

THE POWER OF TEACHING

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS WORKBOOK

From Awareness to Action



BY MARCY MCIVER

WELCOME!

Small intentional shifts can create big gains in how your students learn and feel about themselves.

This workbook is designed to help you:

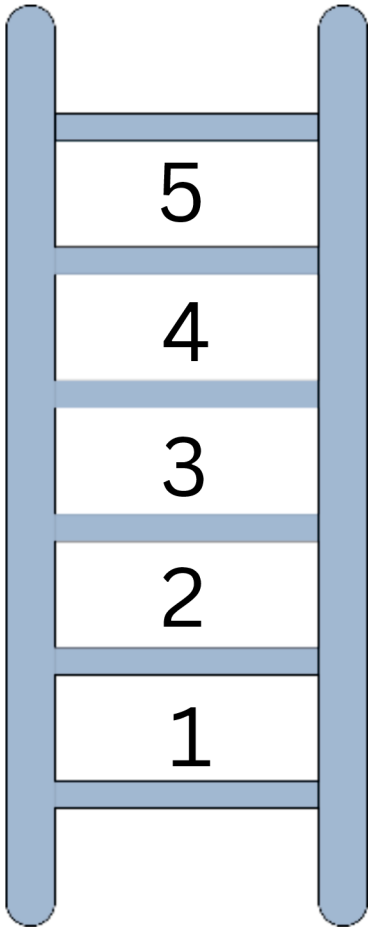
- Understand executive function (EF)
- Become familiar with the 11 key skills
- Identify EF challenges in your classroom
- Apply simple, practical strategies right away

As you move through the session, use this workbook to:

- Jot down ideas
- Note examples
- Write down questions
- Reflect on what you want to try

Questions: Email Marcy at: marcylmciver@gmail.com

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

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

EXECUTIVE SKILLS EXPLAINED

Executive function is : _____

RESPONSE INHIBITION

Pause before acting.

Example:

WORKING MEMORY

Hold information and do something with it

Example:

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Manage and understand feelings

Example:

FLEXIBILITY

Ability to adapt to change

Example:

EXECUTIVE SKILLS EXPLAINED

SUSTAINED ATTENTION

Maintain attention despite fatigue, boredom, distraction

Example:

TASK INITIATION

The ability to get started without procrastination

Example:

PLANNING AND PRIORITIZING

Decide what to do and what matters the most

Example:

ORGANIZATION

Keep track of materials and information.

Example:

TIME MANAGEMENT

Use time wisely.

Example:

EXECUTIVE SKILLS EXPLAINED

GOAL DIRECTED PERSISTENCE

Stick with a goal even when it's hard.

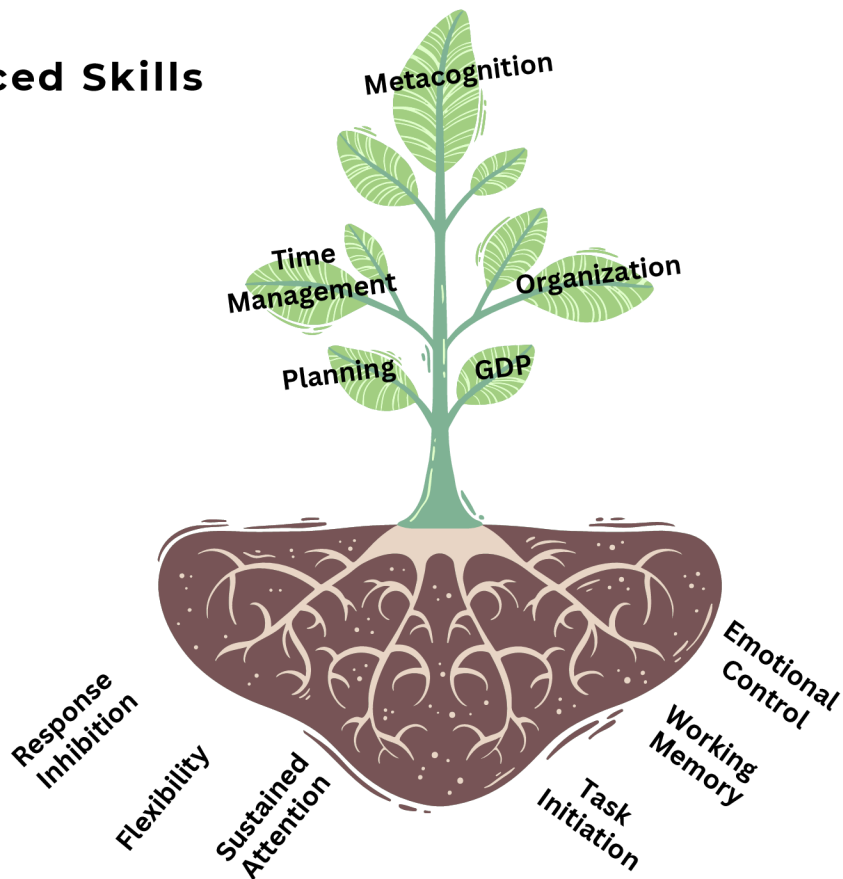
Example:

