

# Workplace Adjustments for Executive Dysfunction



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# Overview

## Executive functioning

Executive functioning skills are the mental skills we use to manage our emotions, thoughts, and actions. Many people have difficulty with executive functioning skills, an experience which is often referred to as executive dysfunction.

Executive dysfunction can impact a person socially and emotionally, and it can also affect their performance in the workplace.

Workplace adjustments are changes to the workplace environment and processes that accommodate and support the needs of employees impacted by disabilities and other needs.

## Intended audience

This resource was written by an Autistic and ADHD person; as such, you might wonder, 'Why isn't this called workplace adjustments for Autistic/ADHD people?'

Executive dysfunction is not limited to people with ADHD or Autism. Depression and anxiety, long-covid, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the side effects of certain medications are all different circumstances that can impact executive function.

Further to that, not everyone has a professional diagnosis, or understands the specific issue they are struggling with; it may just be impacting their work performance without them knowing why.

Lastly, some people may be diagnosed but are not comfortable disclosing this information for fear of discrimination or general privacy reasons, and that is a valid choice.

If these strategies can help you or your staff, please use them.

## Managers

Thank you for consulting this guide; in doing so, you have already taken the important step of supporting your employee by accepting their differences and seeking to support them. The adjustments detailed in this guide are varied, and some are contradictory, as different employees will need different adjustments to enable all employees to thrive.

If you are using this information to help a staff member you manage, please exercise caution in how you apply this to their individual situation. These adjustments are intended as tools to assist and require engagement from the impacted person for success.

If a person has been struggling with executive dysfunction issues, implementation of supports can be understood as punishment rather than help. Take time in a private space to calmly discuss any concerns you may have, and let the person decide if they would like to consider implementing a workplace adjustment.



## Perspective

It is likely that if you have executive dysfunction issues, you may have tried some or many of these suggestions previously. If they have not worked for you, that is okay. You may need a different kind of support, or further assistance with implementing and maintaining the adjustments made.

The suggestions below are not intended as a magical solution that will resolve executive dysfunction issues; and I recommend that you seek the support of health professionals such as a general practitioner, a psychologist, or a psychiatrist. You could also consult a workplace coach, a human resources officer or another professional.

## Disclaimer

The information in this document is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. The information I am providing is correct to the best of my knowledge and is based on my direct experience. You should always be informed by your medical professionals who can advise based on your direct circumstances.



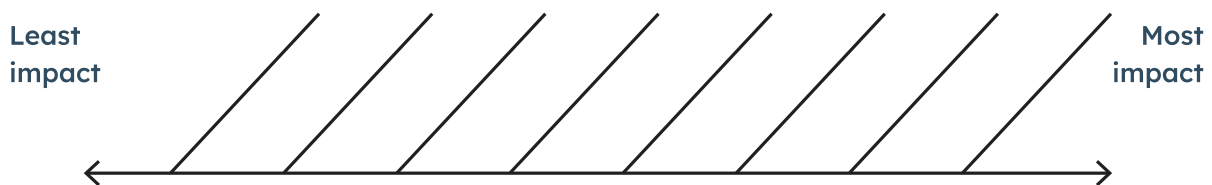
# Evaluation

Before applying any of the suggested workplace adjustments, it is important that you identify what your key challenges are.

Consider:

- What are the specific difficulties you had with a task or project?
- Did they occur at the beginning, middle, or end stages of a task?
- Do you find work easier when you are alone or working with someone?
- Do you need more or less stimulation in your current work environment?

After considering these questions, read through the definitions of the 8 elements of executive functioning. Decide which elements you have difficulty with, and rank these from least impactful to most impactful.



If you plan to implement changes in your work style or environment, decide which change is the most important, and consider adding to this over time once you have adjusted to the initial difference.

As you make a change, take notes on what you are implementing, and what the outcome is. Even if you do not get the result you are hoping for, it will help to remember what you have tried and consider whether a different option is better suited.



