

Welcome to Teaming for Well-Being, brought to you by the Training and Technical Assistance Center at Virginia Tech, where our mission is to improve educational opportunities and contribute to the success of children and youth with disabilities. We do this by supporting and building up the educators who work with them, you. We are your hosts, project coordinators Natalie May and Jen Baldwin. Join us as we talk about tools, tricks, and tips to help positively impact the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of your students, as well as keeping you healthy. welcome, welcome to Teaming for Well-Being season three. I think so. It's really hard to believe, honestly. Thank you to all of our 10 followers. We are so excited for our tens of fans to listen to us again. We just, we love to talk and, um, we want to share it with the world. So thank you guys for, for following along and, um, Jen, let's just get right into it. What are we going to talk about today? Absolutely. Well, we've talked about it before, but we feel like it's just critical at this point to bring it back up. We recently had a professional development with a wonderful group of educators from all over region six and seven of the state. And it's about executive functioning. Back by popular demand. It is. Absolutely. And so it was a great day. It was a really good day. You know, executive functioning is so important. And I feel like it, everything that we've talked about, the problems that we've heard from schools, all roads lead to executive functioning and dysfunction, whether it's the children that we serve or the adults that we work with. Absolutely. And that's kind of the perspective we took is really thinking about it in terms of you, the adult as the educator inside and outside of the school building and how that impacts just everybody in your orbit. And, you know, so taking a look at yourself and we'll dive a little deeper into that in a minute. But also how that then impacts students and thinking about their skills and skill deficits. Absolutely. So let's just start with the definition. So what is executive functioning? So it is a set of cognitive skills that allows individuals to plan, organize, focus, and manage their thoughts, emotions, and actions to achieve their goals. And we know that people have heard about executive functioning and we almost sort of glaze over when we hear about it because we don't really go any deeper than that. And we thought that it was really important to take a deep dive into what it is, each one individually, and really how it impacts just the relationship around everybody you work with and you and your students. This is my favorite quote, Natalie, and I think I've read it before. Let's hear it. I'm going to say it again. Let's hear it. And this is from Edutopia's video that really, I think, just pinpoints perfection around what this means in the world of adults and students is the skills that make up executive function are better predictors of success than test scores, IQ, or socioeconomic status. And that, to me, is hugely impactful. And when we asked our folks at the training if anybody knew that, I believe most everybody was like, absolutely not. I've not heard that before. No. And why would they? Because so often, you know, this child is struggling because of their IQ. They are struggling because they were born on the wrong side of the tracks, that socioeconomic status. And I think this is quite the empowering quote, because a lot of times when we feel helpless to helping a young person that is struggling because of reasons we can't control, this is something we can control because executive function skills can be taught. Yes. And they have to be taught. They have to be taught. I think we need to remember we're born with the capacity to develop the skills. Yes. So they have to be taught and they have to be taught honestly, all the way through young adulthood, especially when we think about brain development and when our prefrontal cortex actually finishes developing, which depending on who you are could be 25 to now some are saying 30, 31. Yeah. So it has to be taught and it has to be reinforced all day long every day