METACOGNITION

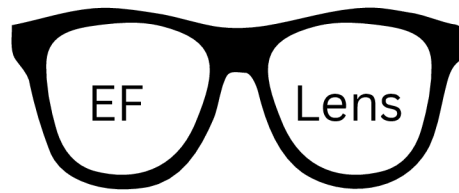
Ability to step back and self-assess

Example:

Advanced Skills



Foundational Skills



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

Sustained Attention Environmental Supports

Do I provide:	Y	IP	NY
a calm classroom that minimizes unnecessary auditory distractions?			
a visually organized classroom that reduces distractions? Examples: clutter free bulletin boards, tidy personal workspace			
seating options that support students learning needs and optimal focus?			
the use of visual timers to stay focused and monitor attention?			
clear predictable routines, class schedules, and procedures?			

THREE WAYS TO TEACH EF

1

FEEDBACK

STRENGTH-BASED

I NOTICED _____

THAT SHOWS STRONG _____ (EF SKILL)

GROWTH-BASED

I NOTICED _____

LET'S WORK ON _____ (EF SKILL)

AND TRY _____

2

PROBLEM SOLVING

Executive Function Action Planner

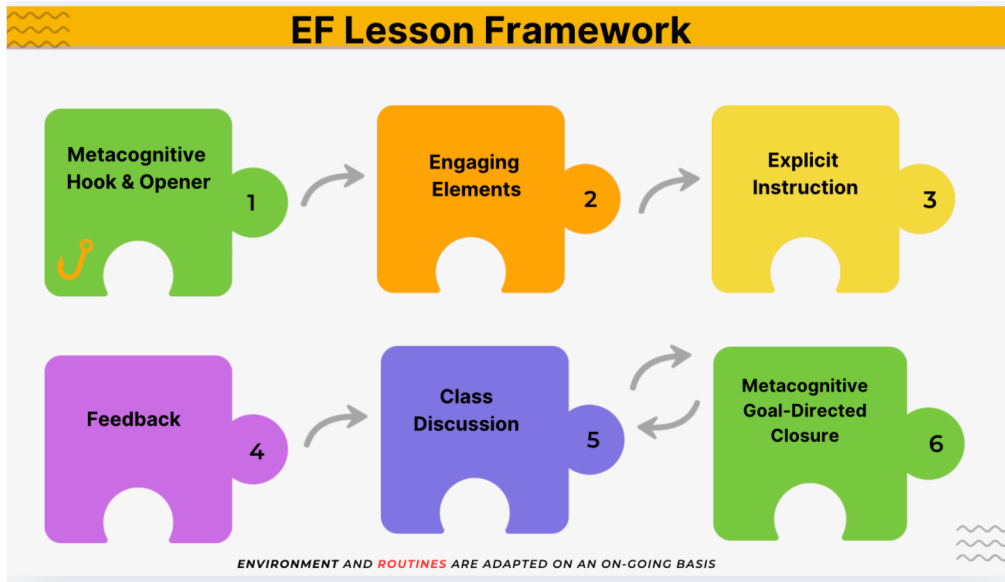
Goal

Problems	Thoughts/Feelings	Obstacles	Solutions	😊 ☹️ 😞

THREE WAYS TO TEACH EF

3

MONTHLY LESSONS



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.			

