

Workshop for the MS 839 community

Strengthening Executive Functions at Home:

Creating a Practical Toolbox For Our Kids

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Agenda

- What is Executive Functioning (EF)?
- Why is EF important?
- Developmental components
- This moment in time – anxiety and new normal – role of EF
- Parental role
- Let's get concrete: EF, mindfulness & coping strategies, communication skills
- Your questions answered

What is Executive Functioning?

- The CEO of the brain
 - Frontal lobe
- An umbrella term
 - Interrelated set of cognitive processes

Working Memory

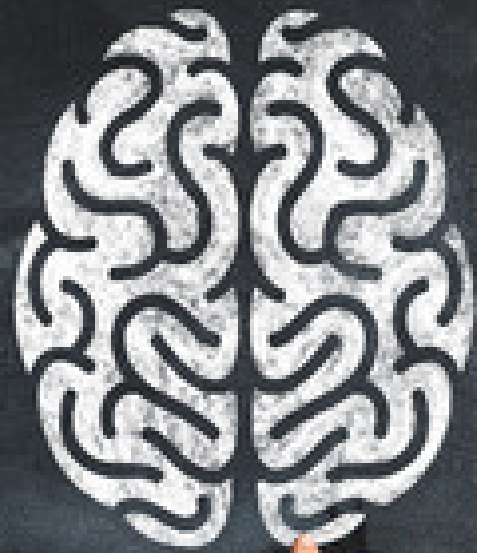
Housing and retrieving

Self-Control

Self-regulation, self-monitoring, and delayed gratification

Mental Flexibility

Flexible thinking and transitions



Executive Functioning Pyramid

Metacognition

Planning/Goals

Task Initiation

Decision Making

Time/Attention Management

Integration of
Lower Level
Executive Functioning

Organizing
Sequencing

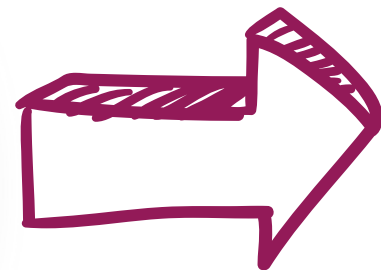
Self Control
Working Memory
Mental Flexibility



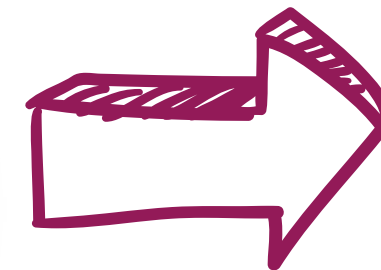
EF During Adolescence:

What is Happening?

Brain moving toward
INTEGRATION:
interconnectedness
& specialization



**Increased
Demands**



**Separation/
Individuation**

Why are strong EF skills important for everyone?



Provides the foundation required for success in:

- Academic
- Occupational
- Social-emotional



We ALL have EF challenges when:

- Tired
- Cognitively overloaded
- Emotionally depleted

In a recent study, Stanford University researchers found that building Executive Functions skills and strengthening the brain's "executive control network" (ECN) can protect against psychological problems during **stressful experiences**.



A network diagram consisting of several nodes (circles) connected by thin lines, located in the top left corner of the slide.

A closer look at **strategies** **and skills** to address EF challenges at home



Our tweens all need something a little **different**
based on **who they are**

Seeking the Growth Edge

Developmental v Chronological Age

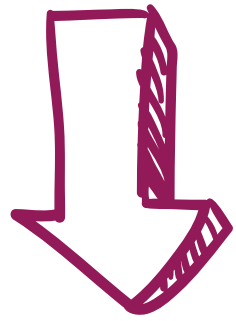
Assess: You know your tween

- Fine motor
- Gross motor
- Interest
- Personality
- Stress levels
- Cognitive strengths/weaknesses

