

The image features a white semi-circular shape at the top, set against a background of teal and blue. The text is centered within the white shape.

**BUILDING EXECUTIVE  
FUNCTIONING SKILLS**



# AGENDA

Introduction

What are Executive Functioning Skills?

Techniques to Strengthen Executive Functioning  
& Increase Efficiency/ Reduce Burnout

# EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Mental processes that help you carry  
and set out goals

Enable us to reason and think before  
acting, meet new challenges head-on  
and with flexibility, and stay focused  
and concentrate





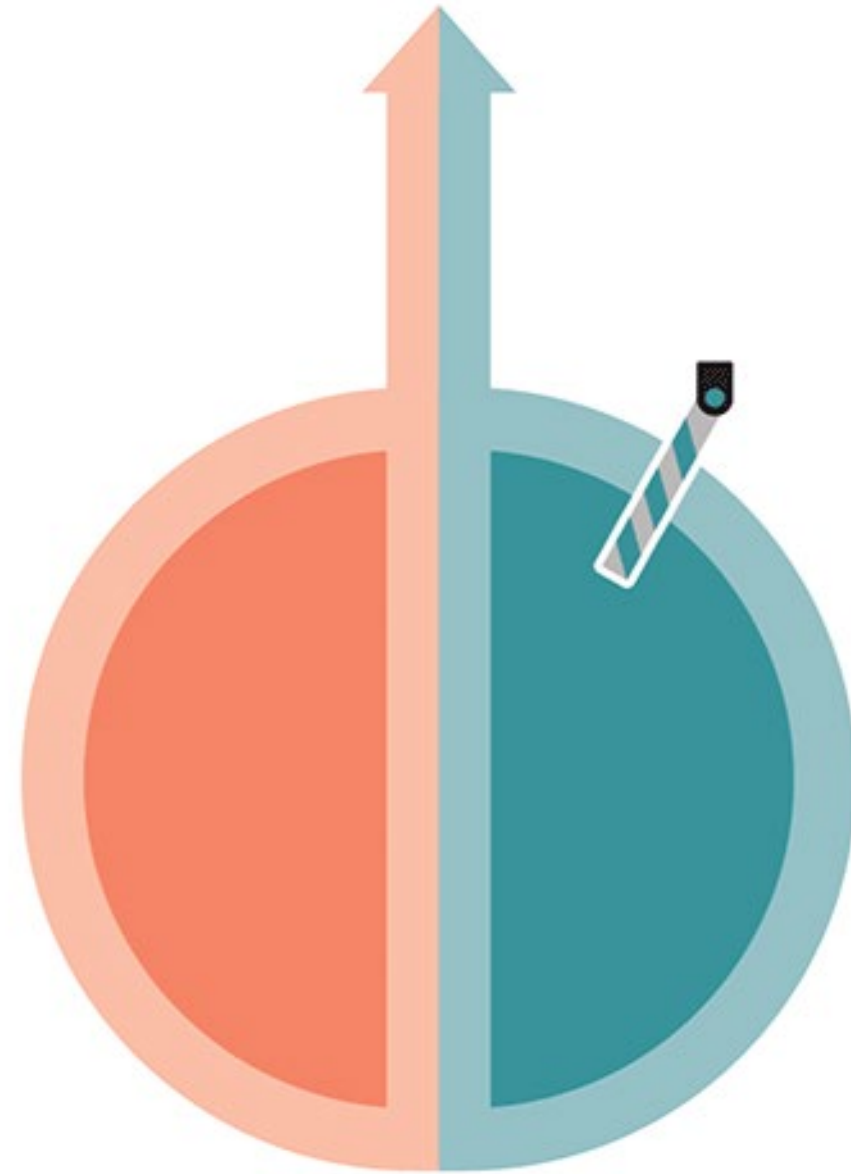
# BRAIN SCIENCE

## Automatic Self-Regulation

Rapid, impulse-directed response  
“Fight or flight”  
Needed for urgent situations

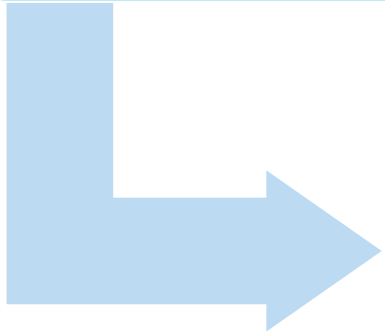
## Intentional Self-Regulation

Conscious and proactive response needed for achieving goals  
Attention is the gate-keeper by directing our focus towards specific things



