Capable but Overwhelmed?

A Parent Guide to Understanding Executive Function Challenges in Teenagers

For parents who know their teenager is capable but are wondering why organisation, revision, planning, managing emotions and getting started seem so difficult.

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WHAT ARE YOU SEEING?

Getting Started

- ☐ Knows what needs to be done but struggles to begin
- ☐ Needs repeated reminders to start homework or revision
- ☐ Seems overwhelmed before starting
- ☐ Puts things off until the last minute
- ☐ Says "I'll do it later" but rarely does

Organisation

- ☐ Frequently loses equipment
- ☐ Forgets books, homework or resources
- ☐ Has difficulty keeping track of deadlines
- ☐ Seems capable but disorganised

Time Management

- ☐ Underestimates how long tasks take
- ☐ Rushes despite having enough time
- ☐ Loses track of time
- ☐ Leaves revision very late

Emotional Regulation

- ☐ Gets frustrated when things do not go to plan
- ☐ Avoids tasks that feel difficult
- ☐ Feels overwhelmed by large tasks
- ☐ Becomes anxious about deadlines

WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN?

A few challenges are common in adolescence. What matters is looking for patterns that occur regularly and affect school, independence or wellbeing.

Instead of....	Try reframing to....
"They are lazy"	They are struggling with task Initiation
"They do not care"	They may be overwhelmed
"They are disorganised"	They need to build the support systems
"They should know this by now"	These skills are still developing

THREE THINGS TO TRY THIS WEEK

Choose the one that fits your teenager best.
Small steps work better than big overhauls.

IF THEY STRUGGLE TO GET STARTED
Ask: "What is the first tiny step?"

IF REVISION FEELS OVERWHELMING
Focus on one subject, one topic and ten minutes.

IF PLANNING IS DIFFICULT
Help them identify their top three priorities for tomorrow.

STRENGTHS MATTER TOO

Many parents spend so much time thinking about what is difficult that they forget to reflect on strengths.

My teenager is good at: _____

One thing I admire about my teenager: _____

Important Information - This resource is a reflection tool only and is not a diagnostic assessment. Executive function skills develop throughout childhood, adolescence and into early adulthood.
What are Executive Functions? - Executive functions are the mental skills that help us organise ourselves, manage time, plan ahead, regulate emotions, remember information and get started on tasks.

Remember
Executive function challenges are not a sign of laziness, lack of intelligence or lack of motivation.
Many capable teenagers struggle because they have not yet developed the strategies and systems that help them manage increasing demands.

Wondering whether executive function coaching could help your teenager?
Book a free Insight Call with Cortex Thinkers.
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