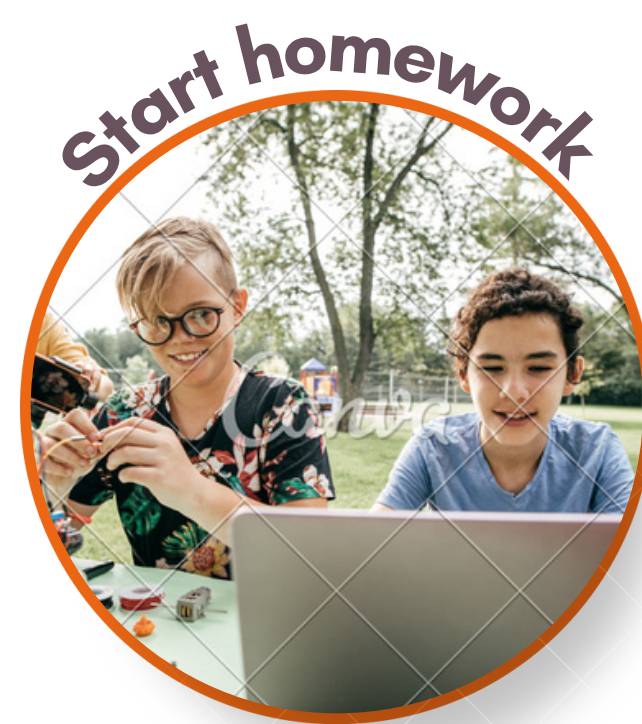
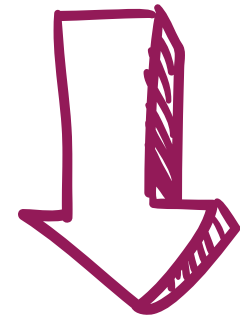


Raising **organized & independent** tweens means helping them:

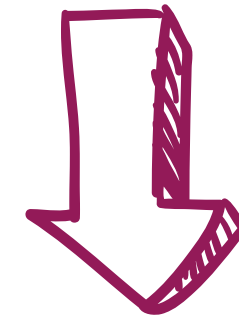
Move efficiently through their days



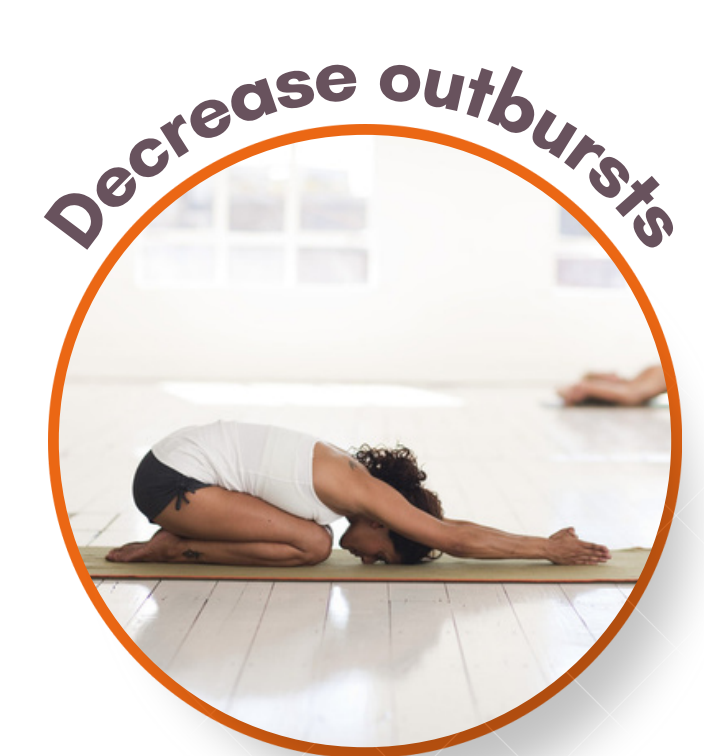
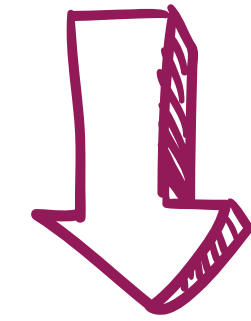
Initiate tasks



Transition



Regulate emotions



“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember.
Involve me and I learn.”

– Benjamin Franklin

How do we build independence?

Do it for you



Do it with you



Watch you do it



Do it completely independently

(Stacy Ashland)



Working Memory



What this means

- Difficulty holding onto and/or mentally manipulating information
- Trouble keeping track of and executing multi-step instructions and/or multi-step problems

Working Memory

How can parents help?

- Debunk the myth of "I can remember"
- One direction at a time
- Multiple forms of the direction

Calendar invite



Written



Verbal Reminder



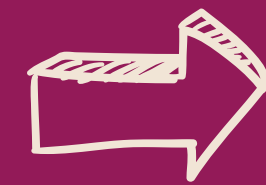
Change Parental directions:

"Please go get ready for school!"

- Brush your teeth,
- Brush your hair
- Put socks on
- Put shoes on
- Pack Water bottle
- Grab lunch bag



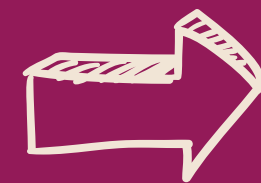
Self-Control



What this means

- Resisting several thoughts or actions to focus on **one**
 - this impacts sequencing in writing
- Self-regulation in service of a greater goal
- RESTRAINING
- DELAYING GRATIFICATION
 - marshmallow test
- STOPPING an action or plan that is already in motion
- INHIBITING a response (Simon says!)