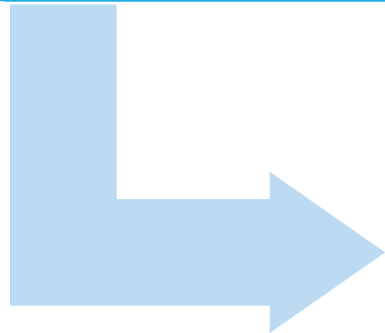
Automatic Self-Regulation

- Responds first, orients to where stimulus is coming from, initiates a response



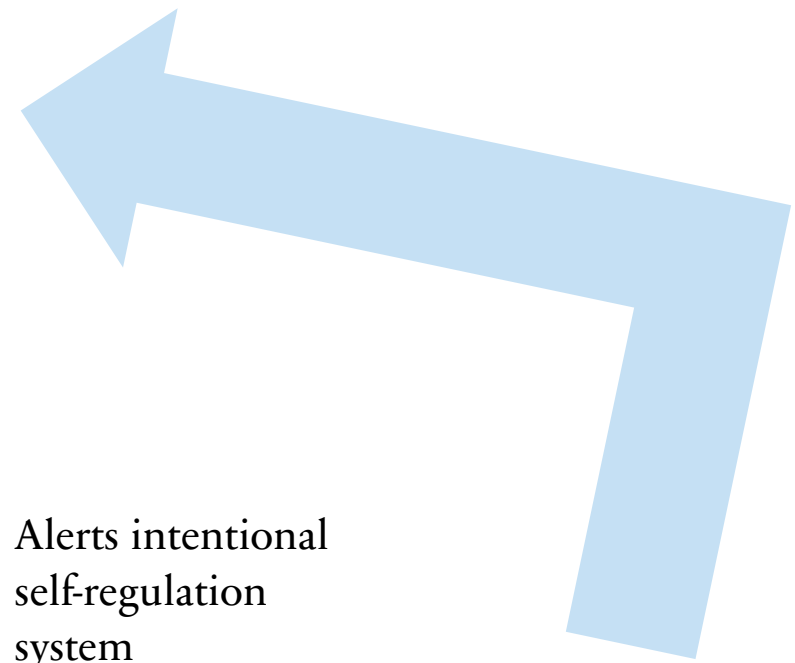
Attention System

- Alerts intentional self-regulation system



Intentional Self-Regulation system

- Responds quickly to direct the attention to where the focus should be and what must be prioritized. Tells Automatic self-regulation whether the initial response was the right one



