



Southeast (HHS Region 4)

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Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

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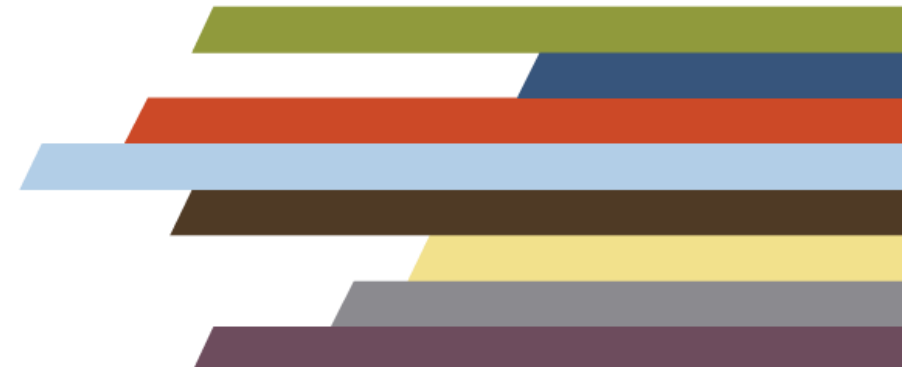
Evidence-based approaches to support the executive functioning of autistic students

Katherine Pickard, PhD

Emory University School of Medicine

March 1, 2023

SAMHSA
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DISCLAIMER

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).



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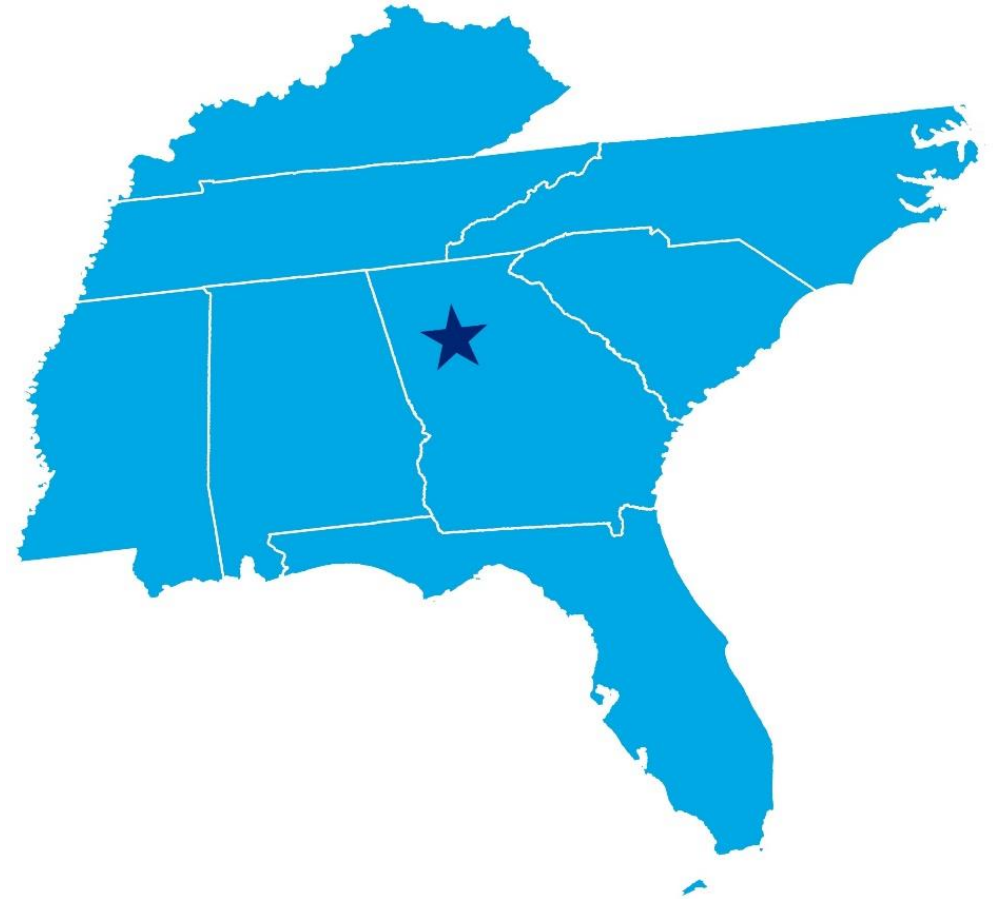
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The Southeast MHTTC is located at Emory University in the Rollins School of Public Health.

Our Mission: To promote the implementation and sustainability of evidence-based mental health services in the Southeastern United States.

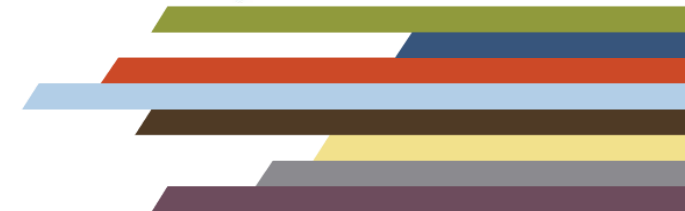
Our Vision: Widespread access to evidence-based mental health services for those in need.

Our Services: We use a public health approach to build leadership capacity and to provide mental health trainings and resources to providers, agencies, and communities across the Southeast.



SAMHSA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



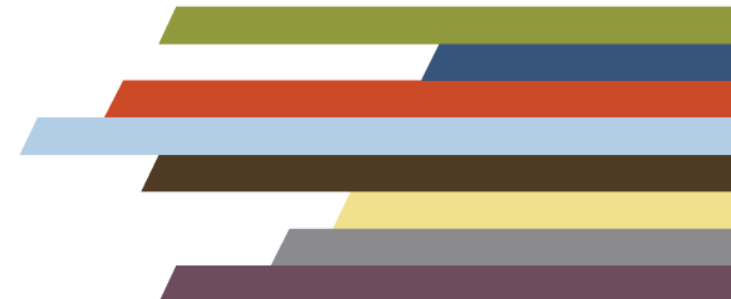
Katherine Pickard, PhD

Assistant Professor

Emory University, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Autism and Related Disabilities

Research and Clinical Interests

- Translating best practice interventions for autism into community settings.
- Extensive work within early intervention and public school systems.



A Note on Identity First Language Use

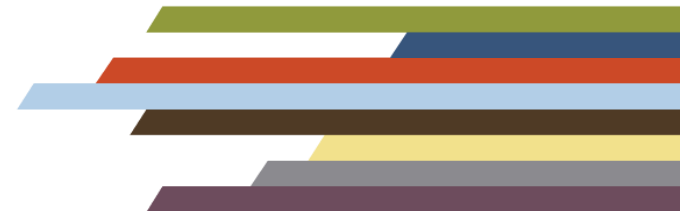
Within our products on autism, we use *identity first* language.

We have made this decision:

- In response to the neurodiversity movement.
- Based on the preference of many autistic adults.
- In order to avoid the use of ableist language.

However, we recognize that this is not the preference of every individual or family and that many people continue to use person-first language.

Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2021). Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 18-29. Link: <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/aut.2020.0014>

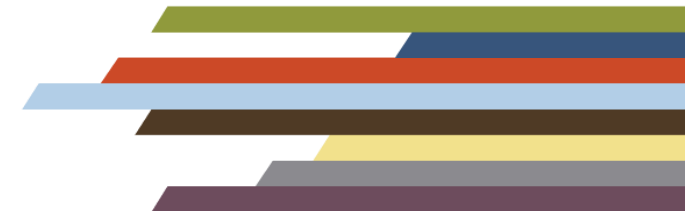


Learning Session Objectives

Part 2 of this webinar series will provide an overview of evidence-based approaches that can be used to support the executive functioning of autistic students, including those with co-occurring ADHD.

