

National Autism Conference, State College, PA  
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## **GETTING UNSTUCK AND ON TARGET: PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR BUILDING EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS**

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Associate Professors, Pediatrics  
GW Medical School  
Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders  
Children's National Medical Center



### **Disclosures and Contact Info**

- We both receive royalties for sale of Unstuck manuals and LK also receives royalties for sales of BRIEF forms.
- Email is the easiest way to reach us:
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  - [lkenwort@childrensnational.org](mailto:lkenwort@childrensnational.org)



## Learning Objectives

- Recognize executive functioning weaknesses in your children or clients and distinguish among different executive functioning (EF) skills
- Apply specific techniques to support improvement in EF at home, in treatment, or at school
- Summarize the research results examining the effectiveness of an EF intervention



**GOAL:** Increase your understanding of executive functions and how to enhance them

### **PLAN**

1. Identify the problem: Poor outcome
2. Define Executive Functions (EF) and why they matter
3. Understand & accommodate specific EF deficits
  - a. Flexibility
  - b. Organization/Integration
  - c. Planning/Working Memory
4. Teach flexibility, organization & planning skills



## Adult Outcome in HFASD

- 46% of children with ASD have IQ in the average range
- Despite average intelligence, adult outcome remains poor (Henninger & Taylor, 2012; Howlin et al., 2004; Howlin & Moss, 2012; Shattuck et al., 2012; Roux et al., 2013).
  - Underemployed, underpaid, socially excluded,
  - Poor adaptive skills, dependent on parents (88%)
  - Even when compared to other developmental disabilities
- Over 25% of the young adults *without* ID have no daytime activities of any kind (Taylor & Mailick Seltzer, 2010)



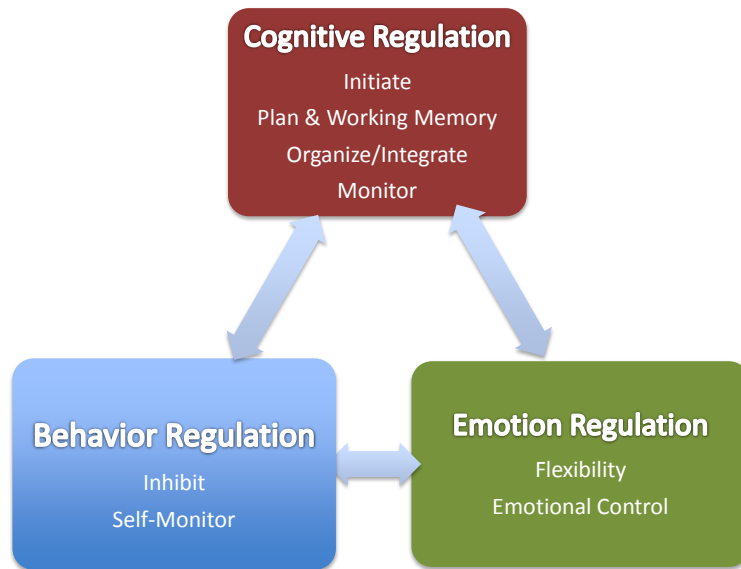
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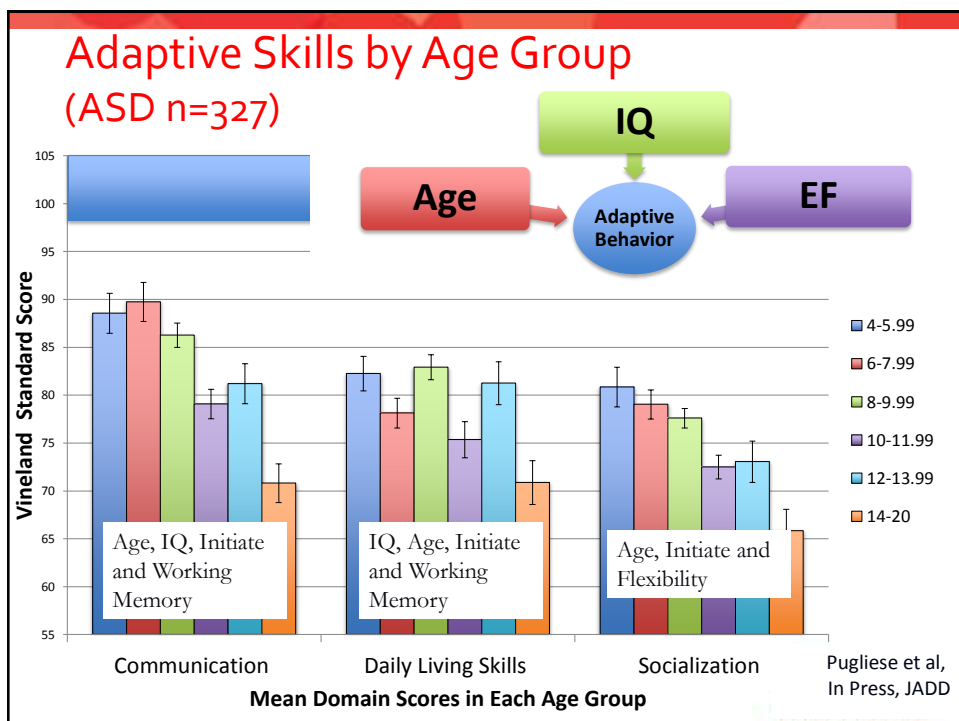
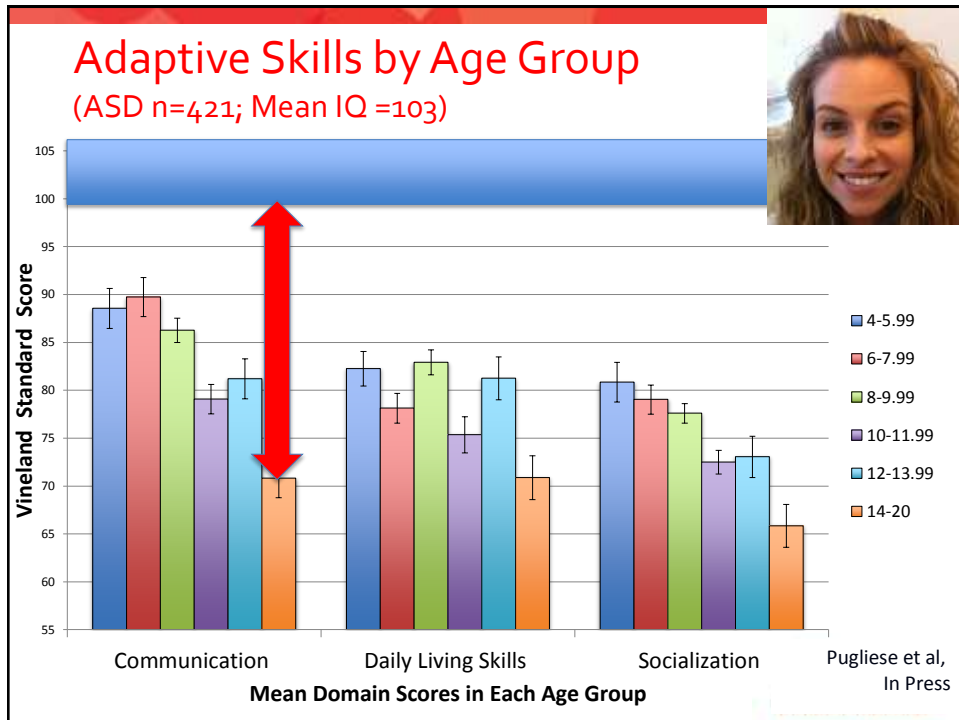
## What is Executive Function?



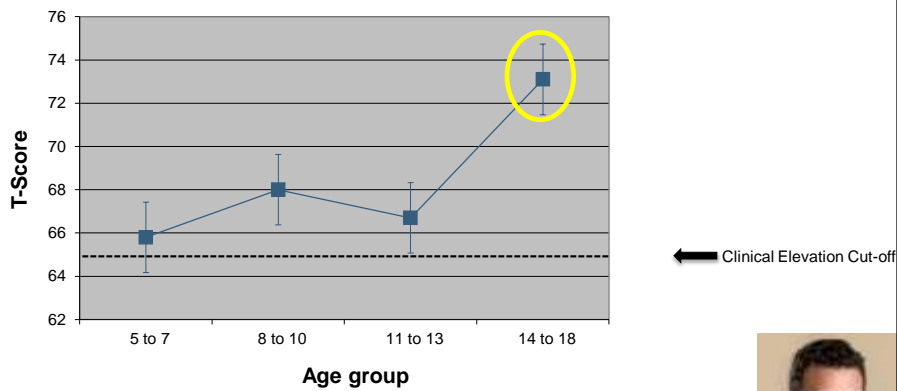
**Executive Dysfunction (Teuber, 1964):**  
 “The curious dissociation between knowing & doing”

### EF problems in ASD relate to:

- Learning
- Adaptive daily living skills (Lopata et al, 2012, Gilotty et al, 2002)
- Family stress (Lounds, 2007)
- Adult outcomes (Hume et al, 2009)

