



Southeast (HHS Region 4)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

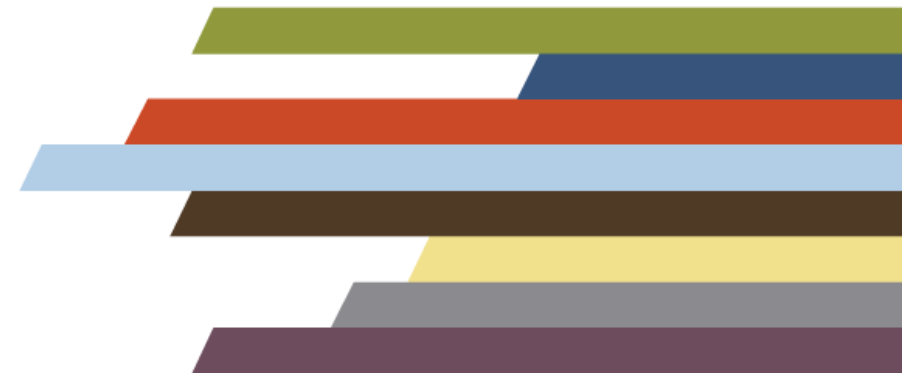
Supporting the Executive Function of Autistic Students in the Classroom: Your Questions Answered

Katherine Pickard, PhD

Emory University School of Medicine

November 16, 2023

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



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).



Southeast (HHS Region 4)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

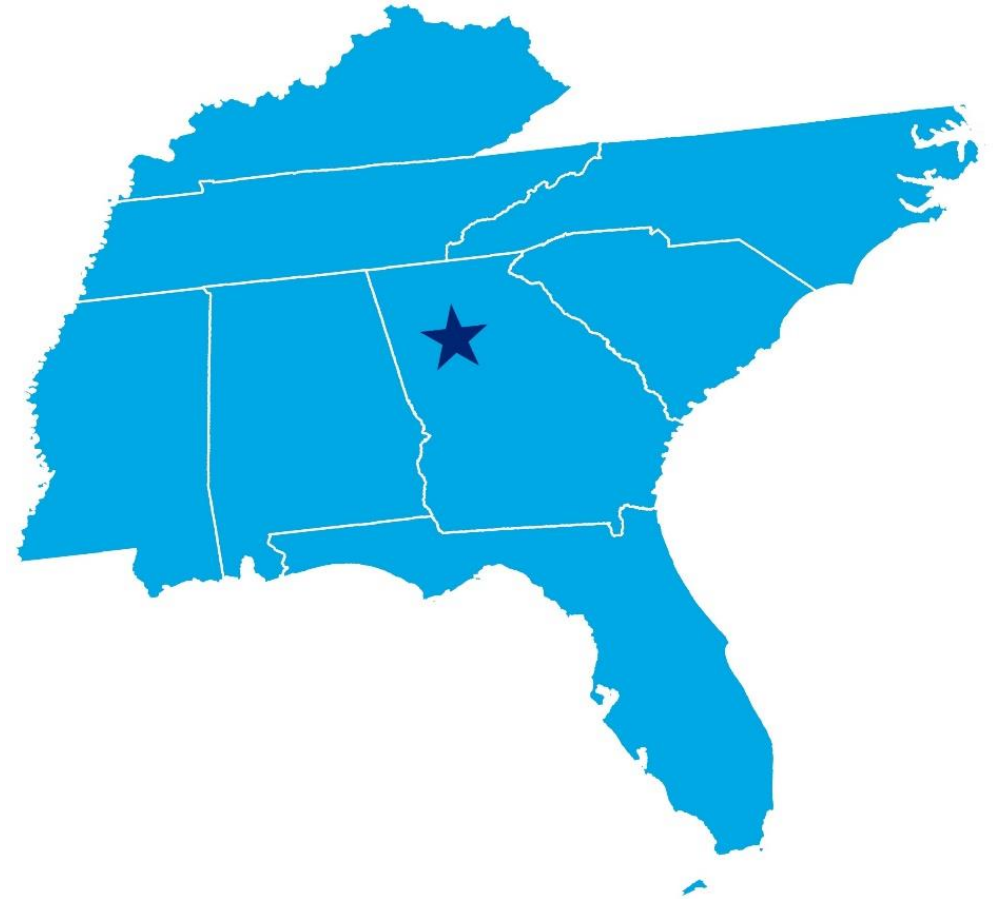
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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.

