

TEACHING EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS

From Awareness to Action

While we wait..

Drop in the chat

- Your name
- Where you're from
- Your role

CREATED BY MARCY MCIVER



Imagine



**FEELINGS OF DAILY
OVERWHELM**

**FEELING MOSTLY
CALM**

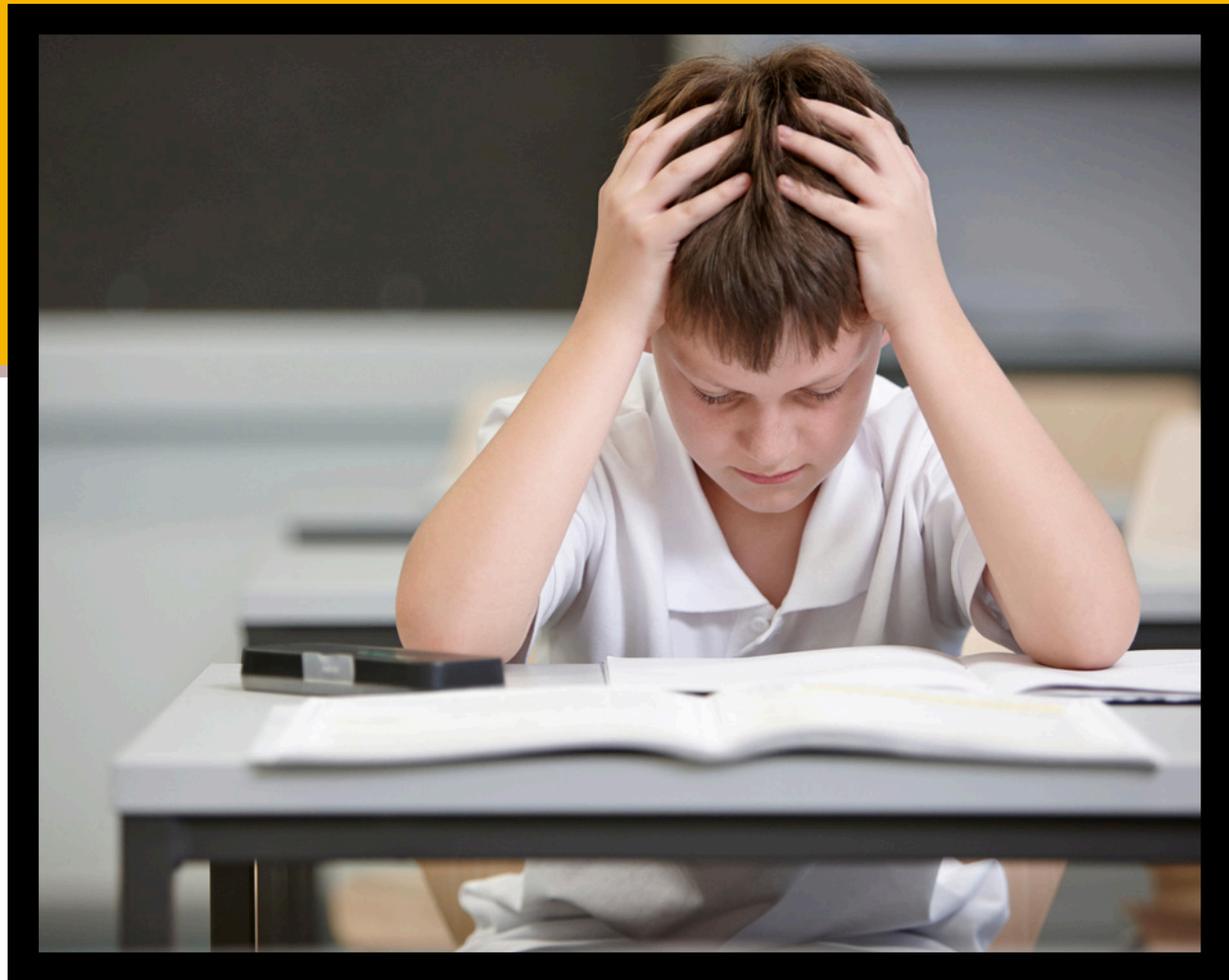
Imagine



**MANAGING
STUDENTS**

**TEACHING
STUDENTS**

Imagine



Dyslexia, ADHD, Dyscalculia

**9 WORDS A
MINUTE**



**19 WORDS A
MINUTE**

Imagine



18 INTERRUPTIONS IN 10 MINUTES

5 INTERRUPTIONS 10 MINUTES

Emotional
Control

Working Memory

Response
Inhibition

Flexibility

Power

Time Management

Sustained
Attention

Planning and
Prioritizing

Organization

Executive Function

Metacognition

Task
Initiation

SKILLS

Goal Directed
Persistence

ABOUT YOUR PRESENTER

Marcy McIver, M.S.

Educational consultant, executive function & ADHD coach, parent coach, and educator with 25+ years of experience supporting students, teachers, and families.

Background

M.S. Brain-Based Education | B.Ed. Special Education |
Orton-Gillingham trained | Parent ADHD Coach | ADHD-CCSP (in progress)

Work

Provides international professional development and works directly with parents, teens and students with executive function challenges, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia.

Publications

Co-lead author (with Dr. Peg Dawson), *Executive Function Facilitator's Guide*

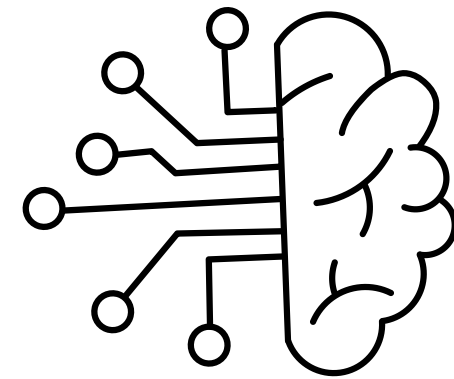
Unlocking Potential: Teaching Executive Function Skills in the K-8 Classroom
(co-author with Dr. Peg Dawson) (forthcoming)



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN TODAY



**WHAT IS
EXECUTIVE
FUNCTION
(EF)**



**11
SUB-SKILLS
OF
EXECUTIVE
FUNCTION**

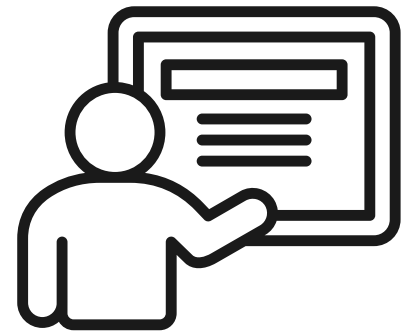


**IDENTIFY
CHALLENGING
BEHAVIOR AS
LAGGING EF
SKILLS**

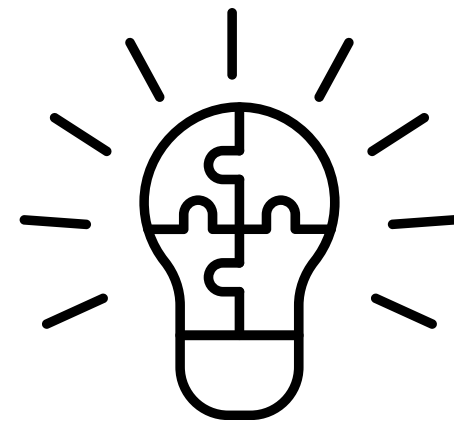


Includes resets that support attention, working memory, and emotional control

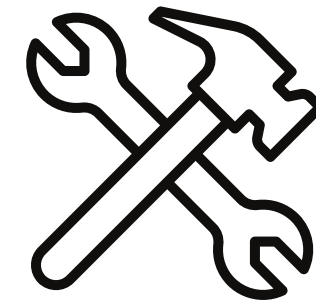
WHAT YOU WILL LEARN TODAY



**HOW TO
SUPPORT
AND TEACH
EF SKILLS**

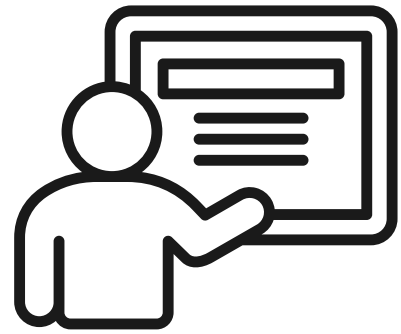


**PRACTICAL
PROBLEM
SOLVING
TOOL**

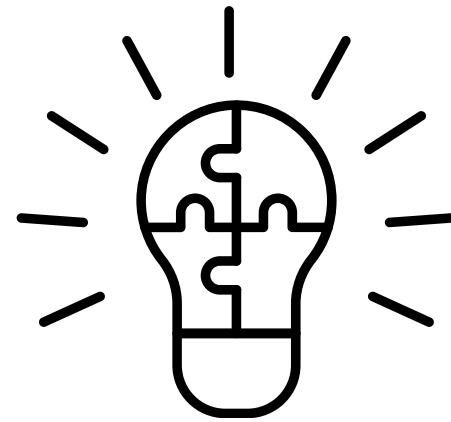


**SUSTAINED
ATTENTION
TOOLS**

HANDOUTS



INFORMATION



IDEAS
P.13



QUESTIONS
P.13



Questions? Jot them down on page 13 or drop them in the chat, and we will have time at the end to address these questions.

POLL - FIST TO FIVE



**THIS IS
NEW TO ME**

**I'VE HEARD
OF IT**

**I KNOW A
LITTLE BIT
ABOUT IT**

**I CAN APPLY
IT**

**I CAN TEACH
IT**

LEARNING LADDER

5	I can teach this with confidence.
4	I understand this and apply it.
3	I know a bit about it.
2	I think I have heard of this.
1	This is new to me.

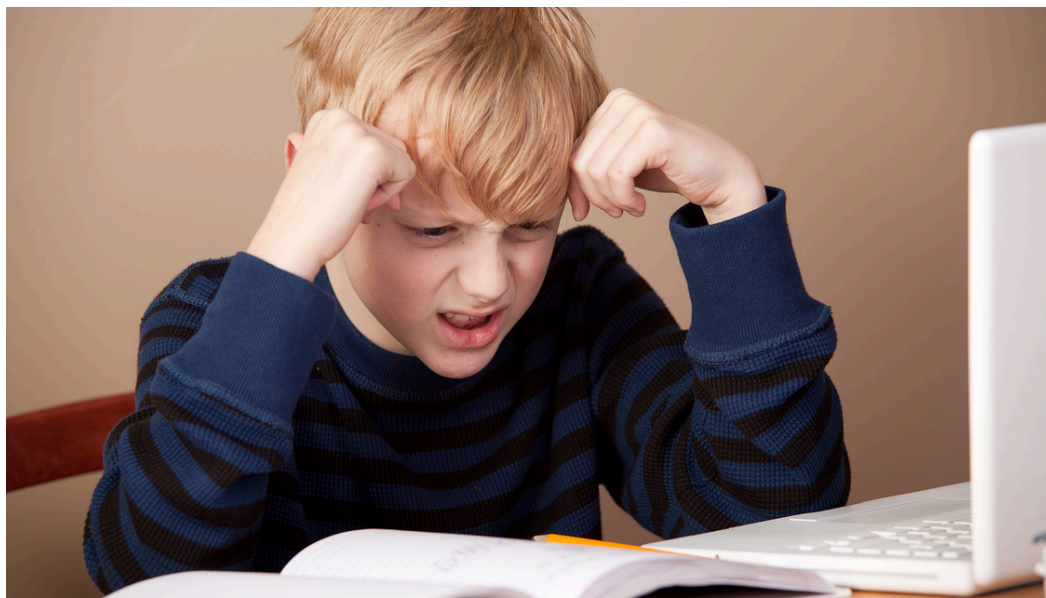
Before Score After Score



WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE IN TEACHING?



Disengagement



Disregulation

LIST SOME OF THE CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN TEACHING

Write the challenges you face in teaching (think about learning and behavior). At the end of this session, you will be able to identify which EF skill is connected to the challenge.

CHALLENGE	EF SKILL

Page 4

Distraction

Disruptions



Disorganization



WHAT ARE REALLY DRIVING THESE CHALLENGES?

