memory load.
Student resists multi-step assignments	"Just do it already."	"Let's number the steps and check them off one at a time."	Makes tasks concrete and reduces overwhelm.
Student gives up when overwhelmed	"You're not trying."	"This feels like a lot. Let's tackle one part now, and we'll handle the rest later."	Promotes pacing and persistence.
Student disorganized with papers	"Your desk is a mess."	"Let's sort papers into 'keep,' 'finish,' and 'done' folders."	Teaches categorization and organization skills.
Student forgets to bring homework	"You're irresponsible."	"Let's add a reminder note to your backpack checklist."	Uses visual planning instead of verbal blame.
Student doesn't use planner or schedule	"I told you to write it down!"	"Let's write it together this time so it becomes a habit."	Models skill development with shared responsibility.

Teacher Notes

- Teach **planning explicitly**, not as an assumption, model your own thinking ("First, I'll gather materials, then I'll start step 1").
- Use **checklists, timers, and visuals** to offload working memory.
- Reinforce **process over perfection,** praise the plan, not just the result.
- Integrate **executive function mini-routines**: morning prep, task chunking, end-of-day review.
- Encourage reflection with prompts like: *"What helped you stay organized today?"*
- Celebrate growth: *"You remembered your folder and planner today, that's progress!"*