



# Executive Functioning Skills

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# What is Executive Functioning (EF)?

- **Mental processes** that enable us to:
  - Plan, organize, prioritize
  - Focus attention
  - Remember instructions
  - Juggle multiple tasks successfully.



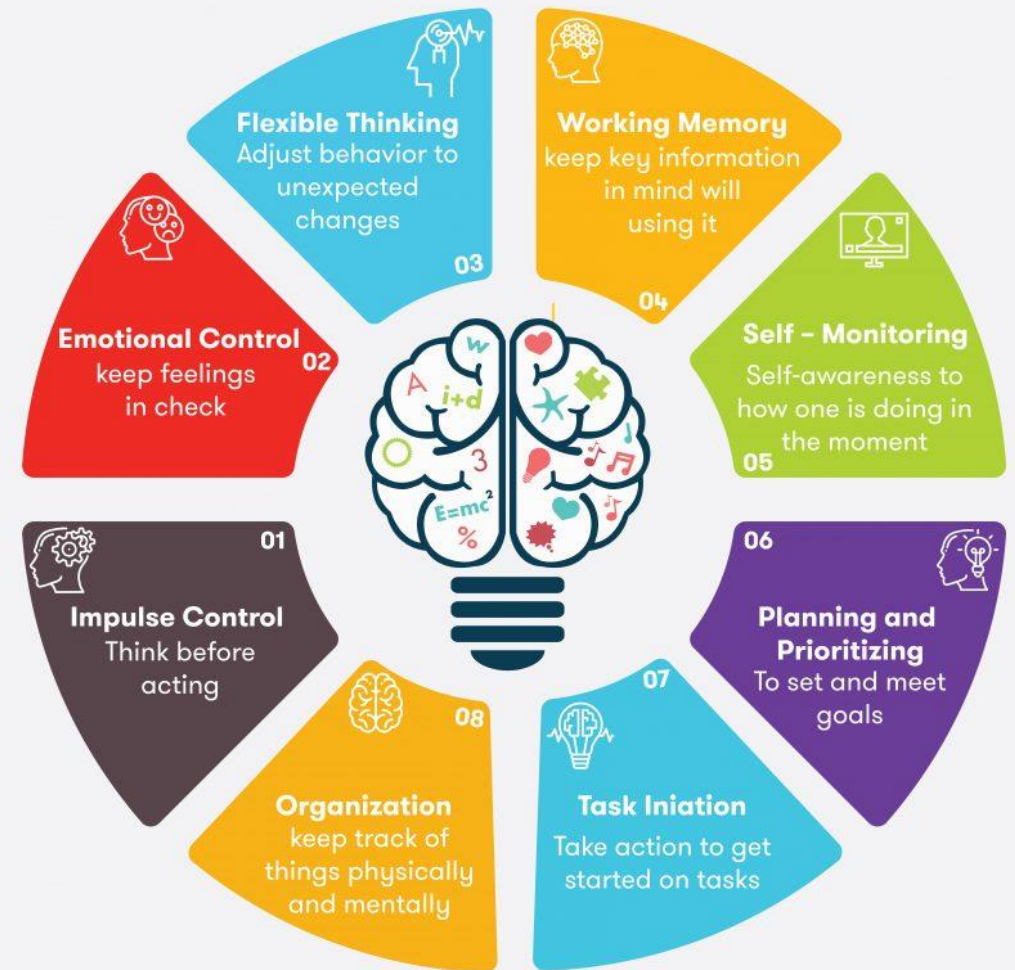
# What part of the brain is executive functioning?

- The executive system involves **the prefrontal cortex, basal ganglia and thalamus.**
- The frontal lobes are the last areas of the brain to fully develop.
- This area of the brain was evolutionarily late to appear and is much larger in human beings than in our closest nonhuman primate relatives.

# EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

## Eight EF Skills

- The fundamental skills related to executive function include:
  - **Flexible Thinking**
  - **Working Memory**
  - **Self- Monitoring**
  - **Planning & Prioritizing**
  - **Task Initiation**
  - **Organization**
  - **Impulse control**
  - **Emotional Control**