and in a way that just is incorporated into all that you do and not a curriculum not a curriculum yeah just every day all day a conversation making kids aware of what executive functions are because we want them to take control it's important also to language and model it, right? So which is why it's important to know your own strengths and weaknesses. And so some of these things are like planning, time management, task initiation, organization, problem solving, flexibility, working memory, emotional control, impulse control, attention control, and self-monitoring. So those specific skills and modeling that for the young people and having them use that language is going to help them be more empowered in their own learning. So definitely something to incorporate in every lesson that you give, all the anecdotal things that you do. And we're going to talk more as we continue to talk about this this school year we're gonna give some of those examples on how to support each of those executive functionings through this book study that we're doing absolutely we'll talk more about that book in a little bit and i think the the best way to start this if you're like what in the world does this even mean where do i start is to think about uh how how do we get the adult the adults to buy in to this they need to understand their own executive function oh my goodness yes right and where they're weak whether or not and how would we suggest they do that natalie well jim i'm a big fan of a self-assessment and lucky for us, there is a very free executive skills questionnaire that we're going to drop in the show notes. And I encourage you all to take it, or you can just Google Peg Dawson executive skills questionnaire, and you can find it on the internet for free. It's about two pages. Take it, take that self-assessment, score it. It's really easy to score. And you'll get your top three strengths and your top three weaknesses or opportunities, as I like to call them. And I encourage you to talk about it with people that are in your orbit. And so for Jen, Jen and I work together a lot. And so it's important that we know each other's strengths and weaknesses. And my number one strength is task completion. I'm getting stuff done. But my number one weakness or opportunity is task initiation. Jen, is that surprising? Getting that thing started. And how many kids do we know also with that issue? Yeah. They just, they struggle to get started, but once they get started, they're going to get it done. And that's me. And I know that working closely with Jen, that this impacts her. And she not surprisingly clocked that. She already knew that about me, but what about your strengths? Because it's important to know our strengths and weaknesses or opportunities for growth because we can use each other for support and why use this and you use that. And this is how we interact. That makes it really work well. And I learn a lot by watching the things that Natalie does or vice versa. Cause I'm sure that i do i do yep but my weakness working memory and she knows that she is my brain at work and she knows this we don't even have to discuss it it's like she just knows jen this is coming up this is happening even though i have it written on my paper calendar yeah she still has a paper calendar guys she doesn't know how to use the internet well I love the paper calendar I can put it on the electric calendar and it can even ding and notify me and I'll forget that it did that two minutes later or even probably 30 seconds later so Natalie is my brain and so that's a good way for us to interact and she knows and I know and it just helps our process when we're working on projects and working with school teams and I think it's important for folks who work in a school building where there's just so much stress to really understand this so they they have a perspective about co-workers that might be a little bit changed well I mean the root of all this and what you're saying is empathy You know, we need to understand how the people around us operate, how their brains work, which is one of my favorite things to do is help. It's like a puzzle. I'm a school

psychologist. I want to dig into how your brain works and executive function is a huge part of that. So if I know that Jen has a hard time with working memory, I know that I can usually help be that person for her. She says I'm half her brain and she's not lying. So, so, and, and we just, we mesh well and she keeps me more organized cause I struggle with organization a bit and she knows that and she will roll out the white and helps me, um, keep my stuff more organized. And so that we compliment each other and you'll see your co-workers that if you know Mrs. Smith down the hallway is always doing something that bugs you it could be because of an executive functioning weakness it's not a personal vendetta against you and that helps you have that empathy towards your co-workers and then the big part here is how can we translate that to the students we work with absolutely absolutely because everybody has executive function skills so why not look at all that that involves and how to build the strengths of all the students because everybody has it we're saying everybody has mental health is no different. I think we need to have a perspective that allows us to see all students on a level playing field and then get them to be involved in, oh, this is what executive function is. This is where my strengths are. How can I use those to work through building up my weaknesses? Oh, so-and-so Johnny across the room, he's so good at that. So we're, I'm going to go ask him. So there's lots of ways to use this in a meaningful way. Plus it allows kids to see that they have strengths. We have a lot of kids who don't see the strengths they have. They hear a lot about what they can't do well. And we kind of focus on that a little too much because that's just kind of the nature of where we are. We got not not a lot of time, and so we've just got to go, go, go. But this really helps build a lot of confidence in kids who typically aren't getting a lot of that positive feedback in their own eyes. Even if we think we're saying things all day long, they just don't see it. They don't feel like it's happening. And so this is really empowering them so they understand that they do have strengths. Yeah, and it allows them to be a mentor to peers in a way that they may have not had the opportunity before. And we really want to build those self-determination and self-advocacy skills like, hey, maybe I should work with Sue on this project because Sue's strengths complement my weaknesses. And we could probably learn something from each other and just mesh well on a project and try those things out and then have the students reflect on what it was like to work with somebody that has that complementary executive function and see what that's like. And when you do that, you're building the skills, you're building the skills, you're building awareness, you're taking away the stigma and allowing these young people to ideally thrive. Absolutely. I'm going to tell one quick story and then we'll talk about the book. At this professional development, I had an assistant principal say, Hey, we have this kiddo. He's sixth grad grader great kid um and he has adhd great kid wants to do well but just that um inhibition he just can't it just you know that reaction it just happens no filter and we can't get him to stop running down the hall and you know i walk with them. I do all these i we've tried i and i said well i think our whole goal for today is to give it back to the student you know we can't carry all that for them number one um does he know that he has adhd and if so has anybody sat with him and looked at executive functioning and said, oh, okay, let's find out where your strengths are, where your weaknesses are. This is part of what is going on with you. And so you tell me what are ideas. You give me the ideas for this because I've tried this, this, and this, and it's not working. So let's talk about what you think would work and you come up with the idea that's called metacognition jim i think that's awesome it is and then you kind of keep track to see if it's improving over the week and then you come back and tell me how did it go so we we need to