Disengagement



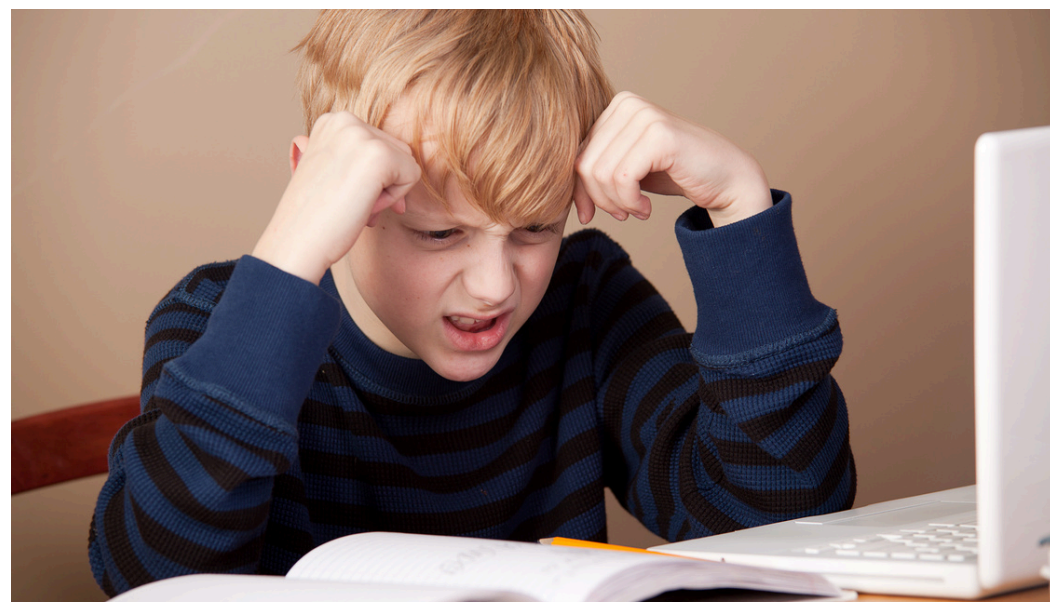
Disruptions



*A behavior problem?
or*

A skill gap?

Disregulation



Disorganization



WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

The management system, CEO, and boss in the brain help humans execute and perform tasks and achieve goals.



*Located prefrontal cortex and
Fully developed between 25-30*

WHAT EF LOOKS LIKE IN REAL TEACHING

Goal Directed
Persistence

Planning and
Prioritizing

Organization

Task
Initiation

Time Management

Metacognition

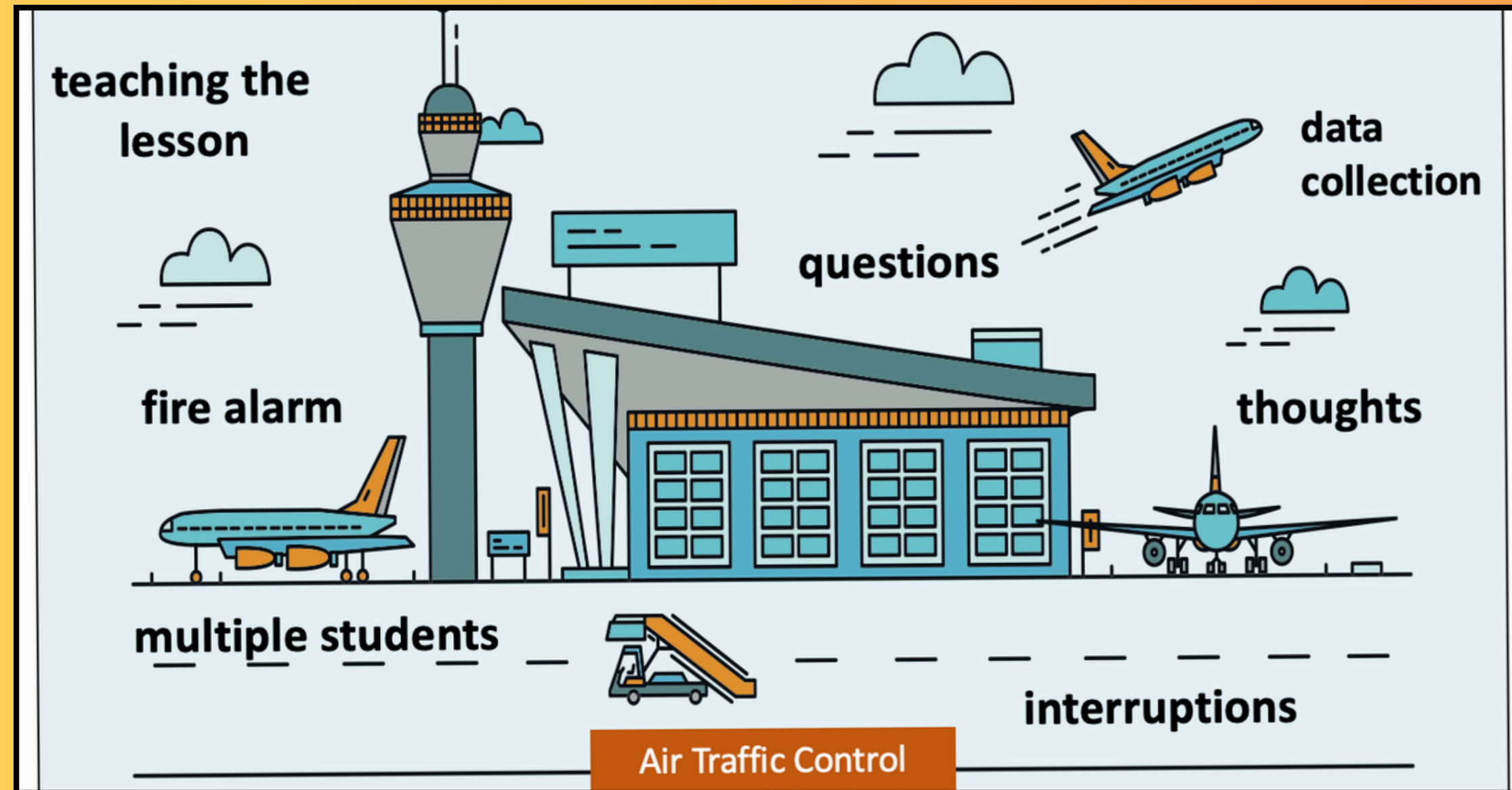
Response
Inhibition

Emotional
Control

Working
Memory

Flexibility

Sustained
Attention



Air Traffic Control
System of the Brain

DID YOU KNOW??

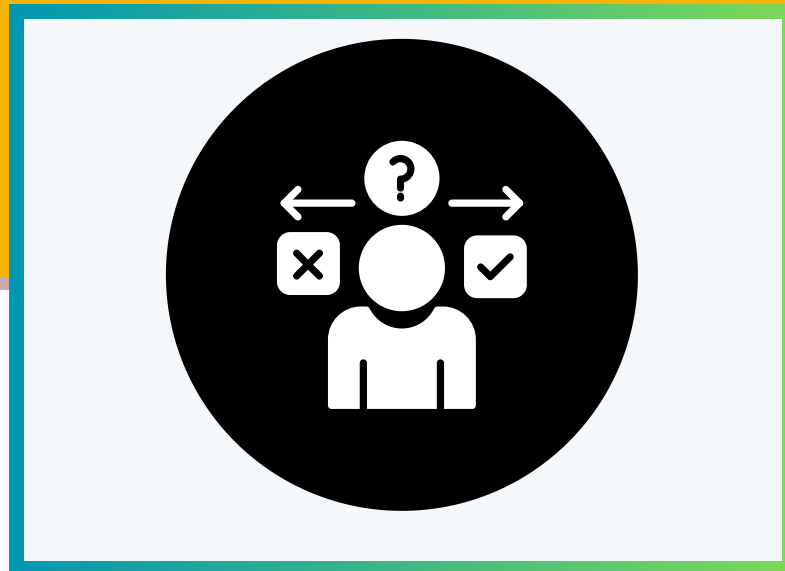
Research shows that executive skills are a strong predictor of academic success! It is even more important than IQ!

ADELE DIAMOND OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



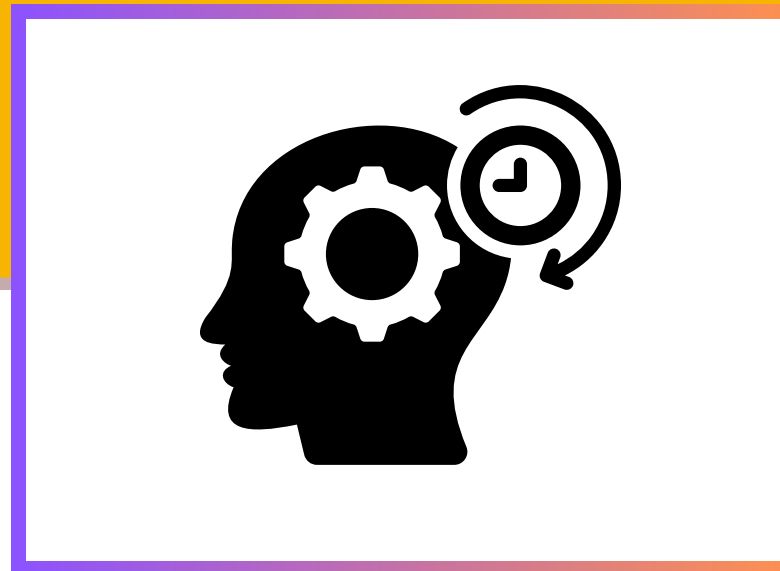
*Strong Executive skills =
key to success!*

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS



RESPONSE INHIBITION

The ability to think before
you act.



WORKING MEMORY

The ability to hold
information in your mind
and do something with it.



EMOTIONAL CONTROL

The ability to regulate your
feelings in order to meet
goals.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS



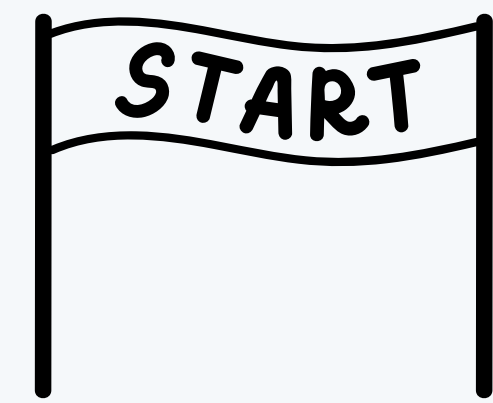
FLEXIBILITY

The ability to adjust when things don't go to plan.



SUSTAINED ATTENTION

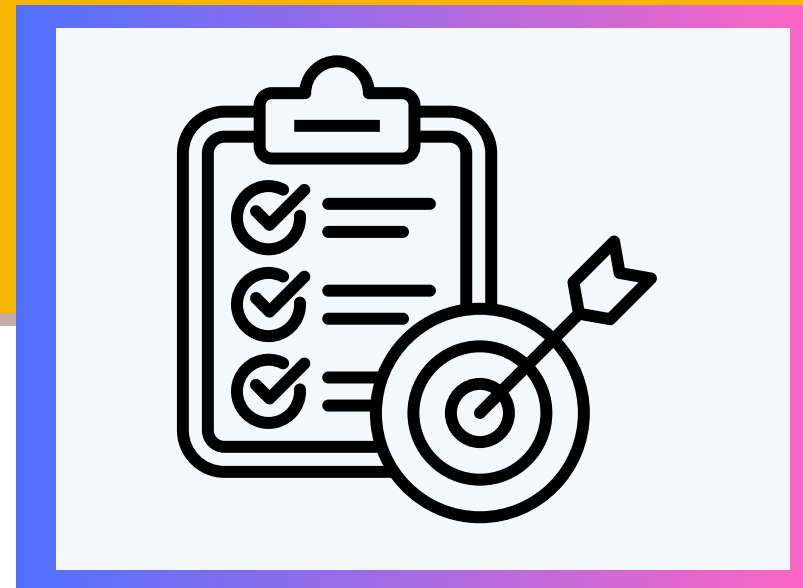
The ability to pay attention despite boredom or fatigue.



