

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING EXECUTIVE FUNCTION AT HOME

Neck River Elementary
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Executive Function At Home: Today's Goals

1. Understand what executive function really is (not just organization — but the brain systems that control attention, behavior, and thinking)
2. Recognize the EF demands hidden inside everyday tasks at home
3. Learn simple strategies to support EF development in K–5 children
4. Shift mindsets from "behavior problem" to "skill-building opportunity"

And, answer some of your questions…

Executive Function: At Home

Identify one task, activity, or hobby that your child does **WELL** at home



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Executive Function At Home

Identify one task or activity that usually seems to be a CHALLENGE for your child



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What is Executive Function?

Executive Function

Much more than
planning and organizing



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Think back to
learning to drive
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What processes did you have to concentrate on or pay attention to?



Familiar Scene?





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Familiar Scene?







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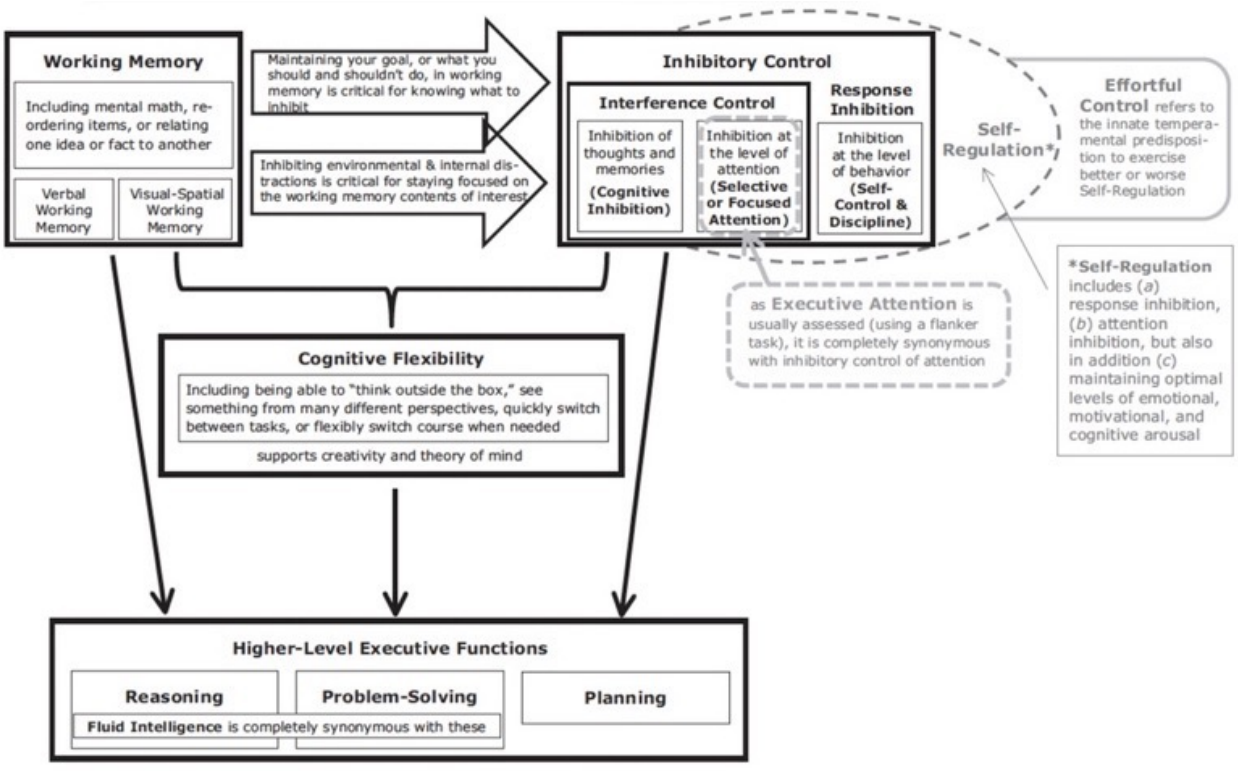


Defining EF

A family of [effortful] top-down processes needed when you have to concentrate and pay attention, when 'going on automatic' or relying on instinct or intuition would be ill-advised, insufficient, or impossible

(Diamond, 2014) p.7

Executive Functions



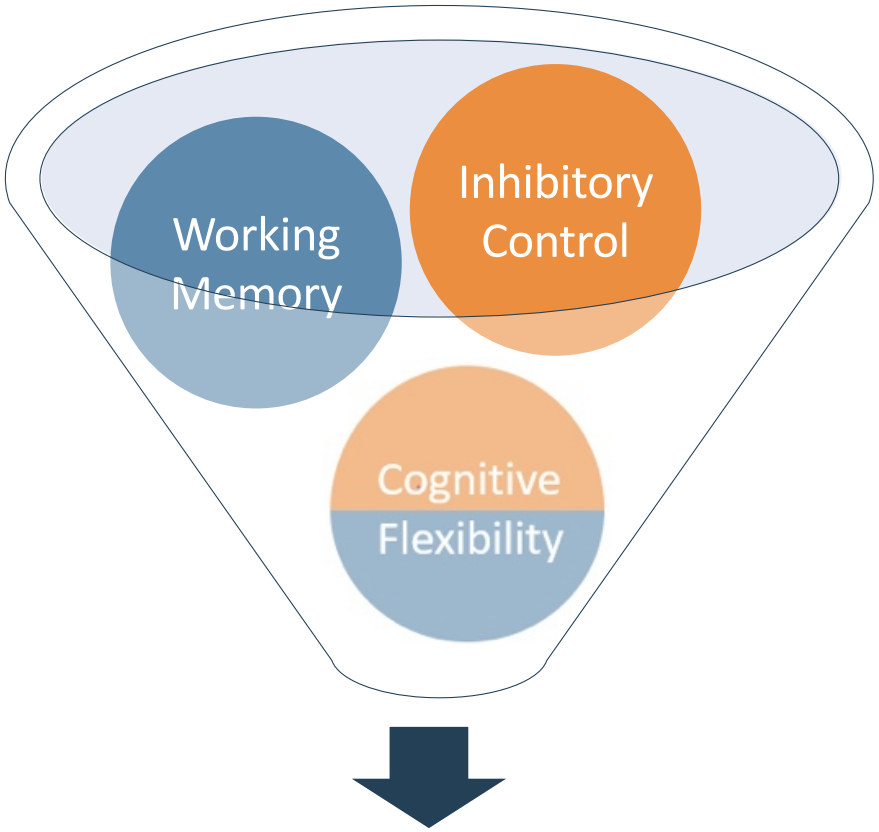


Link to paper

Diamond, 2013

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A Simple View of EF



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Inhibitory Controls



in + habeō (hold in)