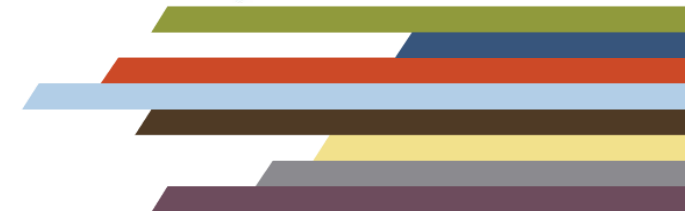
Our Vision: Widespread access to evidence-based mental health services for those in need.

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



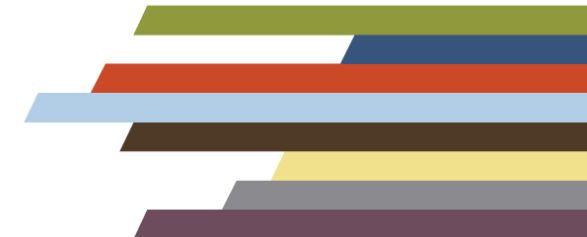
Katherine Pickard, PhD

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

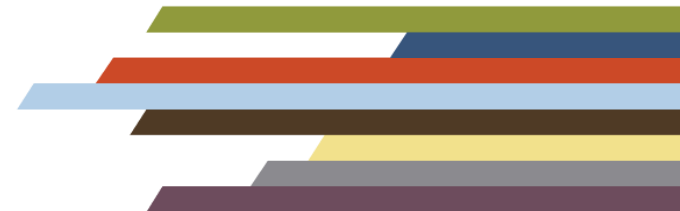
Within our products on autism, we use *identity first* language.

We have made this decision:

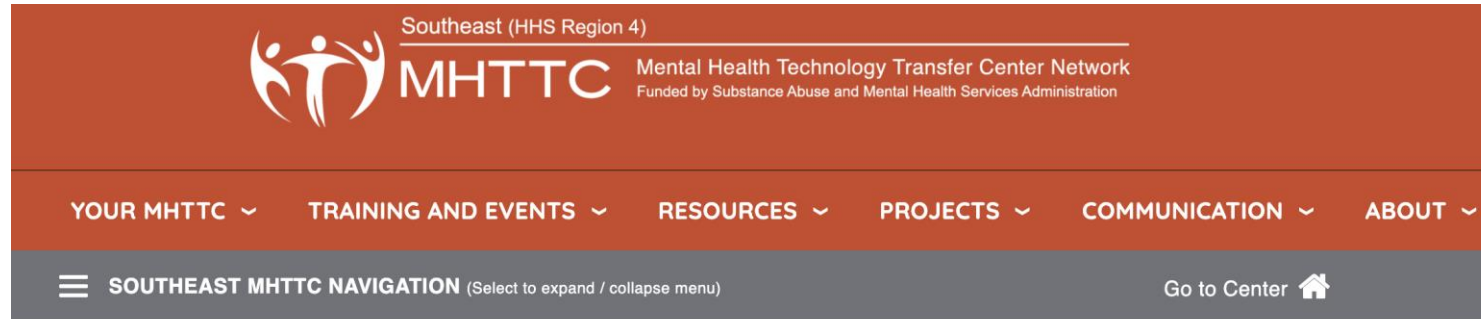
- In response to the neurodiversity movement.
- Based on the preference of many autistic adults.
- In order to avoid the use of ableist language.

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

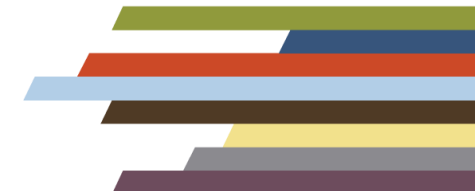
Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2021). Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 18-29. Link: <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/aut.2020.0014>



Toolkit for Supporting the Mental Health of Autistic Students



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

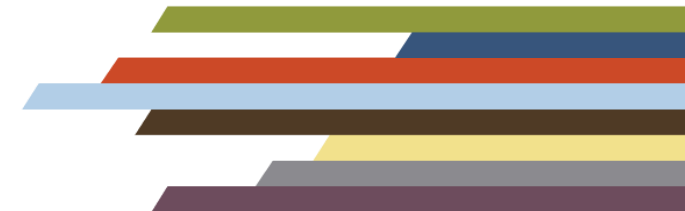


Office Hours Objectives

The second office hour is devoted to evidence-based approaches that can be used to support the executive function of autistic students.