TASK INITIATION

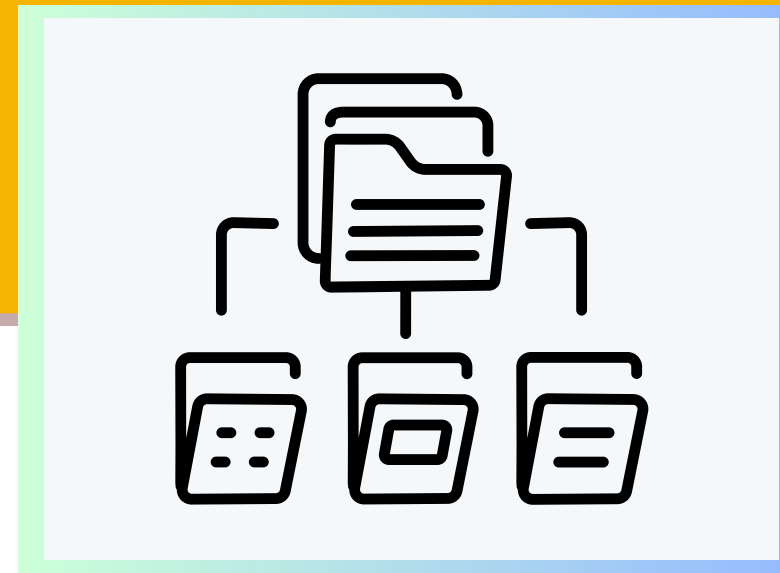
The ability to complete projects without procrastination.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION ADVANCED SKILLS



PLANNING AND PRIORITIZATION

The ability to create a plan to reach a goal and focus on what is important rather than not important



ORGANIZATION

The ability to maintain a system and keep track of materials and ideas.



TIME MANAGEMENT

The ability to organize and plan how much time it will take for a given activity and within a time frame.

THE EXECUTIVE FUNCTION ADVANCED SKILLS



GOAL DIRECTED PERSISTENCE

The ability to set goals,
make a plan and follow
through without
distraction.



METACOGNITION

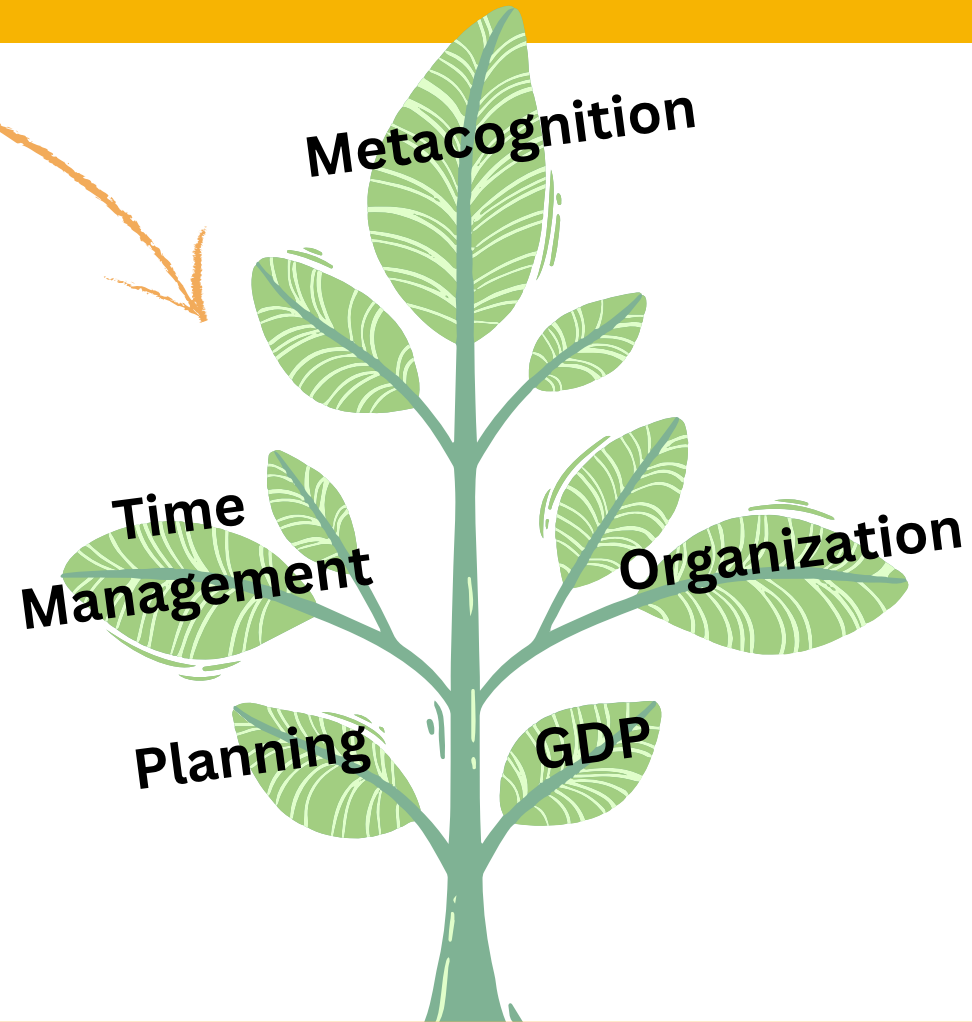
The ability to stand back
and take a birds eye view of
your behavior.

EXECUTIVE SKILLS THAT UNDERLIE SCHOOL SUCCESS

Advanced Skills

emerge later

may incorporate foundational skills

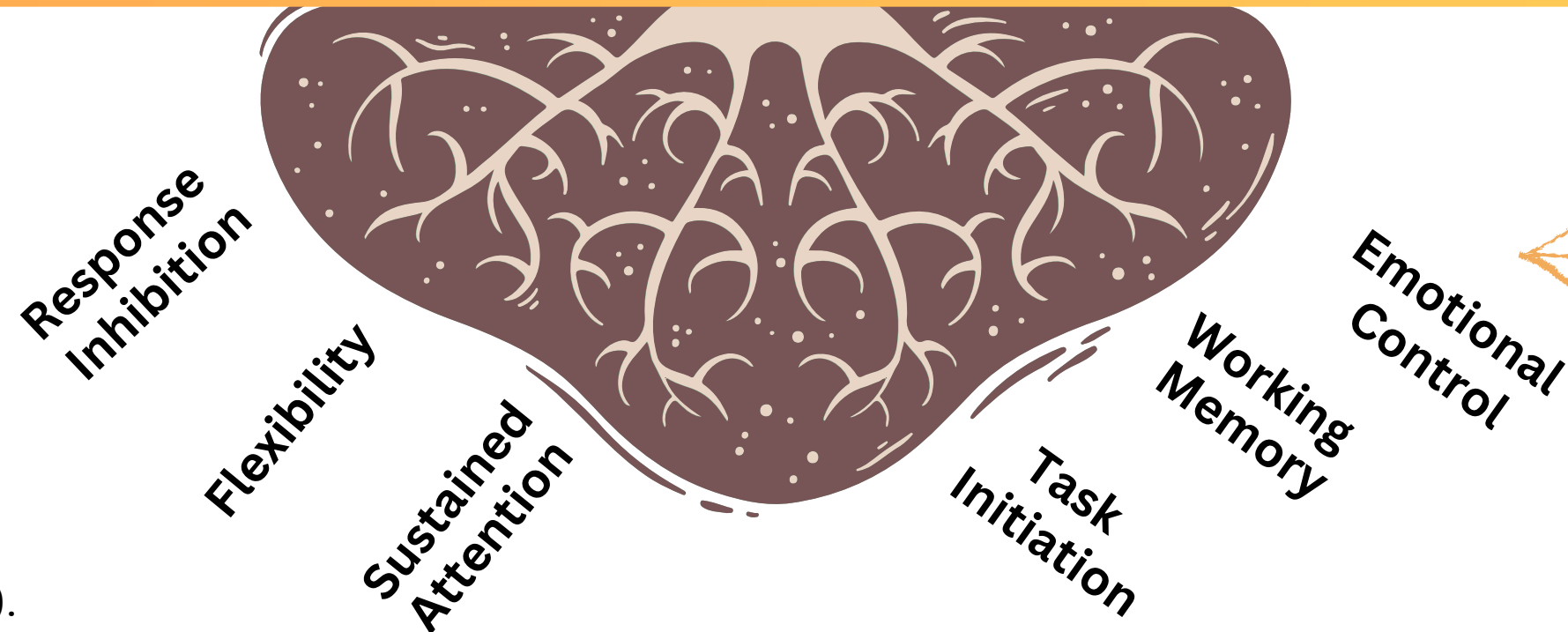


Foundational Skills

first to develop

benefit from scaffolding and environmental adjustments during elementary school

targets for intervention in elementary school



CAN YOU IDENTIFY WHICH EXECUTIVE SKILL MATCHES THE SCENERIOS ON THE LEFT?



- Doesn't listen to instructions or gets distracted in class
- Has trouble remembering multi-step directions
- Melts down when things change
- Can't see the impact of their behavior on others or on themselves
- Blurts out comments in class
- Loses or misplaces work



Organization

Sustained Attention

Response Inhibition

Flexibility

Metacognition

Working Memory



UNPACKING THE 11 EF SKILLS

**Emotional
Control**

**Sustained
Attention**

Organization

**Task
Initiation**

Time Management

LIST SOME OF THE CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN TEACHING

Write the challenges you face in teaching (think about learning and behavior). At the end of this session, you will be able to identify which EF skill is connected to the challenge.

CHALLENGE	EF SKILL

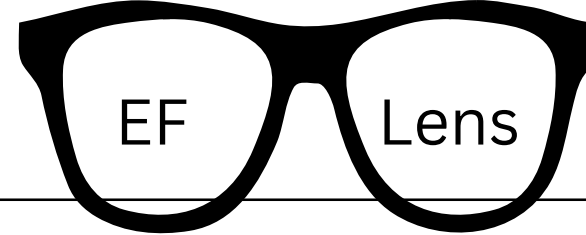
**Response
Inhibition**

**Planning and
Prioritizing**

Metacognition

**Goal Directed
Persistence**

Flexibility

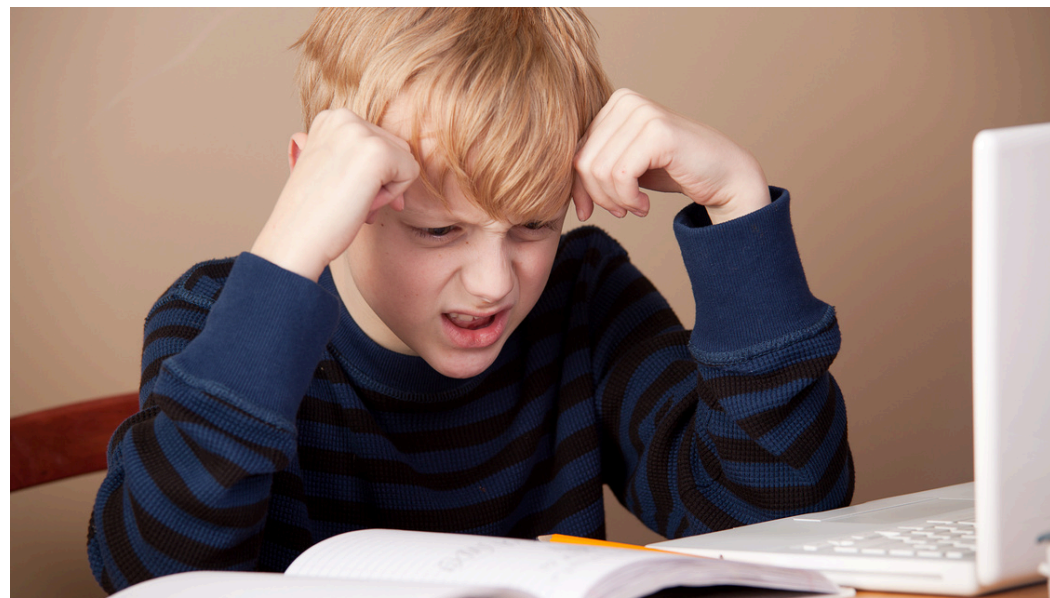


Executive Function Skill	Negative Label	Positive Label
Response Inhibition	Reactive , reckless, impulsive	Thoughtful, controlled, mindful
Working Memory	Scatter-brain, forgetful, stupid	Smart, good memory, sharp
Emotional Control	Explosive, moody, sensitive, rude	Even-tempered, composed, calm
Cognitive Flexibility	Defiant, ridged, inflexible	Adaptable, easy-going, flexible
Sustained Attention	Flighty, distracted, day-dreamer	Focused, diligent, attentive
Task Initiation	Procrastinator, unmotivated, lazy	Proactive, self-directed, engaged
Planning and Prioritization	Scattered, overwhelmed, disorganized	Goal-orientated, strategic, organized
Organization	Messy, cluttered, chaotic	Structured, systematic, orderly
Time Management	Tardy, inconsiderate, unreliable	Reliable, punctual, organized
Goal Directed Persistence	Quitter, unpredictable, lazy	Determined, resilient, driven
Metacognition	Oblivious, dismissive, lack insight	Reflective, self-aware, insightful