## 8 Elements of Executive Functioning

Element	Description
<b>Emotional control</b>	Control over the responses you make to the emotions you feel.
<b>Flexible thinking</b>	Adjusting to unexpected changes in tasks, your environment, or schedule, and shifting your attention as required.
<b>Impulse control</b>	The ability to think, reflect, and make choices before you act.
<b>Organisation</b>	Keeping track of items and tasks physically and mentally.
<b>Planning and prioritising</b>	To set a goal and determine the steps to achieve it. To understand how important or urgent a task is, and the amount of time it will take to complete.
<b>Time management and self-monitoring</b>	Understanding in the moment how you are progressing. The ability to use the time available to you to complete a task or tasks by a deadline.
<b>Task initiation and completion</b>	To act and begin a task or process and sustain the focus required to complete it.
<b>Working memory</b>	The ability to retain and access key information while you are using it.



## Emotional control

*Control over the responses you make to the emotions you feel.*

### What it looks like

- Getting angry or stressed more quickly than expected
- Losing your temper

### Workplace adjustments

- [Ask for help](#)
- [Breaks](#)
- [Checklists, procedural documents, templates](#)
- [Communication methods](#)
- [Difficult conversations](#)
- [Sensory assessment](#)

### Employee strategies

- Have a conversation with your manager and/or team explaining the circumstances that cause you emotional overwhelm and if you would like their support.
- Exit strategy - have options for stepping away from a task or meeting that gets overwhelming.
  - Delegate a task.
  - Put yourself on mute or step out of a meeting.
  - Get a drink of water.
  - Go for a walk.
- Advise your manager your communication preferences, especially in situations when they are upset with you. Consider if speaking in person is better or whether you would prefer an email.

### Assistive technology & focus tools

- [DBT Applications](#)
- [Focus tools \(fidget toys\)](#)





## Flexible thinking

*Adjusting to unexpected changes in tasks, your environment, or schedule, and shifting your attention as required.*

### What it looks like

- Difficulty moving from task to task
- Getting overwhelmed and stressed when things don't go as planned

### Workplace adjustments

- [Agendas](#)
- [Clear instructions](#)
- [Changes \(environment\)](#)
- [Changes \(processes\)](#)
- [Mentorship](#)
- [Transitions \(assistance\)](#)

### Employee strategies

- Have a conversation with your manager and/or team explaining the circumstances that cause you emotional overwhelm and if you would like their support.
- [Block booking](#)
- If you are getting stuck on a task because you find the method of completing it inaccessible, evaluate if there is another way.
- [Transitions \(methods\)](#)

### Assistive technology & focus tools

- [Focus tools \(fidget toys\)](#)
- [Visual timers](#)



## Impulse control

*The ability to think, reflect, and make choices before you act.*

### What it looks like

- Starting tasks that are lower priority or personal projects when there are urgent deadlines
- Booking meetings without considering timing or stakeholder availability
- Interrupting, blurting out responses or saying inappropriate things without thinking
- Easily distracted by sights, sounds, smells, and other sensory input
- Rushing to submit work that may be incomplete or have mistakes

### Workplace adjustments

- [Breaks](#)
- [Check-ins](#)
- [Flexible workspace \(exemption\)](#)
- [No distractions zone](#)
- [Quiet workspace](#)
- [Walk and talk meetings](#)
- [Working from home](#)

### Employee strategies

- Consider ways to reward yourself for staying on task and schedule these rewards to follow the task in your calendar.
- [No distractions zone](#)

### Assistive technology & focus tools

- [Focus tools \(fidget toys\)](#)
- [Noise reduction earplugs](#)
- [Noise-cancelling headphones](#)
- [Screen readers \(drafts\)](#)
- [Sound absorption materials](#)



## Organisation

*Keeping track of items and tasks physically and mentally.*

### What it looks like

- Messy or cluttered workspaces
- Taking extra time to get started due to misplacing or forgetting to prepare all the information and items needed

### Workplace adjustments

- [Check-ins](#)
- [Checklists, procedural documents, templates](#)
- [Clear labels](#)
- [Flexible work hours](#)
- [Weekly review](#)

### Employee strategies

- Build a system that meets the needs of your working style. Be willing to revise it if you find you are no longer engaged.
- Consider whether you work best with digital or paper organisation methods.
- [Colour coding](#)
- [Clear labels](#)