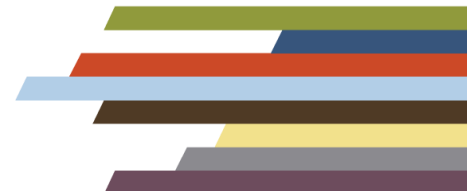
By the end of the learning sessions, participants will be able to:

1. Describe evidence-based approaches and strategies to support executive functioning in autistic students.
2. Identify strategies to support the executive functioning of autistic students within a case study of an elementary student and high school student.



Polling Questions

1. What is your professional role?
2. How much of your professional time do you spend working with autistic students?
3. How much of your professional time do you spend supporting the behavior and/or mental health of autistic students?
4. What is your familiarity with executive functioning differences in autistic students?

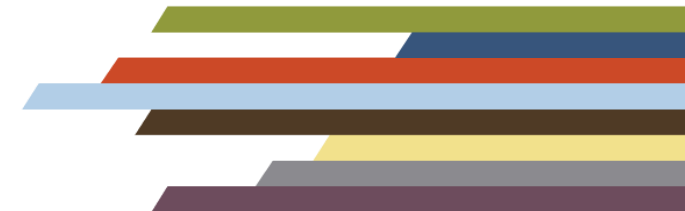


Prevalence of Mental Health Challenges in Autistic Individuals

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

PRE-COVID!

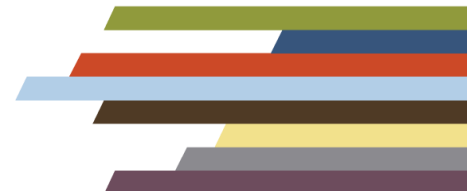
(Ghandour et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2019)



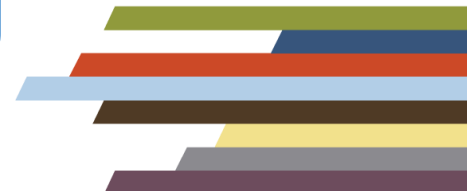
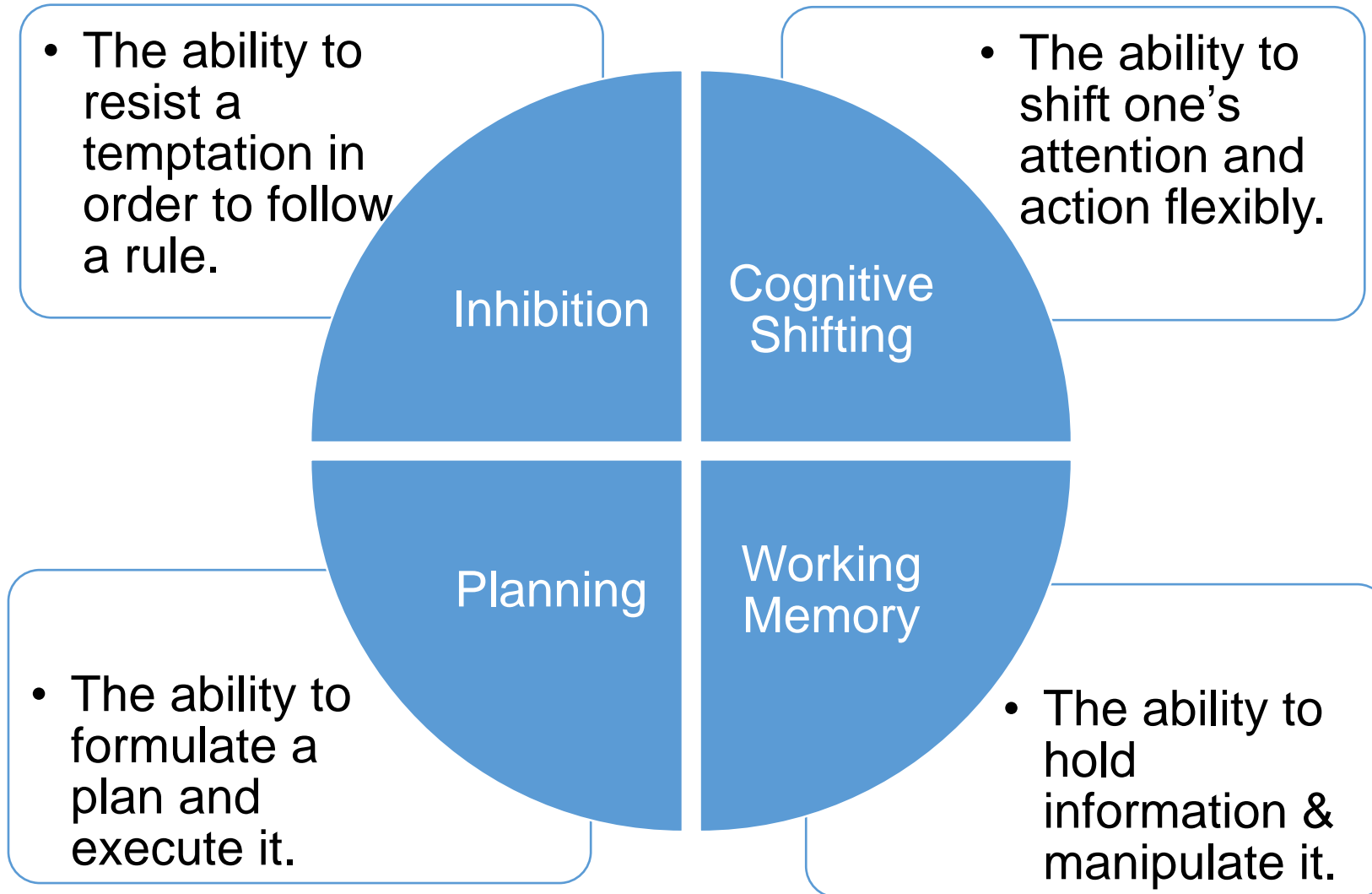
Executive Functioning: What it is