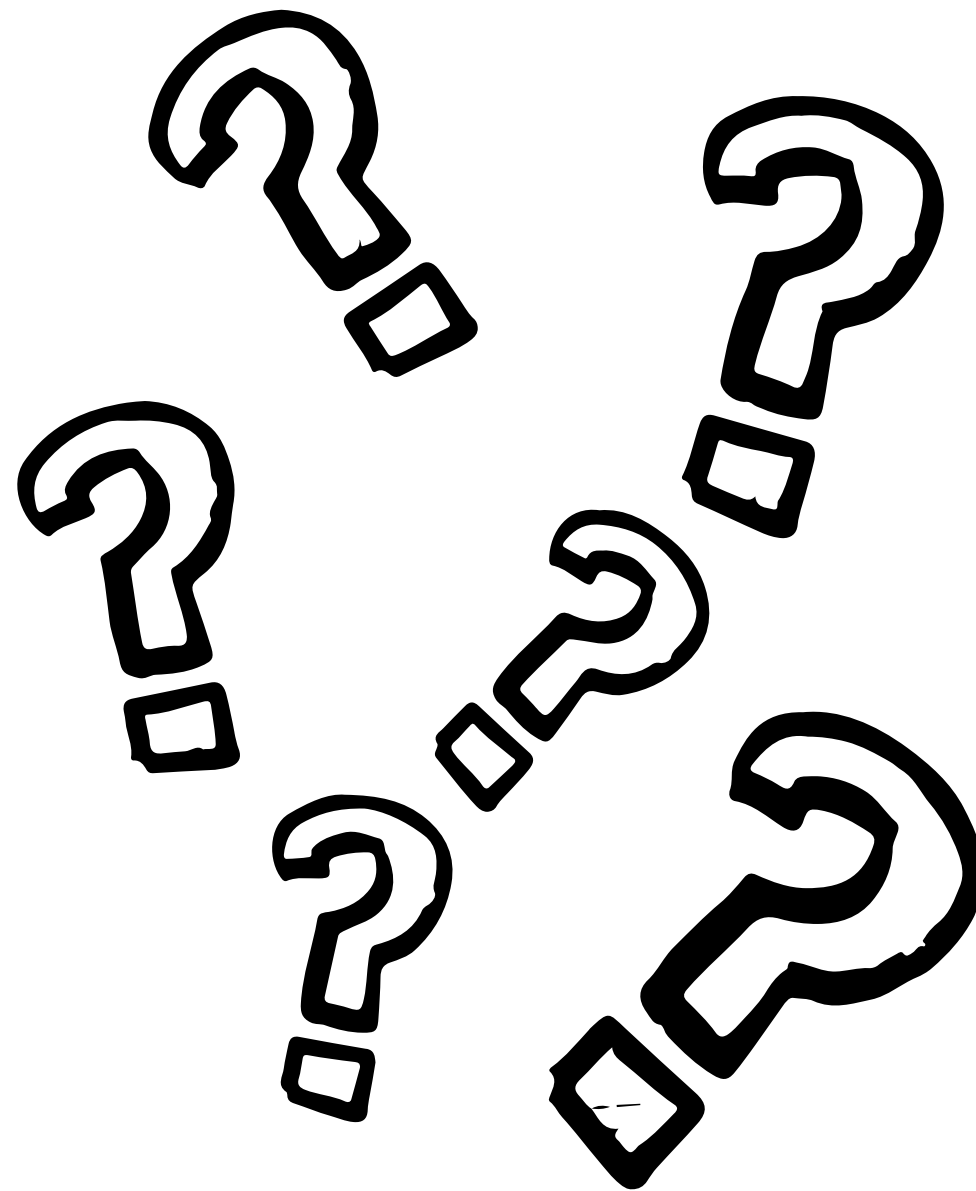
HOW DO I ADDRESS THESE LAGGING SKILLS



Disengagement



Dysregulation



Distraction



Disruptions



Disorganization

START WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

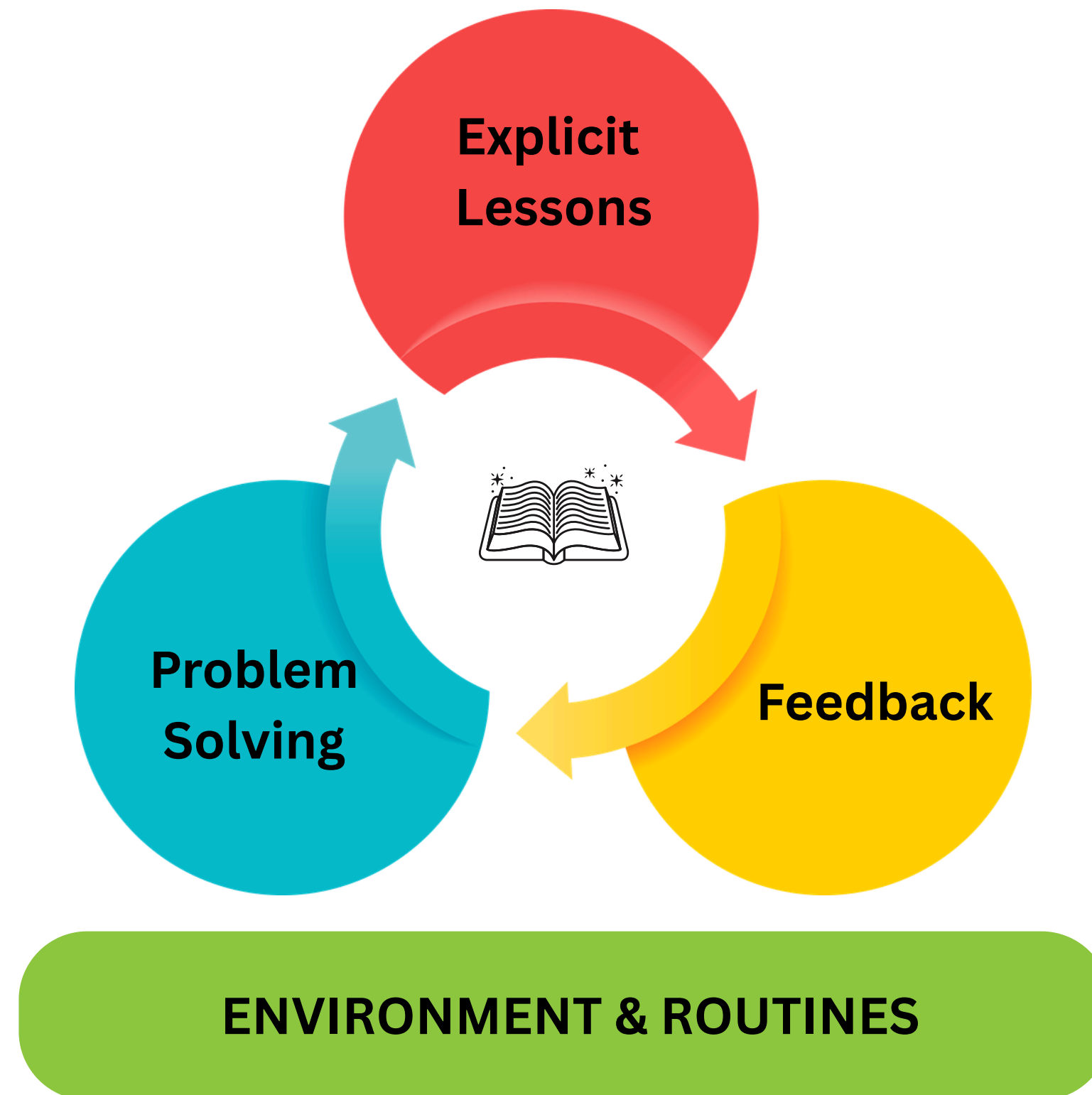
Most simple support.

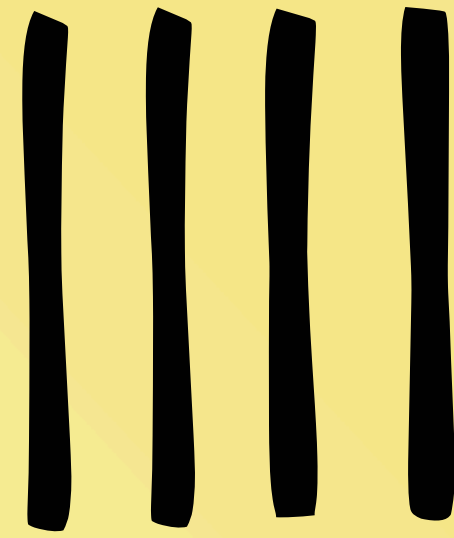
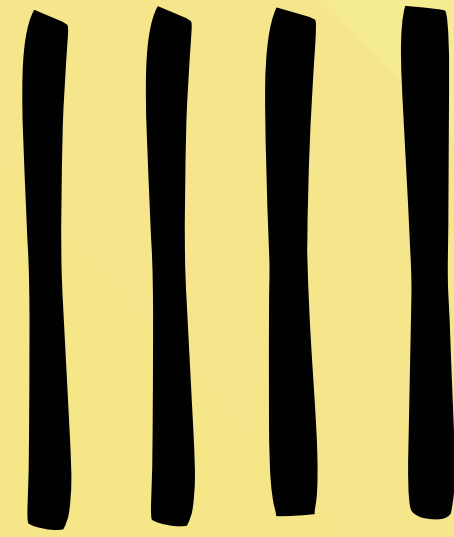


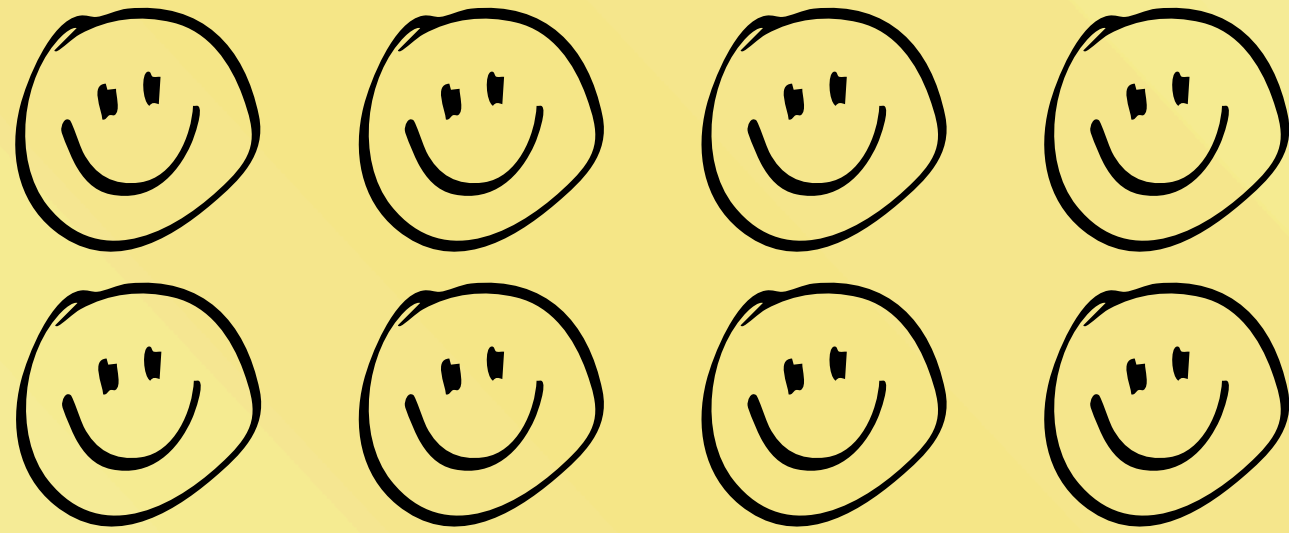
Asks nothing of your kids and is the easiest way to support EF.