### Assistive technology & focus tools

- [Organisational applications](#)
- [Pixie: Accessibility Reader for Google Chrome](#)
- [Reusable notebook](#)



## Planning and prioritising

*To set a goal and determine the steps to achieve it. To understand how important or urgent a task is, and the amount of time it will take to complete.*

### What it looks like

- Difficulty deciding what task should be done first
- Agreeing to do a task and forgetting it

### Workplace adjustments

- [Block booking](#)
- [Checklists, procedural documents, templates](#)
- [Difficult conversations](#)
- [Deadlines](#)
- [Extra time](#)
- [Prioritisation \(assistance\)](#)
- [Reminders](#)
- [Small wins](#)
- [Timers](#)
- [Visual cues \(workflow\)](#)

### Employee strategies

- [Eisenhower matrix](#)
- Build 'cheat sheet' of tasks ranked high and low priority.
- Sort tasks into those you can initiate yourself and those you need assistance with. Do the items you can start and do not get stuck on an item you are unable to progress on your own.

### Assistive technology & focus tools

- [Dual monitors](#)
- [Organisational applications](#)



## Time management and self-monitoring

*Understanding in the moment how you are progressing. The ability to use the time available to you to complete a task or tasks by a deadline.*

### What it looks like

- Getting absorbed in other tasks without realising
- Running late for meetings
- Missing deadlines

### Workplace adjustments

- [Check-ins](#)
- [Self-talk](#)
- [Timers](#)
- [Visual cues \(reminders\)](#)
- [Visual cues \(workflow\)](#)
- [Working from the office](#)

### Employee strategies

- Music and other media can be used to keep to time, ie play a song or playlist that goes for a certain length of time and use the silence at the end as the cue to finish.
- [Visual cues \(reminders\)](#)
- [Check-ins](#)

### Assistive technology & focus tools

- [Organisational applications](#)
- [Visual timers](#)



## Task initiation and completion

*To act and begin a task or process and sustain the focus required to complete it.*

### What it looks like

- Leaving tasks until last minute
- Difficulty making decisions and getting started
- Distracted easily
- Enthused to start tasks but lose interest quickly

### Workplace adjustments

- [Affirmations](#)
- [Chunk tasks](#)
- [Flexible work processes](#)
- [Pomodoro method](#)
- [Working group](#)

### Employee strategies

- Gamify tasks with a timer and music, consider friendly competition with a co-worker or, use a novelty item of stationery or a new program for increased interest in work
- Determine what the most interesting task is and use it to get started
- Sort tasks into those you can initiate yourself and those you need assistance with. Do the items you can start and do not get stuck on an item you can't progress on your own.
- Perfectionism can be a struggle for those with executive dysfunction. Consider what the 'minimum viable product' for your task looks like and remember that any progress you make is still a start.
- Use existing routines and incorporate additional steps into those.

### Assistive technology & focus tools

- [Focus tools \(fidget toys\)](#)
- [Screen readers \(information\)](#)



## Working memory

*The ability to retain and access key information while you are using it.*

### What it looks like

- Struggle with tasks with complex instructions or multiple parts
- Losing track of conversation in long discussions
- Forgetting action items
- Struggling to progress long term projects
- Repeating questions

### Workplace adjustments

- [Document adjustments](#)
- [Flexible workspace \(permission\)](#)
- [Glossary](#)
- [Screenshots](#)
- [Recording \(audio\)](#)
- [Recording \(video\)](#)
- [Written instructions](#)

### Employee strategies

- Always record or write down instructions.
- If memory issues cause you to frequently interrupt to say your point before you forget, instead try to jot down both the point the other person made as well as your response. This can be used as a cue when it is your turn to speak.
- [Glossary](#)

### Assistive technology & focus tools

- [FM Systems](#)
- [Smart pen](#)
- [Speech recognition software](#)
- [Speech-to-text software](#)
- [Sub-titles and transcripts](#)