- 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.

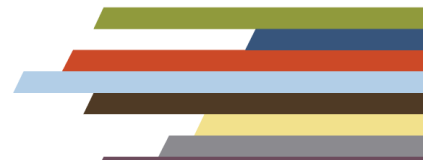
Theory of Mind

Adaptive Skills

School Readiness

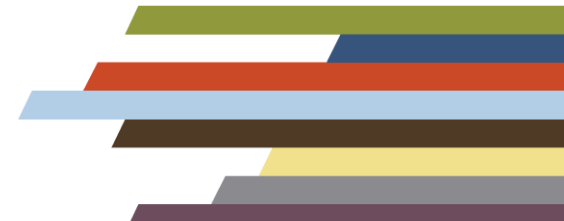
Mental Health

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



Many Programs that Teach Executive Function Are Skills-Based

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



Support with Flexibility

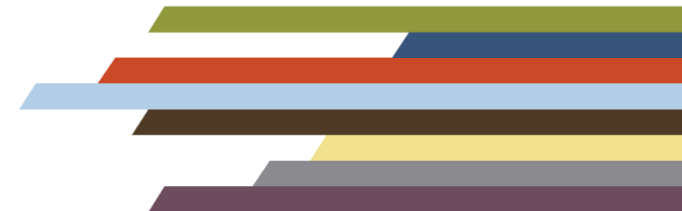
Teach and apply terminology that helps students consider multiple perspectives and handle change.

Plan A and Plan B

Compromise

Big Deal and Little Deal

Expecting the Unexpected



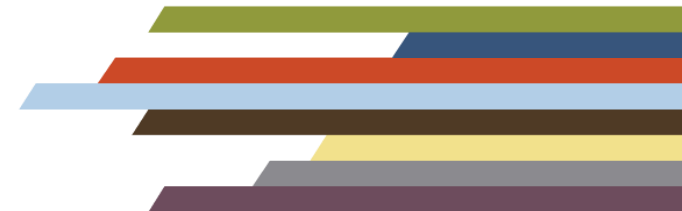
Support with Flexibility

When teaching flexibility, we must consider:

What is in it for the student?

