

Share Your Story

by Susanne Keeley

Executive functions are housed in the frontal lobe of the brain. This area is slow to mature, with some research putting continued development into one's 30s, leading to my overarching premise: Children go through their entire educational experience with immature frontal lobes. Therefore, any opportunity that we as adults can take to promote good executive functions in our children is beneficial. Share Your Story is one such way.

Adult brains are constantly navigating an array of options for action. We determine the desired outcome, evaluate different methods to achieve the outcomes, modify plans...we calculate and recalculate a myriad of tasks simultaneously all day, every day. However, to an outsider it looks like we just do it. To our children, our outcomes seem to occur by magic. They don't know all that has gone on in our head so, to them, it seems that dinner magically appears on the table.

Share Your Story pulls away the curtain and demystifies the magic. It's very simple. Take all that calculating and recalculating that goes on in your head and let it out of your mouth. Talk about your thought process for both tasks you are doing and those your child is doing. For example, as you're getting into the car to drive to a practice, talk out loud about what led to that point.

"I knew you had to be at practice by 4:30 and that you would need your clean uniform so I decided to finish the wash Sunday and I wouldn't have to worry about it on a workday. I need to go to the grocery store but there won't be enough time between when I drop you off and pick you up and I'll need to find a different time for that. I put my sneakers in the car so I could walk the track while you practice and I can also return some phone calls in the parking lot while I wait for you."

These few sentences let your child see that you have a plan, the uniform didn't magically clean itself and drop into the pack, that you considered options for what to do during practice and planned ahead to have what you would need. There was no smoke and mirrors.

Share Your Story about your work situations.

“Today was a crazy day. I had an important conference call scheduled but 10 minutes before it was to start, the system went down. The help desk didn’t know how long it would take to fix and it was stressful to decide whether I should reschedule or hope it comes through and just shorten the content. I decided to cancel and reschedule. Tomorrow I will have to decide when we can try again and contact everyone with an apology and new time.”

By sharing the situation, you help your child to understand that problems happen, options are considered and new plans made. There is no magic wand to fix a difficulty but there is logic and reason.

Don’t limit your sharing to just tangible events. Share Your Story with emotions also.

“Did you see that guy almost hit us! He had his head down texting and almost ran right into our car. I’m so angry. I’d love to pull up next to him at the light and scream at him. But instead I’m going to take some deep breaths. Yelling at him won’t change his behavior and may make him really angry.”

Kids need to see that adults do get angry at times and feel like acting out, but we have our own methods of calming down and analyzing the situation. There isn’t a calming fairy that blows dust and makes us relax.

Children learn by observing adults and Share Your Story is a very simple way you can foster their learning of executive functions skills.

Susanne Phillips Keeley, MA CCC-SLP earned undergraduate degrees in Communication Disorders & Speech Science and in Psychology from the University of Colorado and received her Masters Degree in Speech-Language Pathology from Northwestern University. Susanne is a licensed speech-language pathologist with over 30 years of experience successfully treating those with executive function disorders and differences. She is the author of “Write This Down: Making Your Student Planner Work For You” (www.lulu.com), “The Source for Executive Function Disorders” (www.proedinc.com) and developed GOSTRONG, a unique tool to maximize executive function skills. Susanne’s innovative work has led her to be a frequent speaker at conferences, schools and parent groups across the country. Her private practice is located in Wilmette, Illinois.