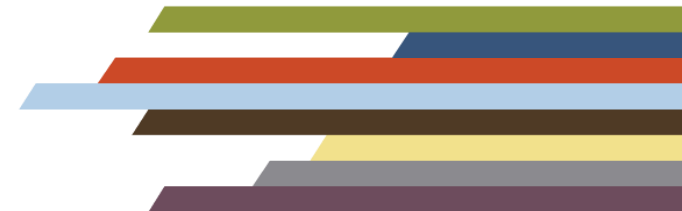
By the end of the learning sessions, participants will be able to:

1. Describe evidence-based approaches and strategies to support executive functioning in autistic students with and without co-occurring ADHD.
2. Identify strategies to support the executive functioning of autistic students within case studies.
3. Know where to find additional resources to support the executive functioning of autistic youth.




Polling Questions

1. What is your professional role?
2. How much of your professional time do you spend supporting the mental health of autistic students?
3. What is your familiarity with executive functioning differences in autistic students?
4. Did you attend the first webinar on executive functioning?



Toolkit for Supporting the Mental Health of Autistic Students

Southeast (HHS Region 4)

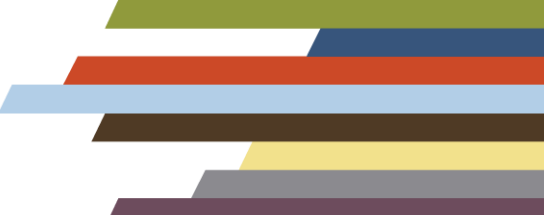


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YOUR MHTTC ▾ TRAINING AND EVENTS ▾ RESOURCES ▾ PROJECTS ▾ COMMUNICATION ▾ ABOUT ▾

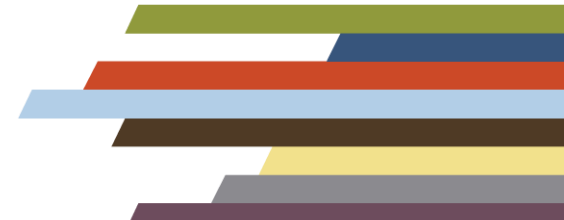
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Toolkit for Supporting the Mental Health of Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



Roadmap for Executive Function Part 2

1. Review of executive functioning.
2. Overview of manualized programs designed to support executive functioning.
3. Learn strategies to support flexibility, planning, inhibition, and emotion regulation.
4. Apply the strategies we discuss within two case studies.
5. Discuss additional resources available to support the executive functioning of autistic students.



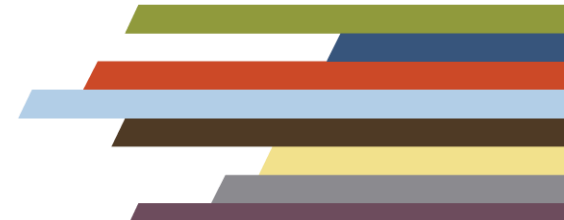
Prevalence of Mental Health Challenges in Autistic Individuals

Mental Health Category	Autism	General Population
ADHD	28%	7.2%
Anxiety	20%	7.3%
Depression	11%	4.7%
Bipolar Disorders	5%	0.7%
Schizophrenia	4%	0.4%

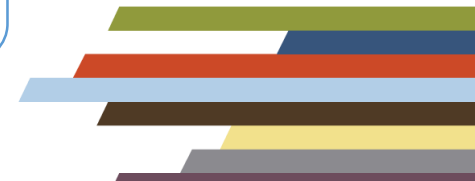
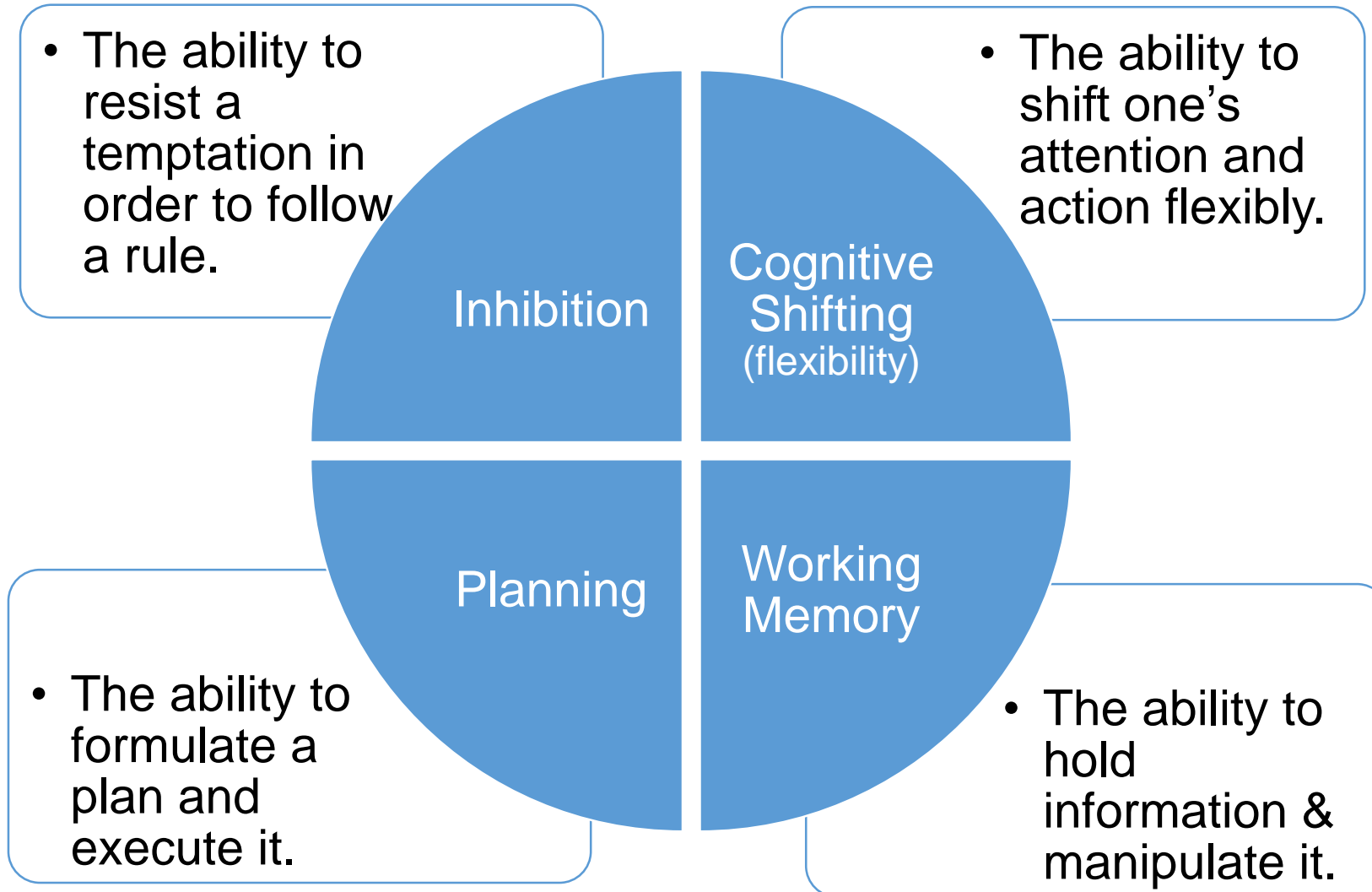
Executive Functioning: What it is

- Executive functioning is a set of “cognitive control” processes.
- These processes enable:

“Self-regulation and self-directed behavior toward a goal, allowing us to break habits, make decisions and evaluate risks, plan for the future, prioritize what we do and cope with novel situations.”