• EF makes intentional self-regulation possible

• Continuum between impulsive behavior → Proactive and goal-directed behavior

# 5 CORE COMPETENCIES

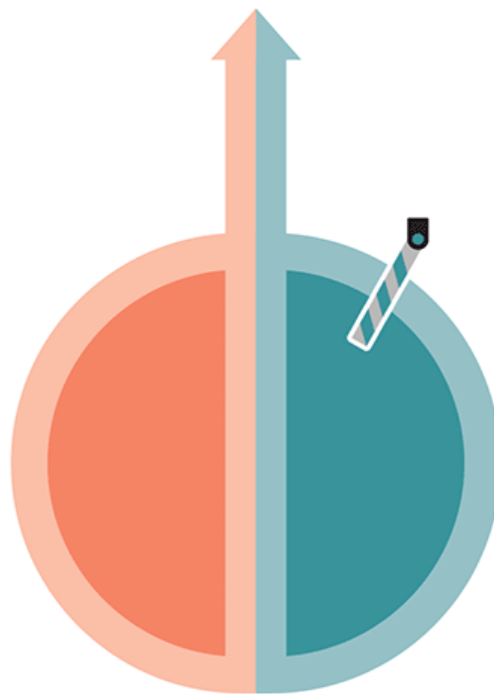
Planning

Focus

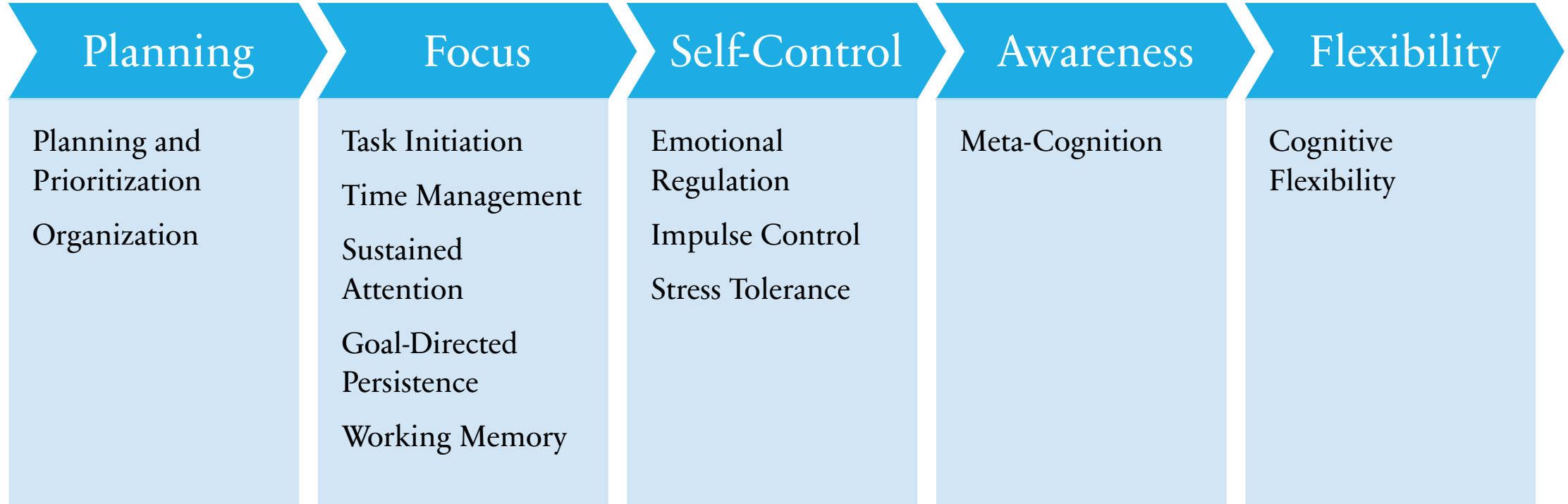
Self-Control

Awareness

Flexibility



# 5 CORE COMPETENCIES





# EXECUTIVE FUNCTION DEVELOPMENT

- By age 3: Most children are using EF skills in simple ways
- 3-5: Major EF development
- 15-23: Major EF development
- Driven by development of prefrontal cortex and its relationship with other brain functions
- As we grow, brain develops increased efficiency *within and between* regions of the brain

# EF DEVELOPMENT BLOCKERS

Chaotic, stressful, and/or threatening situations can not only delay but also redirect brain development

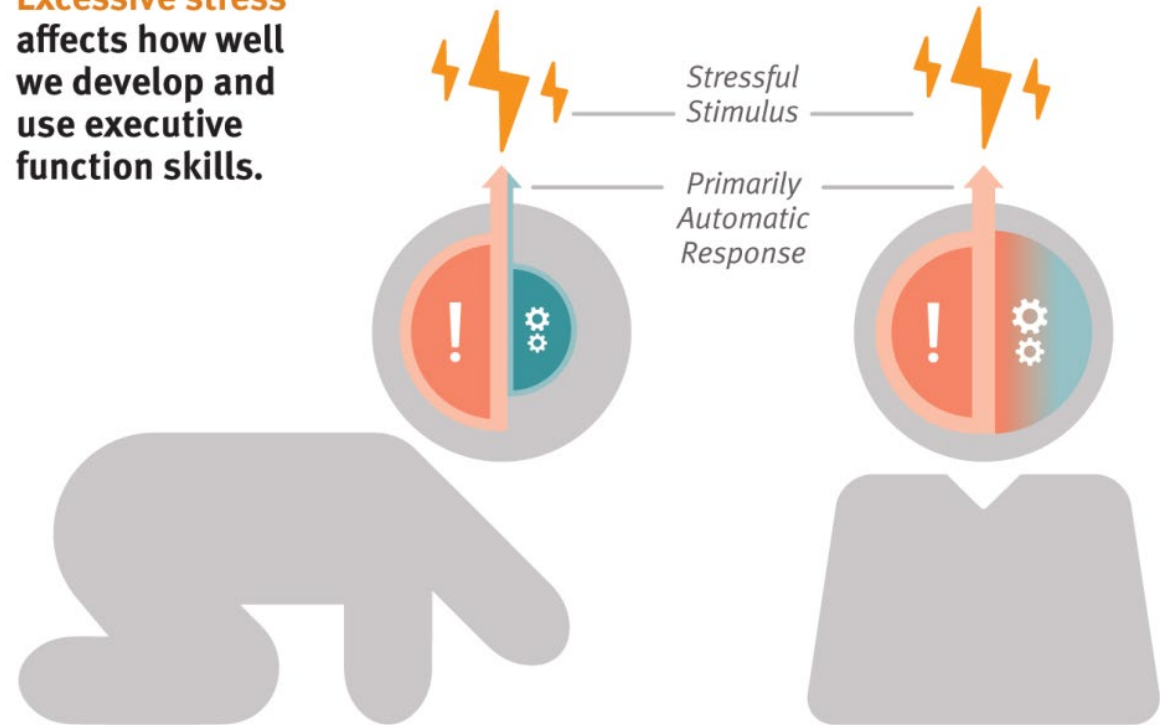
Early childhood: trauma leads to higher levels of stress, increases risk of stress-related health difficulties and mood disorders, compromises EF