Nature

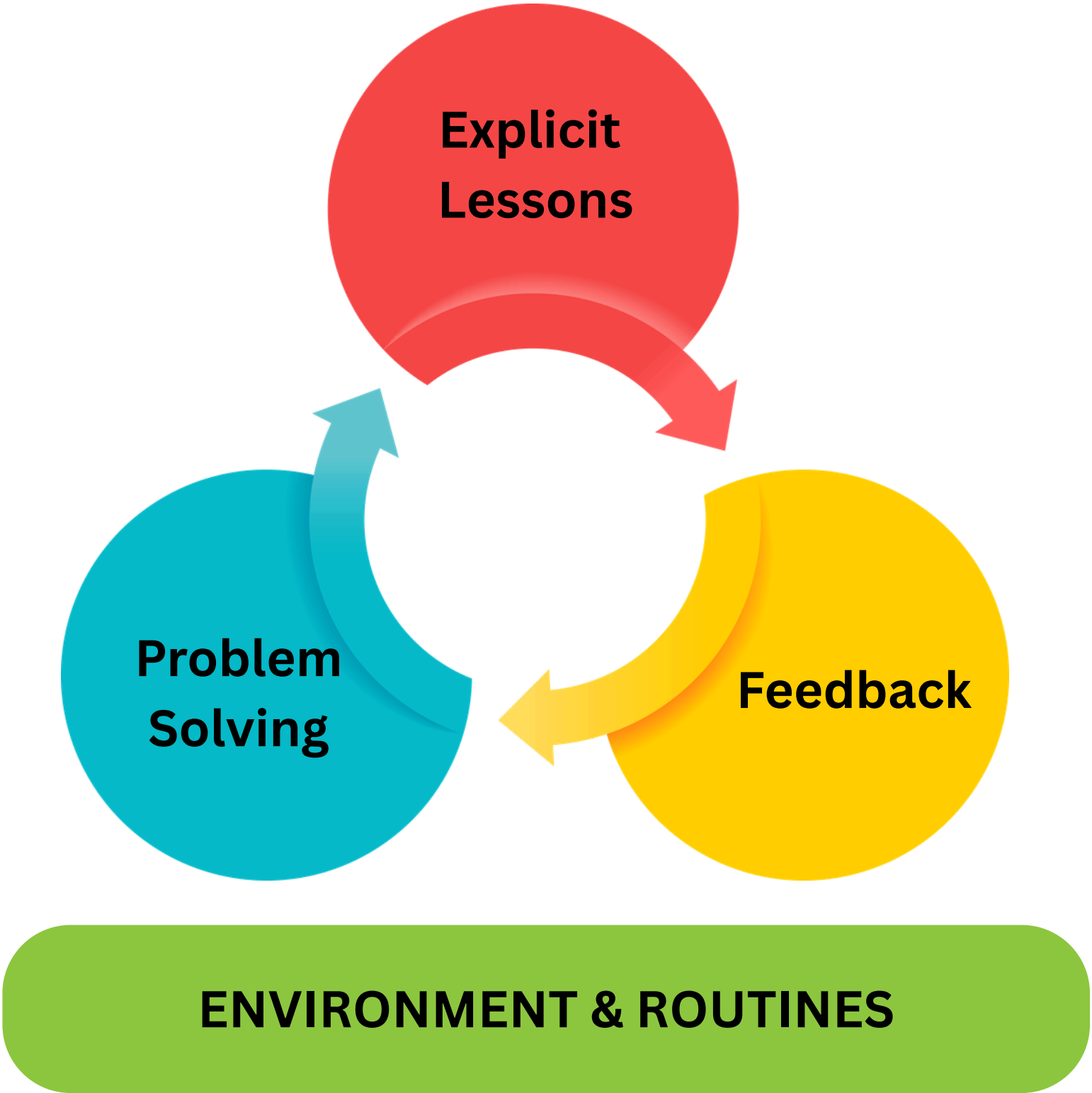
THREE WAYS TO SUPPORT EF SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM







WHICH ELEMENTS DID YOU IDENTIFY IN THE STORY?



AWARENESS CHANGES EVERYTHING

Awareness is the key to making problem-solving, tools, and strategies effective..



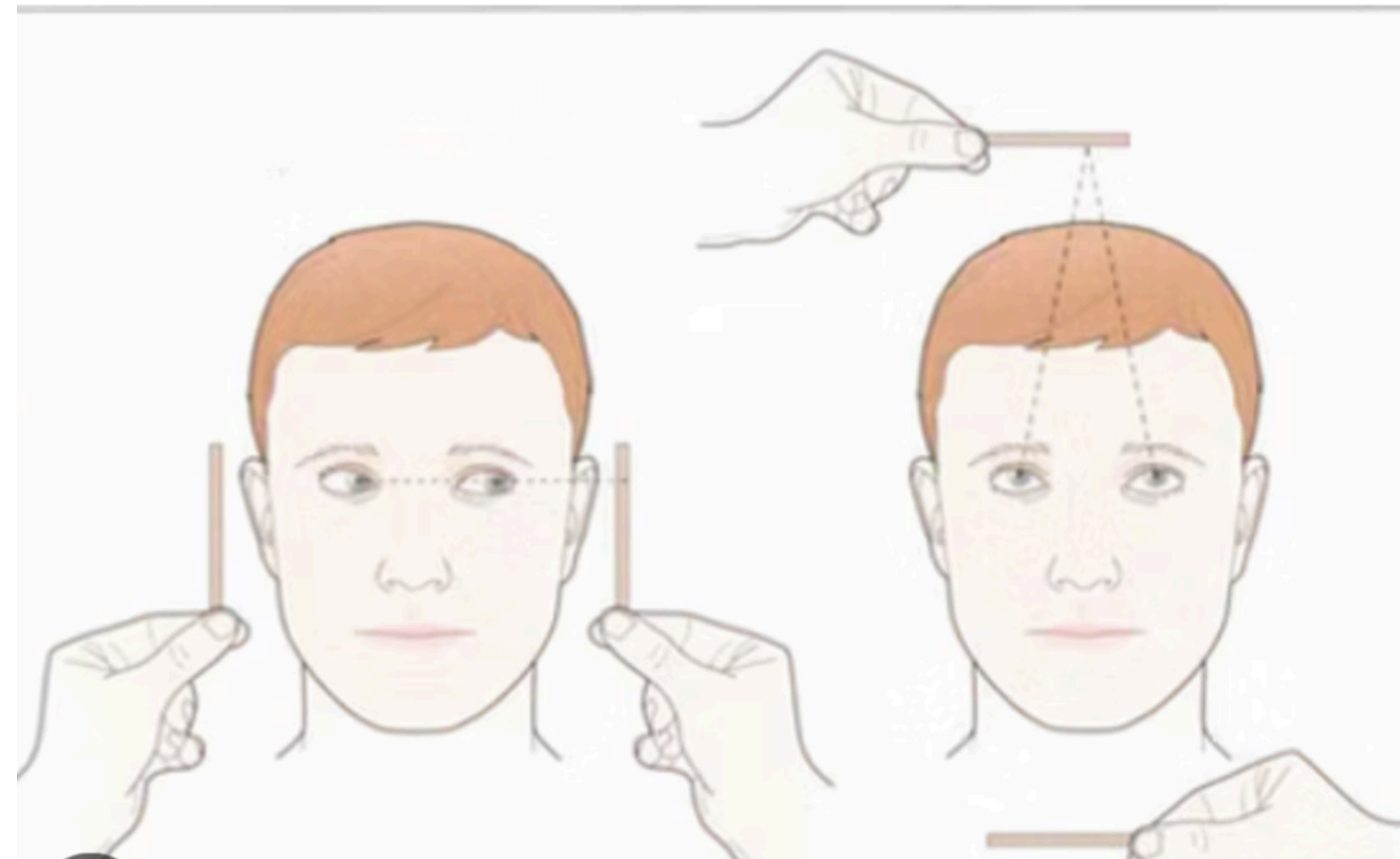
Strategies, tools and problem solving do not work if awareness hasn't been addressed.



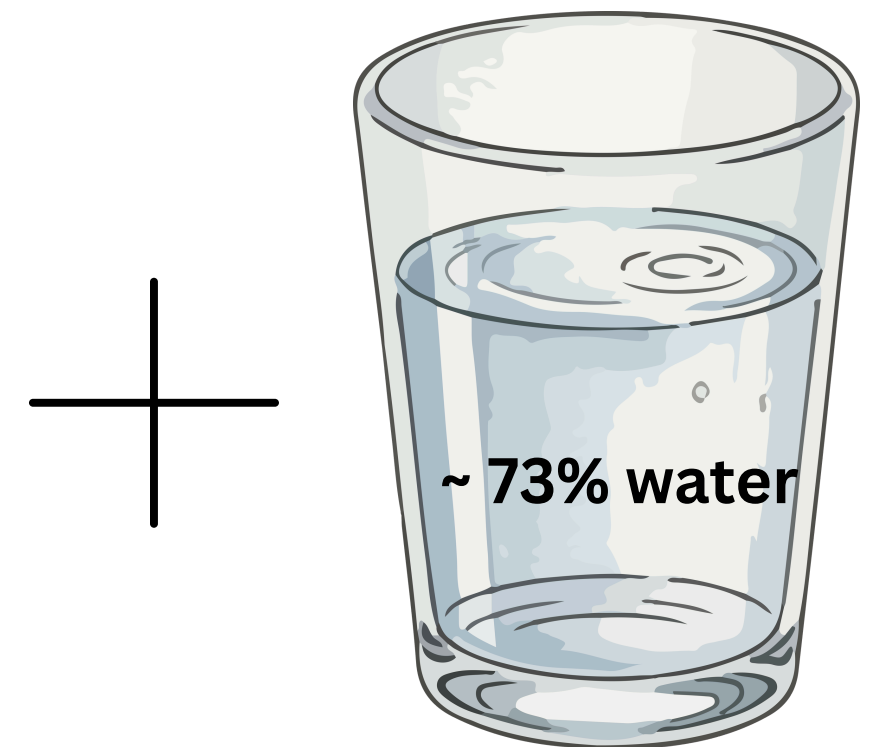
EYE SACCADES RESET & WATER

Improved eye movements reduce the effort required to process visual information, freeing the brain to:

- *focus,*
- *get started*
- *successfully use working memory.*



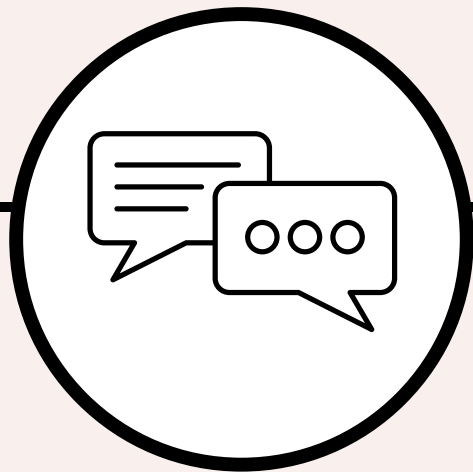
Supports sustained attention, response inhibition, and reading fluency.



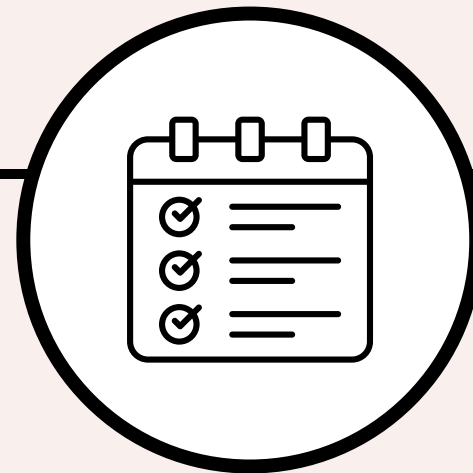
Supports sustained attention, response inhibition, working memory, flexibility, emotional control

TEACHING EF IN THE CLASSROOM

...little by little



FEEDBACK



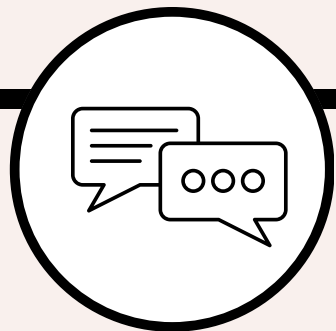
PROBLEM SOLVING



MONTHLY LESSONS



FEEDBACK



- Consistent, positive, specific, constructive
- Builds awareness in real time
- Uses shared EF language
- Provides strategies in the moment
- Act like a video camera - no judgement words

I noticed when you came in after recess, **voices were loud and bodies were moving fast**. Let's work on our **emotional control** by taking a few **deep breaths** when we come into the classroom. **Let's try this now. Well done.** You have reset your body and we are ready to start.