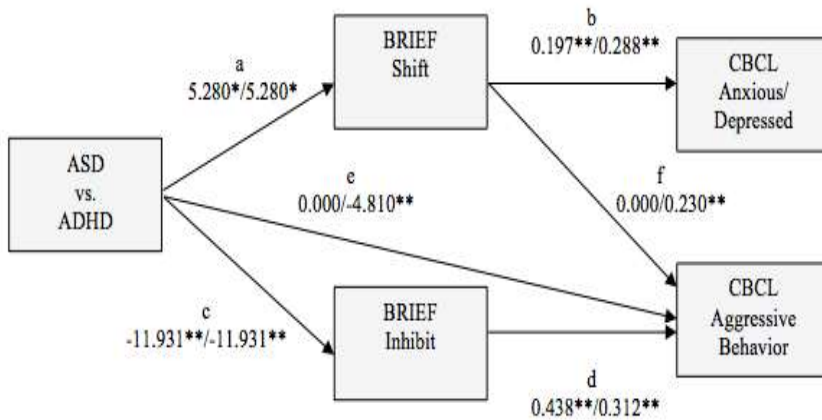


## Parent Report Executive Function Problems by Age Group (ASD n=185)



Rosenthal et al. 2013; *Neuropsychology*

## Diagnosis → EF → Co-Morbidities (ASD n=70, ADHD n=55)



Lawson, et al, 2014, *Neuropsychology*



## *EF relates to autism sx and supports social learning*

- Joint attention: “early developing self-organizing facility” (Mundy, 2003)
- Prolonged visual fixation in infants later dx’ d with ASD, coincides with emergence of ASD behaviors (Zwaigenbaum et al, 2005)
- EF predicts change in ToM (independent of age, language, NVIQ) (Pellicano, 2010)
- Indirect “trickle-down” effect of EF training on TOM performance (Fisher and Happé 2005) and social skills (Kenworthy & Anthony et al, 2013)



Looks Like <i>Won't</i> ...	Could be <i>Can't</i>
Oppositional, Stubborn	Difficulty shifting Avoiding overload
Can do it if he wants to	Difficulty shifting Lack of salience
Self Centered	Impaired social cognition Poor self monitoring
Won't put good ideas on paper	Poor fine motor Disorganization
Sloppy, erratic	Poor self monitoring Overloaded
Won't control outbursts	Overloaded Disinhibition
Doesn't care what others think	Impaired social cognition Poor self monitoring

**GOAL:** Increase your understanding of executive functions and how to enhance them

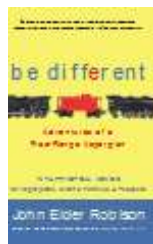
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**Unstuck Philosophy: Accommodate, then Remediate**

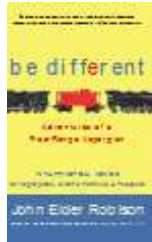
**Neural  
Diversity  
is a civil  
right...**





## Unstuck Philosophy: Accommodate, then Remediate

**Neural  
Diversity  
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right...**

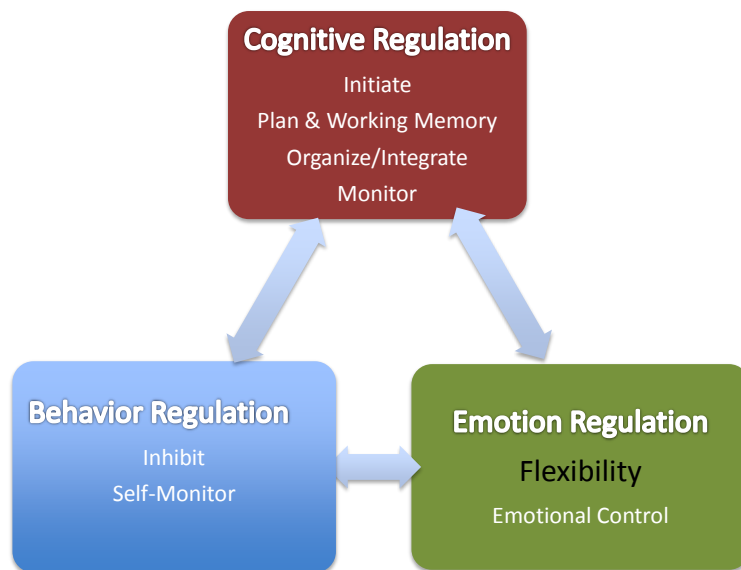


### Overwhelmed people can't learn

- Predictability and structure
- Make Big Picture Explicit
- Talk Less, Write More
- Avoid Overload
- Can't vs Won't
- Keep it Positive



## What is Executive Function?



## Most Common EF Challenges in ASD

### Flexibility

- Transitioning from one activity to another
- Changes in routine
- Violations of expectations
- Seeing more than one way of doing things
- Easy to get stuck

(Rumsey, 1985; Hill, 2004, Kenworthy et al, 2008)



“Asperger’s is like a vise on your brain.  
And each unexpected event is like  
another turn on the vise...it just keeps  
building until you feel like you’re going to  
explode. Sometimes when you explode,  
it comes out the wrong way.”

- A young student with ASD



## What does cognitive inflexibility look like in school and at home?

### Can't or Won't?

- Accept feedback
- Accept different opinions, ideas
- Handle frustration
- Start something they don't want to do
- Stop meltdowns
- Stop doing something even they have been told to stop
- Avoid shutting down when something is challenging
- Stop correcting people
- Let other kids take the lead when playing



## Inflexibility Risks and Accommodations

### Difficulty with violations of expectations

- Schedules, Routines, Predict change, Flexible Adult

### Rigid interpretations of rules

- Respect need for clear, explicit expectations, Flexible Adult

### Overwhelming intense feelings

- Breaks, Downtime, Safe Address, Flexible Adult

### Problems Negotiating

- Compromise, Explicit Etiquette Rules, Flexible Adult

### Repetitive Behaviors/Intense Interests

- Decide where they can/can't happen, agree on a sign



## Accommodations: Inflexibility

Inflexibility is adaptive. It limits unexpected, overloading events.

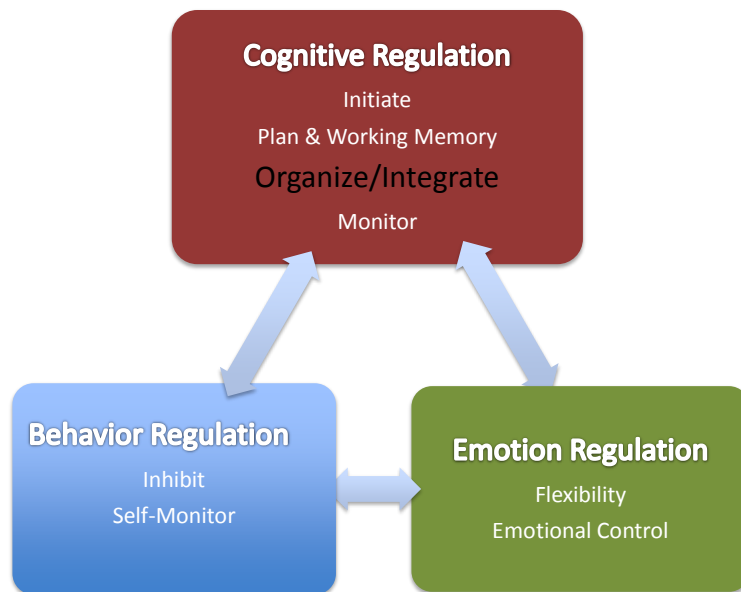
- **Overload is dangerous:** It leads to anxiety, impulsivity, inappropriate behavior
- **Overload creates profound risk** in context of social isolation, teasing and bullying
- **In a mine field it is wise to use caution**

#### Respect

- Routines that don't interfere
- Deep datasets
- Expertise in areas of interest
- Persistence
- Reliability



## What is Executive Function?



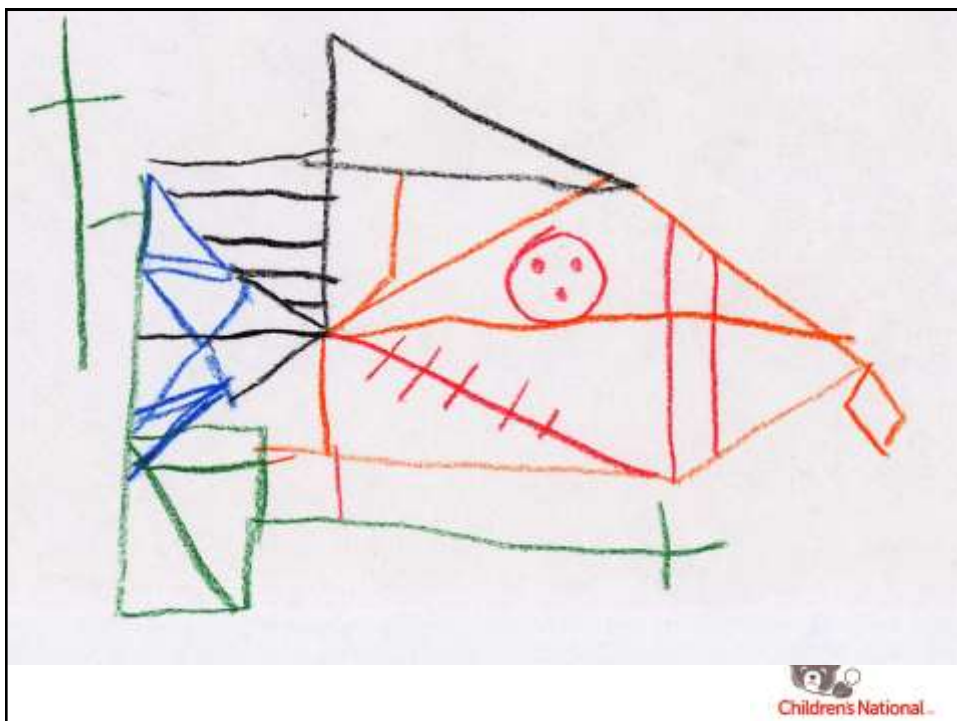
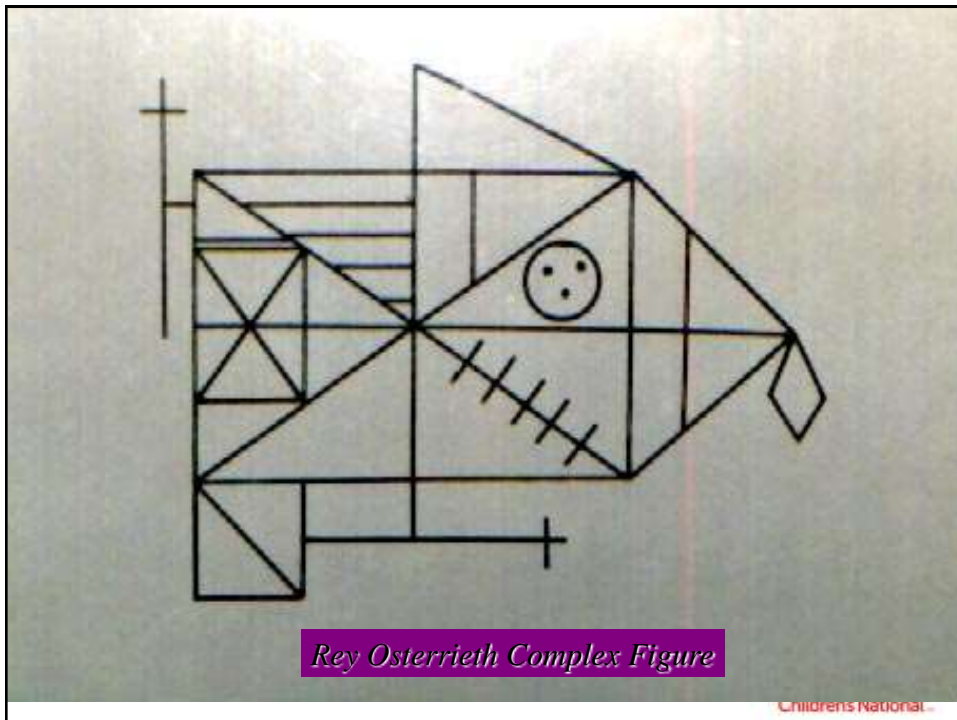
## Most Common EF Challenges in ASD