Executive Functioning: What it is



Executive Functioning: Why it Matters

Executive functioning skills are linked to all sorts of developmental outcomes for children with and without autism.

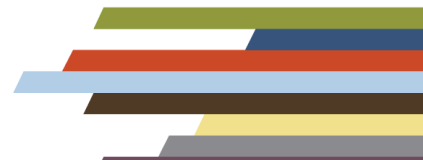
Theory of Mind

Adaptive Skills

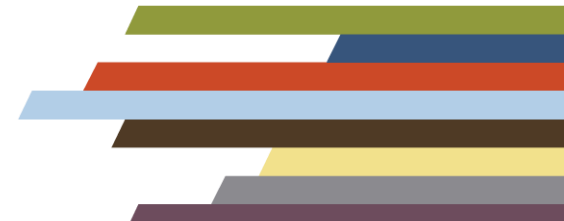
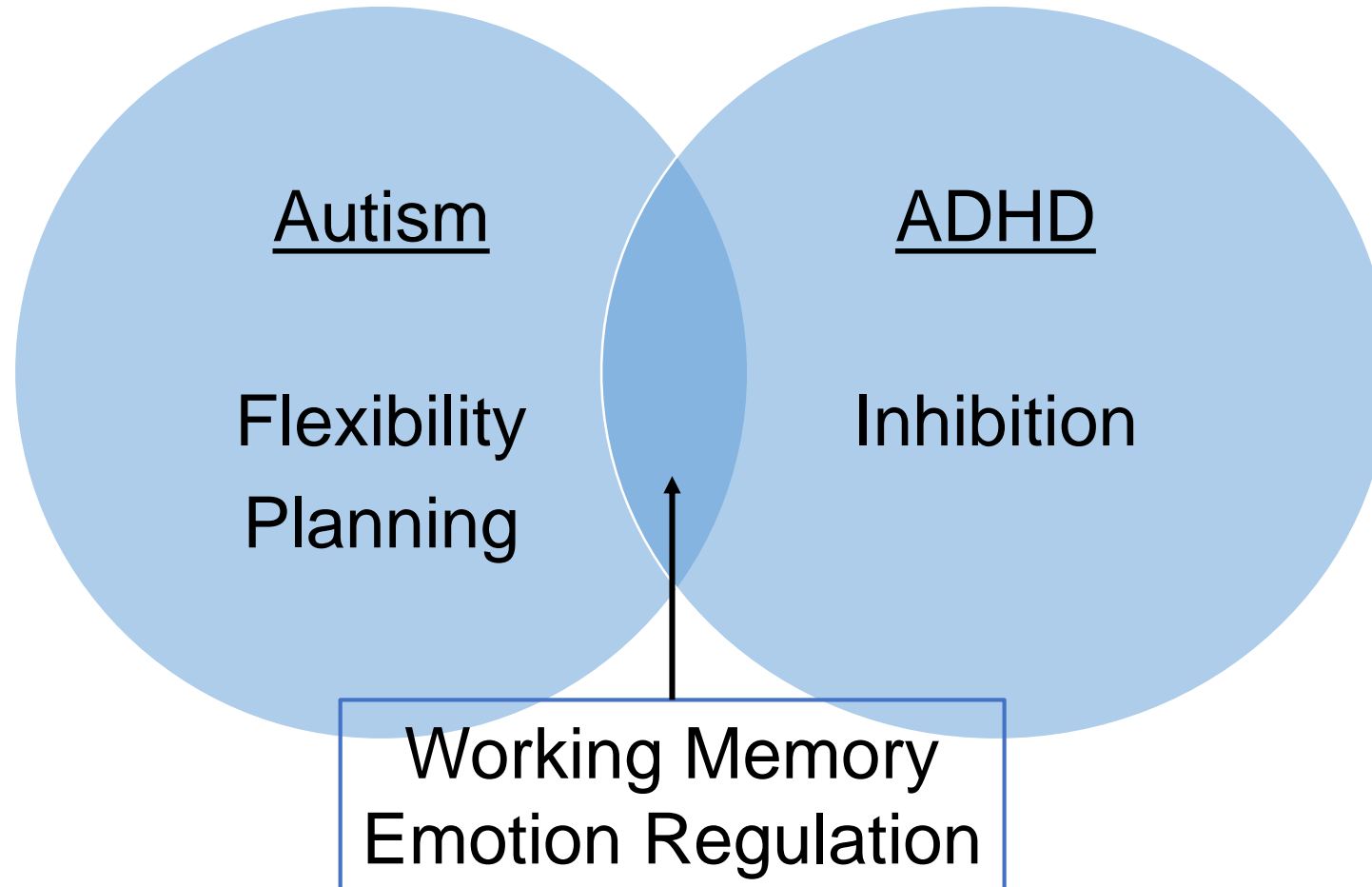
School Readiness

Mental Health

(Chandler et al., 2022; Pellicano, 2012; Pugliese et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2016)

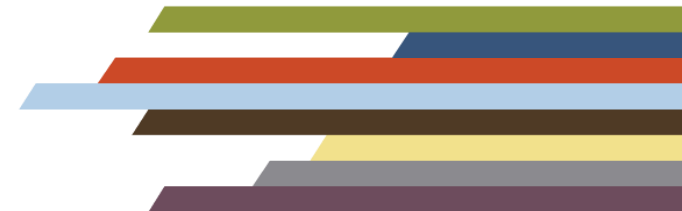


Summary of Executive Functioning Differences in Autism and ADHD



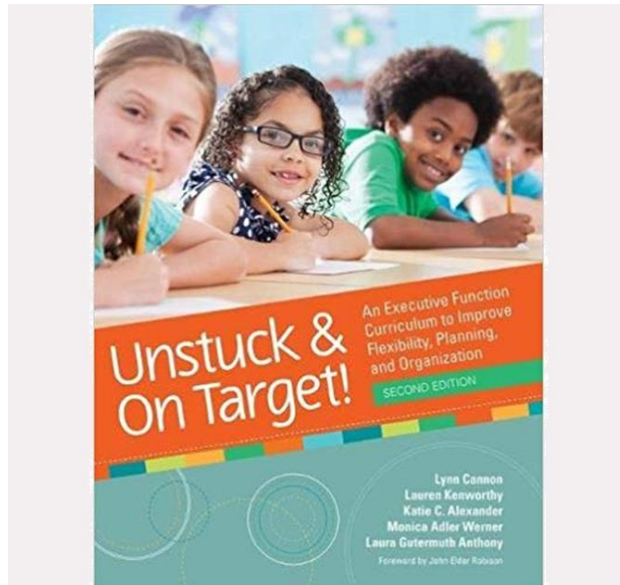
Polling Questions

1. For me, the executive functioning area that I feel most confident supporting is:
2. For me, the executive functioning area that I feel least confident in supporting is:

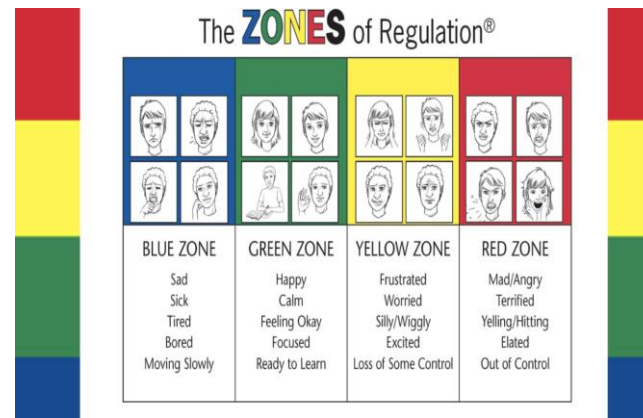


Curriculums Supporting One or More Executive Functioning Domains

Unstuck and On Target



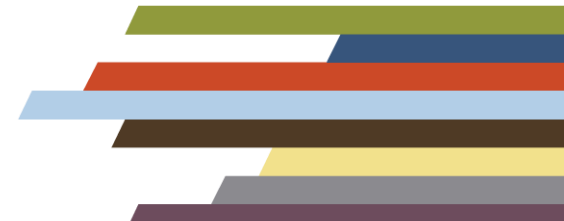
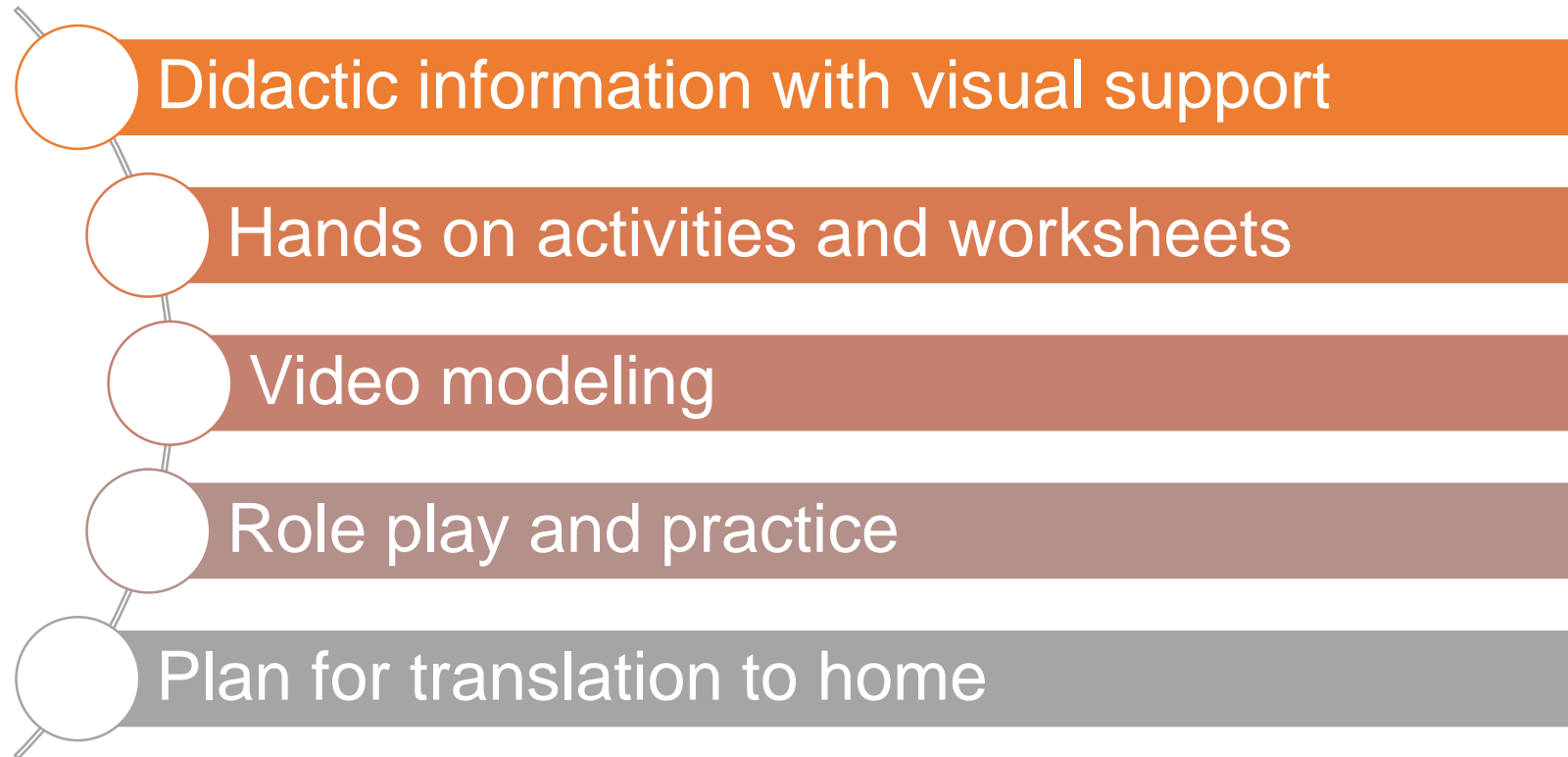
Super Flex



Zones of Regulation

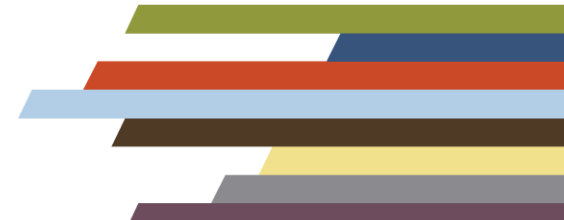
Many Programs Are Skills-Based

- These programs teach skills using best practices to support learning, including:



Teaching in a Supportive Environment

- Many students with executive function difficulties are in school environments intended for students who are organized and flexible.
- A supportive environment includes:
 - A culture of acceptance and support
 - Predictable routines
 - Use of visual supports
 - Support with organization
 - Contact with caregivers



Support with Flexibility

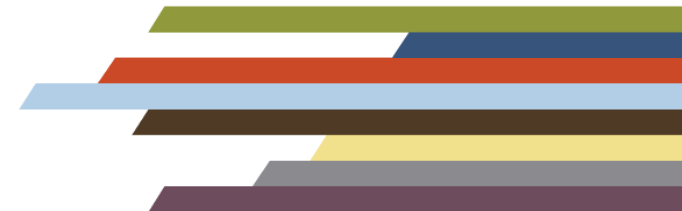
- Teach and apply terminology that helps students consider multiple perspectives and handle change.

Plan A and Plan B

Compromise

Big Deal and Little Deal

Expecting the Unexpected



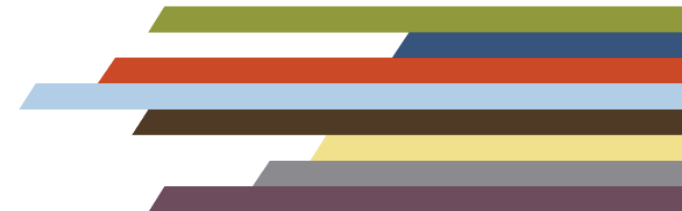
Support with Flexibility

- When teaching flexibility, we must consider:

What is in it for the student?