Cognitive Inhibition — Thoughts, memories



Selective or Focused Attention — Attention-level

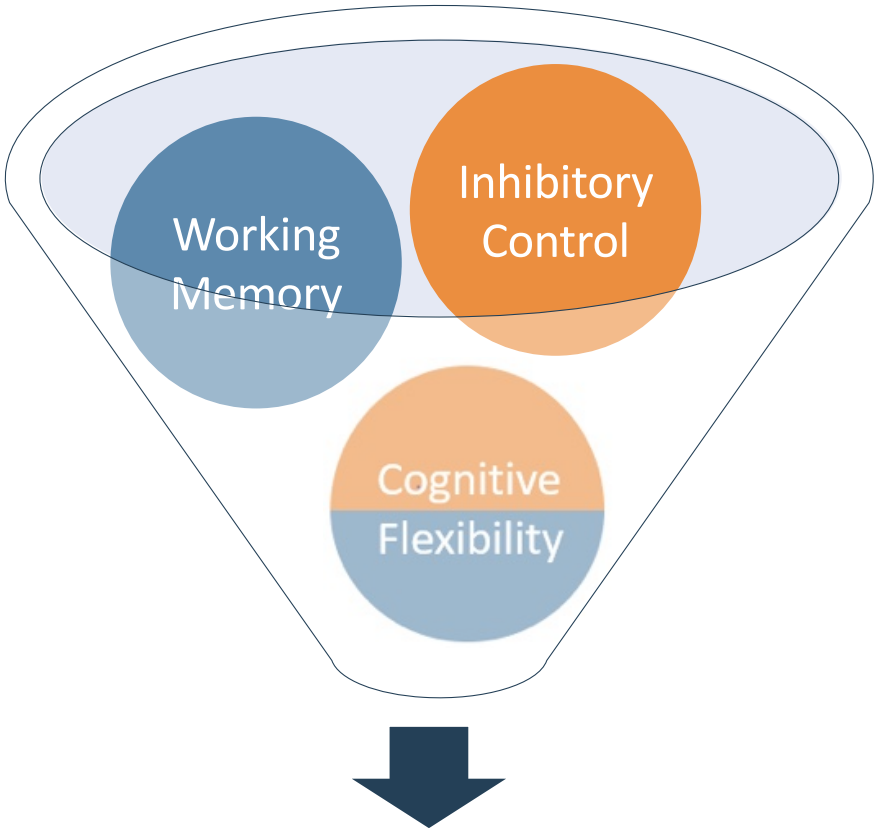


Self-control & Discipline — Behavior

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A Simple View of EF



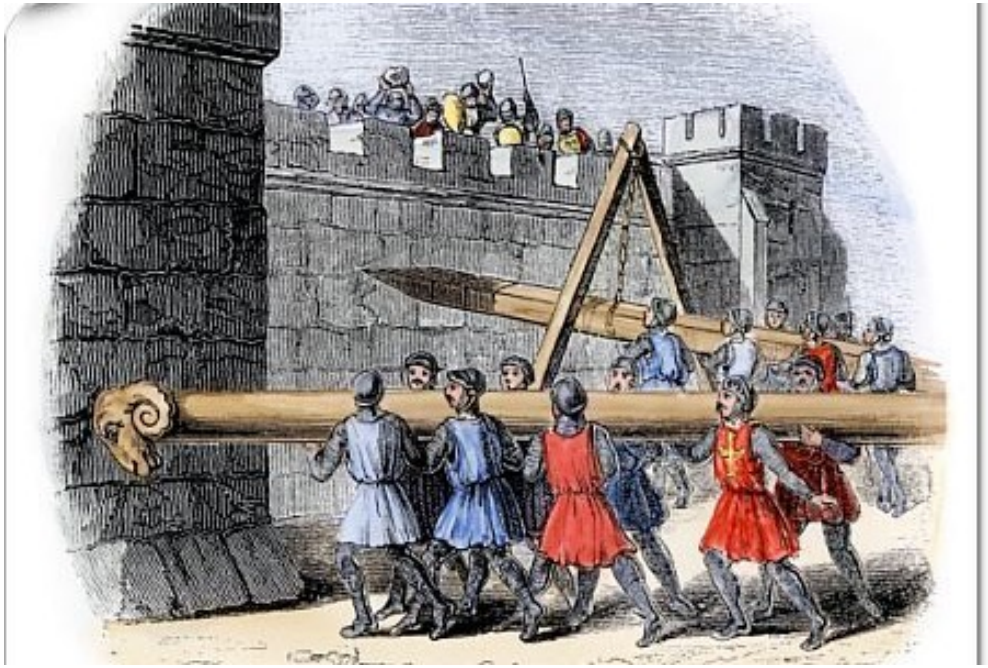
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Working
Memory