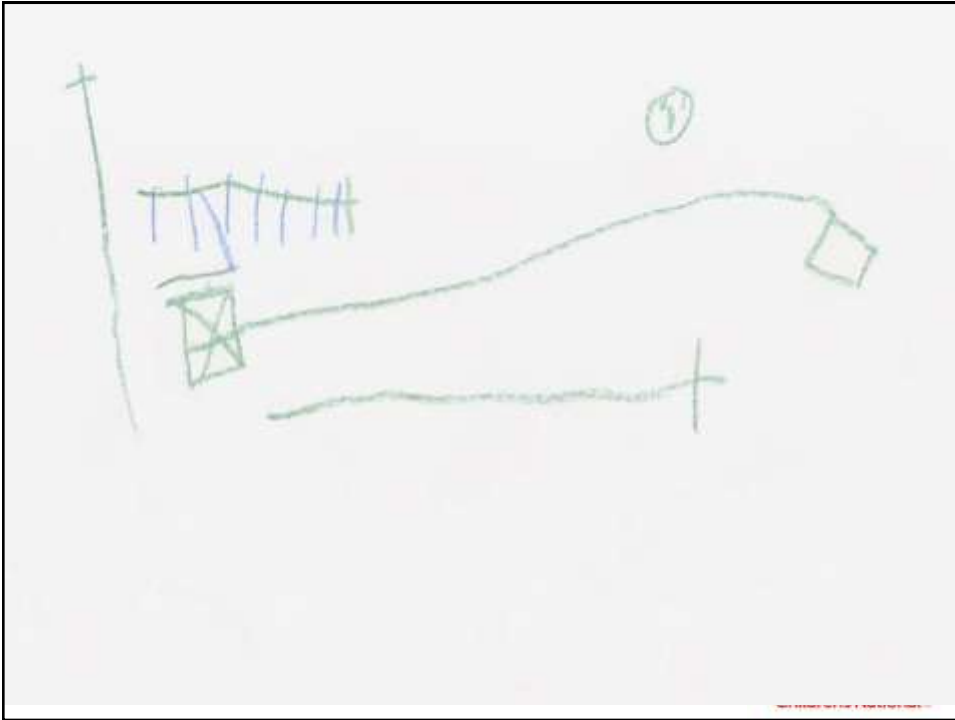
### Flexibility

- Transitioning from one activity to another
  - Changes in routine
  - Violations of expectations
  - Seeing more than one way of doing things
  - Easy to get stuck
- (Rumsey, 1985; Hill, 2004, Kenworthy et al, 2008)

### Planning/Organization

- Knowing how to accomplish a goal
  - Prioritizing
  - Identifying main idea and organizing thinking
  - Can't see the forest for the trees
- (Ozonoff, 1991; Hughes, 1994; Kenworthy, 2005; Hill, 2004)





## What do organization/integration deficits look like in school and at home?

### Can't, or Won't?

- Gets stuck on details
- Get good ideas onto paper
- Stop dominating a classroom discussion
- Let go of a small mistake or inconsistency
- Behave in unstructured groups
- Set a goal
- Learn from mistakes
- Write a well organized paragraph
- Draw meaning from a reading assignment
- Know what to study for on a test

## Missing the big picture risks



- **Lack of generalization:** "My daughter can peel a potato but she can't peel a sweet potato because they are not the same thing."
- **Lack of awareness** that a problem exists
- **Difficulty knowing what is important:** "Recently, my son lost his backpack on his bike ride home. To fix the problem, he called 911. Fortunately, the police officer understood. "
- **Difficulty anticipating** obstacles
- Dealing with failure

31



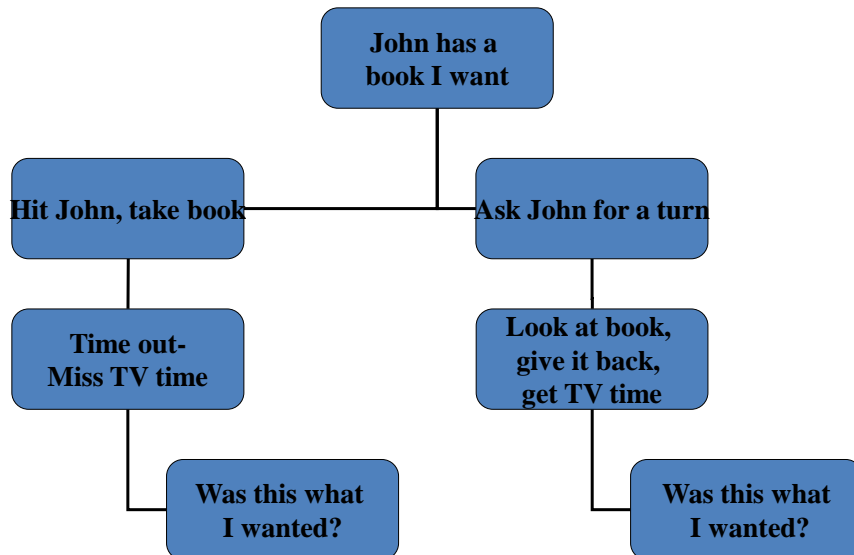
## Accommodations for Disorganization

- Emphasis on goals
- Safe Address
- Teach to strength: explicit short rules, recipes, checklists and routines.
- Put new information in familiar context.
- Explicitly review inferences, nuances.
- Predict decline in abilities as size of group increases.
- Study guides, closed format tests
- Writing rubrics





## *Break it Down*

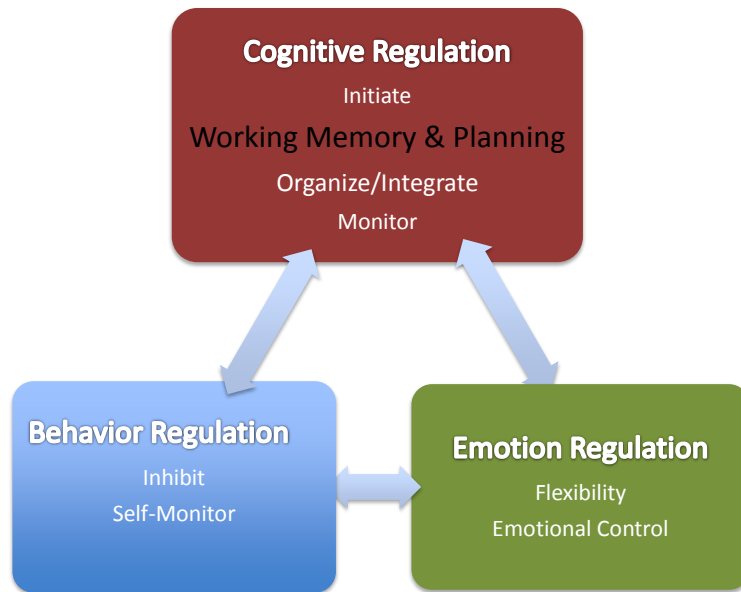


## Detail Processor Strengths

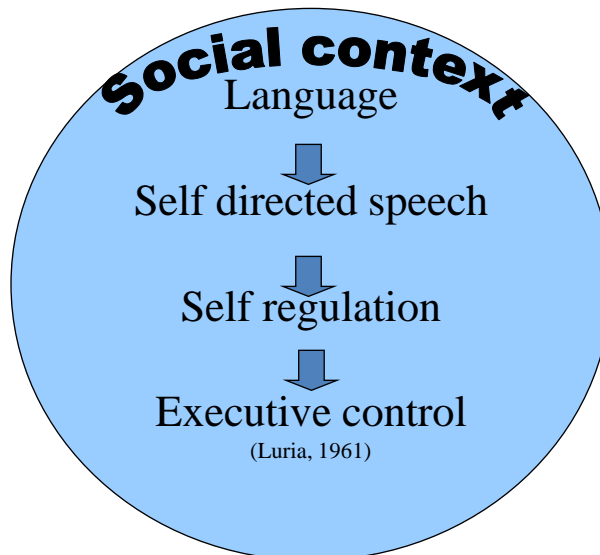
- Patience for details
- Respect, follow, use rules
- Good with recipes, checklists and routines
- Powerful computer related thinking
- Classification strengths
- Painstaking attention to detail—Sherlock Holmes
- Mastery of detailed datasets
- Large Vocabulary



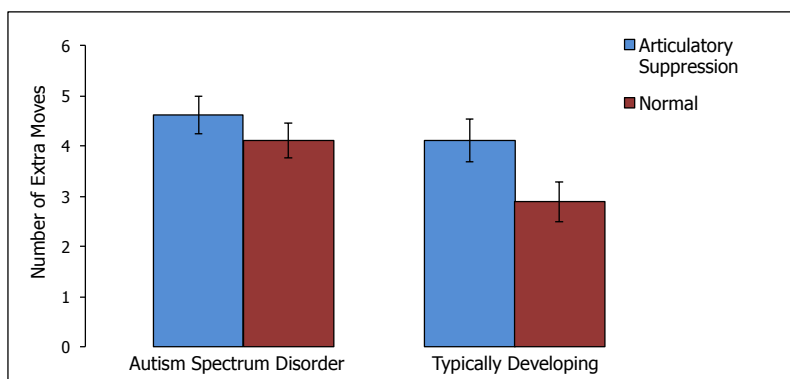
## What is Executive Function?