Chaos and unpredictable environments impedes self-regulation and impulse control as well as self-efficacy

Environment that rewards w/ highly-rewarding stimuli like food or drugs can cue automatic regulatory system

Poverty can overload self-regulation and relies on flight or fight

**Excessive stress** affects how well we develop and use executive function skills.



## Early Childhood

Severe, frequent stress redirects children's brain development away from planning and impulse control toward building the capacity for rapid threat response.

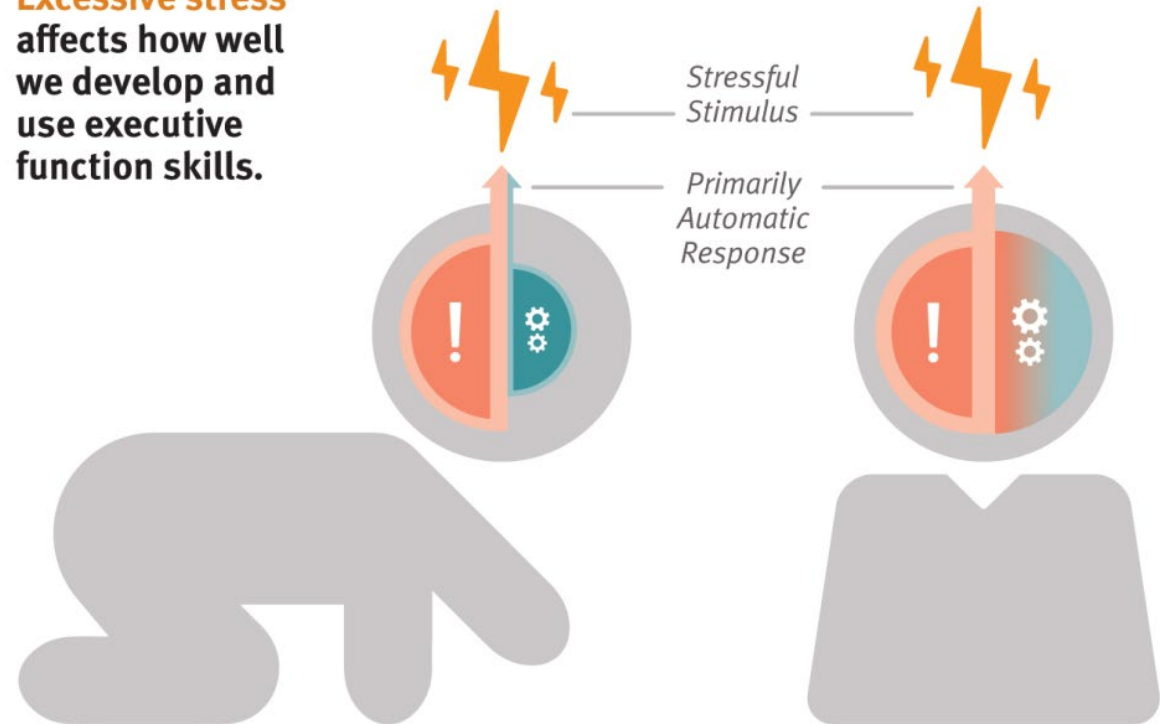
## Adulthood

Excessive stress overloads adults' ability to use executive function and intentional self-regulation skills, leaving them to rely primarily on automatic responses.