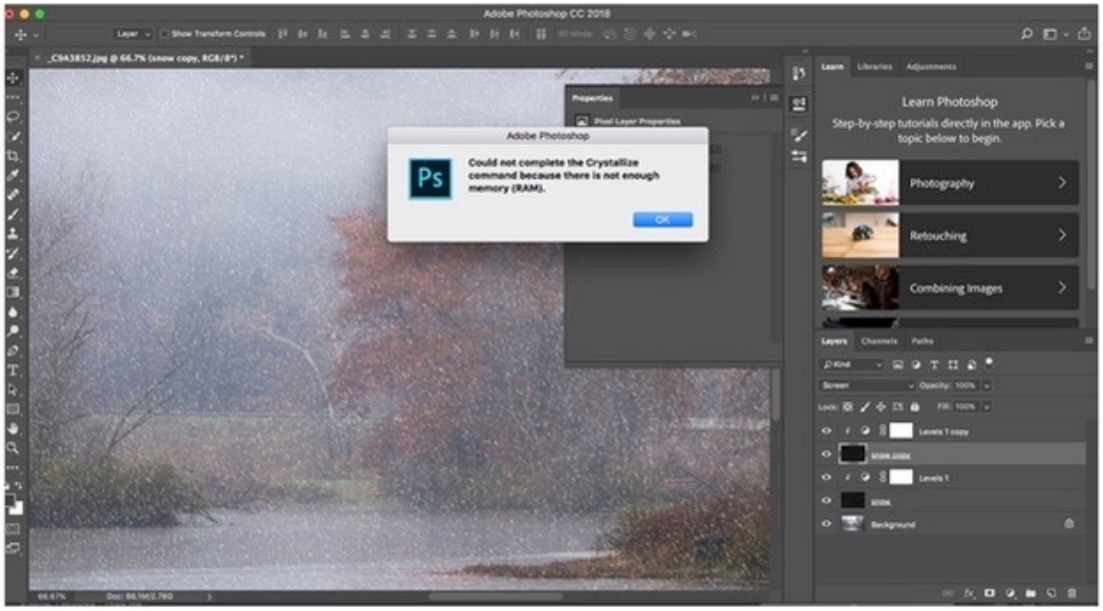
RAM

Or Maybe You Were Thinking…





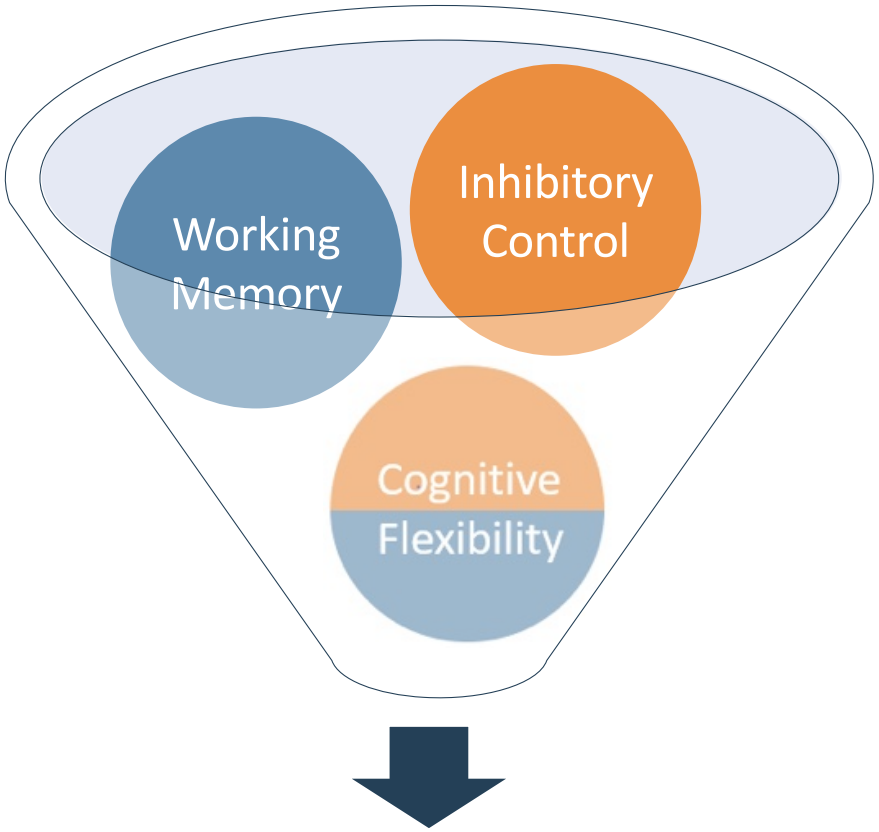
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Think about WM like RAM…

A Simple View of EF



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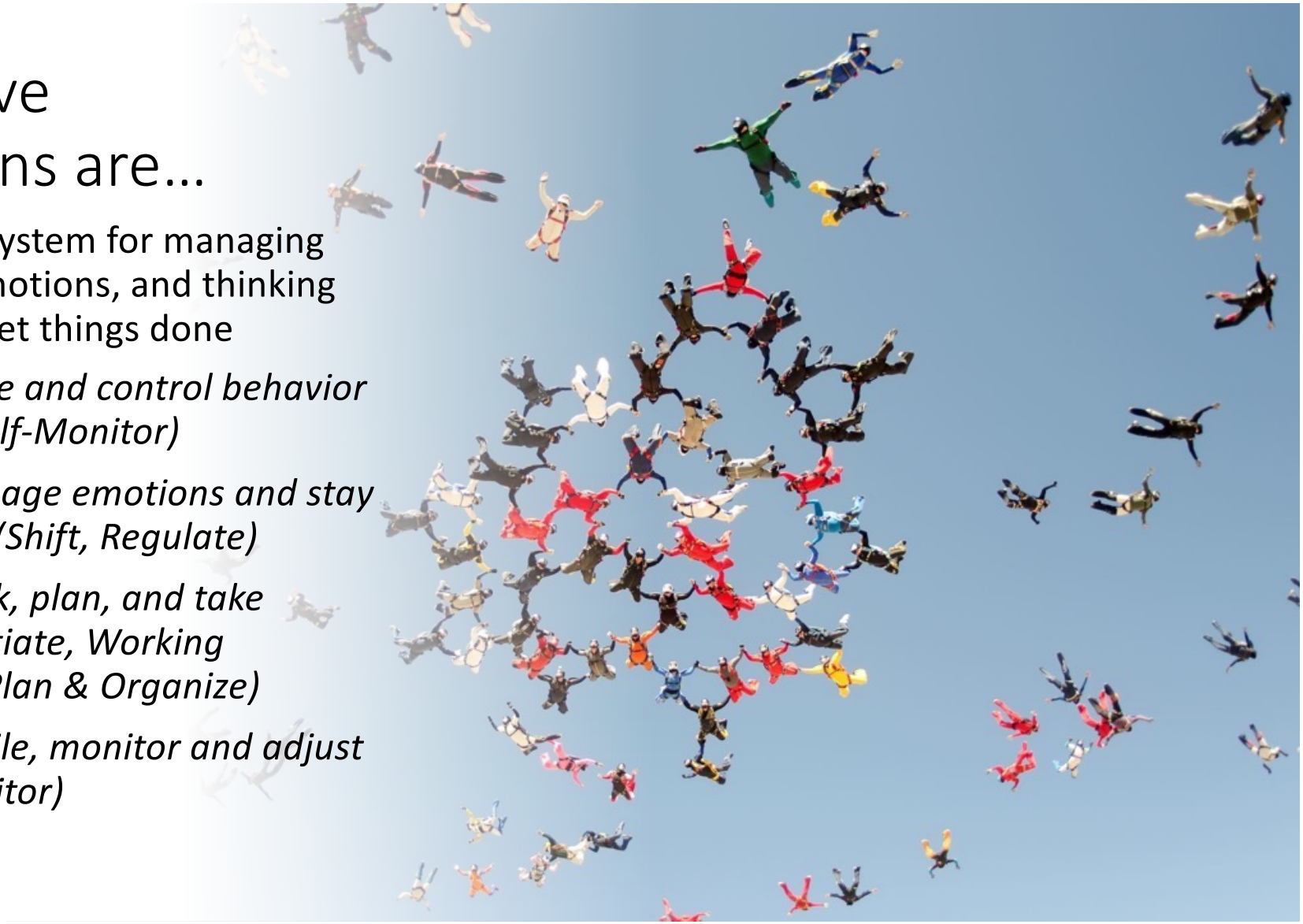
Cognitive Flexibility requires both Working Memory and Inhibitory Control