Self-Control



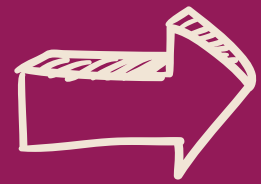
How can parents help?

- Plans/anticipate the problems
- Practicing stopping
- Reward systems
- Empathy for challenge of NOT doing
 - out of sight, out of mind!
 - Lock boxes!



Mental Flexibility

(aka cognitive flexibility)



What this means

To sustain or shift attention in response to different demands or to apply different rules in different settings



How this impacts writing!

WORKING MEMORY

- Working memory helps a child to **keep the topic or goal** of a paper in mind while writing, versus going off on a tangent.
- It also helps in remembering **spelling and grammar rules**.



How this impacts writing!

INHIBITORY CONTROL

- Inhibitory control is needed during the **brainstorming/planning** process of writing.
- This is going to help children inhibit ideas they have already covered, allowing them to think of **new ideas**.
- It is also important during the **revision process** for inhibiting the original way something was written in favor of a more effective way.



How this impacts writing!

COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

- Cognitive Flexibility is important for **thinking of alternative** ways of saying something or to change the organization of an essay.
- It is also needed to take on **multiple perspectives** in fiction writing or to imagine both sides in a comparative essay.

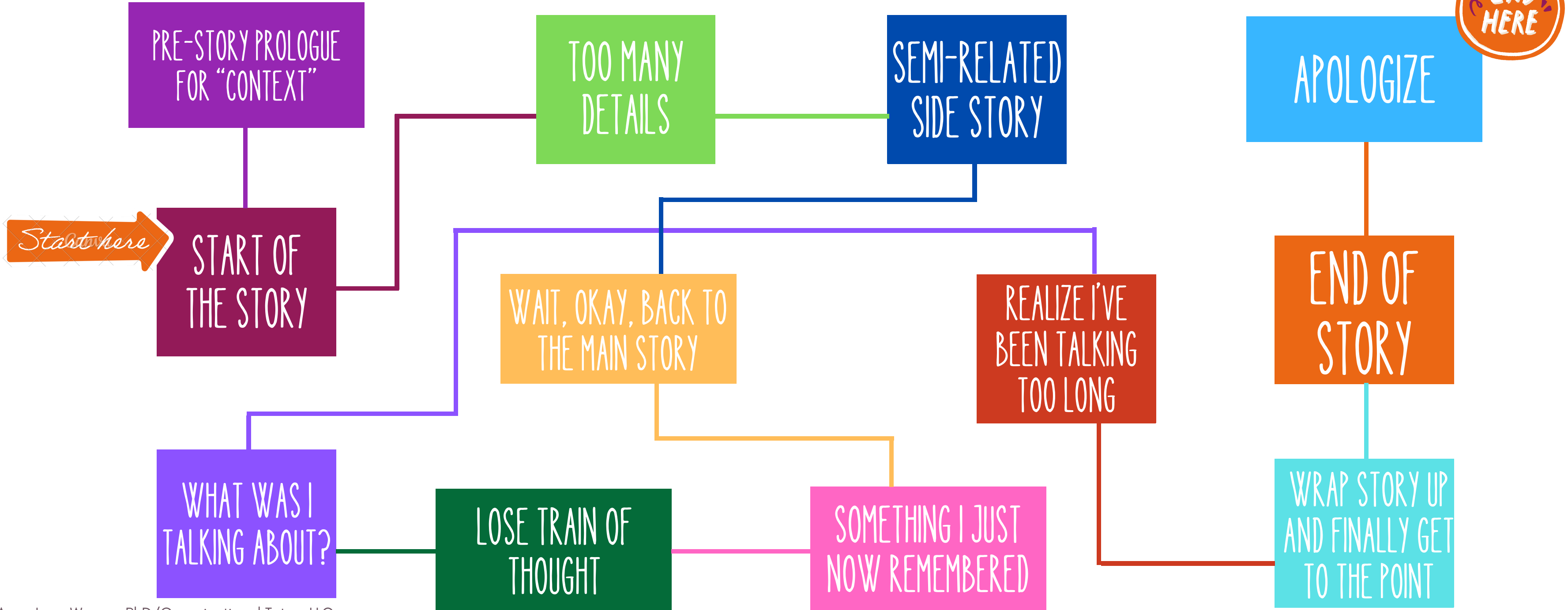


NON-ADHD STORYTELLING

START OF STORY

END OF STORY

ADHD STORYTELLING



Impulse Control

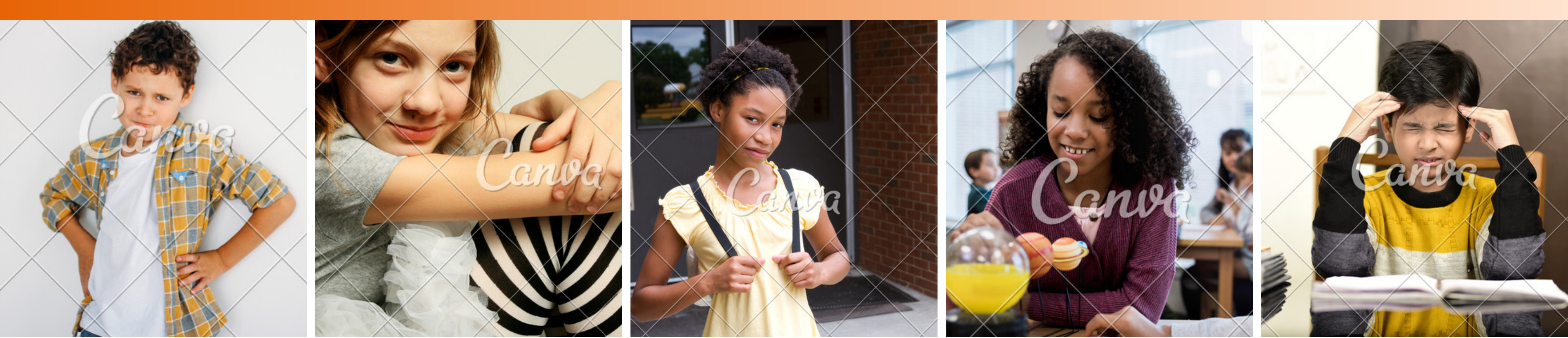


➔ **The problems**

- Thinking before acting
- Waiting for an appropriate time to speak
- Turn-taking
- Writing without editing/checking

➔ **The answers**