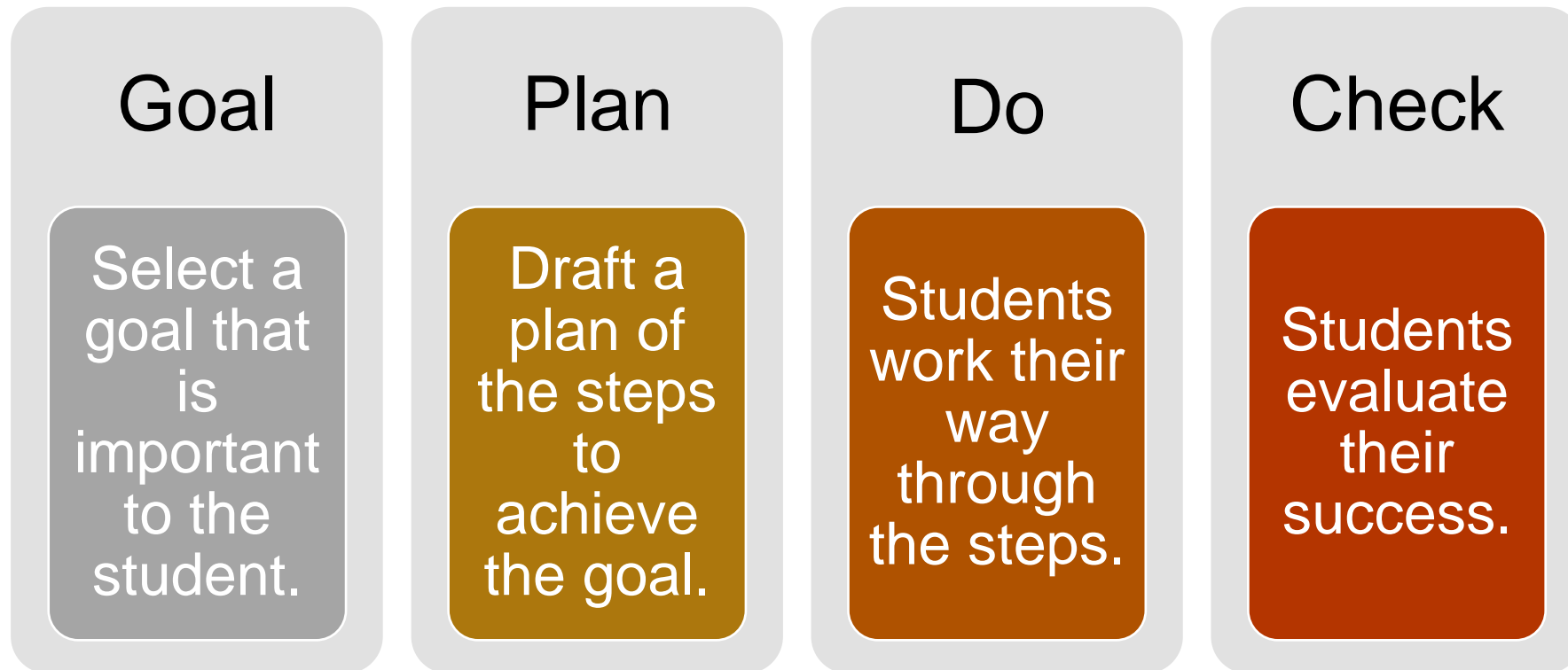
What are the benefits of being inflexible?

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.

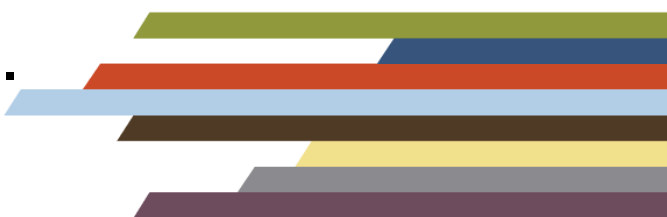


Support with Planning

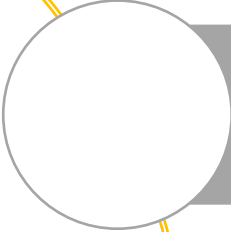
It is important to help students understand the need for multiple plans to achieve the same goal.

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



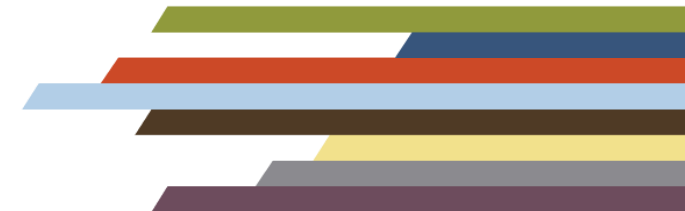
Educators and providers have a tendency to let students know what to do after a problem arises.



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.



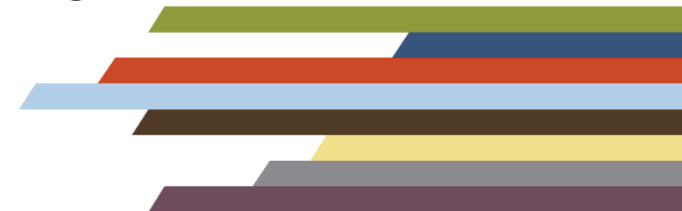
Support with Inhibition

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.