Your Turn!

Home Time Checklist

1. Write homework in agenda
2. Tidy desk
3. Grab your book bag
4. Sit quietly at desk

EF Skills

Emotional Control
Organization
Time Management
Task Initiation



SCENERIO #1

Scenario 1 (Positive):

Students are packing up at the end of the day.

Most students start straight away and write homework in agenda and have their materials neatly put away .



SCENERIO #2

Scenario 2 (Challenging)

One student sits there talking to peers and doesn't begin packing up even after directions are given and steps posted on the board.

FEEDBACK FRAMEWORK

I NOTICED _____ THAT'S STRONG _____
behavior EF skill

I NOTICED _____ LETS WORK ON _____ BY _____
behavior EF skill strategy

A magnifying glass with a copper handle and a clear lens is positioned on the left side of the top image. To its right is a yellow sticky note with the words "EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS" written in a bold, black, hand-drawn font. The background is a light grey surface.

**EXPLORE
YOUR
OPTIONS**

PROBLEM SOLVING

EF ACTION PLANNER



- 5-minute problem-solving framework
- Identifies the challenges
- Develop solutions to meet goals

EF ACTION PLANNER

Engage in problem solving and discover strategies.


EF Action Planner

- Reflective tool
- Elements of cognitive behavioral framework
- Helps students identify their EF challenges
- Plan specific strategies to address challenges
- Supports emotional control and metacognition.

Executive Function Action Planner				
Goal				
Problems	Thoughts/Feelings	Obstacles	Solutions	😊 😐 😞

**Shifts kids from
being
problem-focused
to solution-minded.**

EF ACTION PLANNER

Executive Function Action Planner					
Goal <i>Completing math assignment</i>					
Problems	Thoughts/Feelings	Obstacles	Solutions	😊 😐 😞	
Emotional Control Metacognition Organization Task Initiation	<i>not starting</i>	<i>I don't get it. (sad)</i>	<i>Teacher talks too fast</i>	<i>Teacher can slow down</i> <i>Teacher writes steps on board and goes over them</i>	
	<i>This is boring (bored, mad, frusrated)</i>	<i>Material too easy</i>	 <i>Three Star Stretch</i>		
	<i>It's too hard (frustrated)</i>	<i>Too many steps and things to remember</i>			

explicit adj 1 sta
ing plainly and openly
straightfor

MONTHLY LESSONS



- One skill each month
- Explicit teaching
- Build foundational awareness to return back to
- Teaches practical strategies

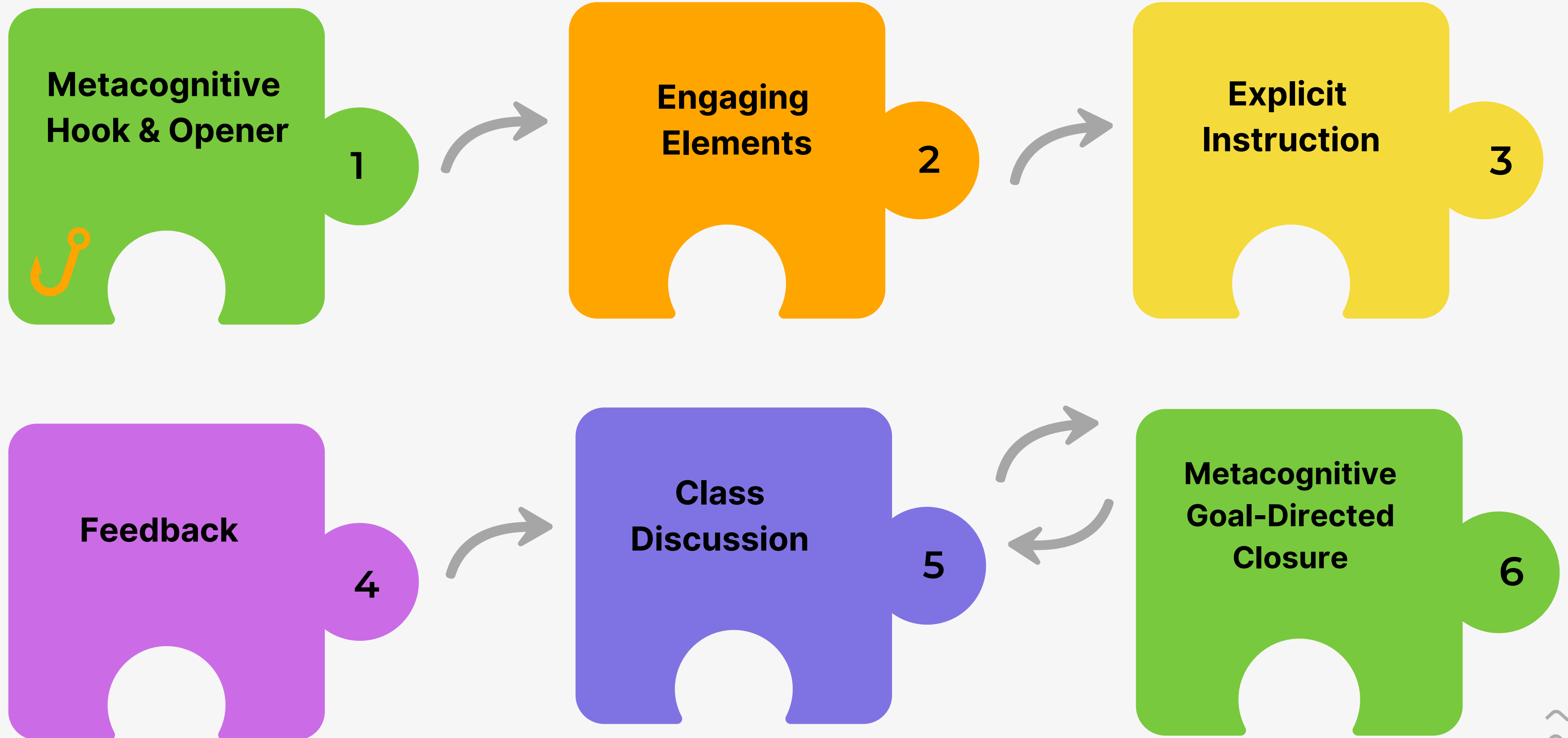


SPOTLIGHT ON SUSTAINED ATTENTION

Boosting Student Focus
Through
EF Lessons



EF Lesson Framework



ENVIRONMENT AND **ROUTINES** ARE ADAPTED ON AN ON-GOING BASIS

CHOOSE AN IMAGE AND KEEP YOUR EYES ONLY ON THE SCREEN WHILE YOU DRAW.



AWARENESS AND GROWTH GUIDES

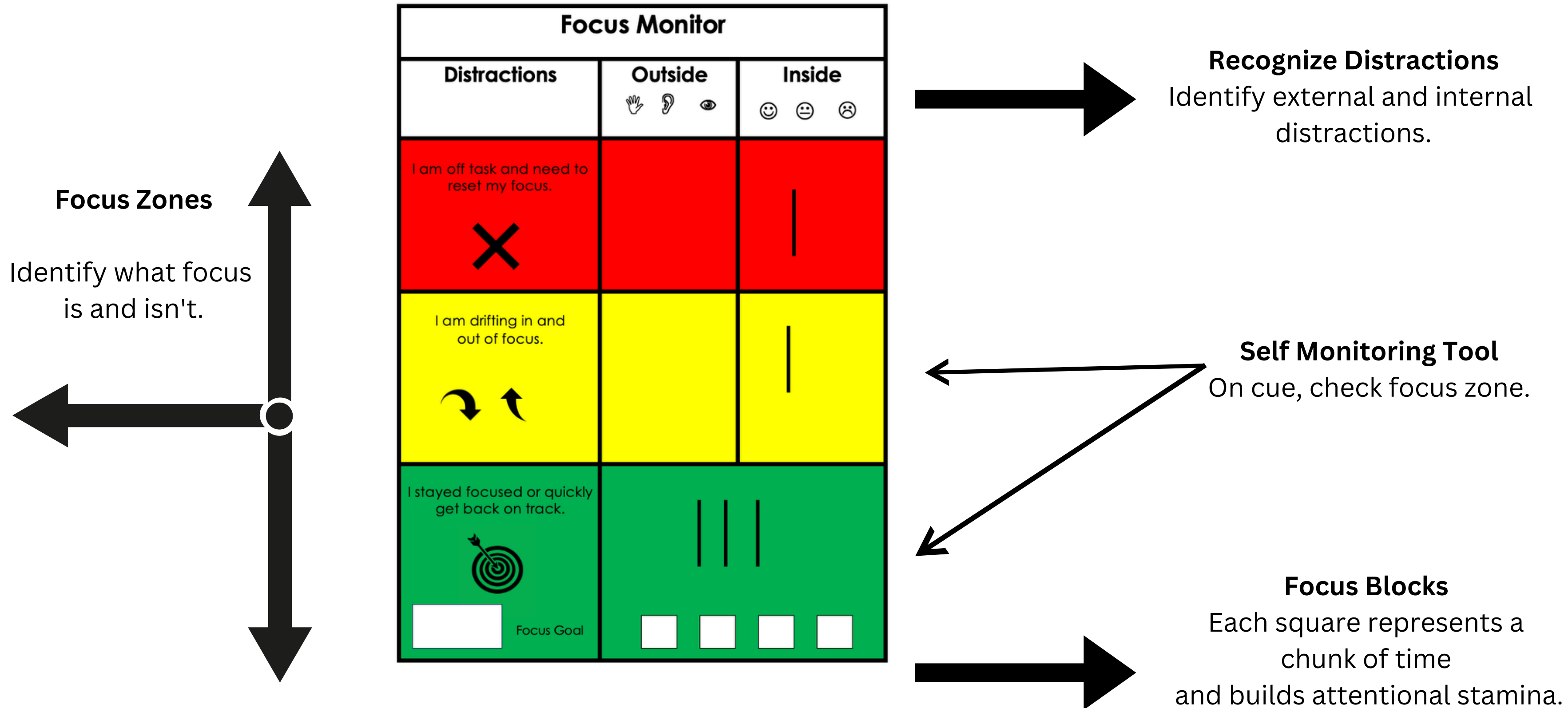
SUSTAINED ATTENTION						
BEFORE			STATEMENT	AFTER		
Yes ☺	Sometimes ☹	No ☹		Yes ☺	Sometimes ☹	No ☹
			I can stay focused even if I am bored, tired, or distracted.			
			I can spot outside distractions.			
			I can spot inside distractions.			
			I know how to reduce distractions.			
			I use a timer to stay focused.			
			I can use tools to track my focus and refocus my attention.			
			I know how to use a fidget to stay focused.			
			I know strategies that can help with focus.			