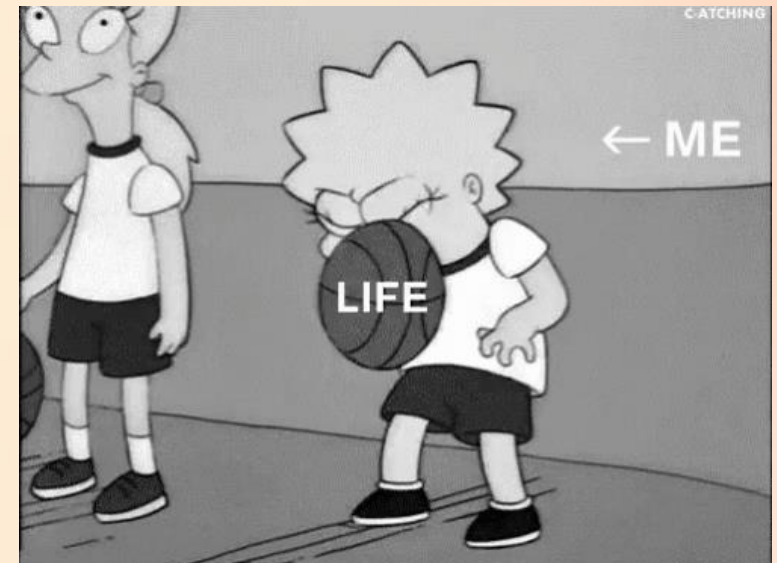
# Three levels of EF skills

- Executive function is a group of important mental skills.
- These skills fall under three areas of executive function.
  - The three areas of executive function are:
    1. **working memory**
    2. **flexible thinking**
    3. **inhibitory control (IC)**
  - The **practice of actively suppressing attention and automatic responses to something**, such as ignoring irrelevant stimuli, ignoring a distraction, stopping oneself from blurting out, or controlling a habitual response



# Signs of struggling with EF Skills

- Have trouble starting and/or completing tasks
- Have difficulty prioritizing tasks
- Forget what they just heard or read
- Have trouble following directions or a sequence of steps
- Panic when rules or routines change
- Have trouble switching focus from one task to another
- Get overly emotional and fixate on things
- Have trouble organizing their thoughts
- Have trouble keeping track of their belongings
- Have trouble managing their time



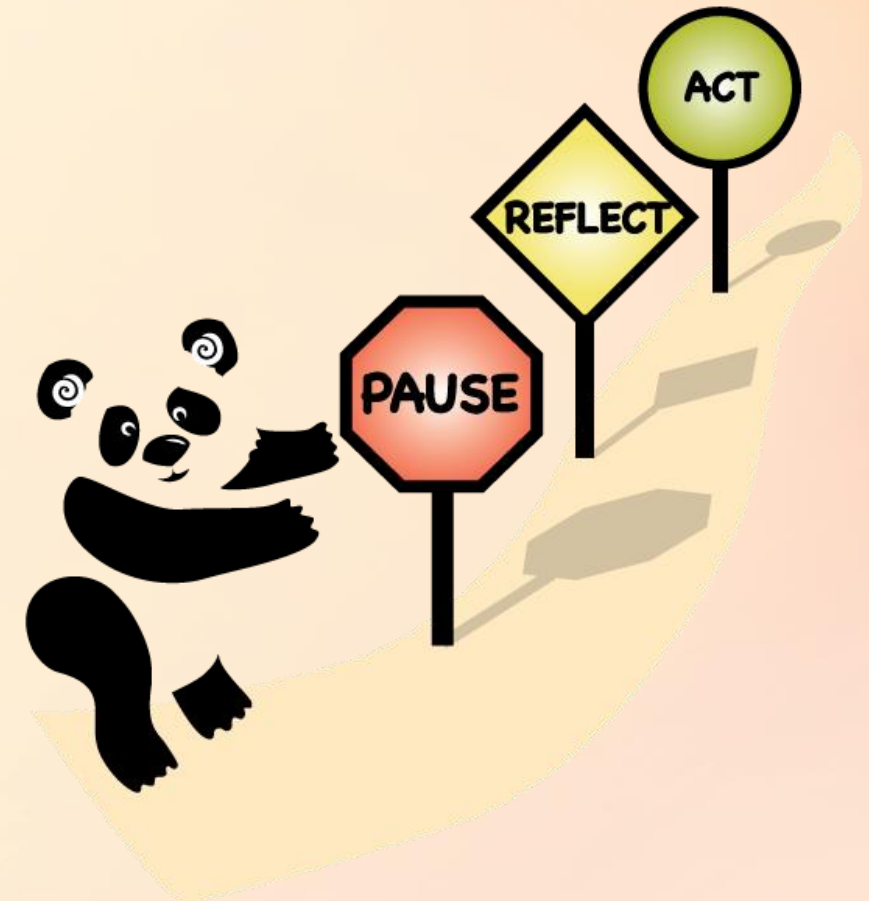
# Who may struggle with EF skills?

- People who have:
- ADHD
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Autism
- And many other disorders



# Helping those with EF issues: Impulse Control

- What it means: Impulse control helps a student think before acting.
- How it looks: Individuals with weak impulse control might blurt out inappropriate things. They're also more likely to engage in risky behavior.
- Strategy to improve: Provide individuals with a:
  - “Wait 5” strategy—counting to five before verbally responding to give input in a conversation at work/school
  - “Wait 3” in personal conversations to think before speaking in pairs or groups.