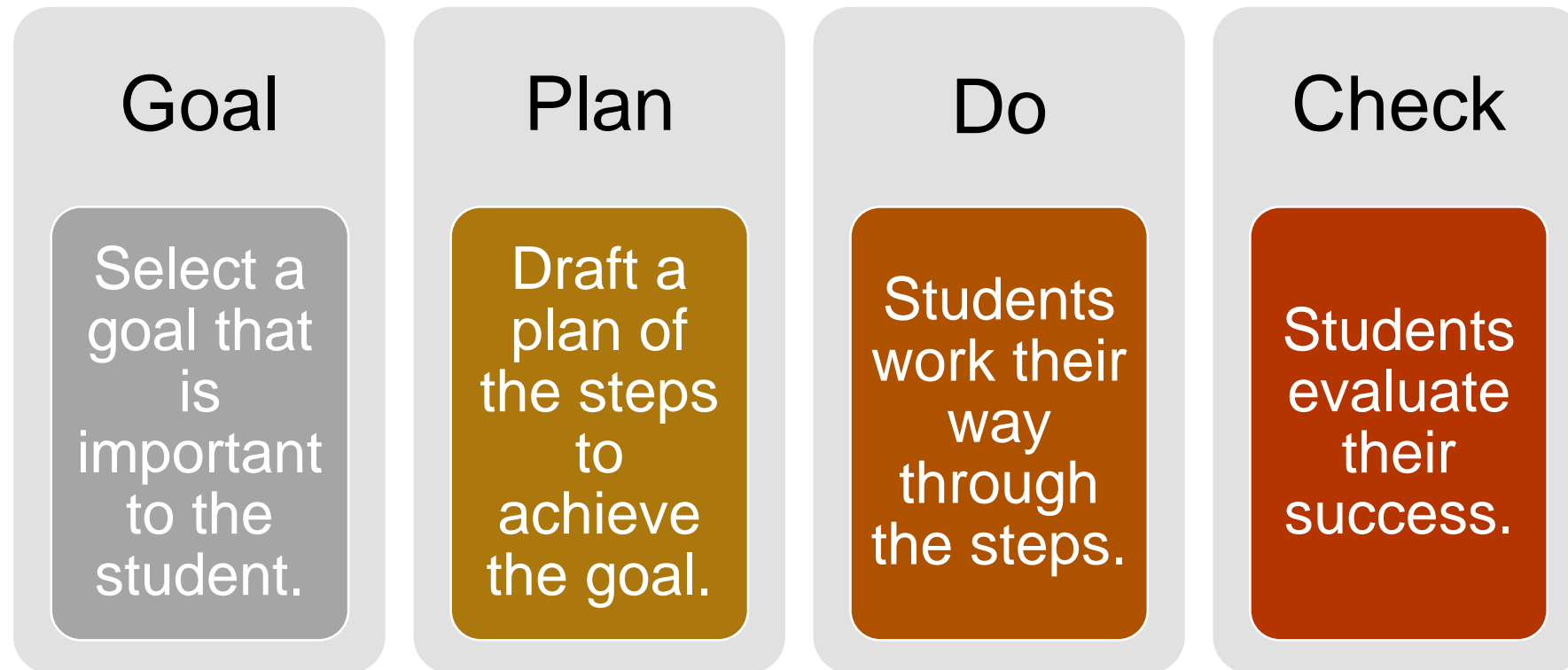
What are the benefits of being inflexible?

When is flexible too flexible?



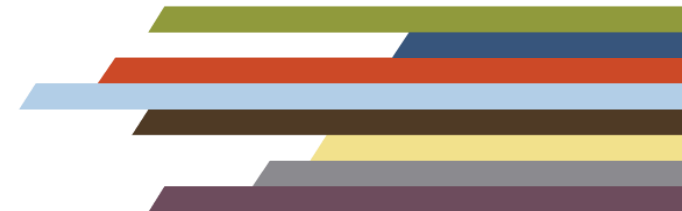
Support with Planning

- Teach the process of creating a goal, generating the steps to achieve the goal, and self-monitoring to evaluate progress.

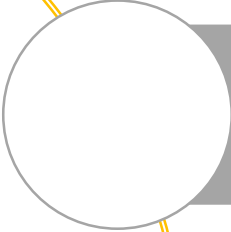


Support with Planning

- It is important to help students understand the need for multiple plans to achieve the same goal.
- It is important to consider other skills that we may need to teach students in order to achieve their goal.
- For example, let's consider the following example scenarios:
 - Student A has a goal to be nominated as “student of the month.”
 - Student B has a goal to make the basketball team.



Support with Inhibition



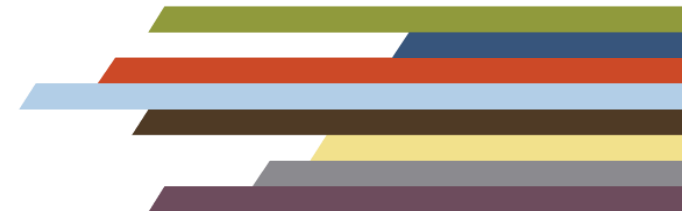
Educators and providers have a tendency to let students know what to do after a problem arises.



Instead, we want to be proactive in teaching and helping students to practice what is expected.