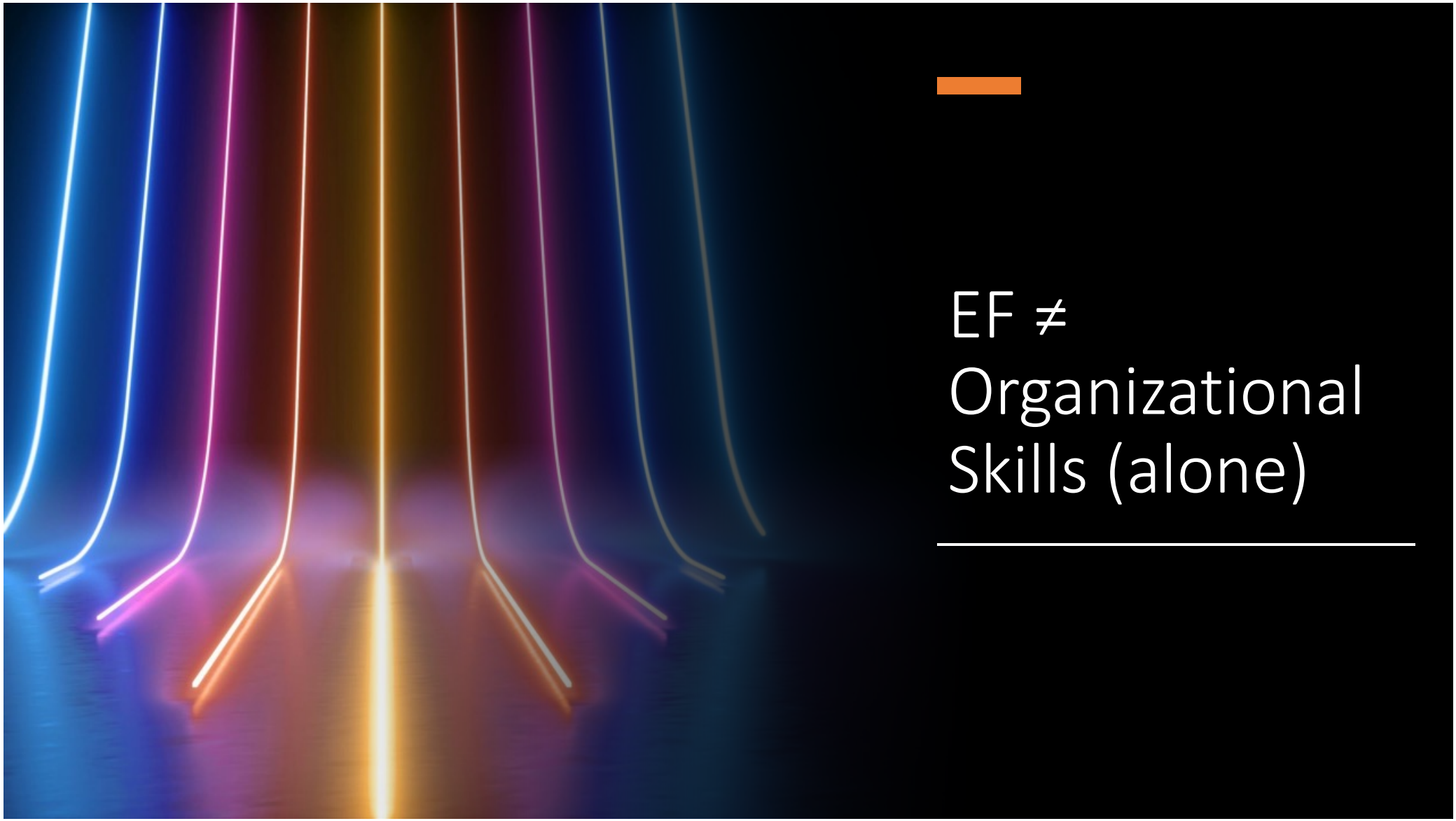
*To approach a new problem or novel circumstance, people need to be able to **change**, **shift**, and **adjust**, which requires them use their Working Memory to hold onto previous knowledge and information while working with new stimuli, which also requires them to Inhibit their rote response or previous perspective.*

Executive Functions are…

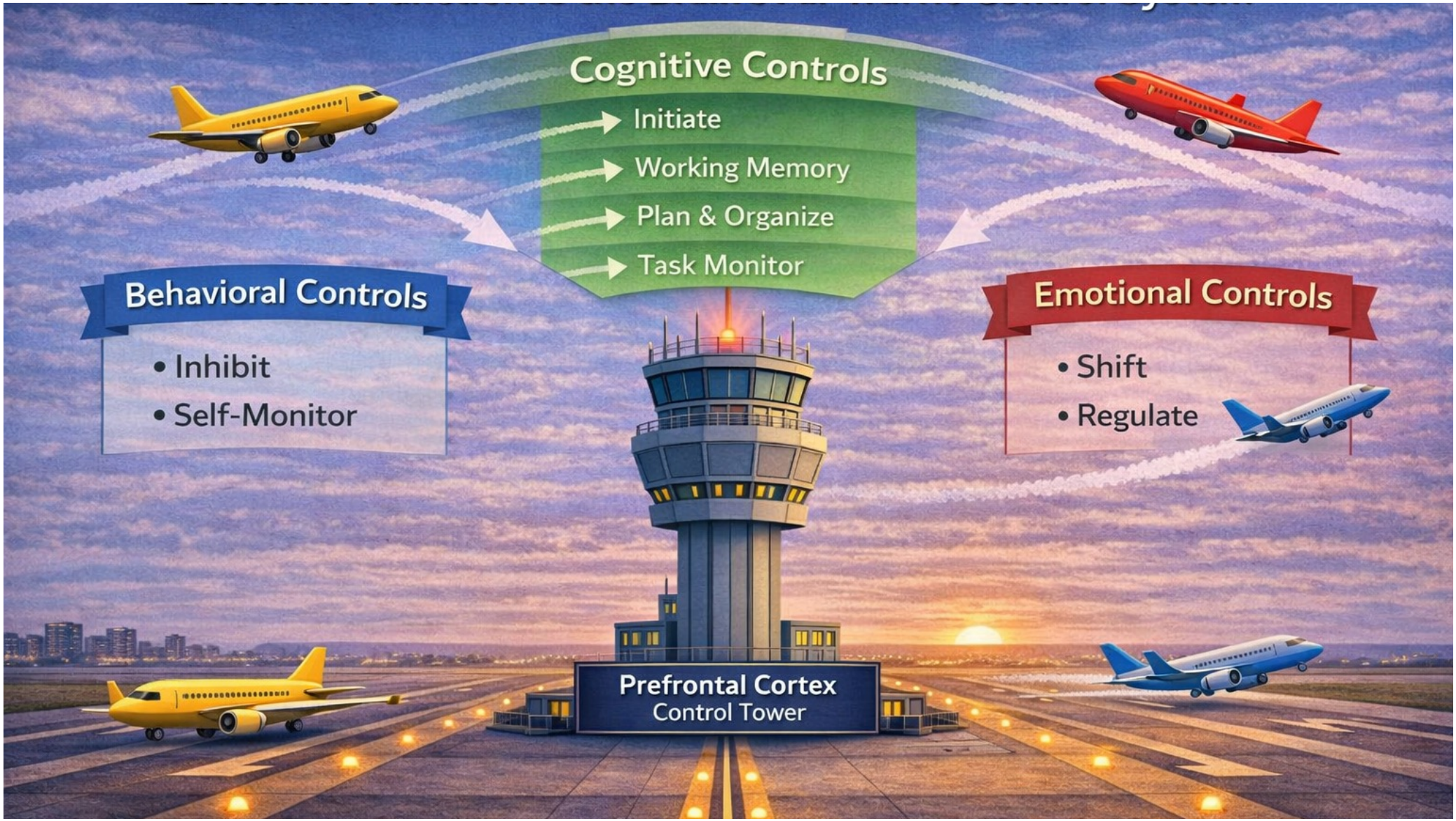
The brain's system for managing behavior, emotions, and thinking in order to get things done

- ***First**, pause and control behavior (Inhibit, Self-Monitor)*
- ***Then**, manage emotions and stay regulated (Shift, Regulate)*
- ***Then,** think, plan, and take action (Initiate, Working Memory, Plan & Organize)*
- ***All** the while, monitor and adjust (Task Monitor)*





EF ≠ Organizational Skills (alone)