- ALWAYS press pause for three seconds in conversations before responding
- Draft responses before submitting them
- Run work by specified adults before submitting



Emotional regulation is a crucial skill for life:
*We need to create **toolboxes**.*

Regulatory Functions

- Help tweens regulate themselves by creating healthy routines and standing by them
- Learn a healthy balance now for the rest of life
- Substance misuse/overuse can be a regulatory issue

Healthy Sleep Habits



Movement & Exercise



Healthy Eating

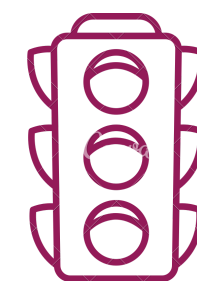


Emotion Regulation

- **Reflect** on intense emotional experiences
- **Create** plans for moving forward
- **Identify** precursors
- **Tolerate** and down-regulate
- **Label** them

➔ **Look out for moments of vulnerability**

- **Sleep-deprivation**
- **Unrelated frustration**
- **Hunger**



**STOPLIGHT: Shift from
BOTTOM UP to TOP DOWN**

Attention: Initiating and Sustaining

Impeded by:

Difficulty
focusing & initiating

Inability
to filter out distractions

Trouble
redirecting attention back
to tasks once distracted



Time & Attention Management



The problems

- Poor awareness of how time elapses
- Difficulty managing schedule
- Procrastination

The answers

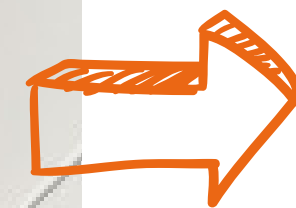
- Time chunking
- Use of timers
- When to take breaks
- Prioritization



What can you do

Sustained Attention:

as a parent?

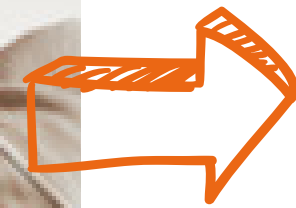


Help kids...

- Understand when to blast music and when not to
- Know the **optimal study environments**
- Know **when** to study
- Decide on **what** to study
- Maintain **organization**
- Keep **workspace clean**

Planning & Organizing

Difficulty with scheduling, strategizing, outlining, etc.



How do we address this?