give that information to build the sense of ownership for this kid right so that he is like all right well yeah let me see what i can do what would work for me how does my brain work We'll be right back. the sense of ownership for this kid right so that he is like oh all right well yeah let me see what i can do what would work for me how does my brain work he understands better than the adult who's trying to guess sometimes as we all do because we just don't have a lot of time um great kid who could probably turn this around on his own and you're also not living in that brain yeah you know it's important for kids to understand the why behind their experiences and i think kind of taking that back gives them the power and if their their brain is operating differently than their peers they know it oh absolutely they know it and they may feel a certain way about it and if you could help them feel empowered by it and that this is just a different way that your brain is working, it's not less, then we can help these kids not feel bad about being who they are. And there's nothing wrong with that. Yeah, it was, it was just a perfect example. That is really good. Yeah. So we, with this professional learning community, we had this initial kickoff um, professional development, but we are doing a book study on a book, um, called Smart But Scattered written by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare. Um, and this book is for age four to 13 year olds, but there's also a Smart But Scattered for teens book if you work in the more secondary level. Um, but we are going to be meeting with this book study group three times over the school year and we are going to take some of the lessons and feedback that we've learned from this book study over the next three sessions and we're going to share it with you all so if you want to follow along yes the first book study meet is in in late November and it's going to cover the first seven chapters of the smart, but scattered book. It's the second edition. So bear with us, hang with us as we learn and, and talk to other professionals in the field of education on their reaction to this book and how they can apply it to the young people that they work with. And then we'll be able to share some of those ahas and, and our personal reactions to the book as well. Absolutely. And I think Natalie set this up so that, you know, the implementers, the educators are the ones leading this because we can talk about it all day long in theory, but they need to really sink their teeth into it and think about how it impacts them, the work they're doing in their buildings, how that could look in their building if they had this information that is also geared towards families as well. And what should they share with families? Absolutely. Because they're so part of this whole process when we're talking about helping our students be successful. So we hope you join us along on this journey as we bring back these conversations that we have with all these educators because we're super excited about it yeah we're going to be able to deep dive into the topic more than we have in the past and we before this school year started decided that this was going to be the year of executive functioning yes because as we know it is so critical so we want to make sure that we spend time on it so that you understand how critical it is and we're again super excited yes we're so excited yeah so we hope that you'll join us on the journey as we said and we'll be back um to update you late november early december on what the conversation was and we do encourage you to go out and get the book if you can um we feel like it's a great resource tap other people that you work with and in your school in your division let them know that this is happening we'll put links to all the information that we've talked about today. And the self-assessment, absolutely. And the show notes. And we hope you join us for the journey. And feel free, as always, to look us up and ask us any questions and reach out if you would like to learn more in your school or school division about executive functioning. Yep. Until next time, thank you guys so much for listening

to teaming for well-being see you later bye-bye thank you so much for listening and as always we hope this has given you a resource tool or idea that you can easily use and share. You can find the show notes on our website at ttac.vt.edu where all the resources discussed are linked. Don't forget to sign up for our weekly newsletter abc123 at [ttac.vt.edu index
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