# EF DEVELOPMENT BLOCKERS

Everyday issues like sleep deprivation, chronic pain, exhaustion, stress, and alcohol and drug use can impair executive functions either temporarily or chronically.

**Excessive stress** affects how well we develop and use executive function skills.



## Early Childhood

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## Adulthood

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# EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING AND DOPAMINE

Neurotransmitter produced in the prefrontal cortex

Coordinates executive function, especially attention, working memory, and behavioral flexibility

“Feel good” chemical

Brain relies on dopamine and norepinephrine to function effectively

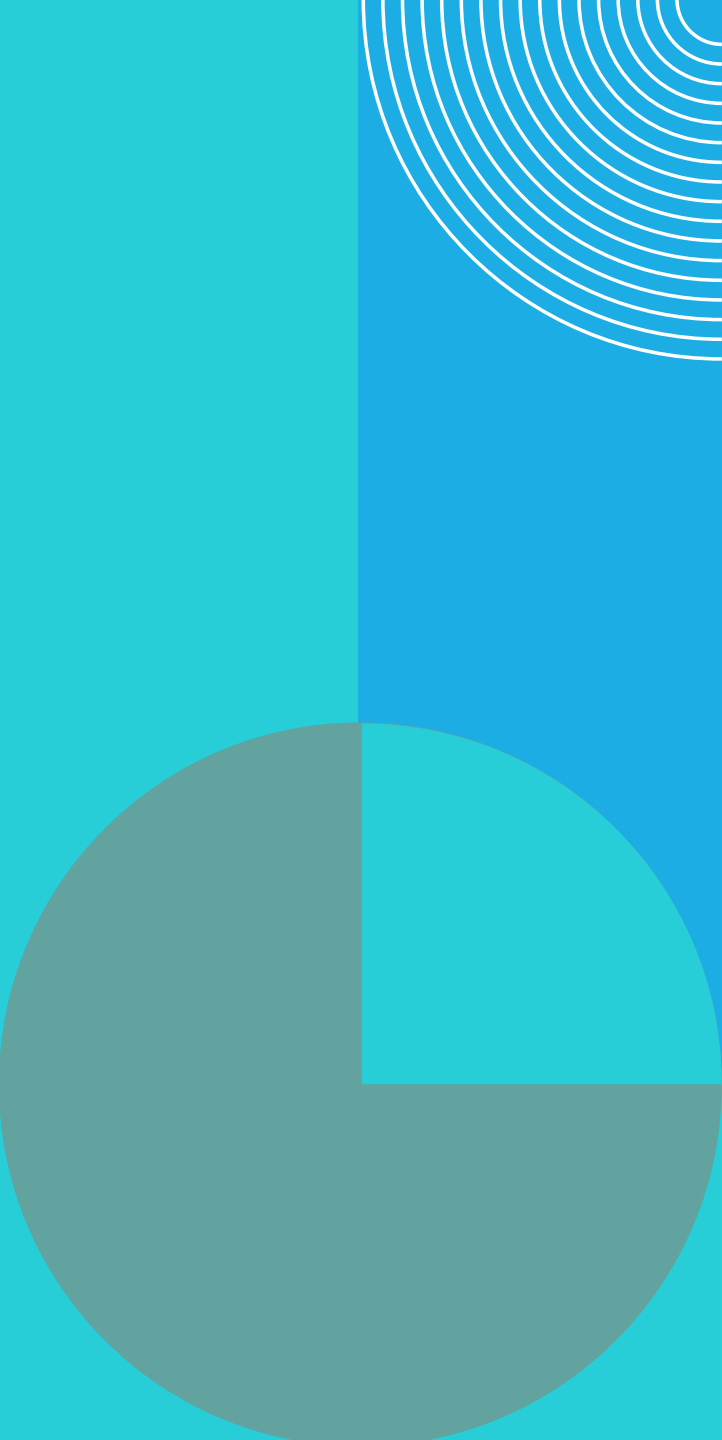
# HOW TO INCREASE DOPAMINE

- Dopamine downfall: Social Media and other addictive behaviors
  - Brief, only temporary
- Exercise (even a 5-minute walk!)
- Nutrient-rich foods
- Sleep
- Meditating
- Sunlight
- Music
- Supplements – probiotics and Vitamin D

# EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING AND NEURODIVERGENCE

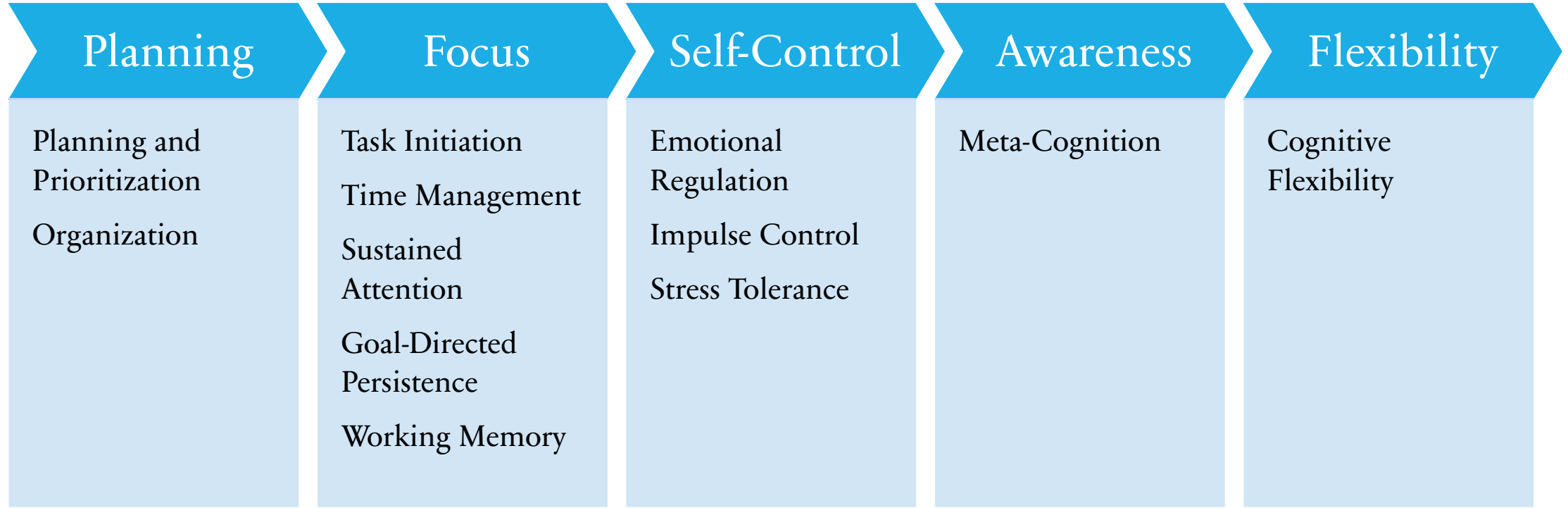
- ADHD/ADD, ASD, Anxiety, Depression, Brain injuries, and other learning disabilities can all affect executive functioning
- Executive functioning weaknesses are not exclusive to neurodivergent diagnoses

# HOW TO STRENGTHEN EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS





# 5 CORE COMPETENCIES



# PLANNING

- Planning
- Prioritization
- Organization

Feels lost

Overwhelm by an “unending to do list”

Cannot prioritize tasks, especially between preferred and non-preferred tasks

Disorganized, chaotic space

Missed deadlines

Difficulty planning large projects

- Make daily to-do lists
- Use a calendar
  - Block appointments
  - Include deadlines
  - Block off time for projects
- Rank things: Urgent, Important, Non-Urgent.
- Color-code
- Set reminders and alarms
- Complete a task completely before moving on or take notes on where you left off

# RESOURCES

## Free, Basic Functionality

- Google Calendar + Google Tasks
- Outlook Calendar

## \$\$

- Motion (uses AI)
- TickTick – can set daily routines and tasks
- Todoist
- Any.do
- Artful Agenda

## Project Management

- ClickUp
- Trello
- Plaky

NOVEMBER

< 2024 >

27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30




TODAY

ADD EVENT

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage."

