



Episode 11: Executive Functions Continued

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder

LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

This is the unfiltered continuation of Episode 10: a real clinical conversation, twists and all, about how executive functions actually come together. Cory sets us up honestly, this is the genuine, slightly messy continuation of last episode, the kind of clinical wrestling we nearly cut.

We start by pulling apart two things that often get bundled together: executive functions and effortful control. Effortful control is the more emotional, motivational engine, the “why am I doing this”, while executive functions do the organising, holding the goal, planning, shifting, responding to change. They run as tandem networks, and telling them apart genuinely matters for our clinical reasoning.

From there we get practical about complexity, which is really just multiple skills having to fire at once: driving a car, eating at the table, playing soccer. We look at automatic versus volitional motor control, and the question that sits underneath it for clinicians: when a child repeats and repeats, are they stuck on the complexity, or are they mastering automaticity and we should let them keep going?

Tracy brings the whole thread together through the saccadic eye movement, that in-to-midline and out-to-the-world pattern that lays the foundation for the attention networks. It is the same rhythm Cory was building with the swing back in Episode 10, the little boy who kept finding Cory’s face across the movement. We finish on scaffolding stretch points: why children persevere, whether that is safety, regulation or language load, and how state and allostatic load shift what any of us can take on from one day to the next.



Resources & Mentions

- The Spirit tool (Sensory, Affective, Motor; Tracy Stackhouse, Developmental FX), for tracking executive function and effortful control in clinical reasoning.
- The spiraling continuum of development (Gilfoyle, Grady and Moore, Children Adapt), for finding a child’s stretch points.
- Dan Siegel on the ‘mwe’ space (interpersonal neurobiology).
- Check out DFX’s Learning Journeys to build your clinical reasoning skills: <https://dfxlearningjourneys.thinkific.com/>



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

- 1 We separate executive functions from effortful control, the organising networks from the emotional, motivational engine. For a child you're working with, which of the two are you actually targeting, and how does naming it sharpen your plan?

- 2 Complexity is just multiple skills firing at once, and breakdowns show up when the load exceeds available resources. Think of a task a child finds hard: how many skills is it really demanding simultaneously?

- 3 When a child repeats and repeats, the key question is whether they are stuck on complexity or mastering automaticity, and whether to let them. Recall a child who perseverates: which is it, and how would you tell?

- 4 We name safety, regulation and language load as drivers of perseveration. For a child who gets stuck, which of these might be underneath it, and how would that change your response?

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State and allostatic load change what any of us can take on day to day. How do you read a child's available capacity on a given day, and adjust the stretch point you aim for accordingly?