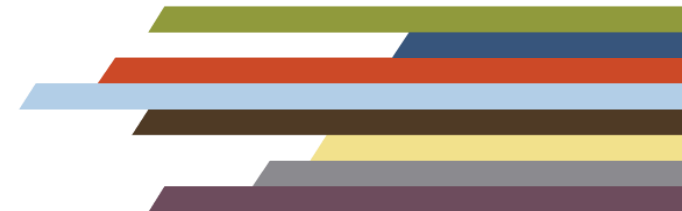


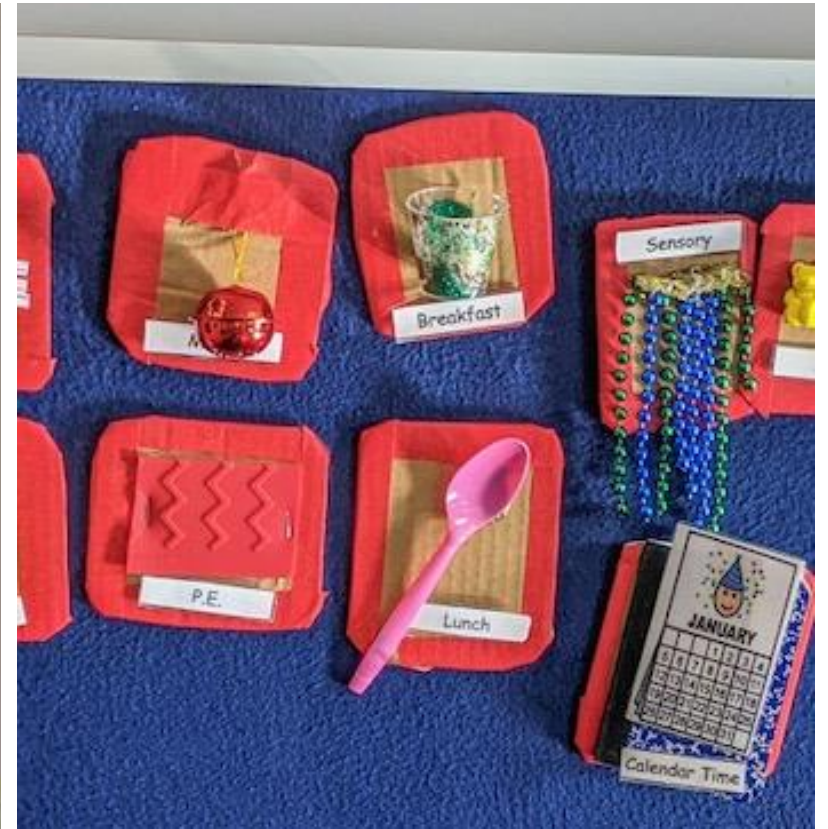
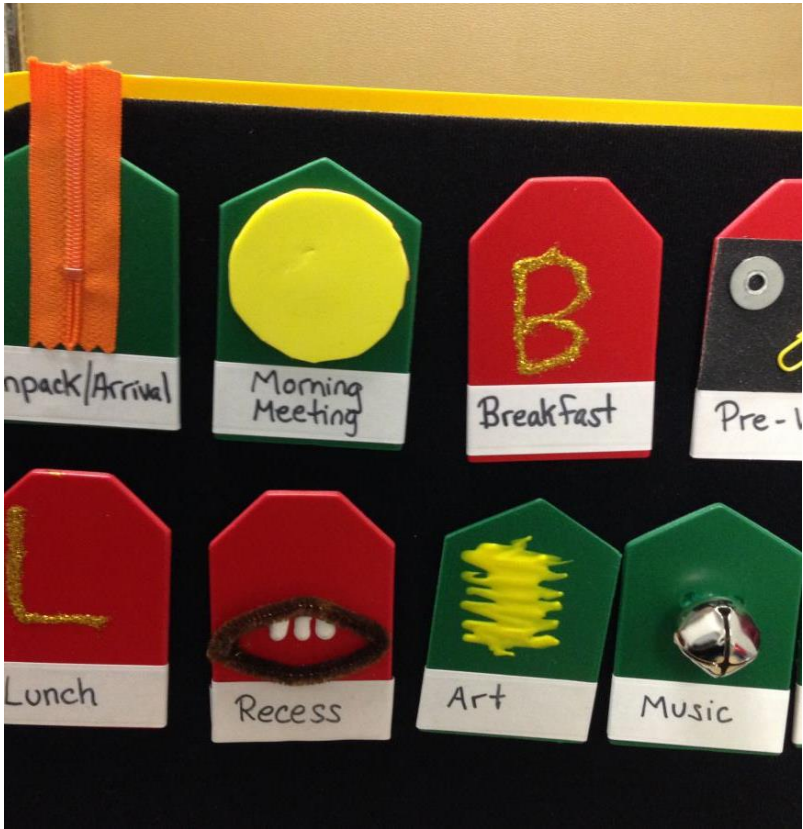
Set up role play so the student has the opportunity to practice when the stakes are lower.



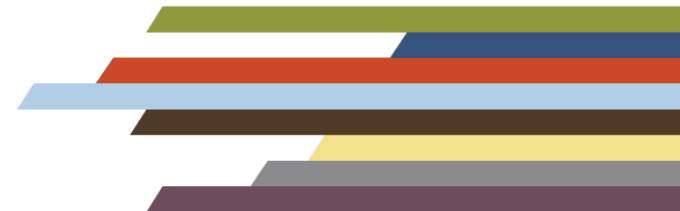
Support with Inhibition

- It is important to think through:
 - What rules are absolutely necessary for the student to follow and what is allowable.
 - What environmental changes can be made to support the student.
- For example, let's consider the following students:
 - Student A tends to get out of her seat and walk around or fidget in their chair.
 - Student B talks to peers while their teacher is talking.



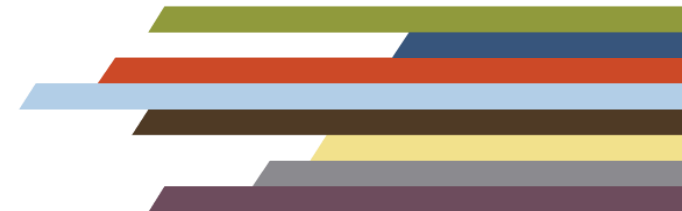


Visual Supports Can Help Remind Students What They Should Do



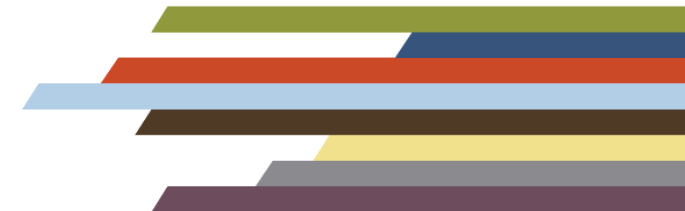
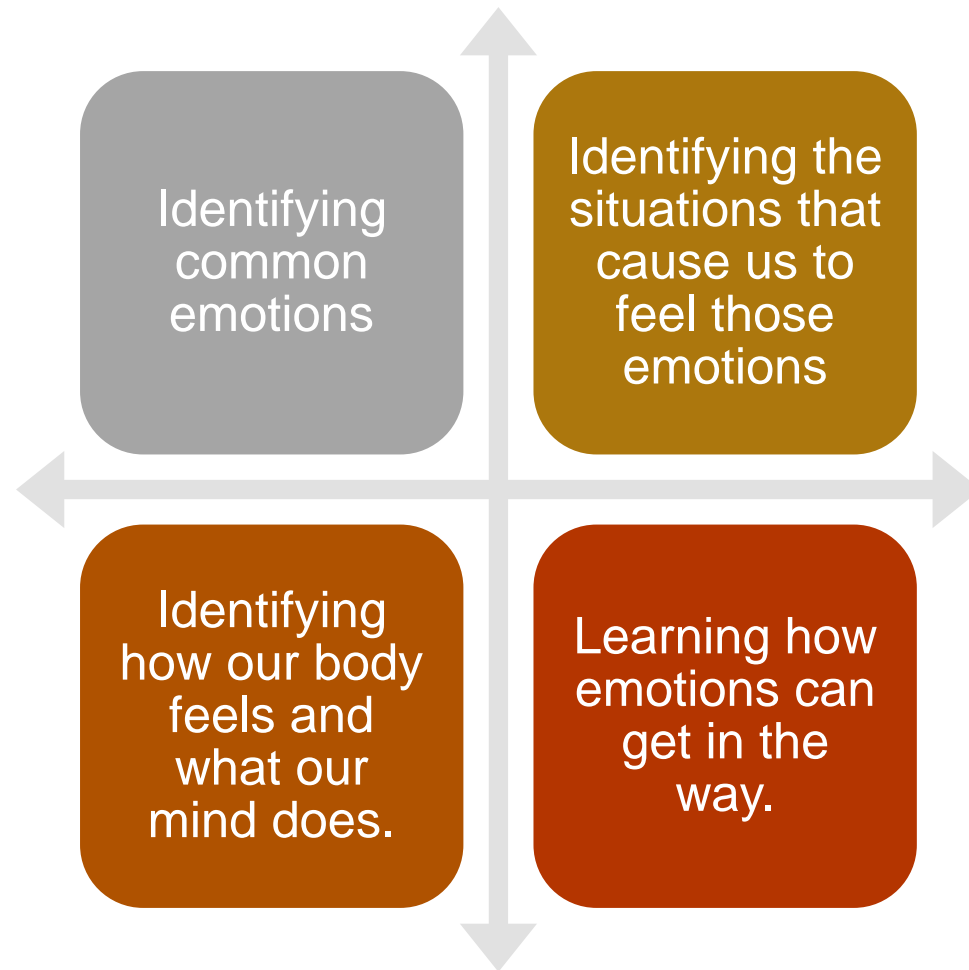
Support with Emotion Regulation