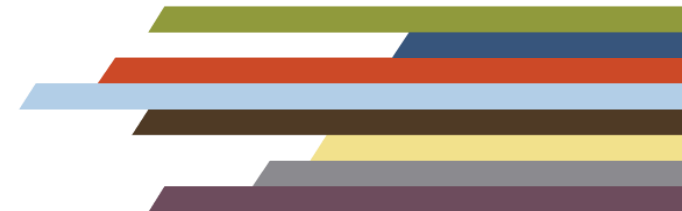
Support with Emotion Regulation

Supporting emotion regulation means teaching strategies that help students manage big emotions.

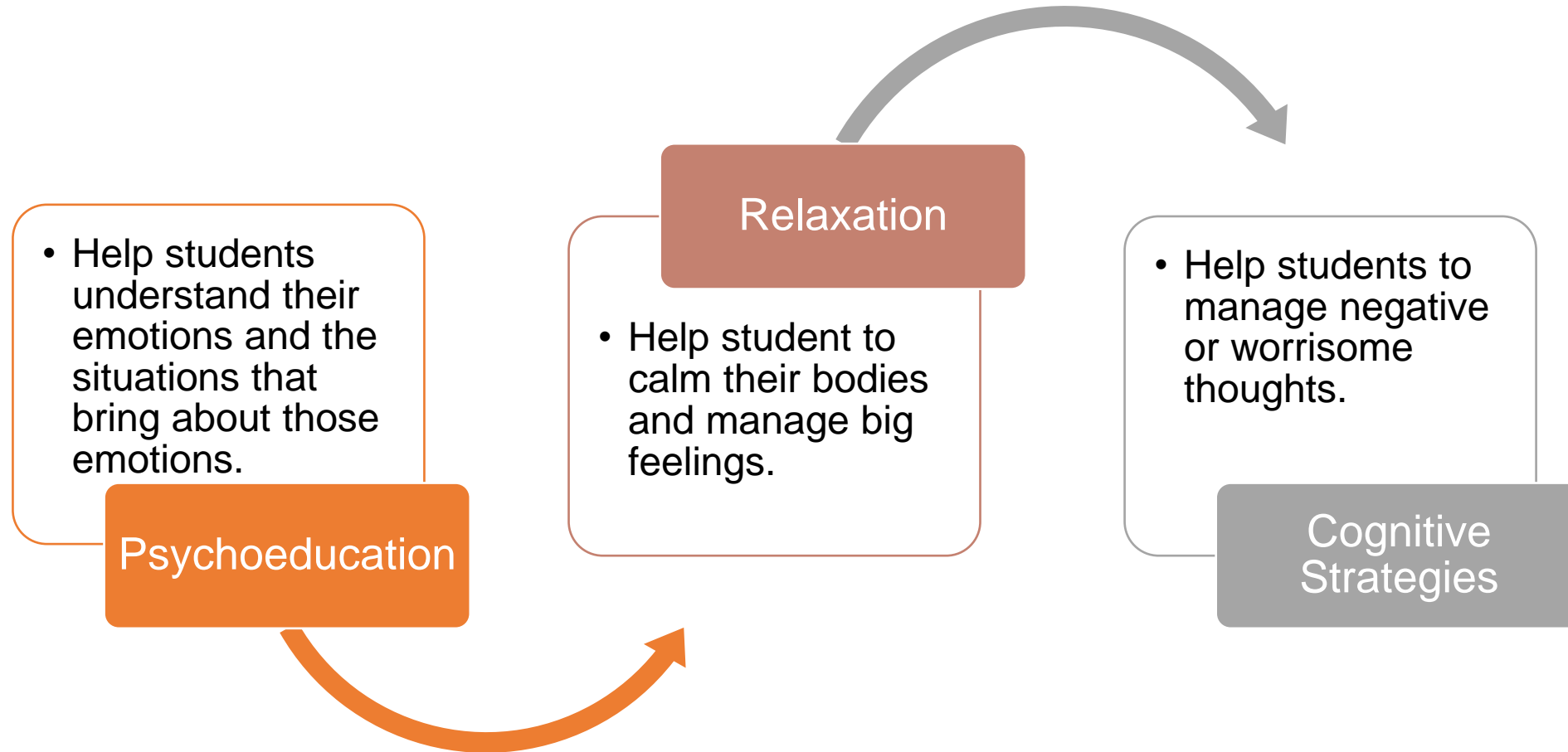
We all develop strategies over the course of our life to regulate our emotions