Cognitive Controls
Initiate
Working Memory
Plan & Organize
Task Monitor
Behavioral Controls
• Inhibit
• Self-Monitor
Emotional Controls
• Shift
• Regulate
Prefrontal Cortex
Control Tower

Executive Function = BACON, EGG & CHEESE



BEHAVIORAL CONTROLS

- Inhibit
- Self-Monitor

EMOTIONAL CONTROLS

- Shift
- Regulate

COGNITIVE CONTROLS

Initiate	Working Memory	Plan & Organize	Task Monitor

Underlying EF Controls



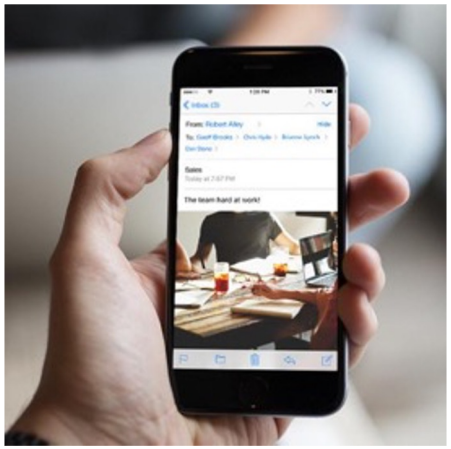
Behavior & Emotional Controls



Inhibit

Demonstrate the ability to disengage from intruding stimuli





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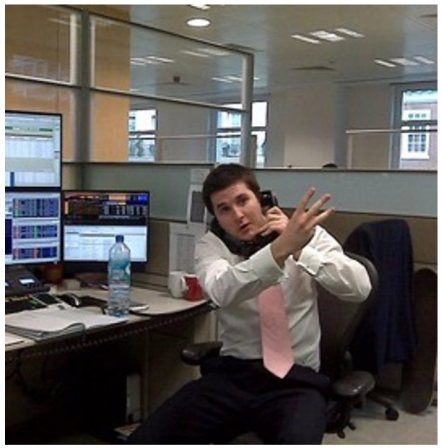
Behavior & Emotional Controls



Shift

Demonstrate the ability to transition from one activity to another





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Behavior & Emotional Controls



Regulate

Demonstrate the ability to control and maintain a pro-social response to stimulus





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Behavior & Emotional Controls



Self Monitor

Demonstrate awareness of the impact of one's behavior on other people and outcomes and adjust accordingly





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Cognitive Controls



Working Memory

Demonstrate the ability to hold information and sustain attention to and throughout a task





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Cognitive Controls



Hit The Go Button

Initiate

Demonstrate the ability to begin a task independently





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Cognitive Controls



Plan/Organize

Demonstrate the ability to develop and prioritize steps to complete a task





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Cognitive Controls



Task Monitor

Demonstrate the ability to evaluate progress and adjust accordingly





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Executive Function Development Patterns

INFANCY 0- 2 years: Emerging Executive Functions Skills

- Inhibition
  * Hot to touch
- Working Memory
  * Hide and Seek, rhymes/songs
- Cognitive Flexibility
  *“Shiny object,” sorting objects (later)

TODDLER 2 – 4 years: Cognitive Flexibility, Self Regulation, Working Memory

- Inhibition
  * Musical Chairs, “Freeze”
- Working Memory
  * Follow simple instructions, collecting objects to play, self talk
- Cognitive Flexibility
  *Managing transitions and change, taking cues when playing with others

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Executive Function Development Patterns

EARLY ELEMENTARY: Self Awareness and Greater Control

- Greater behavioral Inhibitory Control expected - participating in groups
- Increased Working Memory demands - directions, information, listening
- Develop strategies for Cognitive Flexibility -Following rules and routines

MIDDLE SCHOOL: Increased Independence --

- Inhibitory Control - wait their turn, control impulses
- Cognitive Flexibility -making transitions, problem solving,, monitoring performance and adjusting
- Working Memory -holding information from multiple sources, following directions

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Executive Function At Home

How Are Executive Functions Important To The Task?

Task: Cleaning Your Room

Behavioral and Emotional Controls	
Function	**Productive Behavior**
Inhibit	Tune out the distraction of finding something that interests them (e.g., a game, a book)
Shift	Able to move from one task to the next (i.e., clothes picked up, bed is made…)
Regulate	Realizes that the task is manageable if it is taken one step at a time
Self-Monitor	Realizes that value of the task and the time and effort are well-spent

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Executive Function At Home

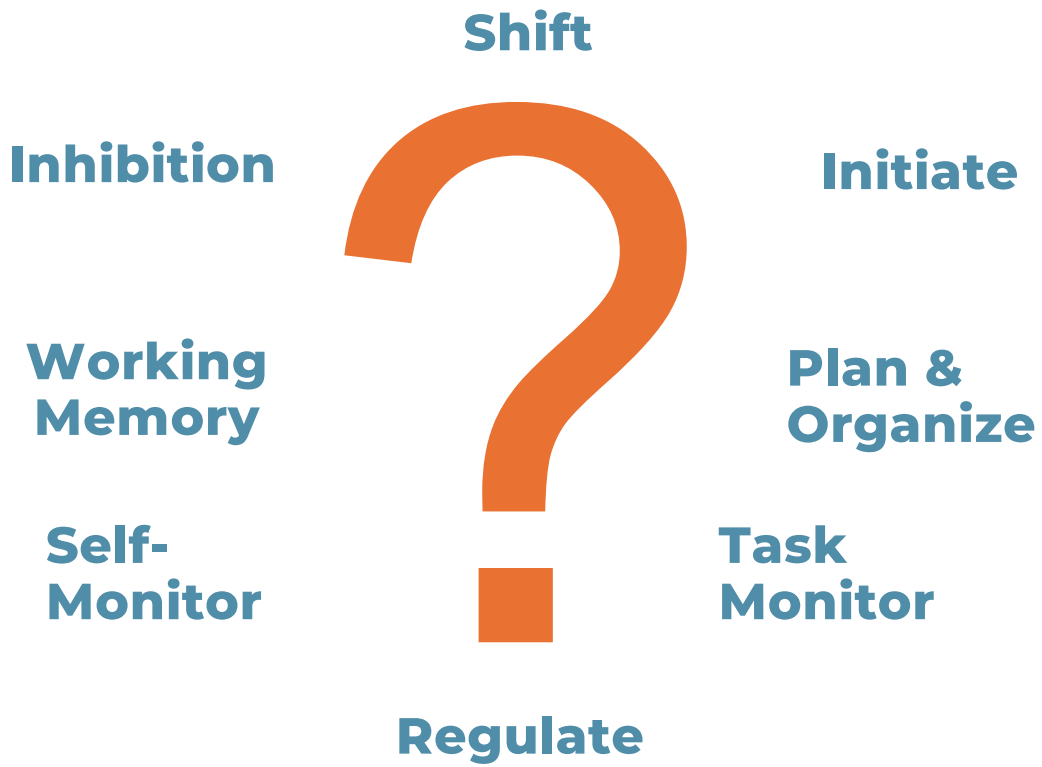
How Are Executive Functions Important To The Task?