- Supporting emotion regulation means teaching strategies that help students manage big emotions.
- We all develop strategies over the course of our life to regulate our emotions
- It is important to:
 - Get student buy-in for these strategies
 - Use consistent terminology
 - Practice



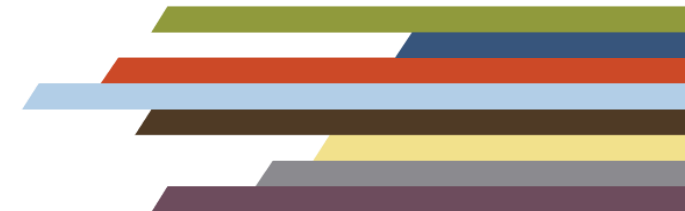
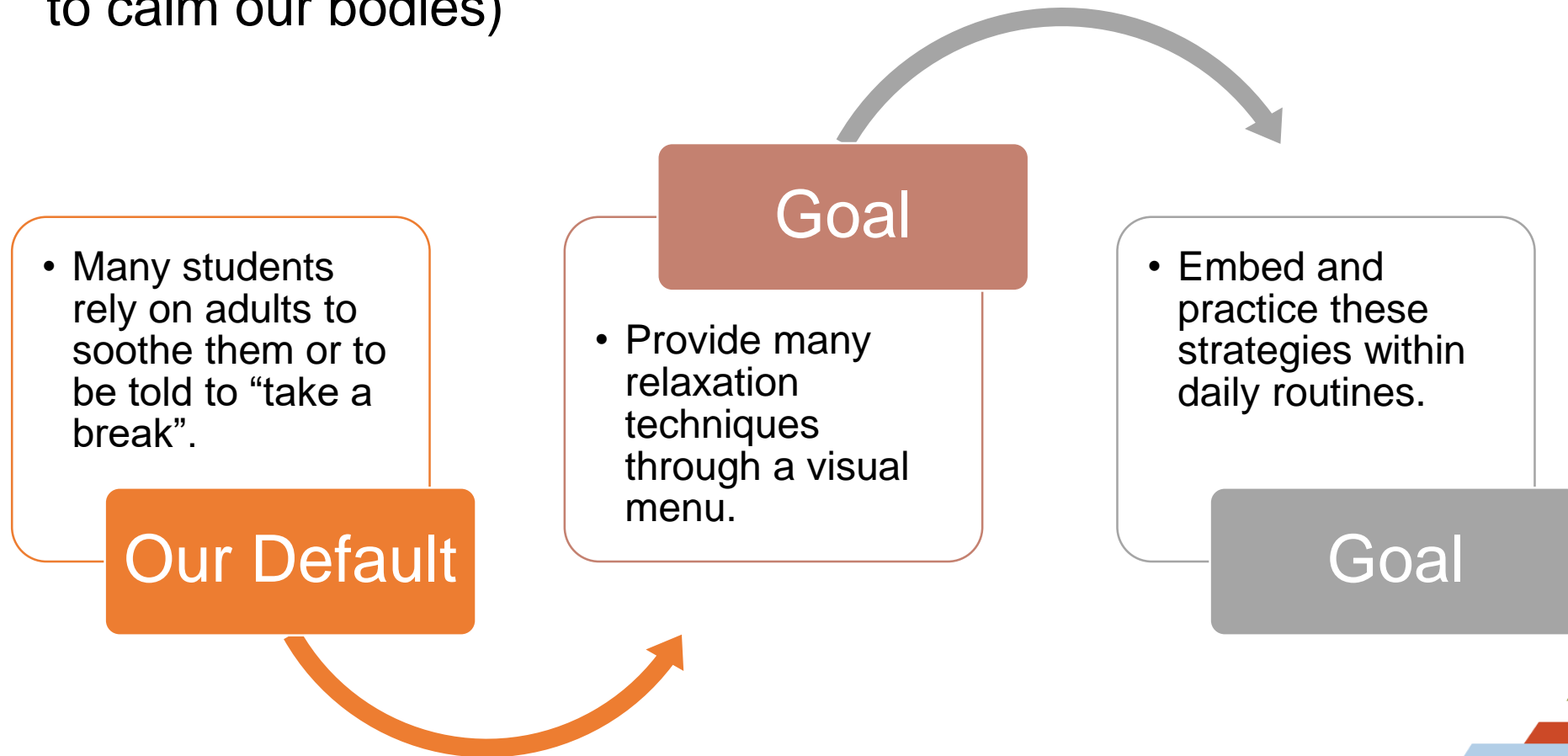
Emotion Regulation: Psychoeducation

Definition: Building foundational emotion knowledge



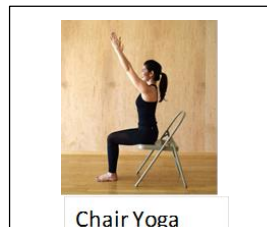
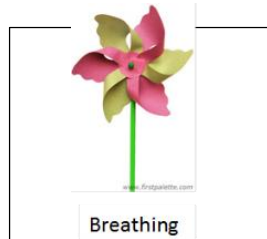
Emotion Regulation: Relaxation

- Relaxation strategies help to prevent and reduce big emotions (i.e., they help to calm our bodies)

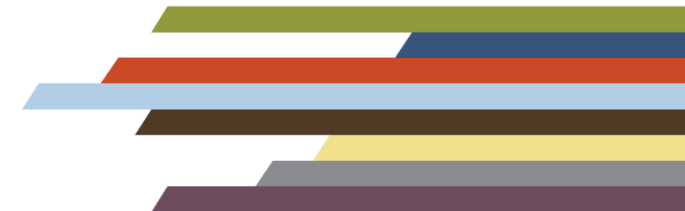


Example of Relaxation Visual Supports

Choose 1:



Calm My Body:



Emotion Regulation: Cognitive Strategies

- Strategies that help students to manage negative or worrisome thoughts



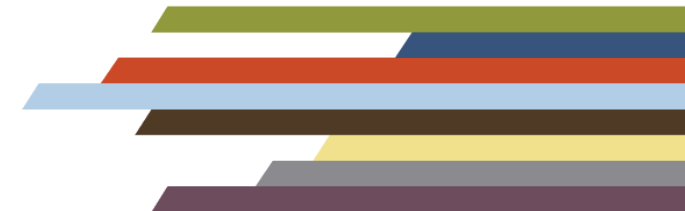
Pay attention to negative self talk, perseverative questions, and reassurance seeking