- Lao Tzu

GOALS






SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
27 Promise Spooktacular S...	28 Promise's Birthday! 10:30 go to lunch w/ Pro... 	29 9 Kids dentist 3p Flu clinic 6p Ezekiel Tribe 
3 Daylight Saving Time en...	4	5 Election Day (General EL... 6p Ezekiel Tribe 
10	11 Veterans Day	12 6p Adoption support gro... 6p Ezekiel Tribe
17	18 5p J at moot court event	19 2:30p Prospective Stude... 6p Ezekiel Tribe 6p What To Do When Yo... 6p What To Do When Yo...
24	25 9:30 Ezekiel dentist appt 3:30p Promise appt broo...	26 6p Ezekiel Tribe

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

30 Mom's Birthday 4p Perfection Pest - 4PM 5p Trick or Treat 7p Take out recycling 	31 Halloween 5p Ezekiel Piano Lesson 5:30p Promise softball	1 First Day of American In... 3:30p appt	2 12:30p Promise's birthda...
6 Alan - RIS Leader Confer...	7 Cleaners Come 5p Ezekiel Piano Lesson	8 Holiday boutique David's Birthday No School - NO Pay Day! 	9 make blankets? 10 Wes coming for quote
13 11 Brooklynn parents ap... 4p Ezekiel hair 7p Take out recycling	14 Luke's Birthday 5p Ezekiel Piano Lesson 	15 \$1 dress down day 6p TGQA Shop Hop	16
20 3:30p Ezekiel appt brook...	21 Cleaners Come 12p Lucky 7s shop hop 5p Ezekiel Piano Lesson	22 Pay Day! 7:30 Promise PT 11 Parents appt Brooklyn... 2p J Wellness presentati...	23 9 Promise Art class
27 No School - KC Closes a... 7p Take out recycling	28 No School - KC Closes a... Anna... 5p... 	29 Dad's sobriety Native American Heritag... 9 Promise art class 	30

STICKERS

LISTS

### Thursday November 14, 2024

TODAY

ADD EVENT

Luke's Birthday

7 am

8 am

9 am

10 am

11 am

12 pm

1 pm

2 pm

3 pm

4 pm

5 pm

6 pm

7 pm

8 pm

9 pm

10 pm

11 pm

5p Ezekiel Piano Lesson

#### PRIORITY TASKS

- CLE for Drake
- Grade LWII
- Grade LAW 803
- Finish Kids' Christmas list
- Follow up on MJ meeting
- Email marketing meeting
- Review textbook options
- Email to Lloyd
- Figure out car/parking for travel
- Get E snack and piano books for lessons
- Book P art class
- Email advisees re: registration
- Review K.C. articles
- Find ESG blog from conference
- Draft JLL transcript
- Make cookies for bake sale
- baptism class

#### OTHER TASKS

#### MY CUSTOM LIST

*"If the wind will not serve, take to the oars."*

- Proverb

MEALS

WATER



MONTH

WEEK

DAY

# FOCUS

- Task Initiation
- Time Management
- Sustained Attention
- Goal-Directed Persistence
- Working Memory

Struggles to start non-preferred tasks, procrastination

May forget steps that are required for completion, especially initial step

Time blindness, chronic lateness, inefficient use of time

Distracted Easily

Easily moves to preferred tasks that may not be part of long-term goals

Errors and mistakes in work

- Remove distractions
  - Set phone on Do Not Disturb
  - Set time limits for apps
- Quick dopamine hits
  - Exercise, fresh air, music, stretch, deep breathing exercise, 5 senses exercise
- Set timers
- Take frequent breaks, keep time limited
- Write down steps needed for a task
- Root your brain in a preferred space
  - Listen to music, keep your hands busy

# SELF-CONTROL

- Emotional Regulation
- Impulse Control
- Stress Tolerance

Poor response inhibition, “no filter”

Dysregulated emotions

May overreact

Crumbles or shuts down under stress

Overwhelmed by performance demands, change, or uncertainty

- Deep breathing exercises can help mindfulness and reduce overreaction
- Remove negative sensory stimuli when possible – headphones
- Increase positive sensory stimuli – calming music, sunshine, smells
- Addictive behaviors: Work to limit or replace with positive behaviors to increase dopamine similarly
- 5 senses exercise
- Take 10 before replying when possible

# RESOURCES

## Apps and technology for emotional regulation

- Headspace
- Calm
- Sleep
- Healthy Minds

## Apps for exercise (variety, can customize)

- Aaptiv (hands-free)
- Peloton (5-60 minute workouts)
- Blogilates (free)
- Find What Feels Good (yoga)



# AWARENESS

- Metacognition
- Ability to think about one's own thinking
- Be aware of and regulate one's own processes

Lack of self-awareness

Misses social cues, interrupts often

Trouble receiving criticism, perceives feedback to be critical and personal

Impostor syndrome

Unable to implement new knowledge

Struggles to evaluate one's own work

- Engage in self-questioning as a form of personal evaluation
- Affirmations to help impostor syndrome
- Take notes to reflect on projects and avoid repeat mistakes
- Goal trackers
- Interconnected with self-regulation