# Workplace adjustments glossary

Item	Description
Affirmations	Affirmations of tasks and goals completed may be of more help if an employee has reduced dopamine uptake (common to a range of disabilities and mental health conditions). Reinforcing the dopamine uptake can be achieved by providing thanks or congratulations in private or public as preferred by the employee.
Agendas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide agendas for long or complex meetings to assist with preparation and moving between items</li> <li>• Ensure these are provided to the employee with enough notice to review and absorb the content and make any preparations necessary</li> <li>• Ensure action items to be covered and the responsible parties are indicated clearly as part of the agenda</li> </ul>
Ask for help	An employee should always be able to ask for assistance with their work without fear of reprimand. Build an environment in which these discussions are accepted and encouraged.
Block booking	Booking similar or related tasks together to assist with transitions between different types of activities.
Breaks	Set times for employees breaks to take time away from the desk to stretch and move around.
Changes (environment)	Provide notice for changes in the work environment so assessments can be made for adjustments needed to meet sensory needs.
Changes (processes)	Do not change the steps on the day or mid-process, especially if there is an urgent deadline. Save improvements for a less busy time in which the process can be reviewed for issues more easily and there is opportunity to practice and review any complex steps.
Check-ins	Check-ins on long term projects can assist with continued attention, prioritisation, and meeting deadlines.
Checklists, procedural documents, templates	These aids can assist an employee to keep track of what they need to do and the step they are up to. They can also reduce impact of emotional overwhelm as the employee can be guided by the documents in place.
Chunk tasks	Separate complex processes into smaller steps that are more manageable.
Clear instructions	Provide clear instructions rather than generalisations. For example, if papers must be printed, tell the employee if 2 sets or 5 sets are needed rather than saying 'a few'.
Clear labels	Locations should be clearly labelled for both physical objects and digital storage (inboxes, shared folders, and other locations).





Item	Description
Colour coding	Colour coding can assist with the categorisation and organisation of information and materials.
Communication methods	Communication methods should be modified to meet the needs of the employee. Delivery method (written - paper, written - email, spoken - in person, spoken - telephone/video conference, recording - voicemail/video) and tone/body language.
Deadlines	Clear deadlines should be provided for tasks. Provide the deadline in writing or follow up in writing if given verbally in the first instance. Be open to providing extensions where possible and encourage employees to notify their supervisor when they are having difficulty so that options (extensions, assistance, and redistribution of tasks) can be considered.
Difficult conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in having difficult conversations is available to give further strategies for these situations</li> <li>• Consider the option to have another employee from the team to attend or be on standby for difficult conversations</li> <li>• Before a difficult conversation, write down possible responses from the stakeholder, and options for responding</li> </ul>
Document adjustments	Use of visuals, breaking up large sections of text, and choice of accessible fonts are all ways of increasing information accessibility.
Eisenhower Matrix	Method of prioritising tasks based on urgency and importance. ( <a href="#">Read more</a> - free template included)
Emotional control (strategies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a conversation with your manager and/or team explaining the circumstances that cause you emotional overwhelm if you'd like their support</li> <li>• Exit strategy - have options for stepping away from a task or meeting that gets overwhelming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delegate a task</li> <li>• Put yourself on mute or step out of a meeting</li> <li>• Get a drink of water</li> <li>• Go for a walk</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Advise your manager your communication preferences, especially in situations when they are upset with you. Consider if speaking in person is better or whether you would prefer an email</li> </ul>
Extra time	Allow for extra time at the beginning and/or end of a task in case there is any extra preparation or closing off required.
Flexible thinking (strategies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Block booking</a></li> <li>• If you are getting stuck on a task because you find the method of completing it inaccessible, evaluate if there is another way</li> </ul>