It is important to:

- Get student buy-in for these strategies
- Use consistent terminology
- Practice

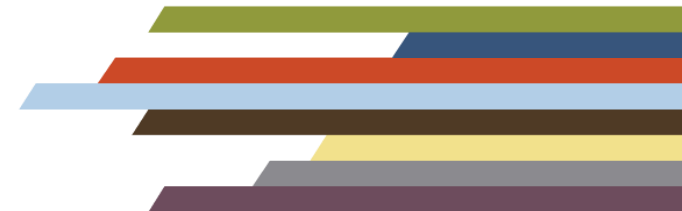


Emotion Regulation: Steps



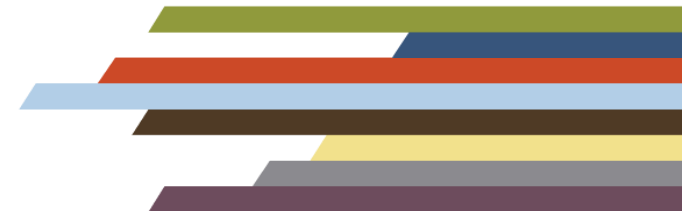
Case Study 1

William is in the fifth grade. William has autism and participates in General Education. William is a motivated student who does well, but he does not like group work, and is quick to correct his peers if they don't follow the rules of the project. Peers are starting to make fun of him and call him the "rules police." William 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, William will sit and stare at his work without starting. On the playground, William becomes upset when his peers break the rules during tag. In these instances, William is quick to hit and push his peers.



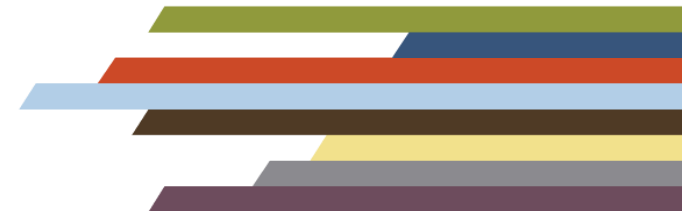
Questions for Case Study 1

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



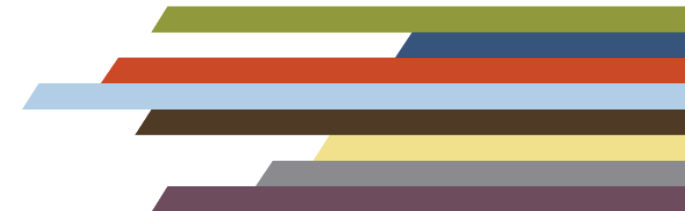
Case Study 2

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.

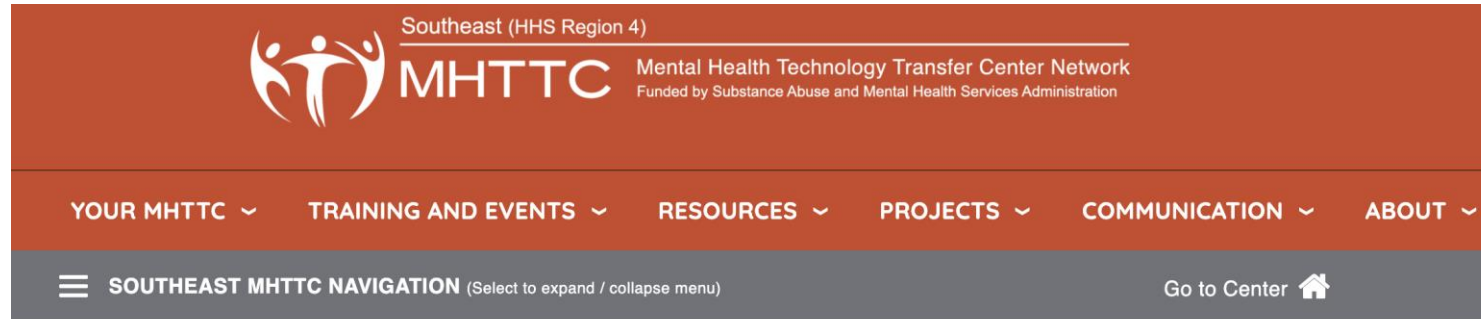


Questions for Case Study 2

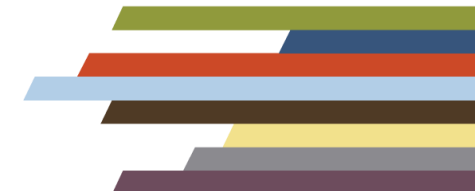
1. What executive functioning differences does Sarah have?
2. What strategies might you consider to support Sarah's executive functioning?
3. What other factors are you considering when deciding how to support Sarah?