- Set **realistic** goals
- **Prioritize** work in order of deadlines and importance
- Use **calendars/planners**
- **Schedule** breaks/downtime
- **Acknowledge** work-related fantasies as separate from the reality of the work



ROUTINES

The Calendar

REFLECT

PRIORITIES

- Make it a reflection of real life
- Put in the **routines** you need
- Work backward
- Make time to **DO** the 'to dos'
- Have your calendar reflect your **priorities**
- Invite your family to events
- Use it as a way to **reflect**

Regaining Control of Screen Time



- Validate
- Identify the **WHAT** as much, if not more than the **HOW MUCH**
- Let the experts help (Screened Out documentary & Screenstrong challenge)
- Collaborate
- Model
- **Scaffold** goals and incentivize
- **Schedule** alternative activities, based on your teen's interests

Technology tools: what can YOU do?



Bottom up attention:



- INVOLUNTARY
- Stimulus driven

Need to activate top-down

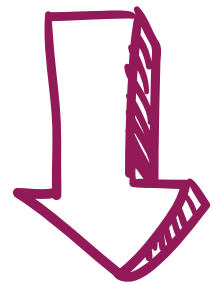


- APPS
- Freedom
- Self Control
- Agreed upon monitoring
- Shutting down the internet
- Lockbox
- Sacred times
 - Dinner
 - An hour before bed

Action Potential

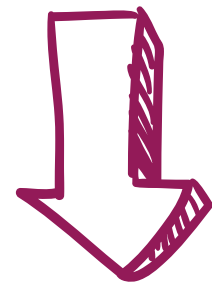
It isn't just about EF

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING



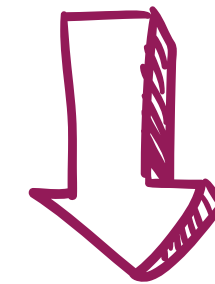
- Impulse Control
- Working Memory
- Self-Regulation
- Attention
- Planning/Organizing
- Time Management
- Self-Monitoring

GROWTH MINDSET



- Belief that:
 - IQ
 - Talent
 - Creativity
 - Love/friendship
- Develop through effort and deliberate practice
- Failure is learning & opportunity

GRIT



- Willingness to commit to action
- "Sticking with things over the very long-term until you master them" - Duckworth's 'Hard Thing Rule'
 - Reminder that everyone has a 'hard thing.'
 - Finish what you start, no quitting mid-season, but you don't have to sign up next year.
 - You pick the 'hard thing' yourself.

Reducing Uncertainty (& EF support)



Create a Family Calendar



Define/Simplify Your Routine



Sleep Hygiene & Routine



Identifying what I DO Know



The most important Modeling Way to help

Put tech away



Use of calendar



Emotional regulation
through breathing



Hitting pause and
mindful attention to
reducing impulsivity



Help with the
setup and plan



Self-care
routines, sleep,
exercise



Use of timers



Looking Ahead to High School

Carve

We want kids to:

Build independence & routines

Conclusion

**Planning &
Organization**

Model and teach.
Share calendars.

**Learn to
pause**

Especially in moments
of distress

**Manage
technology**


Have clear rules about
access.
Use apps to shut down

When do you get a neuro-psychological test done?



- **Learning or organizational difficulties**
- **A cognitive evaluation with a series of tests designed to measure intellectual, academic, and cognitive strengths and weaknesses and to determine underlying problems.**
 - Significant trouble focusing (feedback from teachers)
 - Significant negative changes in grades without clear antecedents
 - Significant difficulty managing the workload (slowed pace, comprehension...)

How do I know when to get more support?

- 
- Interest in activities that use to bring pleasure
 - Connection with peers
 - Communication/withdrawal
 - Unremitting worries
 - Functionality (ADLS, sleep patterns, ability to get to work/camp/school, social engagement, appetite)
 - When they ask, listen
 - You **always ask**, don't avoid (use the real words)

You know your kid! How far are they from their "normal"?

Resources

▶ Books

- *Executive Functions at Home and at School: Six Skills Young Learners Need to Succeed* By Christina Young, M.S.Ed., LPC
- *Growth Mindset: The new psychology of success* By Carol Dweck
- *Action Potential: The Secrets of Superlearners* By Dr. Vivian Mougios
- *Parenting in the Age of the Attention Snatchers: A step-by-step guide to balancing your child's use of technology* By Lucy Jo Palladino PhD.
- *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* By Daniel Siegel

▶ For concrete tools/resources:

- [Understood.com](https://www.understood.com)
- www.organizationaltutors.com

A network diagram background consisting of a series of interconnected nodes and lines, rendered in a light purple color against a darker purple background. The nodes are small circles, and the lines are thin, creating a web-like structure that spans the entire slide.

THANK YOU

Feedback?

CONTACT



Feel free to contact us if you have more questions/feedback:

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