

## Strategies to Support Executive Function in Autistic Students: Inhibition



When supporting autistic students with executive function difficulties, it is important to teach new skills while also creating an environment that supports neurodiverse learning.<sup>1</sup> This infographic focuses on strategies to support ***inhibition*** — which is a component of executive function — to promote friendships, independence, & wellbeing.

**Inhibition is the ability to stop an automatic response in order to follow a rule or achieve a goal.<sup>2</sup>**

Educators and providers tend to let students know what to do differently *after* they have “broken a rule” (e.g., left their seat, forgotten to raise their hand, etc.). Instead, it is important to proactively support students to learn, practice, and be recognized for trying to follow classroom norms.

Examples of strategies to do this include:



Teach the student the behavior or skill you want them to use (e.g., raising their hand) and have them practice it one-on-one or in a smaller group.



Employ visual supports to remind the student to raise their hand or to use another skill you would like to see.



Acknowledge and reward the student for using the skill to make it more likely they will do it again.<sup>3</sup>

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When teaching inhibition, it is important to ensure that students have the appropriate supports and accommodations to meet their goals.

For example, it may be important to consider the following:

Think about what rules are necessary for the student to follow and what rules are flexible. For example, do students always need to stay seated or raise their hand?



Consider environmental and sensory changes that could support the student. For example, can they have fidget toys, request breaks to move around, or sit in a spot where they have better access to visual or sensory supports?<sup>4</sup>

Understand why a student may be having a difficult time and whether additional mental health supports may be warranted (e.g., to teach emotion regulation strategies or mindfulness so that the student does not become easily frustrated).<sup>5</sup>



**For more information on executive function and its relationship to mental health, you can view these related Southeast MHTTC resources!**

*"Understanding executive functioning differences among autistic students with & without co-occurring ADHD": [bit.ly/3MKbdUs](https://bit.ly/3MKbdUs)*

*"Evidence-based approaches to support the executive functioning of autistic students": [bit.ly/3pLl6lw](https://bit.ly/3pLl6lw)*

*"Strategies to Support Executive Function in Autistic Students": [bit.ly/43FUUNr](https://bit.ly/43FUUNr)*

### References

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