

THE HIDDEN KEY TO LANGUAGE: EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

UNDERSTANDING THE SKILLS BEHIND YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING, COMMUNICATION, AND EVERYDAY INDEPENDENCE

>> Executive functioning is the umbrella of skills that help a child to pay attention, recall information, manage impulses, shift between activities, and complete tasks (often asked to do all at the same time). These skills work closely with language development, influencing how children understand directions, organize thoughts, answer questions, and communicate needs. When these skills are still developing, children may appear not to listen or understand. Supporting executive functioning through predictable routines, visuals, repetition, and processing time can make communication easier and more successful. Quite often a neurodivergent child seen through a neurotypical lens will be interpreted as "they're just not motivated to do it", or this certain skill only happens "when they want to do it". Oftentimes, that's not the case – it's typically an executive function support that is missing or needs to be established **alongside** that language target. <<



SKILL VS. WILL:

WHEN "WON'T" IS REALLY "I'M STILL LEARNING"
WHEN "MOTIVATION" IS REALLY "THIS IS HARD FOR ME RIGHT NOW"
WHEN "THEY DO IT WHEN THEY WANT TO" IS REALLY "THE SKILL ISN'T RELIABLE YET"

LET'S BREAK IT DOWN

WHAT IT IS

Working Memory: Remembering information long enough to use it.

Attention: Focusing on important information or activities.

Processing Speed: How quickly your child understands and responds.

Cognitive Flexibility: Adjusting thinking when situations or expectations change.

Planning/Organization: Knowing what to do, gather, and do next.

HOW TO HELP

01. Working Memory: Break directions into small, manageable steps.

02. Attention: Use visual supports alongside spoken language.

03. Processing Speed: Give your child extra processing time.

04. Cognitive Flexibility: Practice turn-taking, memory, and flexible thinking through play.

05. Planning & Organization: Use predictable routines to support understanding and independence.