# Helping those with EF issues: Emotional Control



- What it means: Emotional control helps individuals keep their feelings in check.
- How it looks: Individuals with weak emotional control often overreact. They can have trouble dealing with criticism and regrouping when things go wrong.
- Strategy to improve: Help individuals see the relationship between thoughts and feelings.
  - Reframe thoughts
  - Deep breathing to calm down and clear mind to think logically
  - Create a visual to show what they think/feel.

# Helping those with EF issues: Flexible Thinking

- What it means: Flexible thinking allows individuals to adjust to the unexpected.
- How it looks: Individuals with “rigid” thinking don’t “roll with the punches.” They might get frustrated if asked to think about something from a different angle.
- Strategy to improve: Create weekly journal prompts that require individuals to do exactly that—see things from multiple perspectives.
  - A person drops their laptop in front of their friends.
  - A coach screams at a player.
  - A shy student wins an award
  - Have the individual describe these situations from the multiple perspectives of different participants. This helps with perspective taking



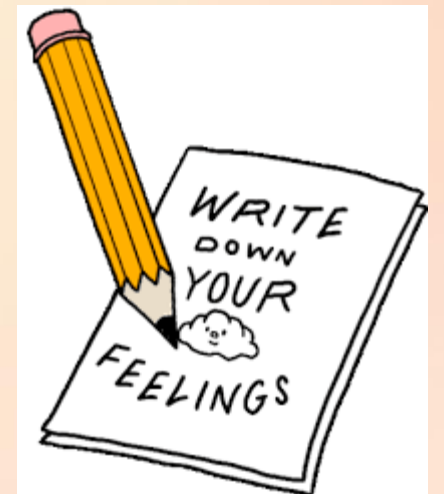
# Helping those with EF issues: Working Memory

- What it means: Working memory helps individuals keep key information in mind.
- How it looks: Individuals with weak working memory have trouble remembering directions—even if they've taken notes or you've repeated them several times.
- Strategy to improve: Use memory games or apps like Fit Brains Trainer or Lumosity.
  - Use an agenda to write things down and reference later
  - Use calendar apps and reminders to input important dates/deadlines



# Helping those with EF issues: Self Monitoring

- What it means: Self-monitoring allows individuals to evaluate how they're doing.
- How it looks: Individuals with weak self-monitoring skills may be surprised by a bad grade or negative feedback.
- Strategy to improve: 'Stop & look'—prompt the individual to do this so that so that they can intentionally:
  - Pause at any given moment
  - Assess what they're doing
  - Assess how they're feeling
  - Assess what their engagement level is
  - Assess whether or not they are making progress towards a personal goal.

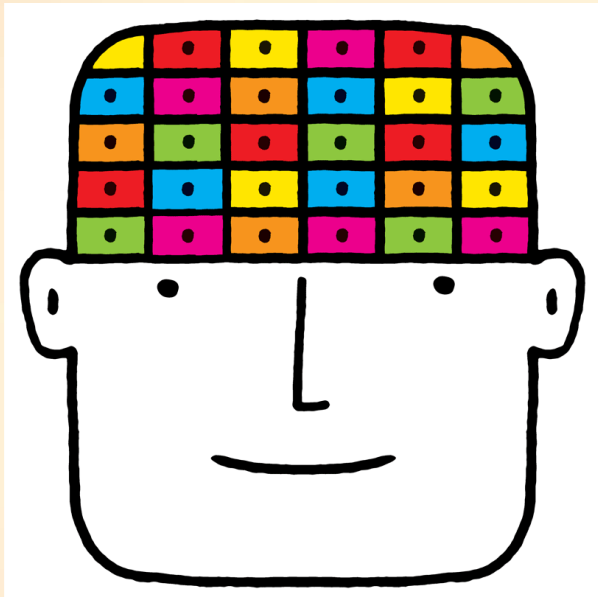


# Helping those with EF issues: Planning & Prioritizing

- What it means: Planning and prioritizing helps a person decide on a goal and a plan to meet it.
- How it looks: Individuals with weak planning and prioritizing skills may not know which parts of a project, conversation or task are most important.
- Strategy to improve: Have individuals create scenarios of the potential event or task.
- Have them map out how they could accomplish that goal. Rate most important to least important.
- Role-play (if possible), to ensure all outcomes are addressed. This helps with Emotional Control and Flexible Thinking as well).



# Helping those with EF issues: Organization



- What it means: Organization helps an individual keep track of things physically and mentally.
- How it looks: Individuals with weak organization skills can lose their train of thought.
- Strategy to improve: **Organizational apps**. Checklists. Planners.
- Different things work for different individuals.
  - Experiment, persist, and find what works to help individuals organize themselves.

Thank you!



Any Questions?