



Institute on Executive Functioning™

## Promoting Positive Relationships with Your Middle School Student Regarding the Start of School

As summer break is quickly coming to an end, there are many visible reminders to students that school is about to start. These reminders (school supply displays, tv advertising, amazing back to school savings on computers, chrome books and tablets, trendy school clothes placed in the most visible section of the clothing dept., etc.) result in excitement for many students. That is not always the case for a student experiencing executive function (EF) deficits. Often, for a student with EF deficits, such reminders serve as a memory trigger of his/her past failures (difficulties with following directions, remembering routines and procedures, completing and submitting assignments – especially when it came to homework, being accepted by peers and having friends, and being able to self-regulate which often resulted in a disciplinary action). These students are well aware of their difficulties and failures and are already in or in danger of falling into the Downward Spiral (Strosnider & Sharpe, 2019, pp. 9-11). The Downward Spiral can lead to a lack of self-confidence, anxiety, and a dislike for school. Attention to the feelings of students at risk or in the downward spiral can be started well before the first day of school using these simple tips for all students.

### *TIP #1*

Prior to the first day of school, a card from the instructional team sent to the student can help the student feel better about the upcoming year. The card should list the name, subject taught, and room location of each team member. As well, a brief fact about each teacher can be highlighted with an encouraging sentence asking the

### *TIP #2*

about a personal fact they can share with their teacher and peers the

first day of school.

One week before the first day of school, a card from the student's homeroom teacher can help the student feel welcome into the new class. The purpose of this card is to identify the homeroom teacher, the location of the homeroom, and the designated time a student is required to be in homeroom. The homeroom teacher may wish to add a personal touch such as noting a sign he/she has posted outside the classroom to assist the student in locating the classroom.

### *TIP #3*

A few days before the first day of school, students and parents usually receive a letter or email from the school administration that outlines the student's schedule and any pertinent information that the student will need for the first day of school. Also, the letter should highlight a designated Open House Day, for students to meet their teachers. The opportunity to meet teachers and practice finding classroom locations can lessen the student's anxiety and boost self-confidence. The teacher can highlight the importance of attending this event in prior notes described in Tips 1 and 2. When planning for the Meet and Greet, be aware of time management of greetings so that all students and parents get an opportunity to say hello. Students who are not looking forward to the first day may be reluctant to participate, so make sure you approach anyone who may seem unsure of the process.

#### **Reference:**

Strosnider, R & Sharpe, V. (2019). *The Executive function guidebook: Strategies to help all students achieve success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Content provided by Strosnider & Sharpe, [www.instituteonexecutivefunctioning.com](http://www.instituteonexecutivefunctioning.com), authors of the EF Guidebook, Corwin, 2019.



