



INVENTIVELABS – REFRAMING SELF IMAGE

Below is a step by step guide to help your child keep a positive self-image.

Step 1: Discuss/Identify Executive Function Challenges

Your child likely knows they struggle with Executive Function (EF.) Let them know we all have troubles in some aspect of EF. If you are comfortable with it, share some areas where you struggle. Then have a discussion about the one or two EF challenges your child would like to improve.

Optional: Fill out the EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE created by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare in their book *Smart but Scattered*. The questionnaire will help identify the areas they struggle the most.

Step 2: Discuss how negative self-talk can be generated by their challenges

When things don't go well, our minds typically fill with negative thoughts: "I can't do it!" "I'm always late", etc. Sometimes your child articulates this, and sometimes it is just the narrative running through their head.

When discussing EF challenges, also talk about the language these challenges foster. Be clear that this type of language is natural, but it does not help the situation. In fact, it often makes the situation worse.

Step 3: Brainstorm the positive side of their challenges

It might not be easy at first, but brainstorm with your child about the positive aspects of their challenging trait(s). For example, being late is often the result of living in the moment, a skill many people struggle to master. Individuals who are not strong planners, are often great improvisors; they have learnt to improvise by necessity. Individuals who struggle monitoring their emotions are often (but not always) sensitive and empathetic to others. You know your child well and can be a championing in talking about their positive qualities.

Step 4: Reframe Mindset A into Mindset B

Reframing is a strategy that looks at a situation from a different perspective. It is a problem if your child is always late. It is a bigger problem if your child forms a negative self-image because of this trait.

Help your child change the mindset they discussed in Step 2, into a mindset that is more positive.

Example:

Mindset A: Everyone is always mad at me because I'm never on time and can never finish my homework

Mindset B: I'm a good person who lives in the moment, which often makes me late, but my teacher and classmates enjoy having me around. - I don't enjoy homework, but with some assistance, I can get through it so I can spend time on the activities I enjoy.

Step 5: Practice reframing when times are tough, or when you see negative self-talk settling in

The first four steps should be taken when not in “crisis mode.” The fifth step is to practice reframing when in the heat of the moment. You may need to do the reframing for your child at first or when they are younger, but eventually you can just ask them if they can reframe the situation. They’ll know how to change their mindset.

In addition to helping your child, you can also reframe your thoughts when things are spiraling out of control. Maybe taking something like: “The kids are making me late for work again”, to something like, “I’ll miss this hubbub when they are older.” It won’t necessarily solve the problem, but it may put a smile on your face for a moment.

Note: Reframing is not an excuse to avoid making changes

Having your child recognize and accept their challenges is not a reason not to work on them. If time management is an issue, use tools like alarms and the Time Timer to help keep them on schedule. Reframing should lead to improvement, not reinforce the status quo.

Bonus 1 : Focus on the behavior, not the person

When discussing EF challenges, it is important to keep the discussion about the behavior, and not “personalize” the behavior. It is not helpful to say someone is lazy. They internalize that feeling about themselves and come to believe they are indeed lazy. Asking why homework wasn’t finished stays focused on behavior and provides an opportunity to correct the situation

Bonus 2 : Praise the effort, not the result

Research on Growth Mindset says it is beneficial to praise a child’s effort and strategy, as opposed to the outcomes or their abilities. For example, telling a child they are smart instills the belief that ability is more important than effort. This leads to a fixed mindset. Saying the child came up with a clever solution instills the belief that it is beneficial to spend time figuring out a clever solution and leads to a growth mindset. If you are not familiar with Growth Mindset, it is worth doing some research on the subject.