Cognitive Controls	
Functions	**Productive Behavior**
Working Memory	The subtasks are worked through in a logical sequence
Plan and Organize	Expresses a logical plan to complete the task - the initial steps
Initiate	Once a plan is established, begins the task without delay
Task Monitor	Each subtask is evaluated before moving on to the next

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What Are Your EF Strengths & Challenges?



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Executive Function At Home

Think about the task, activity, or hobby that your child does **WELL** at home.

What may be your child's EF strength(s)?



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Games and Activities that Develop Behavioral & Emotional Controls

Inhibit – Stop & Think

Movement Activities
Charades, Freeze Dance, Red Light/Green Light, Freeze Tag

Quiet Activities
Marshmallow, The Quiet Game, Statue, Count by…(round robin), Seven Up

Classic Games
(Opposite) Bingo, Simon, Slapjack, Taboo, Spot It, Trouble, Chutes and Ladders, Operation

Home Opportunities
Cell phone challenge, Make a list of the most distracting



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Executive Functioning Goals & Outcomes

Inhibit - Stop & Think

- Providing active practice in “Stop and Think”
- Identifying and developing both verbal and physical inhibition
- Recognizing and developing strategies that help your child inhibit



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Games and Activities that Develop Behavioral & Emotional Controls

Shift Gears

Movement Activities
Scavenger Hunt, Simon Says, Four Corners (max. per corner), Hide and Seek

Quiet Activities
Matching activities, Crossword Puzzles, Brain Teasers, Seek and Find

Classic Games
Crazy 8s, Uno, Blink, Poker, Spot It, Scrabble, Yahtzee, Don't Break the Ice, Connect Four, Othello

Home Opportunities
Chores checklist, set a timer for after school activities



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Executive Functioning Goals & Outcomes

Shift Gears

- Validate Shifting Gears - a mental process that guides action
- Recognize situations that call for a shift in mindset
- Connect the shift in mindset as a reason (cause) for a specific action (effect)



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Games and Activities that Develop Behavioral & Emotional Controls

Regulation – Keep Calm and Carry On

Movement Activities
4 square, dodgeball, statue/museum, spud, duck, duck, goose, role playing emotions

Quiet Activities
building a card house, stacking dominoes, therapeutic coloring pages, breathing exercises

Classic Games
Spit, Lucky 7s, Perfection, 5-second Rule, Pictionary, Taboo (any game with a time element), Sorry, Trouble, Chutes and Ladders, Barrel of Monkeys

Home Opportunities
mindful minute (before dinner), brain breaks before/during HW routine, yoga, hobbies



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Executive Functioning Goals & Outcomes

Regulation – Keep Calm and Carry On

- Reinforce that it is OK to have emotional reactions
- Validate the ways your child “Keeps Calm and Carries On”
- Identify and develop strategies that your child utilized (or could have) to regulate emotions

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Games and Activities that Develop Behavioral & Emotional Controls

Self Monitor – How Am I Doing?

Movement Activities
Making a creation with household items, Organizing the group by birthdate, Trust Walk

Quiet Activities
Building puzzles, Making models, Coloring/Poster-making (cooperatively)

Classic Games
Charades, Spit, Pictionary, Escape Room activity

Home Opportunities
Review and discuss report card/ grades/ academic day (what I like, am good at, struggle with), daily reflection



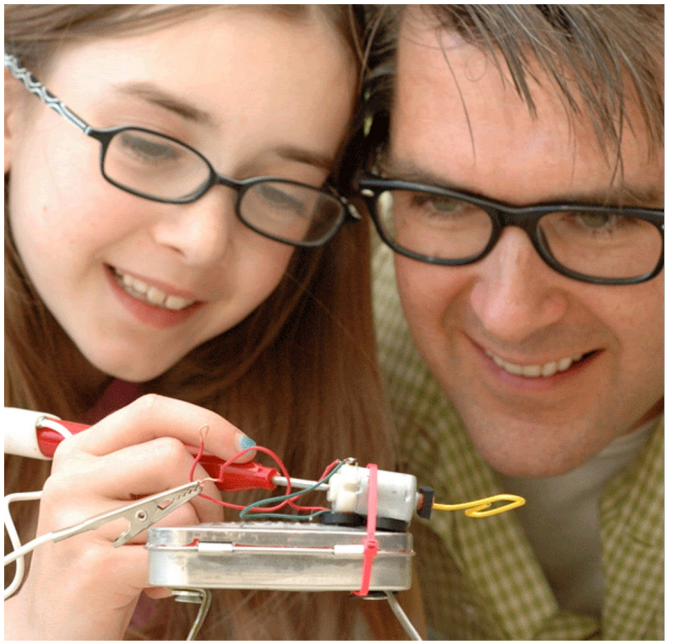
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Executive Functioning Goals & Outcomes

Self Monitor – How Am I Doing?

- Providing active practice in working/controlling behavior in group
- Identifying attributes you bring to an activity
- Recognizing when a behavior is outside of the norm and finding a way to work back
- Dealing with emotions that determine behavior



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Games and Activities that Develop Cognitive Controls

Working Memory – Keep It In Mind

Movement Activities

Mother May I?, What time is it Mr. Fox?, clapping rhythms/songs with action (HSKTs, Ms. Mary Mack), repeat the beat, scavenger hunt

Quiet Activities

Hidden Pictures, Crossword puzzles, Telephone, 20 Questions, I SPY

Classic Games

Checkers, Chess, Simon, Spit, Go Fish, Battleship, Lucky 7s, Concentration, Bingo, Battleship, Connect Four, I'm Thinking of an Animal...

Home Opportunities

Dinner conversation/book of questions, would you rather, following a set of 3 directions, discuss a shared or different book, learning a song or a dance (follow a video)



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Executive Functioning Goals & Outcomes

Working Memory – Keep It In Mind

- Develop the skill of Focus - paying closer attention to larger amounts of visual and verbal information
- Make connections to dual coding - processing verbal and visual information and making the exchange
- Develop strategies to retain and recall multiple pieces of information



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Games and Activities that Develop Cognitive Controls

Initiate – Hit The Go Button

Movement
When you want to be near a chair), acting out a process (charades), 4 corners

Quiet Activities
Mazes, Word Searches, Crossword puzzles, copy a drawing, complete a model

Classic Games
Chess, Pictionary, Taboo, Checkers, Don't Break the Ice, Jenga, Connect Four, Don't Spill the Beans

Home Opportunities
Morning routine contest, set a goal for the day



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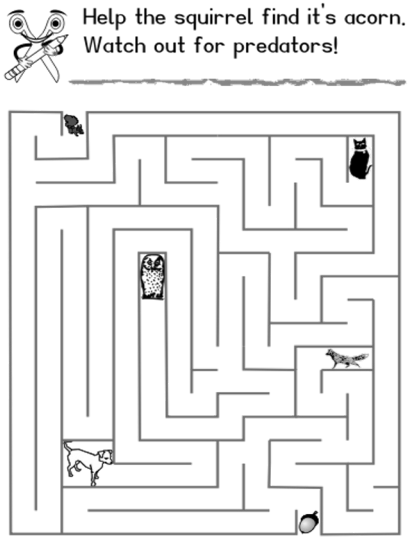
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Executive Functioning Goals & Outcomes

Initiate – Hit The Go Button

- Building the confidence and ability to Hit the Go Button - it can be a risk
- Link the first step to the final outcome – How does this get you there?
- Validate the fact that the first step can be different for everyone and/or every time



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Games and Activities that Develop Cognitive Controls

Plan & Organize – What Is My Plan?