## The Importance of Inner Speech



## Articulatory Suppression and Planning



Wallace et al. (2009) *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*

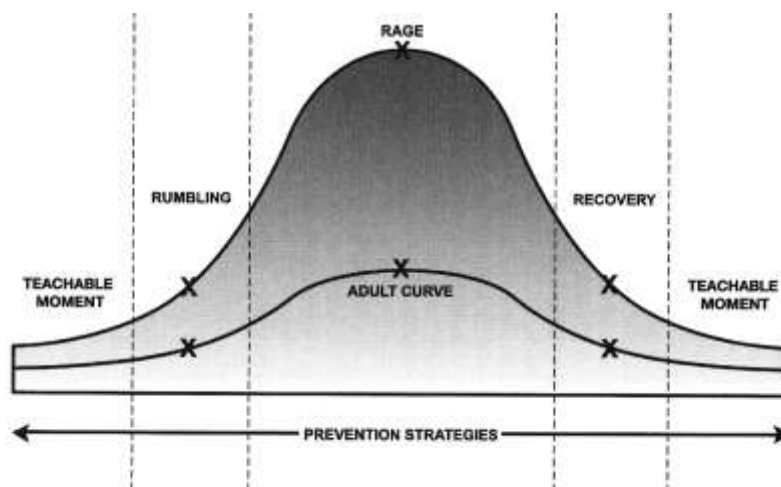


## Poor planning/Inner Speech/Working Memory Looks Like: Won't follow directions, work independently

- Talk Less, Write More: White Boards
- Use technology for tracking tasks, calendar, writing
- Communication: e-mail, texting
- Notes
- Computer-based curricula
- Socratic method



## Overload: Looks like anxiety, impulsivity, meltdowns Brenda Smith Myles: *AS and Difficult Moments*



## Comparing Student EF Behaviors to Inclusion Teacher Behaviors and Classroom Supports

Teacher Behavior	Student EF Behaviors				
	Follows Rules	Transitions	Not Stuck	Not Negative	Participates
Teacher Praise	.211**	.345***	.248**	.149	.347***
Teacher Priming	.148	.167	.073	-.027	.258***
Teacher Flexible	.289***	.391***	.259***	.122	.430***
*p<.01 **p<.005 ***p<.001					

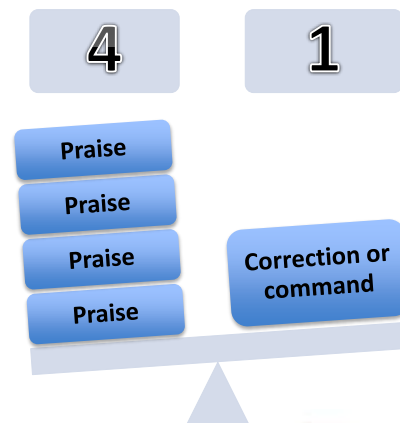


## The most important accommodations of them all: **Be Flexible and Keep it Positive!!**

**Emotions are Contagious  
...and Flexibility is too**



**Reinforcement Breaks the Cycle**



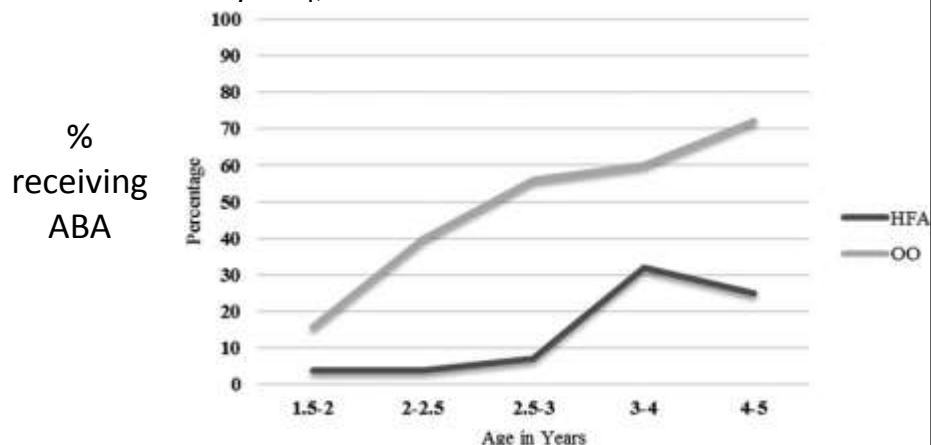
## Find your people: What do these people have in common?

- Tim Page, Pulitzer prize winner
- Vernon Smith, noble laureate
- Satoshi Tajiri, creator of Pokémon
- Matt Savage, “Mozart of jazz”
- Daryl Hannah, actor
- Michelangelo
- Thomas Jefferson
- Jesse Eisenberg
- Mozart
- Orson Wells
- Charles Darwin
- Glenn Gould
- Gregor Mendel
- Carl Sagan
- Marie Curie
- Einstein



## Debbie Fein: What Leads to Optimal Outcome ?

- A few children w/ASD can reach *typical* levels of social functioning with no residual symptoms
- Earlier intervention and more ABA (Orinstein et al, JDev Behav Pediatr, 2014)



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## Unstuck Team

### Ivymount Model Asperger Program/Take2 Summer Camp

- Katie Alexander
- Lynn Cannon
- Monica Werner

### Children's National Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Laura Anthony
- Lauren Kenworthy
- John Strang
- Cara Pugliese



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# Teaching Executive Function Skills

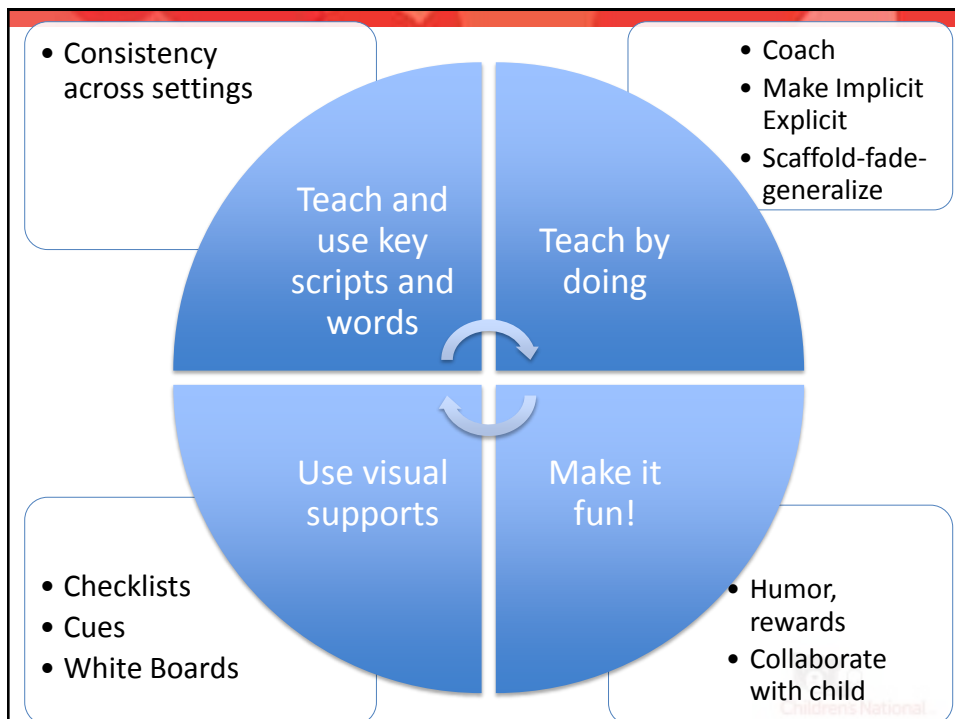
*OR... bridging the dissociation between knowing and doing*