ENGAGING STORY OR VIDEO



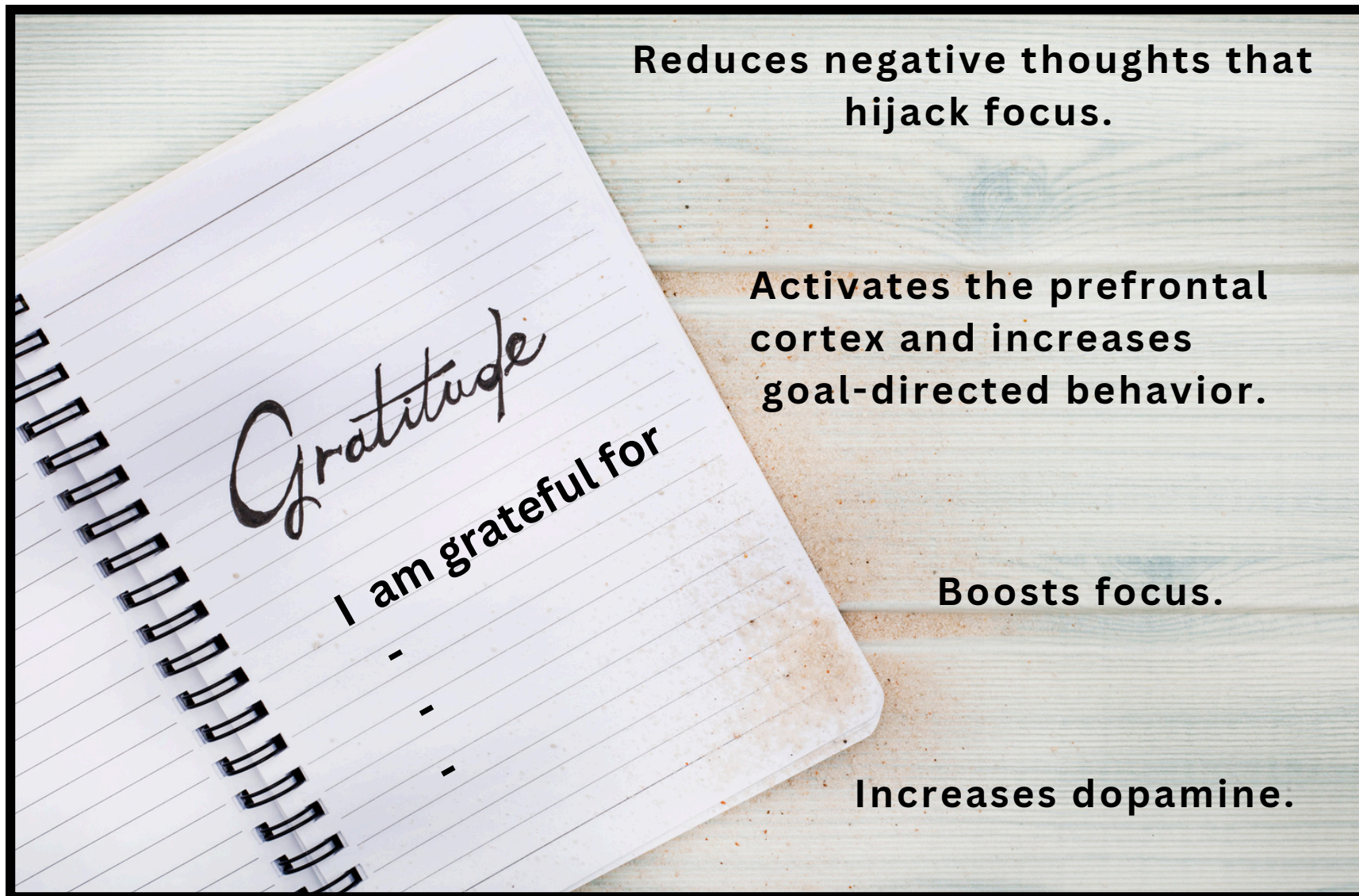
FOCUS MONITOR

MULTI-PURPOSE FOCUS TOOL



YOUR TURN!

FOCUS MONITOR IN ACTION



Reduces negative thoughts that hijack focus.

Activates the prefrontal cortex and increases goal-directed behavior.

Boosts focus.

Increases dopamine.

Focus Monitor		
Distractions	Outside 👤 👂 👁	Inside 😊 😐 😞
I am off task and need to reset my focus. X		
I am drifting in and out of focus. ↻ ↶		
I stayed focused or quickly get back on track. 🎯	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus Goal <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	



CLASS DISCUSSION

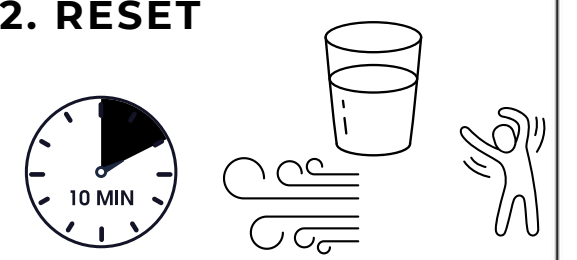
Engage in problem solving and discover strategies
Start by setting class goal

EF Action Planner

Executive Function Action Planner

EF Action Planner:

- Reflective tool
- Helps students identify their EF challenges
- Plan specific strategies to address challenges

Goal				
Problems	Thoughts/Feelings	Obstacles	Solutions	😊 😐 😞
			<p>1. REMINDER TO FOCUS - FOCUS MONITOR</p> <p>2. RESET</p>  <p>4. REDUCE DISTRACTIONS</p>	

Shifts kids from being problem-focused to solution-minded.
















METACOGNITIVE GOAL DIRECTED CLOSURE

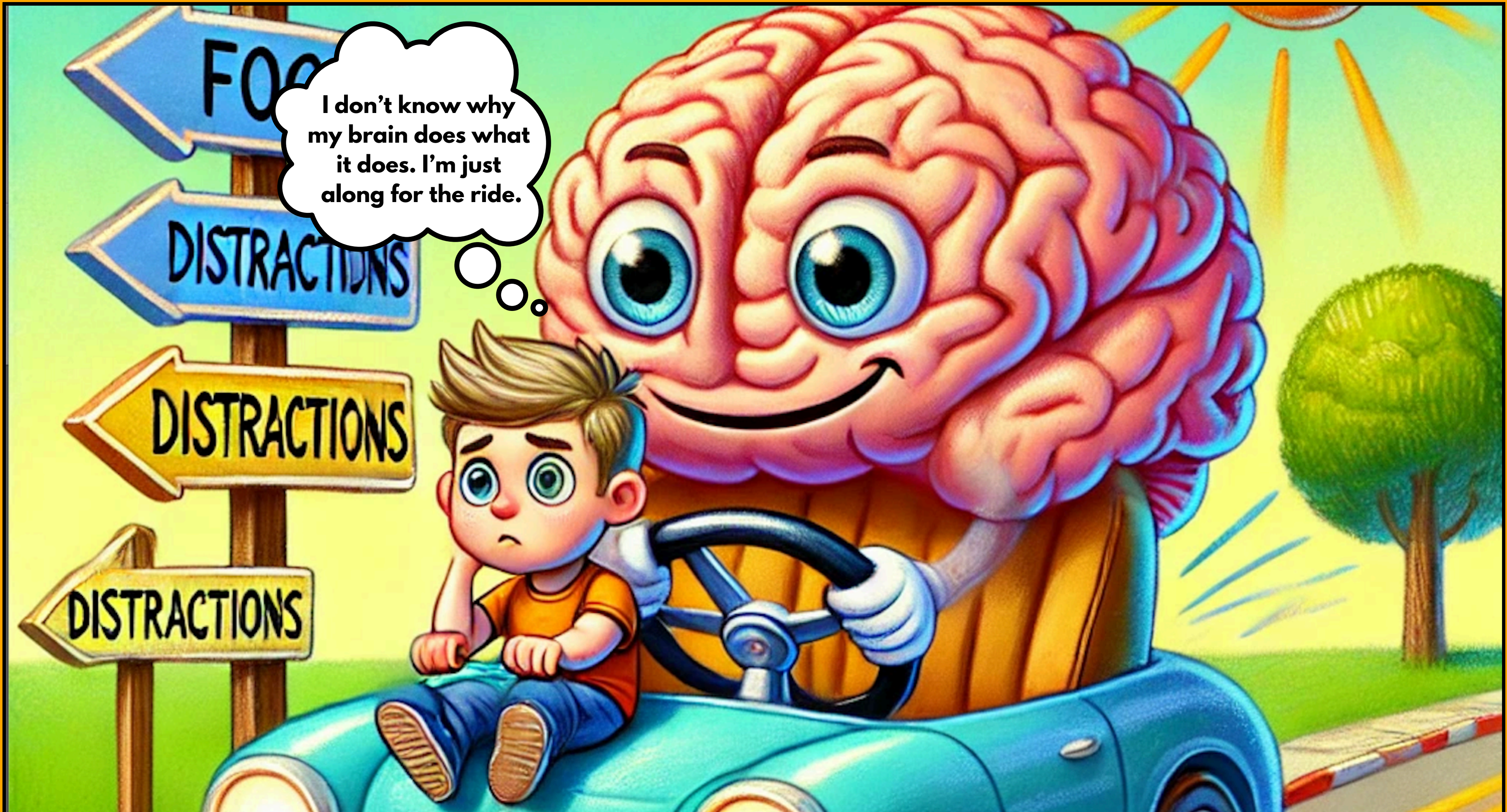
Compare initial and final understanding of EF skill.

Identify what they didnt know about focus and what they know now.

Choose a self-monitoring tool to support goals.

Focus Monitor		
Distractions	Outside 	Inside 
I am off task and need to reset my focus. 		
I am drifting in and out of focus. 		
I stayed focused or quickly get back on track.  <input type="text"/> Focus Goal	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

SUSTAINED ATTENTION						
BEFORE			STATEMENT	AFTER		
Yes 	Sometimes 	No 		Yes 	Sometimes 	No 
			I can stay focused even if I am bored, tired, or distracted.			
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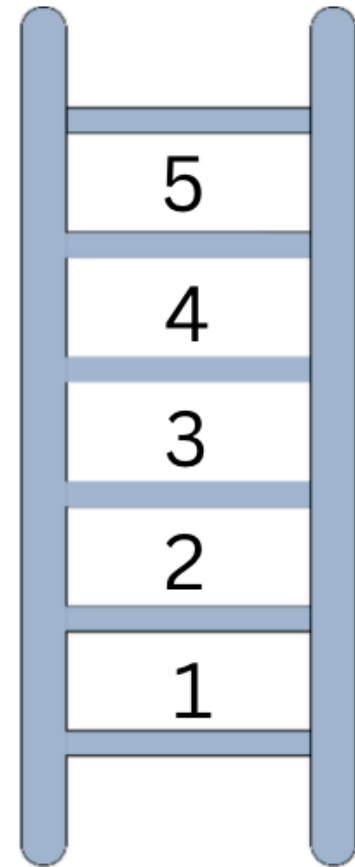


WHEN THE BRAIN TAKES THE WHEEL



WHEN THE STUDENT TAKES THE WHEEL

LEARNING LADDER



I can teach this with confidence.

I understand this and apply it.

I know a bit about it.

I think I have heard of this.

This is new to me.

Before
Score

--	--

After
Score



**WHAT IS ONE THING
THAT STUCK?**

**IDEA, CONCEPT OR
SOMETHING YOU WANT
TO TRY?**





WANT TO GO DEEPER?

Accountability partner

- someone from this session
- a friend
- colleague
- Marcy



- Sharing what you tried
- What worked and didnt
- What you will adjust
- Sharing ideas

ACCOUNTABILITY & ACTION
Sometimes change sticks when we dont do it alone.

An accountability partner helps: Stay consistent • Reflect on what's working • Motivation

Step 1: Choose Your Partner
Pick someone who is:
Supportive (not judgmental) • Reliable (shows up) • Positive and solution-focused
My partner: _____

Step 2: Choose ONE Small Focus - Keep it simple.

Environment (e.g., adjust seating, reduce noise)
 Noticing (e.g., name EF skills during the day)
 Strategy (e.g., try one EF tool with students)
 Reflection (e.g., use EF Action Planner once)

My focus this week: _____

Step 3: Set a Check-In Routine - Consistency is more important that duration.

2-5 minute check-in
 2-3 times per week
 In person/text/voice note

Days: _____ Method: _____

Step 4: Use the Quick Check-In Script - Keep it fast and focused

- What did I try?
- What worked (even a little)?
- What got in the way?
- What is my next small step?

Step 5: Keep It Supportive

✓ Celebrate small wins ✓ Focus on effort, not perfection ✓ Problem-solve, don't criticize

Step 6: Reflect at the End of the Week

- What felt easier this week?
- What did I learn?
- What will I keep, tweak, or try next?

The difference between a helpful workshop and real change is what happens after today...