Movement Activities
Twister, Obstacle Courses, Cooking/Baking

Quiet Activities
Tell a Story/Recap a Movie (Beginning, Middle, End, Five-Finger), Mazes, Puzzles

Classic Games
Battleship, Checkers, Chess, Scrabble, Gin Rummy, Jenga, Quiddler

Home Opportunities
planning a playdate or a party, creating a homework routine



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Executive Functioning Goals & Outcomes

Plan & Organize – What Is My Plan?

- Reinforce the importance of Planning to complete a task effectively
- Validate the fact that plans can be different but effective
- Develop the habit of writing and following notes/lists



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Games and Activities that Develop Cognitive Controls

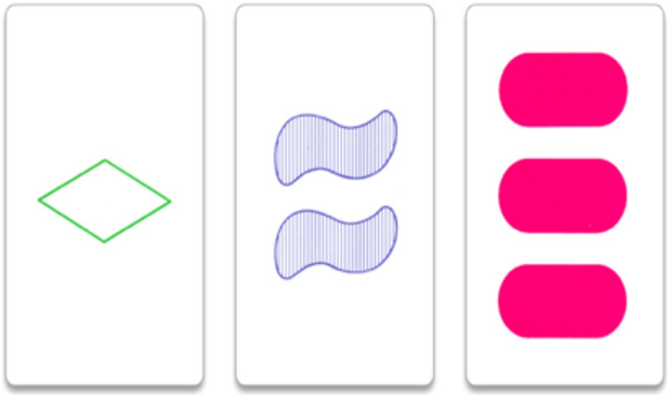
Task Monitor – Am I On Track?

Movement Activities
Yoga poses – monitor breathing and position, Hopscotch, Scavenger Hunt

Quiet Activities
Matching and Sorting Activities, Crossword Puzzles, Sudoku

Classic Games
Set, Blink, Crazy Eights, Uno, Jenga, Connect Four

Home Opportunities
Brain teasers, cooking-following a recipe, packing the backpack for a school day



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Executive Functioning Goals & Outcomes

Task Monitor – Am I On Track?

- Develop the internal habit of periodically asking, “How am I Doing?”
- Validate how monitoring progress towards a goal may lead to a shift in thinking and action
- Make connections between this self-check and the end goal (task requirements/rules and timeframe)



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Executive Function Is Everywhere

How Is Executive Function Important To The Task?

- Inhibit
- Self-Monitor
- Shift
- Plan & Organize
- Initiate
- Working Memory
- Task Monitor
- Regulate



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Executive Functions At Home

Take a look at your child's at home task that **ALWAYS** seems to be a **CHALLENGE.**

What may be your child's EF challenge(s)?



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Building Executive Function At Home

1. Take every opportunity to provide specific authentic validation of executive function strengths whenever seen



PLAN

"Your bedroom looks spotless. You must have had a great plan to get it so clean. What were your steps?"



SHIFT

"You completed all three homework assignments. You did a great job shifting from one task to the next."

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Building Executive Functions At Home

2. Encourage desired behaviors by connecting Executive Function terms and language to desired actions/outcomes



INITIATE

"When you go up to get ready for bed, you know the routine. It is important to Initiate. You need to Hit that GO Button."



REGULATE

"Looks like you have a lot of History homework and it's making you anxious. You've got to use your strategies to calm yourself down. When you Regulate your emotions, you are much more productive."

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Building Executive Function At Home

3. Involve the child in developing the strategies used to overcome Executive Function



INITIATE

"It seems that you're having some difficulty getting up in the morning. Can you think of some things we can try that may help you?"



WORKING MEMORY

"You seem to have difficulty remembering the morning routine. Let's think of some ways we can make it easier to remember everything."

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Building Executive Function At Home

4. Take every opportunity to be a positive Executive Function role model



INHIBIT

"I can't seem to find my car keys. Let me stop and think for a minute and maybe I'll remember where I left them. "



TASK MONITOR

"We need to finish this activity in ten minutes, so I am going to set a timer to help us remember."

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Questions: How and When?

- What methods have you found most effective for improving executive functioning?
  - Experiences that also provide opportunity for reflection
  - The best are “normal” childhood experiences that require thinking, remembering, and self-control
    - *especially games*!
- What role does early intervention play? Is there such a thing as too early or too late?
  - ***Never too early, never too late! Brain plasticity allows EF to grow throughout life (see next two slides on importance).***