## The Challenge:

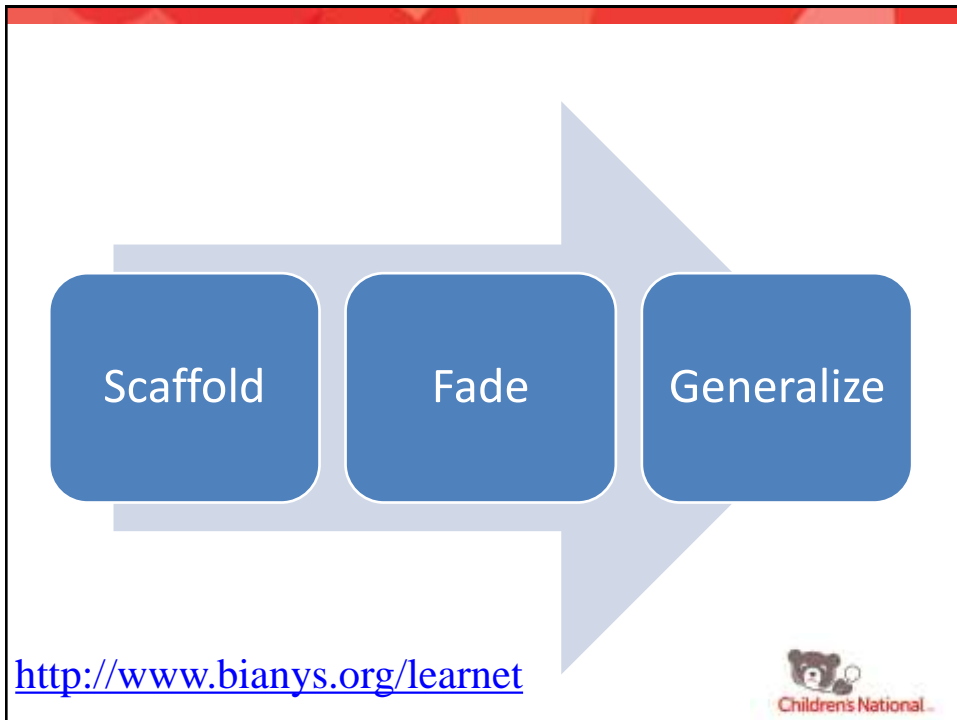
- A student with ASD: *“My biggest problem in college has been executive functioning. I’m not organized, I’m late with everything and I don’t know how to get started. My school did a great job of including me in school, but why didn’t anyone teach me this EF stuff?”*
- EF skills are hard to generalize (Ylvisaker et al., 2003)

## The Strategy:

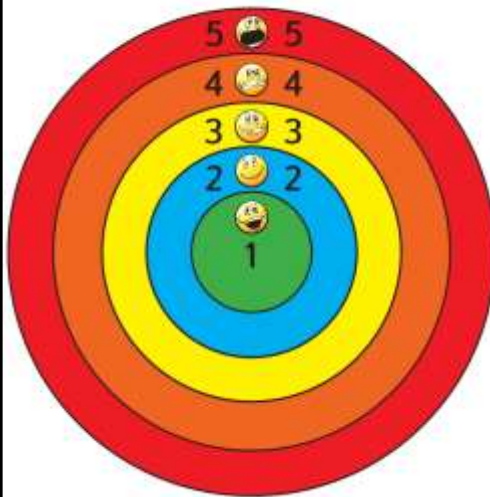
- Embed teaching in the real world: school & home
- Show, model and coach







## Feelings Target & Feelings Chain

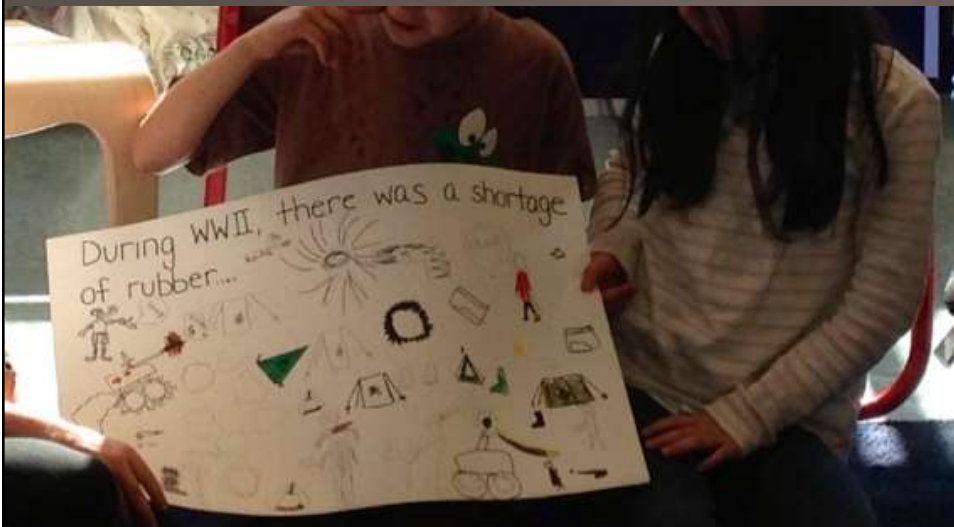


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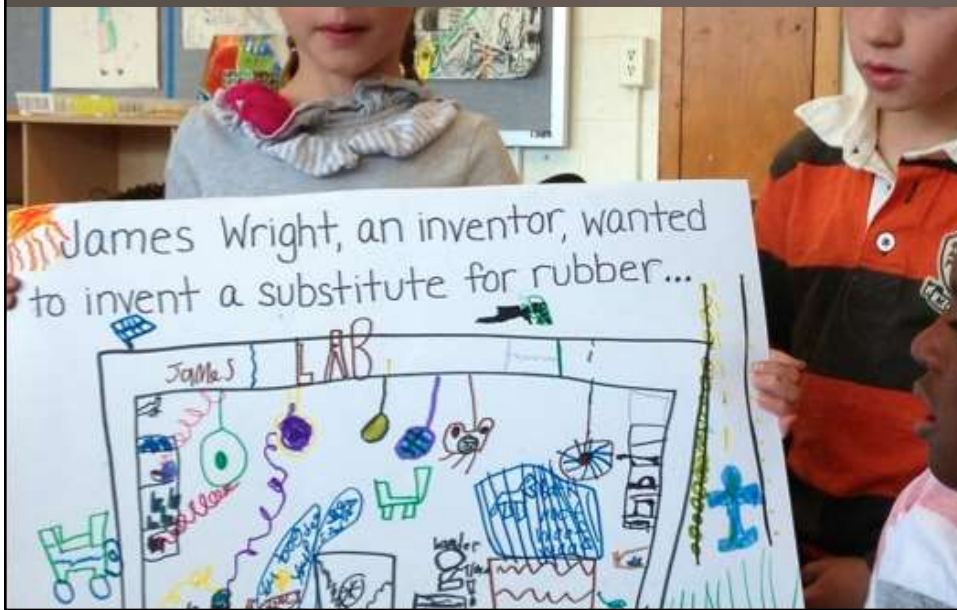
## The Story of Silly Putty (Plan A/Plan B)

Photo credits to Maurice Tome

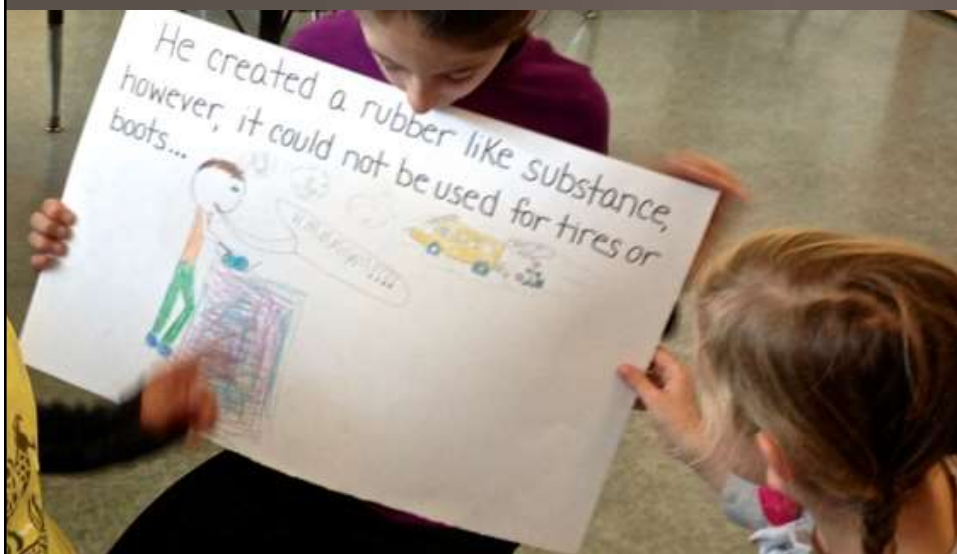
<http://schoolwithinschool.org/look-forward-to-succeeding/>



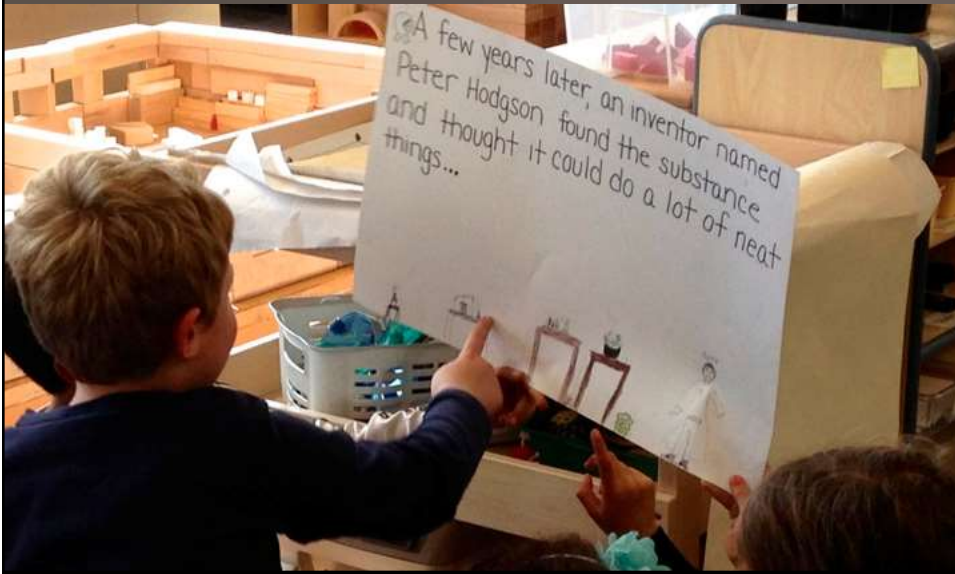
## The Story of Silly Putty



## The Story of Silly Putty



## The Story of Silly Putty



## The Story of Silly Putty



## Teaching: Why Be Flexible

- Advantages of physical flexibility
- The “facts” of life
- What to do when what I want is impossible
- Pie charts: getting part of I want is better than getting nothing at all



## Teach How to Be Flexible: Self-Regulatory Scripts

- ✓ Avoid too much talking
- ✓ Refer to the big picture
- ✓ Build an alliance—you're collaborating!
- ✓ Need to be practiced





## How to be Flexible: Words and Scripts

Flexible

- Great job being flexible

Unstuck

- I'm getting stuck on \_\_\_\_, how can I get unstuck?

