



Executive Functions: What They Are, How They Work, and Why They Evolved

By Russell A. Barkley PhD ABPP ABCN

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This groundbreaking book offers a comprehensive theory of executive functioning (EF) with important clinical implications. Synthesizing cutting-edge neuropsychological and evolutionary research, Russell A. Barkley presents a model of EF that is rooted in meaningful activities of daily life. He describes how abilities such as emotion regulation, self-motivation, planning, and working memory enable people to pursue both personal and collective goals that are critical to survival. Key stages of EF development are identified and the far-reaching individual and social costs of EF deficits detailed. Barkley explains specific ways that his model may support much-needed advances in assessment and treatment.

See also Barkley's empirically based, ecologically valid assessment tools: *Barkley Deficits in Executive Functioning Scale (BDEFS for Adults)* and *Barkley Deficits in Executive Functioning Scale--Children and Adolescents (BDEFS-CA)*.

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Editorial Review

Review

"With this seminal work, Barkley single-handedly initiates a paradigm shift in our understanding of executive functioning (EF). Drawing on fields as diverse as neuropsychology, neurobiology, evolutionary biology, behavioral genetics, anthropology, and philosophy, he achieves a masterful synthesis, culminating in a hierarchical model of EF development through eight stages. Of particular value, the model gives rise to ecologically valid strategies for management of EF deficits and clearly enhances our understanding of ADHD and other conditions in which executive dysfunction is prominent. Highly readable, interesting, even exciting to read, this volume will undoubtedly stimulate and guide EF research and clinical applications for decades to come."--Mary V. Solanto, PhD, Department of Psychiatry and Director, ADHD Center, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

"For real advances in the field of executive functioning (EF) to occur, we need, first and foremost, a clear definition of the term. Barkley has provided that clarity. He explains what executive functions are, why they are critical to our day-to-day existence, and how they affect society. He justifiably rejects psychometric assessments of executive functions, based on their lack of ecological validity, and instead proposes multilevel assessments grounded in the natural environment. As a clinician working in the real world of people with EF deficits, the fact that Barkley's theory yields logical and applicable strategies for intervention is of great significance to me."--Richard Guare, PhD, Director, Center for Learning and Attention Disorders, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

"Barkley has never been one to shy away from new theories and ideas. He is perhaps one of the foremost critical thinkers of our time. *Executive Functions* is a tour de force of creativity and wide-ranging thinking. Barkley offers a reasoned and reasonable theory to understand the emerging field of EF and its related disorders. The chapter on clinical implications is particularly important for practitioners. This book is essential reading for researchers, clinicians, and students interested in the complexities of brain-behavior relationships and human adaptation."--Sam Goldstein, PhD, Neurology, Learning, and Behavior Center, Salt Lake City, Utah

"Barkley presents the best and most comprehensive and systematic overview of the field of EF to date. His coherent theory of EF has the potential to profoundly change the way EF is studied and assessed in clinical populations. In outlining the problems of how to conceptualize and assess EF--and providing compelling evidence for an extended phenotype model--he offers a desperately needed roadmap for future research. This volume should be on the bookshelf of every practicing clinical neuropsychologist, and is a 'must read' for students in neuropsychology and cognitive neuroscience."--Ellen Braaten, PhD, Department of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital/Harvard Medical School

"Barkley develops a new framework for thinking about executive functions by describing them through a biological evolutionary paradigm....He shines a new light on a new path to discovering more about executive functions. Although helping to answer many questions, he leaves much to be discovered, in effect tantalizing and prodding the reader to engage in future research endeavors that might bring us closer to understanding executive functions and what makes us human."

(*PsycCRITIQUES* 2013-01-23)

"Barkley...a widely recognized expert, provides a fresh and original look....Barkley's account is deliberately psychological and functional rather than neuroanatomical, and provides an important reconceptualization for those working in the area of EFs. Recommended. Upper-division graduates and above."

(*Choice Reviews* 2012-12-01)

"Readers will find this book fascinating if they take the time to sift through Barkley's findings along with the research data. I know I did, because I have a daughter who struggles with ADHD, and this book weaves the correlation between ADHD and executive functioning (EF) in a way that no other book (to my knowledge) has done before."

(*The Chronical* 2015-01-22)

About the Author

Russell A. Barkley, PhD, ABPP, ABCN, is Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at the Medical University of South Carolina. Dr. Barkley has published numerous books and five assessment scales, plus more than 260 scientific articles and book chapters on ADHD, executive functioning, and childhood defiance. He is also the editor of the newsletter *The ADHD Report*. A frequent conference presenter and speaker who is widely cited in the national media, he is past president of the Section on Clinical Child Psychology (the former Division 12) of the American Psychological Association, and of the International Society for Research in Child and Adolescent Psychopathology. His website is www.russellbarkley.org.

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