RESOURCES



Grades 4-6 Story and Interactive Lesson

EF SIMPLE START 4 WEEK GENTLE IMPLEMENTATION			
WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
1	Adjust the Environment <i>Reduce auditory and visual load</i>		
2	Notice and Name <i>Build awareness</i>		
3	Assess and Adjust <i>Identify what is getting in the way</i>		
4	Take Action <i>Try a strategy</i>		



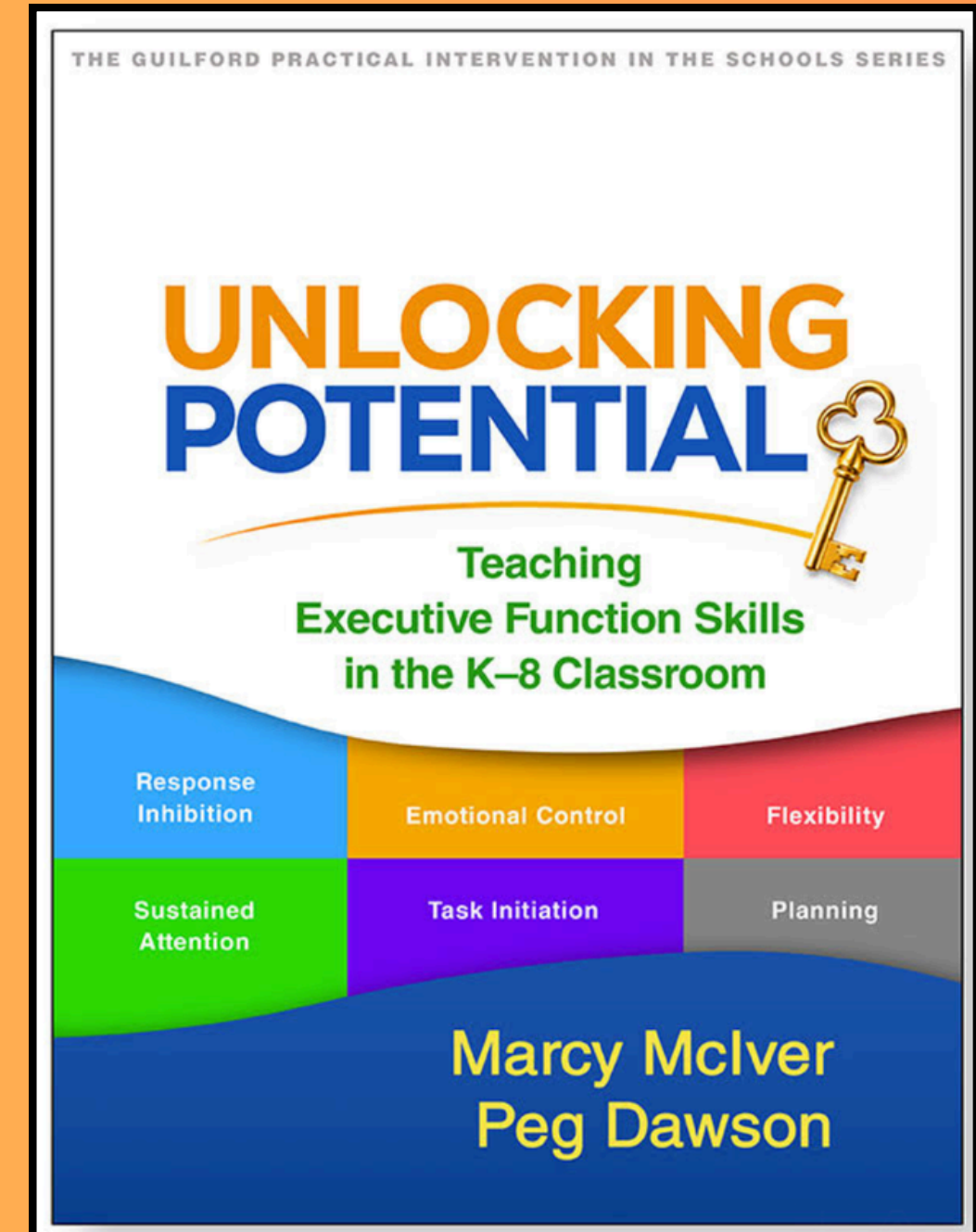
Simple Start - 4 Week Plan to Bringing EF into Your Classroom

EF RESOURCES

FREE



smartbutscatteredkids.com



Coming Soon!

ANY QUESTIONS...



How to get in touch...

Still have questions about what you learned today? Feel free to send me an email at marcylmciver@gmail.com

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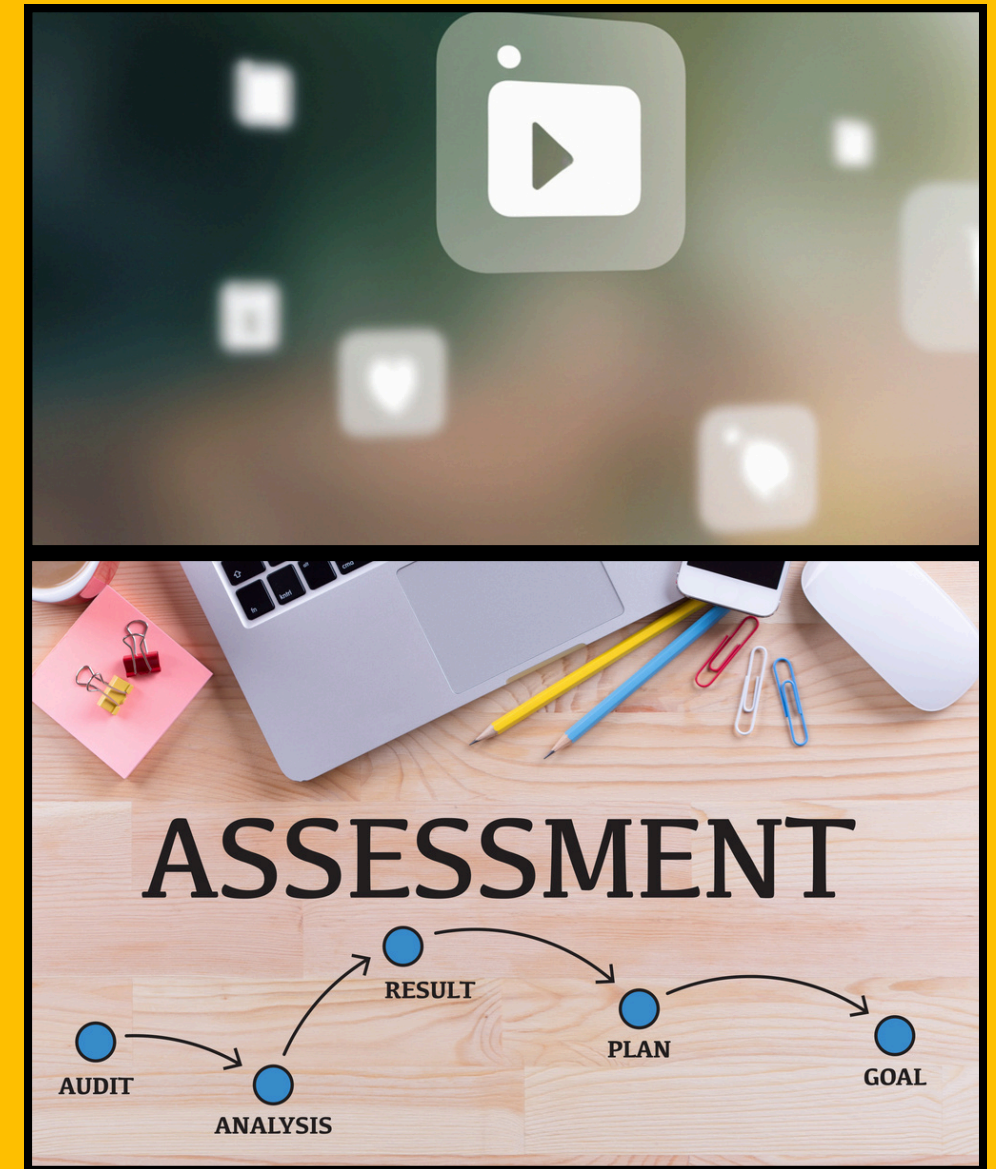
ENGAGING ELEMENT STORY OR VIDEO



K-3



4-5



6-8



QUICK-COHERANCE TECHNIQUE

Inhale for 5

“Let’s take some calming breathes”



“This is a 30-second reset athletes use before performance. Focus on slowing your system down.”

Exhale for 5

Supports sustained attention, emotional control, response inhibition and working memory

LET'S TAKE ACTION



Feedback



Teaching a Lesson



**EF Action
Planner**



Environment

**Modelling
Focus**

Focus Monitor		
Distractions	Outside 👁️ 🗣️ 👁️	Inside 😊 😐 😞
I am off task and need to reset my focus. ✘		
I am drifting in and out of focus. ↻ ↶		
I stayed focused or quickly get back on track. 🎯		
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus Goal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



RESPONSE INHIBITION

6-12 MONTHS



PLANNING AND PRIORITIZATION

12 MONTHS



TASK INITIATION

12-24 MONTHS



WORKING MEMORY

6-12 MONTHS



ORGANIZATION

TODDLER AND CHILDHOOD



EMOTIONAL CONTROL

6-12 MONTHS

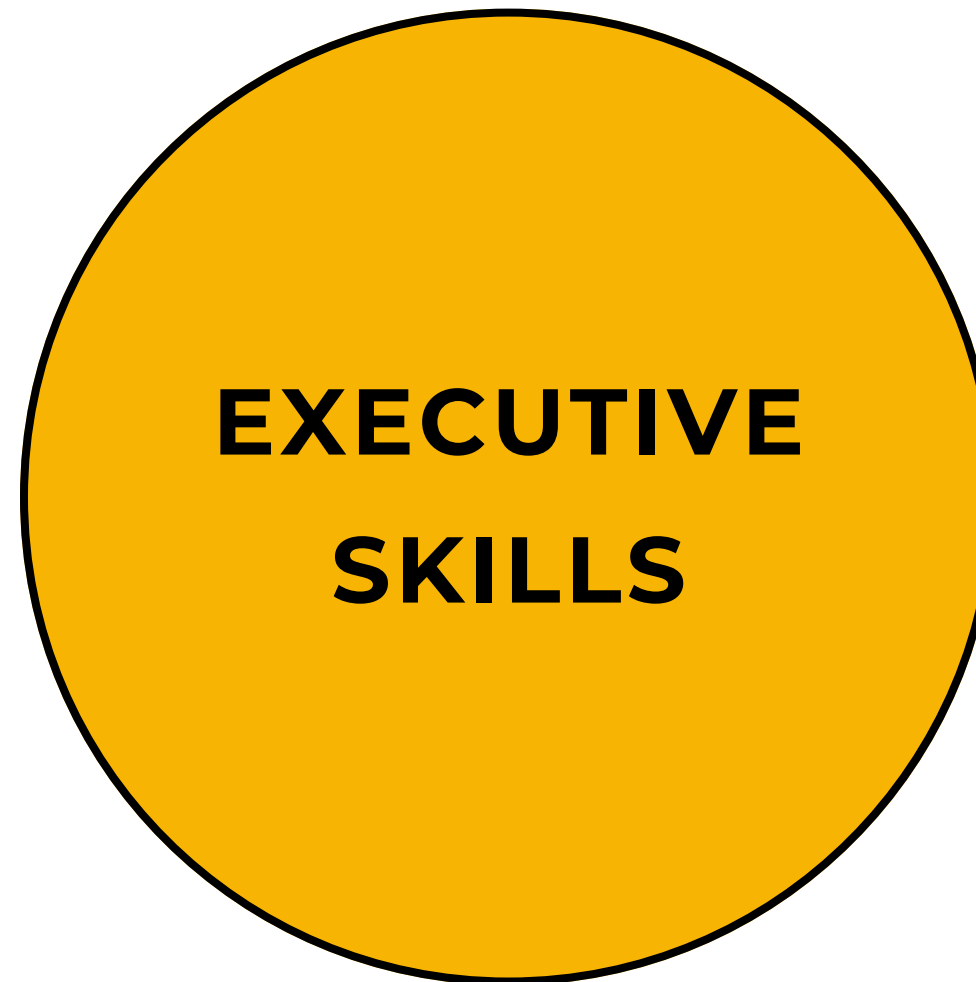


GOAL DIRECTED PERSISTENCE

TODDLER AND CHILDHOOD



FLEXIBILITY



SKILLS ARE LISTED IN ORDER OF DEVELOPMENT



TIME MANAGEMENT

TODDLER AND CHILDHOOD



SUSTAINED ATTENTION

6-12 MONTHS



METACOGNITION

TODDLER AND CHILDHOOD