Compromise

- Let's compromise so we both get some of what we want

Plan A/Plan B

- What is our plan?
- What is our Plan B?

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Teacher Goal: To go to bus / Brady's Goal: To keep playing  
kick ball

Compromise:

- Play for 20 minutes
- Play the next morning

Plan:

- ☐ 1. If Brady finishes check-out before 8:00 he will get 20 minutes of kickball
- ☐ 2. If my bus gets called before 20 minutes I will take the rest of my time the next morning
- ☐ 3.
- ☐ 4.

Do: Have we done all the steps to accomplish the goal?

Check: How did it go?

© The Ivymount School, Inc.  
www.ivymount.org




## Flexibility Scripts

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Big Deal/Little Deal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we make this big deal into a little deal?</li> </ul>
Choice/No Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is this a no choice situation?</li> </ul>
Handling the Unexpected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will change?</li> <li>• What will stay the same?</li> <li>• Why is the change happening?</li> </ul>

Ylvisaker & Feeny, 1998; Feeny & Ylvisaker, 2008

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## Modeling Flexibility Scripts

- **Accidents:** After a child spills something at the dining table, you could say, "at first when that spilled and was starting to drip on me, I felt like it was a really *Big Deal*, but then I realized I could make it a *Little Deal* by mopping it up and you helped clean it up. Now I feel much better. Thanks."
- **On a play date or at recess.** When a child wants to play Legos, but his or her friend wants to play a board game: "How can you be *flexible* and still reach your goal of having fun with your friend?" "Can you *compromise* and play a board game first and then Legos? Then you will both get what you want in the end, which is better than not getting what you want at all."
- **Unpopular Chores:** If you got a parking ticket: "Oh, how I wish paying this parking ticket was a *choice* situation..."

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## GPDC script (goal, why, plan, do, check)

<b>Goal</b>	To have fun at recess
<b>Why</b>	Recess is my free time
<b>Plan A</b>	Ask Johnny if he wants to play soccer
<b>Plan B</b>	(If J says, "no") Ask Melissa to play soccer
<b>Plan C</b>	Swing on the swings
<b>Do</b>	Follow my plans
<b>Check</b>	Did I meet my goal?  Which plan worked?  Would I do it the same or different next time?

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MISSION POSSIBLE?	
<b>GOAL</b> 	What is my mission for today? <input type="text"/> I will have fun playing with Adam.
<b>PLAN(S)</b> 	<div> <b>Plan A</b>            What is my plan for my mission?            1. Pick up Adam from his house.            2. Go to the park.            3. Ask Adam if he wants to play on the swings or the climbing wall.            4. If I feel tired or need a break, I can tell Adam I need a few minutes to myself.            5. Have a snack.            6. Drive Adam back to his house.         </div> <div> <b>Plan B</b>            What is an alternative plan?            1. If the park is too crowded, I can go to the park I live in.            2. Ask Adam if he wants to play Legos or soccer.         </div>
<b>DO</b> 	What plan did I use to complete my mission? <input type="text"/> Plan A      Plan B      Other (explain)
<b>CHECK</b> 	Did I accomplish my goal? <input type="text"/> YES      NO How did I do? 1 Not so good      2      3 OK      4      5 Great!
<b>NEXT STEP</b> 	Tomorrow, I will... <input type="text"/> MOVE ON      TRY AGAIN Why? <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>



## On Target for Life (©Strang et al.)

### An Executive Function (EF) Intervention for Teens with ASD

- Middle School adaptation of *Unstuck and On Target*
- 22 classroom lessons targeting:
  - Flexibility
    - Plan A/Plan B
    - Compromise
  - Planning
    - Increasing power in your life
    - Setting goals
    - Big picture thinking
    - Delayed gratification

# On Target for Life

## Teaching techniques:

OTL is structured around a series of engaging group planning events to increase motivation for planning:



# On Target for Life

## Table of Contents

Flexible Thinking	Keeping Your Eyes on the Prize
Power	Keeping Your Eyes on the Big Picture
Being Flexible = More Power	Efficiency – Eyes on the Clock
How to Help Others Be Flexible	Using All of the Skills to Plan
Putting a Plan on Trial	The Long-Term Goal – 3 <sup>rd</sup> Group Event
The Plan B Party	Learning From Our Experiences
Compromising a Win-Win	Making It Real – Using Skills Outside Group
When to Compromise	Personal Goal – Making a Plan
Planning an Event with Compromise	Self-Reflection
Celebration Day – Trying Out Our Plan	Graduation – Using Skills in the Real World

# On Target for Life

Teaching techniques:

**Scripts and Vocabulary** – simple and meaningful words and phrases used in many contexts to teach and generalize skills:

“How to increase power in my life?”

“That’s an interesting detail. How long should we get stuck on it?”

“What is the big picture?”

“When and how to compromise”

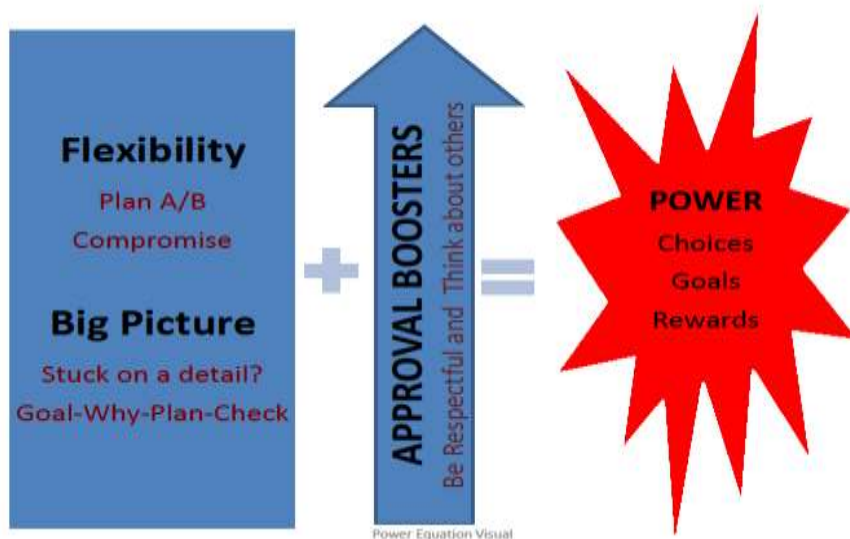
“Eyes on the prize”

“Making it real!” (using the skills in my life)

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# On Target for Life

Organizing visuals:



4 Ways to Compromise			
EACH GET PART	COMBINE IDEAS	TAKE TURNS	SOMETHING DIFFERENT YOU BOTH LIKE

"Let's get pizza"      "How about hot dogs?"

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Compromise (Flexible Futures, High school-Transition age, ©Pugliese)

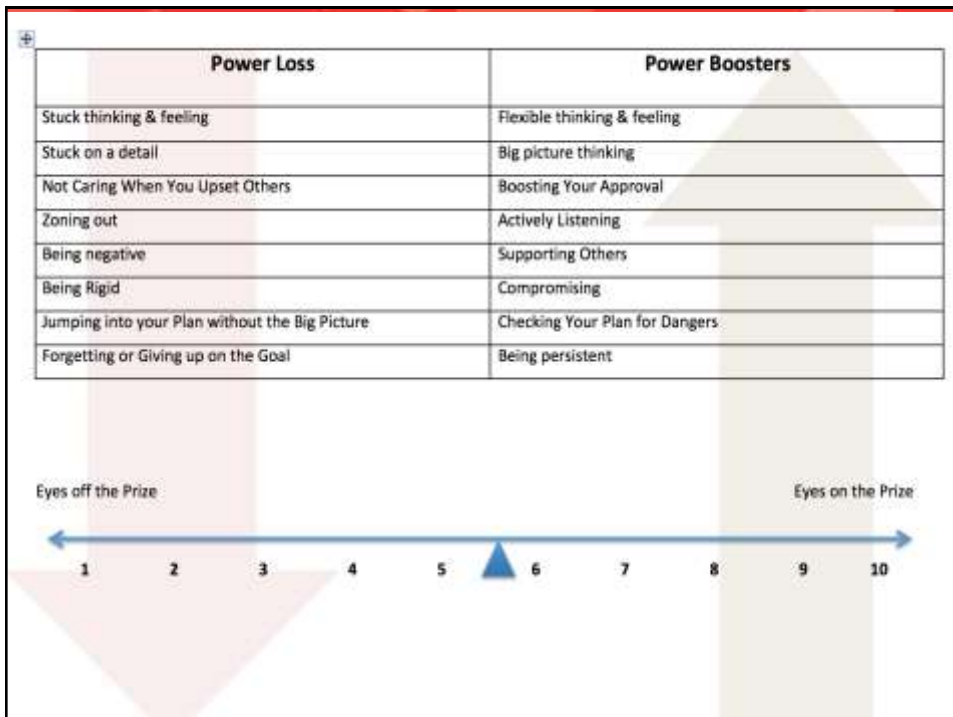
<u>With Yourself/ Two Goals</u>	<u>With Others</u>
When I want to play a computer game but I have to do my homework.	With sister when she acts stuck and doesn't want to share her electronics.

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## GOAL: Have fun hanging out with your friend.