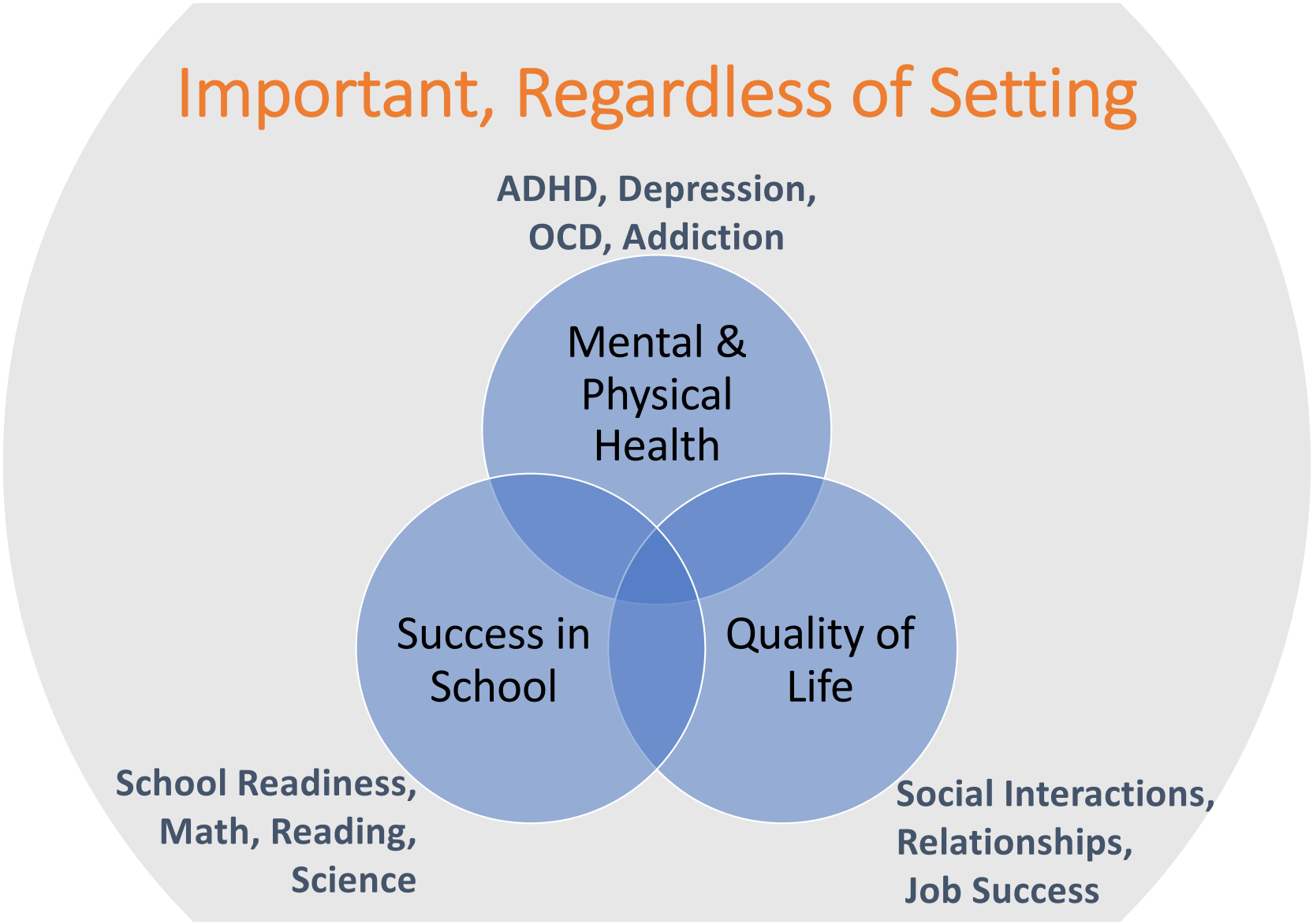
Important, Regardless of Student

- EF plays an important role in learning (c.f., Bull, Johnson, & Roy, 1999; McLean & Hitch, 1999; Swanson, Ashbaker, & Lee, 1996)
- Relationship between EF and scholastic achievement (St. Clair-Thompson & Gathercole, 2006), including success (Guare, 2014; Meltzer, 2010)

But, super important for some!

❖Impaired EF in ADHD (Willcutt et al., 2005)

Important, Regardless of Setting



Questions: Are there EF apps?

- Are there good apps for EF?
  - Visual schedule apps
  - Timers
  - Organization

The best way to improve EF is through experience and reflection; Apps can be useful to support routines.

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Questions: Technology & EF

How Technology Helps

Examples:
- digital reminders
- calendar alerts
- timers
- organizational apps

Supports:
- planning
- time management
- task monitoring

How Technology Can Hurt

- Heavy device use may:
- reduce sustained attention
- reduce frustration tolerance
- reduce independent problem solving

Technology should support executive function, not replace it.

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Question: Does Mindfulness Help?

- Mindfulness
  - pause
  - notice emotions
  - calm their body
  - regain control

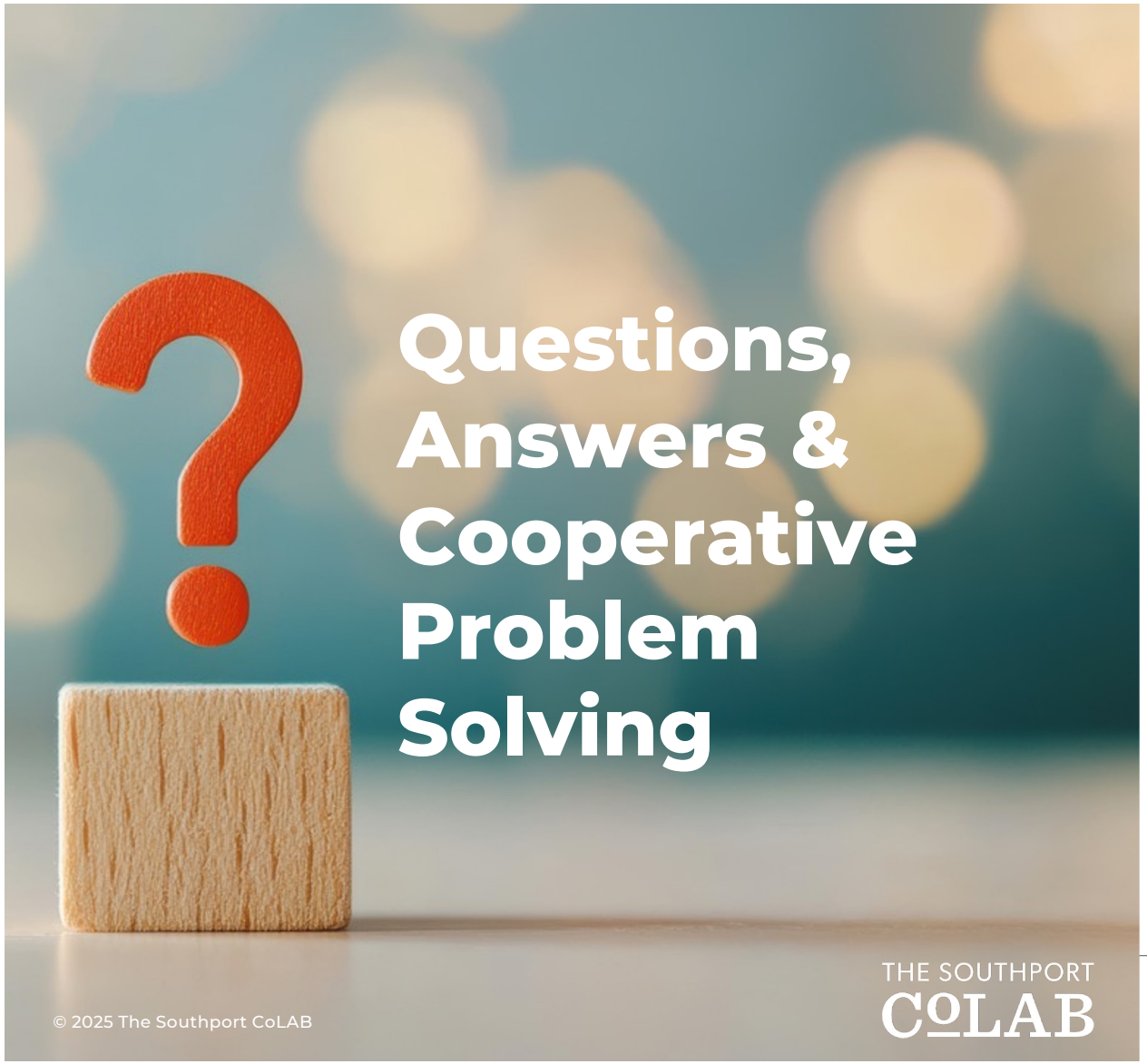
Which strengthens:
  - inhibition
  - emotional regulation
  - attention

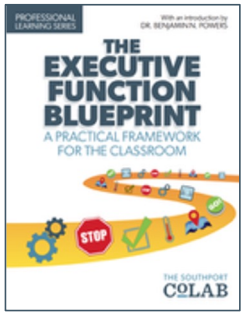


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So What's the 411?

- Executive Functions (EF) are real, complex, and brain-based.
- All students benefit from EF support in school AND at home.
- There are easy ways to support EF development
- Stronger EF = growth and success.





bit.ly/efblueprintonamazon

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