Item	Description
Flexible work hours	Employees should be supported to start or finish work at different times to provide more options if they run late or work better at different times of day.
Flexible work processes	An employee may have unorthodox workarounds for dealing with their executive functioning issues, such as wearing a specific hat or listening to a particular song. If the task is achieved and there is no impact to their safety or their co-workers, be open to supporting their methods.
Flexible workspace (exemption)	New locations and daily set up processes may mean increased distractions, difficulty in finding locations, and more setup prior to beginning work.
Flexible workspace (permission)	Flexibility to work in different locations may increase an employee's ability to seek an environment better suited to their sensory needs at the time.
Glossary	Provide a glossary of new terms or acronyms that an employee may need to reference throughout their work.
Impulse control (strategies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider ways to reward yourself for staying on task and schedule these rewards to follow the task in your calendar</li> <li>• <a href="#">No distractions zone</a></li> </ul>
Mentorship	A mentor with experience in similar work tasks can be identified to assist the employee to identify strategies to ease the impact of executive dysfunction. They may be able to identify which tasks can be grouped together, or the duration a task can be expected to take. Alternately, someone with similar experiences of executive dysfunction may have suggestions and strategies to help even if they are less familiar with the employee's work.
No distractions zone	<p>Set times or places in which an employee has the least number of distractions as possible to cope with from other people. Options include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put work devices into a 'do not disturb' mode that will reduce notifications and pop ups from inboxes or messaging systems</li> <li>• Diverting phones to voicemail</li> <li>• Limit co-worker interactions at that time</li> <li>• Set expectations that this is the employee's time to focus</li> <li>• Use a visual to enforce that the employee should not be disturbed – sign, use of headphones etc.</li> </ul>



Item	Description
Organisation (strategies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a system that meets the needs of your working style. Be willing to revise it if you find you are no longer engaged</li> <li>• Consider whether you work best with digital or paper organisation methods</li> <li>• <a href="#">Colour coding</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Clear labels</a></li> </ul>
Pomodoro method	Select a task and work on it for 25-minutes, followed by a 5-minute break. Every 2 hours (4 pomodoros) take a longer 15–30-minute break. This can assist with breaking bigger projects into manageable portions and establishes a reset point during breaks.
Prioritisation (assistance)	If an employee has competing responsibilities, they may have difficulty deciding which items should be completed first. The workload should be discussed with the supervisor who can advise what is most important. If priorities change, the supervisor should take the time to communicate this rather than assuming a staff member is aware.
Prioritisation (strategies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Eisenhower Matrix</a></li> <li>• Build ‘cheat sheet’ of tasks ranked high and low priority</li> <li>• Sort tasks into those you can initiate yourself and those you need assistance with. Do the items you can start and do not get stuck on an item you are unable to progress on your own</li> </ul>
Quiet workspace	Location that is removed from distracting and/or uncomfortable sensory input. It should be away from meeting rooms, walkways, kitchens, and similar spaces.
Recording (audio)	Allow meetings and training to be recorded where possible, especially if the employee is responsible for minute taking.
Recording (video)	If a regular procedure requires use of a laptop, tablet, or phone, record a video demonstrating the steps to be used as a reference guide.
Reminders	Reminders of upcoming tasks, meetings or deadlines can assist with refocusing attention and drive for the current task.
Screenshots	Take screenshots of progress made in a task. These can be saved in a convenient location and deleted when complete or added to a calendar event.
Self-talk	An employee may be assisted by narrating the process they are completing (silently or out loud depending on the environment). They can start by describing the current step, the step that will follow, and the state of the finished process.
Sensory assessment	Sensory assessments can be provided by occupational therapists and other professionals. There are also online templates that will guide the employee through an evaluation to determine the sensory impact the environment has and whether any changes could assist.



Item	Description
Small wins	Seek/provide opportunities to complete tasks that can be accomplished as small wins to accompany long term projects. This assists with motivation and the generation of dopamine that can be used to fuel on-going work. An employee should include all items they have completed on their to do list, even if that means adding it at the time it was completed. This provides a sense of accomplishment and can assist with further motivation.
Task initiation (strategies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gamify tasks with a timer and music or consider friendly competition with a co-worker to make a task more interesting</li> <li>• Novelty - use a novelty item of stationery or program for increased interest in work</li> <li>• Determine what the most interesting task is and use it to get started</li> <li>• Sort tasks into those you can initiate yourself and those you need assistance with. Do the items you can start and do not get stuck on an item you can't progress on your own</li> <li>• Perfectionism can be a big issue for those with executive dysfunction. Consider what the 'minimum viable product' for your task looks like and remember that whatever progress you make is still a start</li> <li>• Use existing routines and incorporate additional steps into those</li> </ul>
Time management (strategies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music and other media can be used to keep to time, ie play a song or playlist that goes for a certain length of time and use the silence at the end as the cue to finish</li> <li>• <a href="#">Visual cues (reminders)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Check-ins</a></li> </ul>
Timers	Can be used by an employee to keep to task on a deadline. They can also be used to determine the duration of a task to assist with time management in future.
Transitions (assistance)	Reminders of upcoming tasks, meetings or deadlines can assist with preparing to change activities mentally as well as allowing physical preparations to be made.
Transitions (methods)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify a task that can be used for transitions, such as going to the kitchen to make a hot drink. Use the walk to the kitchen to think through your last task. Once your drink is made, start to think about your next task as you return to your workspace</li> <li>• Acknowledge that transitions may be a task of their own for you to complete and give yourself the time needed to complete a transition</li> </ul>
Visual cues (reminders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calendars - printouts, or set the calendar as the desktop background</li> <li>• Post-it notes</li> <li>• Kanban method</li> </ul>



