



## Institute on Executive Functioning™

### Tips Using EF Skills to Help Early Childhood (K-2) Students Enjoy the First Days of School

While parents and teachers find more students school savvy in the early grades, we still find students who go through separation anxiety. This is often the case with some students who have not had any formal day care or nursery school experiences. For this group of students, the student may not be school savvy and require more orientation than those who have experienced a school setting. In addition to lack of classroom experience, these students find themselves in a new school, sometimes knowing no one, and in some cases not speaking the same language as the rest of the students. This can be very frightening for those students. It is important to think about the students' level of development in the EF skill, social/emotional as you address these issues. Fortunately, teachers can prepare for these students by following some tips.

**Tip 1:** Teachers, review your class list, and get to know as much as you can about your class members. Become informed, not judgmental. Parents, complete all paper work, get vaccinations, and enroll your child early so you and your child do not face long lines and experience anxiety about vaccination records and other enrollment requirements. Wait until you get the official list of required materials before investing in school supplies.

**Tip 2:** Teachers, as soon as you have your class lists, reach out to the parents and students. Encourage them to share concerns with you and to attend the Back To School event, prior to the opening of school, so their children can become familiar with the school building, room and the teacher. Parents, note there will not be time to discuss concerns during Back to School event; address concerns by communicating with the guidance counselor, teacher, etc.

**Tip 3:** Parents and teachers, while we expect students entering early childhood to be able to demonstrate executive function skills including developmentally appropriate working memory and communication skills (For example, being able to state their name, address and a parent's phone number), they may find it difficult to transition activities (putting away materials and moving to the next activity). We do expect them to control their impulsivity and inhibit negative behaviors. For example, we expect them to have disagreements with others but to refrain from hitting, taking things away, speaking unkindly, interrupting, etc. We know that some students

have not developed these skills, and they cannot just start demonstrating them on their own. They will need explicit training in executive function skills and the earlier the training intervention takes place, the better for the student and his or her peers.

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