Toolkit for Supporting the Mental Health of Autistic Students

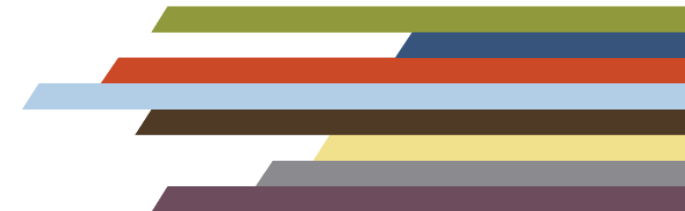


Toolkit for Supporting the Mental Health of Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



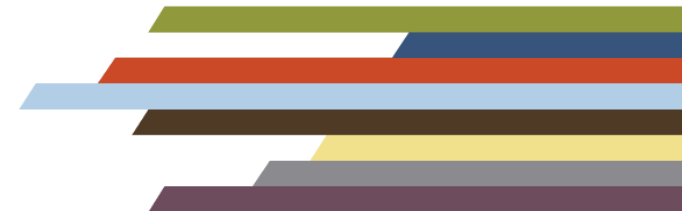
Additional Resources

- American Association for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD): <https://www.aidd.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>



Keep in touch with us!

Visit our website to view:

- Upcoming events
- Products and resources

[Southeast MHTTC](#)

Sign up for our listserv:

<https://southeastmhttc.org/listserv/>

Follow us on social media:

- Facebook:
- Twitter: @SE_MHTTC

<https://www.facebook.com/semhttcriv/>

<https://twitter.com/SoutheastMHTTC>



References

- Antshel, K. M., & Russo, N. (2019). Autism spectrum disorders and ADHD: Overlapping phenomenology, diagnostic issues, and treatment considerations. *Current psychiatry reports*, 21(5), 1-11.
- Craig, F., Margari, F., Legrottaglie, A. R., Palumbi, R., De Giambattista, C., & Margari, L. (2016). A review of executive function deficits in autism spectrum disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Neuropsychiatric disease and treatment*, 12, 1191.
- Demetriou, E. A., DeMayo, M. M., & Guastella, A. J. (2019). Executive function in autism spectrum disorder: history, theoretical models, empirical findings, and potential as an endophenotype. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 10, 753.
- Faja, S., Clarkson, T., Gilbert, R., Vaidyanathan, A., Greco, G., Rueda, M. R., ... & Driscoll, K. (2022). A preliminary randomized, controlled trial of executive function training for children with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism*, 26(2), 346-360
- Ghandour, R. M., Sherman, L. J., Vladutiu, C. J., Ali, M. M., Lynch, S. E., Bitsko, R. H., & Blumberg, S. J. (2019). Prevalence and treatment of depression, anxiety, and conduct problems in US children. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 206, 256-267.
- Gioia, G. A., Isquith, P. K., Guy, S. C., & Kenworthy, L. (2000). Test review behavior rating inventory of executive function. *Child Neuropsychology*, 6(3), 235-238.
- Happe, F., Booth, R., Charlton, R., & Hughes, C. (2006). Executive function deficits in autism spectrum disorders and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: examining profiles across domains and ages. *Brain and Cognition*, 61(1), 25–39.
- Hollocks, M. J., Lerh, J. W., Magiati, I., Meiser-Stedman, R., & Brugha, T. S. (2019). Anxiety and depression in adults with autism spectrum disorder: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Medicine*, 49(4), 559-572.
- Hossain, M. M., Khan, N., Sultana, A., Ma, P., McKyer, E. L. J., Ahmed, H. U., & Purohit, N. (2020). Prevalence of comorbid psychiatric disorders among people with autism spectrum disorder: An umbrella review of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. *Psychiatry Research*, 287, 112922.
- Pellicano, E. (2012). The development of executive function in autism. *Autism research and treatment*, 2012.