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.



Focus Goal

REFLECTION & ACTION

AN IDEA, THOUGHT OR CONCEPT
THAT STUCK OUT FOR ME:

THINGS I WOULD LIKE TO TRY















QUESTIONS

EF Classroom Needs Assessment

Rate how often you observe the behaviors that impact teaching and learning in your classroom.

1 = Rarely (Low Need) 2 = Sometimes (Moderate Need) 3 = Often (High Need)

Key:

RI: Response Inhibition

WM: Working Memory

EC: Emotional Control

SA: Sustained Attention

F: Flexibility

TI: Task Initiation

PP: Planning and Prioritizing

O: Organization

TM: Time Management

GDP: Goal-Directed Persistence

M: Metacognition

Date:

Class:

EF Skill Focus:

Foundational Skills Typically Emphasized in Early Grades	1	2	3
How often do your students blurt out answers or negative remarks in class? (RI)*			
How often do your students struggle to stop and think before they act? (RI)*			
How often do your students start their work without understanding instructions? (RI)*			
How often do your students forget routines or instructions? (WM)*			
How often do your students lose track of materials or personal belongings? (WM)*			
How often do your students forget rules to games? (WM)*			
How often do your students struggle to manage frustration and shut down? (EC)*			
How often do your students lash out at peers when something is upsetting? (EC)*			
How often do your students struggle to respond constructively to their emotions? (EC)*			
How often do your students lose focus during lessons or independent work? (SA)*			
How often do your students struggle to complete tasks without redirection? (SA)*			
How often do your students get distracted by their environment or their peers? (SA)*			
How often do your students respond poorly to change in routine or plans? (F)*			
How often do your students resist trying new approaches or strategies? (F)*			
How often do your students struggle with creative writing or open-ended assignments? (F)*			
How often do your students procrastinate to get started their work? (TI)*			
How often do your students need reminders to start work independently? (TI)*			
How often do your students struggle knowing how or where to start? (TI)*			

Notes:

Advanced Skills	1	2	3
Build Upon Foundational Skills			
How often do your students struggle to break down assignments into small parts? (PP)			
How often do your students prioritize less important tasks over more critical ones? (PP)			
How often do your students struggle to carry out long-term assignments (e.g. book reports) (PP)			
How often do your students misplace items or supplies? (O)			
How often do your students desk areas impact their ability to start or focus? (O)			
How often do your students struggle to keep backpacks, notebooks or desks organized? (O)			
How often do your students struggle to manage their time or complete tasks on time? (TM)			
How often do your students rush and underestimate the time to complete tasks? (TM)			
How often are your students late for school, coming in from recess, etc.? (TM)			
How often do your students give up when faced with a challenging task? (GDP)			
How often do your students battle to stay motivated to complete long-term projects? (GDP)			
How often do your students live in the moment and focus on immediate interests? (GDP)			
How often do your students struggle to reflect on their performance? (M)			
How often do your students struggle to monitor their performance towards a goal? (M)			
How often do your students struggle in identifying their strengths and challenges? (M)			
Notes:			

ACCOUNTABILITY & ACTION

Sometimes change sticks when we don't do it alone.

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

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 than 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?

COGNITIVE RESETS

Three cognitive resets to support sustained attention, working memory, emotional control and response inhibition.

Coherence Breathing

Breathe in for 5 and out for 5, focusing on your heart center.
Do 5-10 rounds.

Supports: emotional regulation, sustained attention, task initiation, response inhibition, and working memory.

Eye Saccades

Eyes move left ↔ right, then up ⇕ down, then diagonal ↗ ↘ ↙ ↖

Head stays still

20–30 seconds

Supports: Refocuses attention, supports working memory, impulse control, and reading fluency.

List three other cognitive resets that have worked for your students:

1.

2.

3.

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