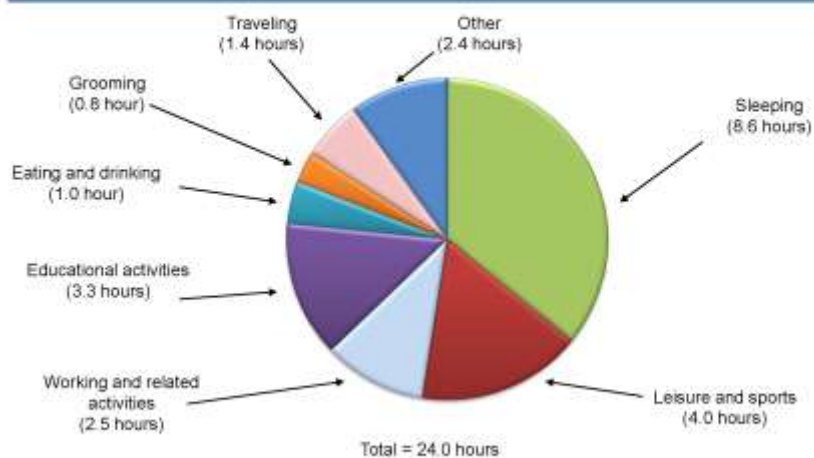
You love video games. You just got a new video game for your birthday, and you can't wait to show it to your friends. Ethan is coming over to hang out. Ethan usually likes to play basketball or Chess, but you are really excited to show him the game, and want to spend the whole time he is at your house playing it. As soon as Ethan walks through the door, you pull out the video game and ask him if he wants to play. Ethan pauses, frowns, and says, "Not right now, I was hoping we could finish our Chess game."

What's your Plan A?	How important is it to you?		How important is this to _____?		What's your Plan B?
	0 (Little Deal: I don't really care)		0 (He doesn't really care)		Compromise
	1 (I care a bit)		1 (He cares a bit)		Let it go
	2 (I care a lot)		2 (He cares a lot)		Stick to Your Idea





## Time use on an average weekday for full-time university and college students

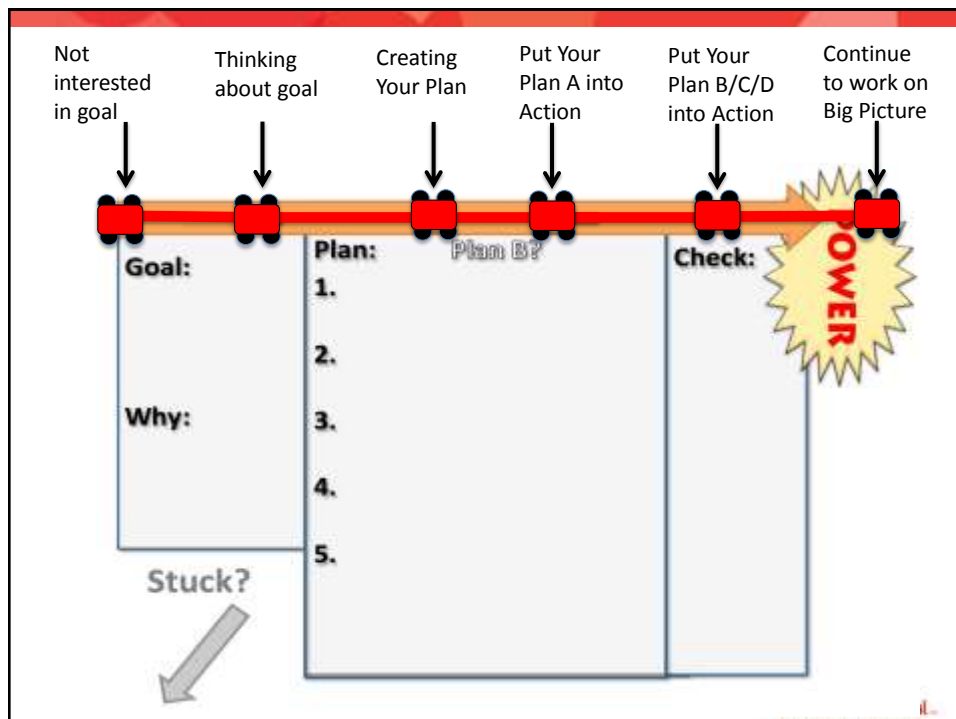
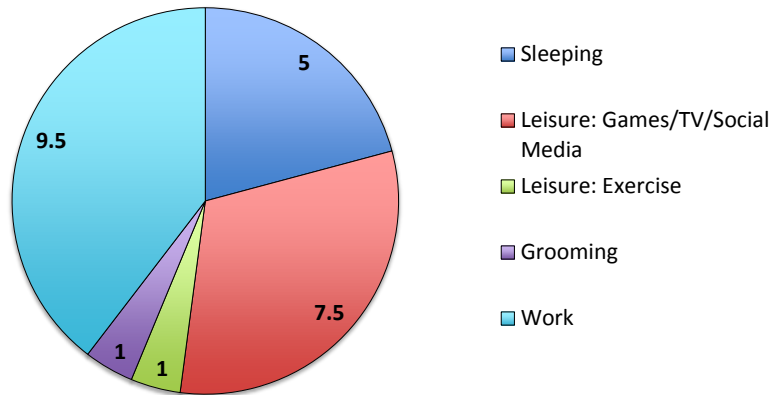


NOTE: Data include individuals, ages 15 to 49, who were enrolled full time at a university or college. Data include non-holiday weekdays and are averages for 2009 -13.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey



## Danger Pie or Balanced Pie?



## *The goose that lays the golden egg: Motivation*

What  
Motivates  
Us?  
*Daniel Pink*

**Autonomy**

**Mastery**

**Purpose**



**GOAL:** Increase your understanding of  
executive functions and how to teach them

### **PLAN**

1. Define Executive Functions (EF) and why they matter ✓
2. Understand & accommodate specific EF deficits ✓
3. Teach flexibility, organization & planning skills ✓

### **PLAN B?**

Do you want to see the data showing that Unstuck works?





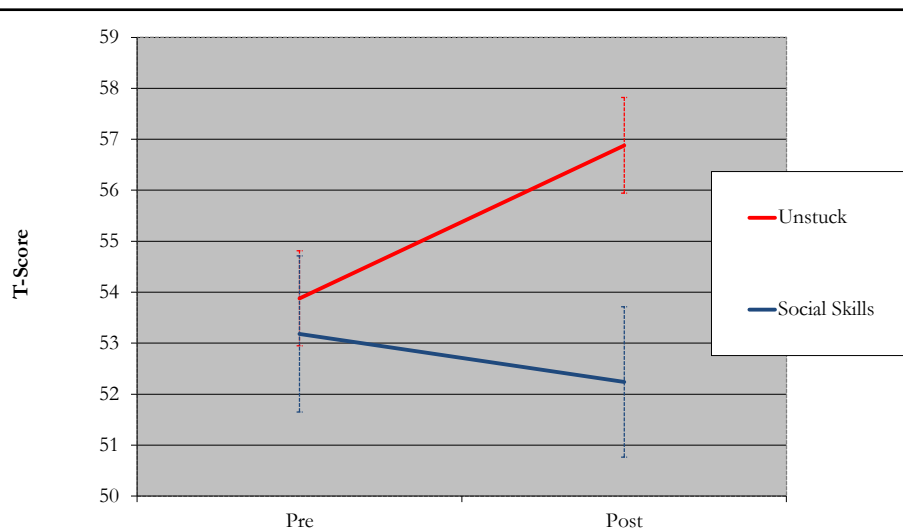
## Unstuck Trial: Participant Demographics

*Kenworthy & Anthony et al., 2014*

	Unstuck (n=47)	Social Skills (n=20)
Male	87%	90%
White	70%	55%
On Psychotropic Medication	55%	60%
Age	Mean (SD) 9.49(1.00)	Mean (SD) 9.58(1.10)
Mother's education	1.91(0.88)	1.95(0.76)
Father's education	2.04(1.12)	1.95(0.91)
WASI FSIQ	108.80(18.52)	107.63(17.20)
ADOS Social+Comm	11.64(3.76)	12.00(4.39)
ADOS Stereotyped Beh	1.98(1.71)	1.90(1.33)