Item	Description
Visual cues (workflow)	Use visuals to show a different perspective of the steps involved. This could include brainstorming or using flow charts, and an example of a finished product for comparison.
Walk and talk meetings	If the purpose of a meeting is only discussion (without a need to consult documents or discuss sensitive topics) consider walking and talking. Go for a stroll outside if this is accessible.
Weekly review	Book a weekly meeting to review work completed during the week. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record any unexpected tasks and the duration for future reference</li> <li>• Record the goals for next week</li> <li>• Note any impacts to consider such as planned staff leave or deadlines</li> </ul>
Working from home	Working from home can enable an employee to control their environment to meet sensory needs and reduce distractions.
Working from the office	Working from the office may provide the structure and environment needed to concentrate and overcome task inertia.
Working group	Working group sessions in which staff can work alongside a colleague or group of colleagues on their individual work. This helps with motivation and accountability. It can be done alongside the <a href="#">Pomodoro method</a> .
Working memory (strategies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always record or write down instructions</li> <li>• If memory issues cause you to frequently interrupt to say your point before you forget, instead try to jot down both the point the other person made as well as your response. This can be used as a cue when it is your turn to speak</li> <li>• <a href="#">Glossary</a></li> </ul>
Written instructions	Provide instructions in writing rather than verbally. If you cannot provide written instructions, pause, and wait for the employee to record the task assigned. Confirm their understanding of the task.



# Assistive technology glossary

Item	Description
DBT Applications	<p>DBT Applications are mobile phone apps that are based on the concepts found in Dialectic Behavioural Therapy (DBT). DBT is a skills-based therapy that helps people understand and accept difficult feelings and regulate the intensity of the emotions they experience. The four pillars of the therapy are mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills.</p> <p>DBT Diary Card and Skills Coach (iPhone) and DBT Coach: Guided Therapy (Android) come recommended by qualified psychologists, however you can check in with a health professional about whether they would recommend this for you.</p>
Dual monitors	Dual monitors can assist with organisation of information and prioritisation of tasks.
FM Systems	FM Systems can reduce the impact of a difficult listening situation by relaying the sound from an instructor, trainer, or other speaker directly to the employee's hearing aid.
Focus tools (fidget toys)	These can fulfil sensory and stimulation needs impacting executive functioning.
Noise reduction earplugs	Examples include Loop earplugs and CALMER by Flare Audio.
Noise-cancelling headphones	These can be used with or without audio tracks based on the employee's needs.
Organisational applications	There are many applications for phones, tablets, and computers to assist with organisation. Options include Microsoft OneNote (and Onetastic), Microsoft Teams, Todoist, Notion, and Forest.
Pixie: Accessibility Reader for Google Chrome	For accessibility of websites and other information viewable in an internet browser. Includes text-to-speech, screen shader, reading ruler, Dyslexia fonts (OpenDyslexic), ePub reader view, Dictionary and other tools that increase accessibility.
Reusable notebook	A reusable notebook that can convert handwritten notes to electronic text may assist an employee with organisation of notes, memory issues and record keeping. Examples include Rocketbook and Miro.
Screen readers (drafts)	Microsoft Word's read aloud feature can be used by an employee to check their written work for missed words and incomplete sentences prior to submission.
Screen readers (information)	A text to speech technology can assist with absorbing information online or in PDFs. Google Chrome's 'Read Aloud' extension and Adobe Reader's 'Read Out Loud' function are potential options for use.



