



## Executive Functions in the Classroom

### INHIBITION



Our ability to resist a first impulse is a predictor of lifelong success in school, work, and our personal life.

Inhibition is measured with questions (“I rush through things”) and tasks, such as Stroop test and Flanker test, which require someone to hold back a response.

### How to help students who struggle...

Impulsivity is a detriment to our goals at all stages of life. Young children with impulse control issues will grab a toy even if someone else is playing with it. In early grades, you can expect impulsive students to use harsh language for its shock value. Adolescents might lash out at others. Even as adults, not inhibiting our first response can lead to hurt feelings and worse.

**Social Stories.** Students with impulse control sometimes say things that are hurtful, even when they didn't intend to be. Help them be more considerate of others by developing a Social Story about consequences. Role play more acceptable responses together.

**Smaller Steps.** With all their distractions, impulsive students may have a hard time developing a sense of accomplishment from their work. You can help by helping them stay organized breaking assignments into smaller chunks. For older students, a series of short-term, small-stakes deadlines can be better than one big, scary deadline later.

**“I'm finished!”** Students who rush through their work may benefit from a checklist (or anchor chart) with guidelines for acceptable finished work. Also, choose an appropriate follow-up activity. If the reward for being done is free time, impulsive students may have a hard time sticking to the task.

**Getting Buy-In.** Choose goals and strategies *with* the student as much as possible. You can't inhibit *for* the student; they must do it themselves. That means they need to believe the goals and strategies you try together make sense. Be direct and clear with them, as early as possible in the process.

**Non-verbal signals.** With practice, students will learn to identify when they should inhibit their first impulse, but until that day then they may need some help. Decide on a discrete signal (hand gesture) so you can highlight without drawing attention from others. A subtle signal from you can provide in-the-moment feedback, which is extremely helpful.



University of  
Lethbridge

[scrappyteachers.com](http://scrappyteachers.com)