Focus on replacement not identification and challenge of negative cognitions

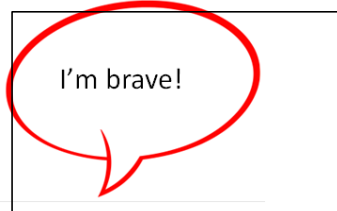


Use repetitive helpful thoughts designed to reinforce self competence

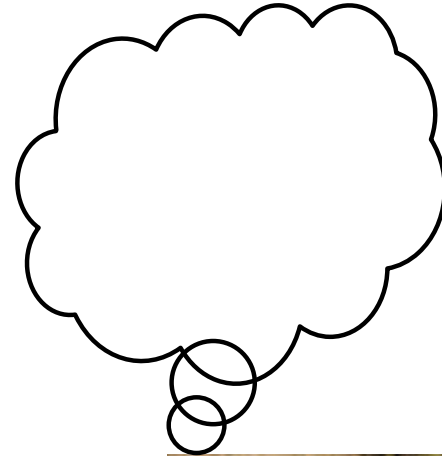


Example of Visual Support for Helpful Thoughts

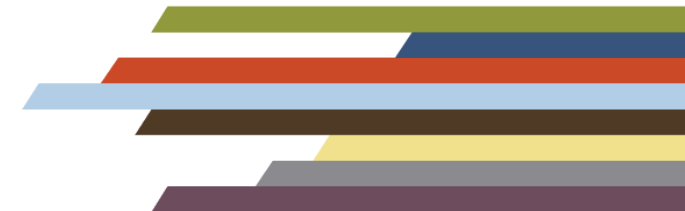
Choose 1



Calm My Mind

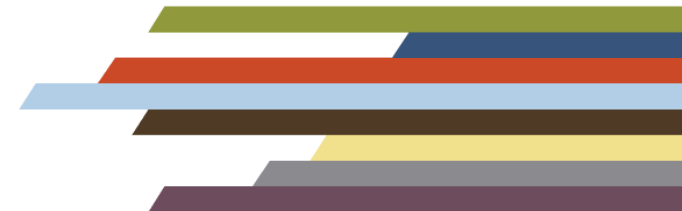


(Reaven et al., 2021)



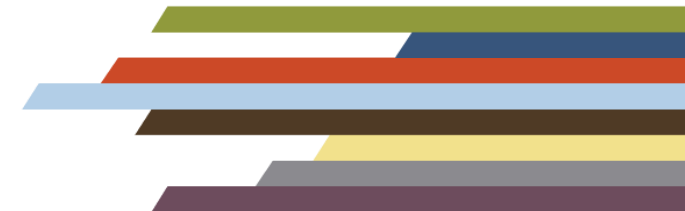
Polling Questions

1. For me, the executive functioning strategy that I am most confident with:
2. For me, the executive functioning strategy that I feel least confident with is:



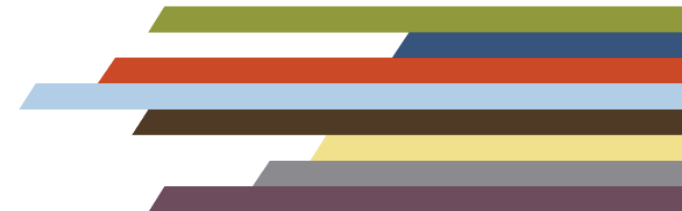
Case Study 1

Darnell is in the fifth grade. Darnell has autism and participates in General Education. He does well, but he does not like group work, and is quick to correct others if they don't follow the rules of the project. Peers are starting to make fun of him and call him the "rules police." Darnell does better during individual work. However, he needs support from his teacher to get started completing activities and reminders to stay on task. Without this support, Darnell will sit and stare at his work without starting. On the playground, Darnell is sometimes observed not responding to his peers when they talk to him and often joining in conversations in an off-topic way. His teachers are wondering which of his challenges are related to executive functioning and which may be related to autism.



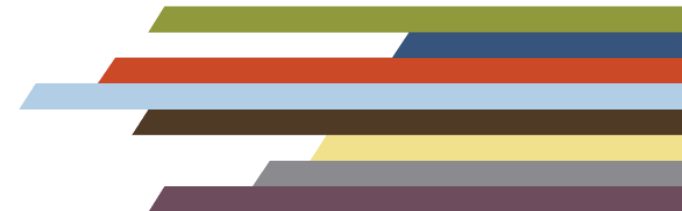
Questions for Case Study 1

1. What executive functioning differences does Darnell have?
2. What strategies might you consider to support Darnell's executive functioning?
3. What other factors are you considering when deciding how to support Darnell?



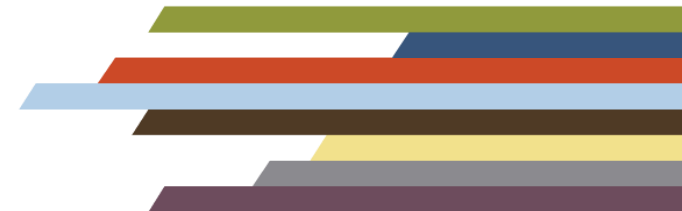
Case Study 2

Sarah is in 10th grade and has an Individualized Education Plan with an Autism designation. Sarah has borderline cognitive skills and is learning at a fifth-grade level. She has a few friends but is often observed to interrupt them, say things that appear off topic, or talks persistently about fashion design. Sarah is sensitive to loud noises, including fire drills, the intercom, and loud laughter. Sarah often is late to class, loses her belongings, and/or forgets to complete and turn in assignments. Sarah is easily annoyed and upset when she is reprimanded or learns of her forgetfulness. In these situations, she puts her head on the desk, cries, or tries to walk out of the classroom. Her teachers are wondering whether she may have executive functioning differences in addition to her learning challenges.



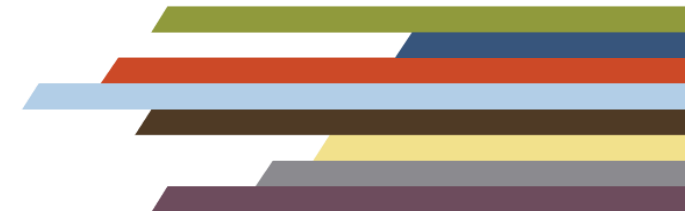
Questions for Case Study 2

1. What executive functioning differences does Sarah have?
2. What strategies might you consider to support Sarah's executive functioning?
3. What other factors are you considering when deciding how to support Sarah?



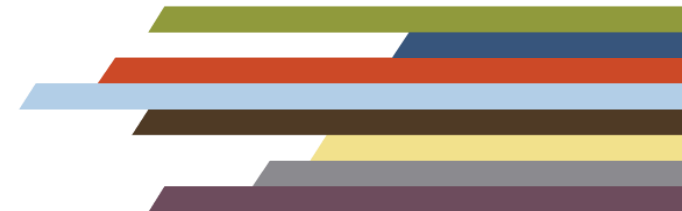
Additional Resources

- American Association for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD): <https://www.aaid.org/>
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD): <https://www.aucd.org/template/index.cfm>
- Unstuck and On Target: <https://www.unstuckandontarget.com/>
- Mental Health Technology Transfer Center: <https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mhttc-network-coordinating-office/national-school-mental-health-implementation-guidance>
- National Center for School Mental Health: <http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/>



Polling Questions

1. What are mental health topics that you would like more information on?
2. For the topics you identify, how would you want information presented?



Thank you!

Southeast MHTTC:

<https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/southeast-mhttc/home>

Contact:

Katherine.e.pickard@emory.edu

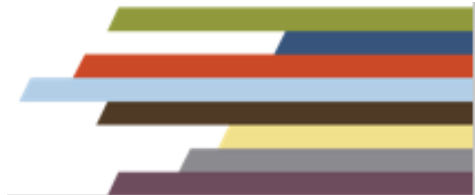
Website:

<https://www.marcus.org/autism-research/autism-research-team/katherine-pickard>



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Evaluation

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<https://ttc-gpra.org/P?s=919868>

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