Item	Description
Smart pen	A smart pen that records notes and audio may assist an employee with organisation of notes, memory issues and record keeping. Examples include Livescribe and the Neo Smartpen.
Sound absorption materials	Sound absorption materials can reduce noise, echoes, reverberations, and vibrations that distract.
Speech recognition software	Speech recognition can assist if an employee has disabilities or other conditions that impact computer access.
Speech-to-text software	Speech-to-text software can assist if an employee has disabilities or other conditions that impact processing speeds when writing or typing.
Sub-titles and transcripts	Training and announcement videos should use subtitles to assist with processing information. Meetings can use a software like Microsoft Teams to ensure live captions are available.
Visual timers	Visual timers can assist an employee to track the time they have left during a task as well as the point the timer goes off and may be easier to notice than a small pop-up on screen.



# Focus tools (fidget toys) guide

## Tools or toys?

Many people are aware of the concept of fidget toys, which are also referred to as focus tools by some therapists. By referring to these objects as focus tools, we make it easier for a workplace to understand the role that focus tools have in assisting employees to meet their workplace performance goals. This also helps some employees feel better about needing focus tools, as some find the concept of fidget toys to be infantilising.

## Needs

There are many different types of focus tools that meet a variety of needs and goals. Focus tools enable their users to calm their nervous systems, by regulating the levels of input they are receiving and responding to. To understand what kind of focus tool will help, you must consider what need you are trying to meet, as well as the goal it will help you to perform.

## Goals

Depending on which element of executive functioning you are struggling with, different focus tools will be needed to achieve the goal or activity you are trying to complete.

Consider the work activity you are doing to help decide the appropriate focus tool.

- How many empty hands do you need to complete it?
- Do you need to be able to listen?
- Are you working with or near other employees?

## Sensory and emotional

If your sensory environment is over or under-stimulating, or you are struggling to regulate your emotions, you may benefit from a focus tool that provides tactile feedback or sensory input.

## Stimulation

If the activity you are working on is not providing enough stimulation, using a focus tool can meet your needs and prevent distraction. Choose a focus tool that allows you to use muscle memory, without thinking about it. Anything that diverts your attention completely is too distracting to be a helpful focus tool in this case. Focus tools that use repetitive motions can be well suited to this.

## Reset and transition

Focus tools can also assist with resetting your brain and transitioning between tasks. In this instance, the focus tool should allow your focus to move away from your work and onto the focus tool.





## Options

Needs	Options
<b>Sensory and emotional needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worry stones</li> <li>• Blu tack</li> <li>• Stuffed toys</li> <li>• Putty</li> <li>• Objects to twist or spin (fidget spinners, tangles)</li> </ul>
<b>Stimulation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Puzzle fidgets</li> <li>• Rubik's cube</li> <li>• Knitting</li> <li>• Pick and peel rock</li> </ul>
<b>Reset and transition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lava lamps</li> <li>• Sand art and timers</li> <li>• Short puzzles (eg sudoku)</li> <li>• Comfort item</li> <li>• Pick and peel rock</li> </ul>

## Suppliers

Australian suppliers run by Neurodivergent people or their families:

- [Kaiko Fidgets \(VIC\)](#)
- [Sensory Oasis for Kids \(VIC\)](#)
- [My Autism Store \(QLD\)](#)



# Workplace Adjustments for Executive Dysfunction

[www.neurodivergentemabler.com](http://www.neurodivergentemabler.com)



Photo credit: Sarah Abramowski 2022

## About the author

Emma Sharman (she/her) is an ADHD/Autistic person living and working in Canberra, Australia, on Ngunnawal land. She received diagnoses of ADHD in 2019 and autism in 2020.

Emma started her journey as a neurodivergent advocate by sharing her experiences with her family, friends, and co-workers, taking on public advocacy and guest speaking opportunities from 2021.

Through her work, Emma aims to increase understanding and acceptance of neurodivergent people in a variety of environments, and hopes to improve the experiences of the neurodivergent community in the process.