# FLEXIBILITY

- Cognitive Flexibility
- Adapt and change with problems

Struggles with disappointment

Struggles to find new ways to approach a problem or see a situation from different perspectives

Struggles to shift to new tasks when new demands arise

Struggles to multi-task

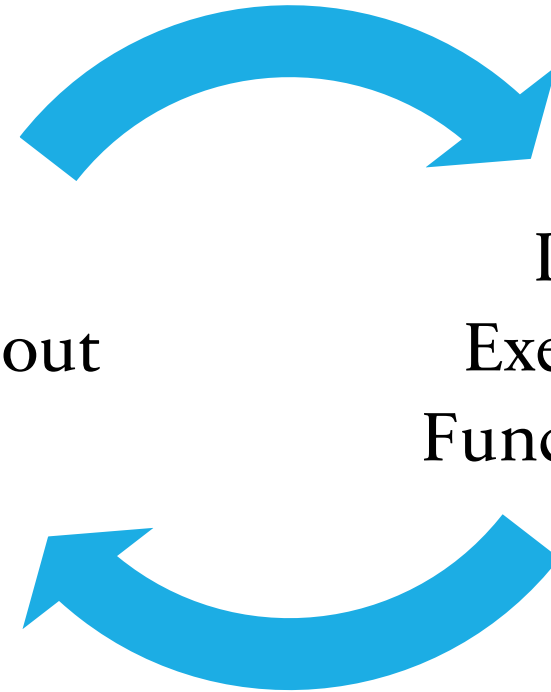
- Develop a transition routine – short stretch, deep breaths
- Reflect on why transitions are hard
  - Fear, anxiety, overwhelm, struggle to get started again
- Practice taking in new information
- Take time to brainstorm
- Validate feelings of disappointment, then find solutions

# BURNOUT

- Cognitive decline
- Lack of motivation
- Challenged prefrontal cortex
- Lack of creativity
- Heightened negativity
- Emotional exhaustion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of attention to detail
- Numbness towards work or personal life
- Increased stress/frustration
- Cynicism

Burnout

Poor  
Executive  
Functioning



# TAKE-AWAYS

Executive function weaknesses can impair work product, reduce effectiveness and efficiency, and lead to higher levels of stress and burnout

Daily habits like exercise, nutrition, planning, and mindfulness can help build executive functioning in our brain

Easy things you can do today:

- Set your phone to do not disturb for one hour
- Play a song instead of opening social media
- Step outside for 3 minutes in-between phone calls
- Affirmations and pep talks

**YOU  
CAN  
DO  
HARD  
THINGS.**

**THANK  
YOU**

Julia Steggerda-Corey

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# RESOURCES

- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/deep-dives/adult-capabilities/>
- <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>
- <https://proactiveapproaches.co.uk/an-introductory-guide-to-executive-function-skills/>
- [https://www.google.com/search?q=executive+functioning+and+burnout&rlz=1C1GCEA\\_enUS1057US1059&oq=executive+functioning+and+burnout&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIICAEQABgWGB4yCAgCEAAYFhgeMggIAxAAGBYHjIICAQQABgWGB4yDQgFEAAyhgMYgAQYigUyDQgGEAAYhgMYgAQYigUyDQgHEAAYhgMYgAQYigUyCggIEAAYgAQYogTSAQg1OTY3ajBqNKgCALACAQ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=executive+functioning+and+burnout&rlz=1C1GCEA_enUS1057US1059&oq=executive+functioning+and+burnout&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIICAEQABgWGB4yCAgCEAAYFhgeMggIAxAAGBYHjIICAQQABgWGB4yDQgFEAAyhgMYgAQYigUyDQgGEAAYhgMYgAQYigUyDQgHEAAYhgMYgAQYigUyCggIEAAYgAQYogTSAQg1OTY3ajBqNKgCALACAQ&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)
- <https://helpfulprofessor.com/metacognitive-theory/>
- <https://lincs.ed.gov/state-resources/federal-initiatives/teal/guide/metacognitive#:~:text=Examples%20of%20metacognitive%20activities%20include,completion%20of%20a%20task%2C%20and>
- <https://www.additudemag.com/7-executive-function-deficits-linked-to-adhd/>