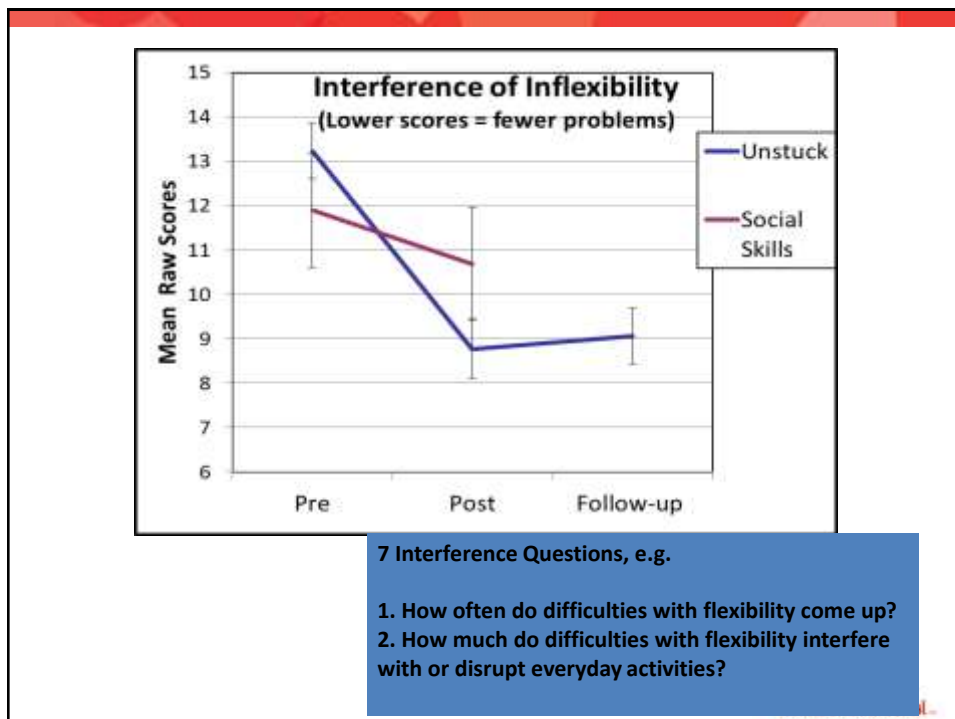
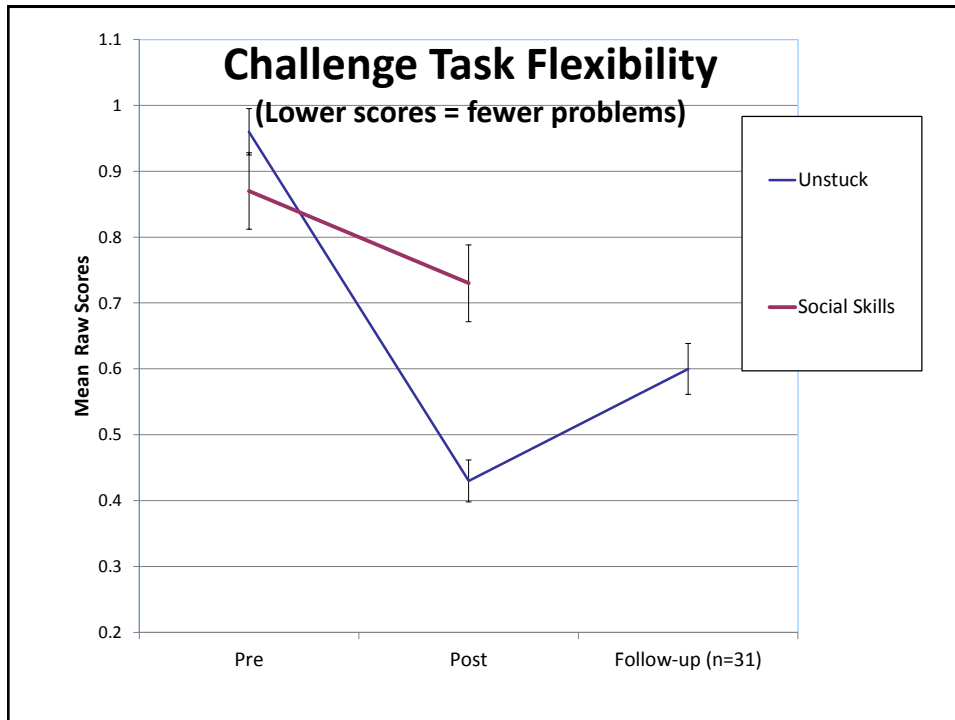
## WASI Block Design

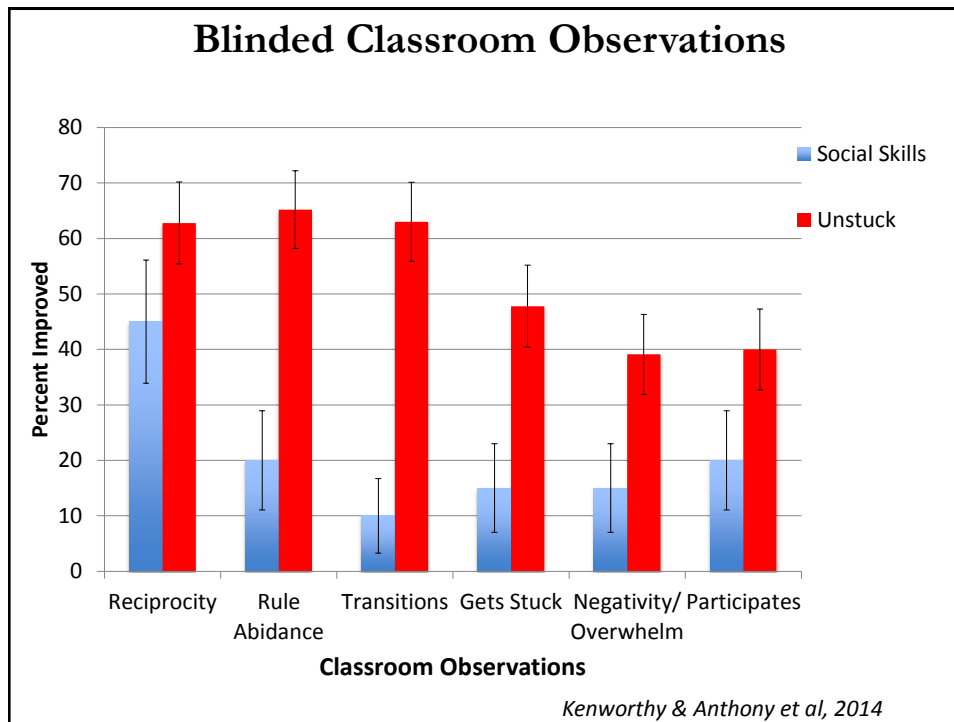
Higher Score = Better Performance



Cohen's  $d=0.65$

*Kenworthy & Anthony et al., 2014*





## Conclusions

- Unstuck = SS for social skills
- Unstuck > SS for flexibility, problem solving, and transitioning, negativity and following rules in class
- Unstuck > SS real world planning/organization
- 1 year after Unstuck, gains were sustained in:
  - Flexibility
  - Planning (lab task, not parent report)
  - On task behavior at school

## Anecdotal evidence

- Parent: "This has been a life changing experience for my daughter"
- Teacher: "One student had three meltdowns per day, and UOT reduced her outbursts to two occurrences in one quarter"
- Parent: "UOT was a lifesaver for us this year!"

## Project Overview: The Method

- **Sample**

- Two hundred 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> graders (100 with ASD and 100 with ADHD), will be chosen from two school systems that have agreed to participate and currently use CBM.
- The Partnering School Systems
  - DC KIPP Charter Schools
  - Fairfax County School System
    - Both systems have had previous relationships with project staff, have demonstrated a commitment to their students with special needs, evidence a value of family/parent engagement and have adequate number of children with ASD and ADHD to support the study. Both systems include a preponderance of low income families.



## GOAL: Increase your understanding of executive functions and how to teach them

### PLAN

1. Define Executive Functions (EF) and why they matter ✓
2. Understand & accommodate specific EF deficits ✓
3. Teach flexibility, organization & planning skills ✓

#### PLAN B?

Do you want to see more about our adaptation processes?



## PARENT TRAININGS AND ADAPTATION



### Parent Involvement in Interventions: Unstuck and On Target (UOT)

- Parent manual
- Weekly parent handouts
  - Session summary
  - Tips for reinforcing skills at home
- 4 parent trainings (60 minutes each)
  - Program Overview
  - Flexibility Scripts and Vocabulary
  - Planning & Coping Skills
  - Avoiding Distraction and Emotion Regulation



## Planned Adaptations for Low Income Families

- User friendly texts with lots of visuals and shorter descriptions
- Real-world examples (not "picking up your dry cleaning")
- Diverse photos and names used throughout
- Time for practice built into training sessions
- Parent check-ins with a family navigator
- Training sessions scheduled at convenient times with childcare provided



### Executive Functioning: What is it?

**Executive functioning** is a term used to describe skills that help people control their behavior and reach their goals. Each person's brain controls how well these skills operate. These skills are important because they help us manage all of our life activities. Executive functioning helps us to keep track of time, decide whether or not an idea is good or bad, change our minds if we get new information, handle more than one thing at a time, know when to ask for help, and know how to use that help when we get it!



#### EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS: FLEXIBILITY, PLANNING, & ORGANIZATION

Our brains are always at work as we go through our day. Our brains help us to manage our daily activities.

In this chapter we will meet a girl named Andrea and see how she tries to use the executive functioning skills of flexibility, planning, and organization.

### "Ser Flexible"

**Ser flexible** significa que puede cambiar sus ideas, hacer algo diferente de lo que pensó iba a hacer, pensar en algo diferente, y mantener una mente abierta.

La "Práctica en Casa" 5 incluye un juego que se puede jugar para ayudar a su hijo/a con ser flexible.

Cuando los niños son flexibles, ellos tienen muchas opciones. Puede usar frases como:

- "Vamos a pensar de una manera que podemos ser flexibles en caso de que nuestro primer plan no funciona."
- "No siempre puedes conseguir lo que quieres, así que tienes que ser flexible."
- "Puedes ser flexible, lo has hecho antes."
- "Cuando compartiste tu juego, estabas siendo flexible, ¿y funcionó?"



Este icono representa el vocabulario "flexible". Cada vez que lo ve, hay una buena oportunidad de ayudar a su hijo/a a reconocer los beneficios de ser flexibles en situaciones difíciles o inesperadas!



## Algunos ejemplos de cómo utilizar "acuerdo"

### Jugando con Amigos

Cuando un niño quiere jugar fútbol, pero su amigo quiere jugar con Legos, usted podría decir: "¿Se puede llegar a un **acuerdo** para jugar fútbol y luego Legos? De esta manera, ustedes dos pueden conseguir lo que quieren en el final, que es mejor que no conseguir lo que quieren en absoluto".

### Cuando un niño no quiere hacer algo

Se podría decir, "Pareces **atrapado**. Mi **Plan A** era pedirte limpiar la casa y ayudarme a cocinar la cena para tu abuela esta noche. ¿Podemos llegar a un **acuerdo**? ¿Qué te parece si yo cocino y tú limpias?"

Escriba su propio ejemplo: Si su hijo/a quiere un regalo de cumpleaños que está fuera de su presupuesto

Usted podría decir: "\_\_\_\_\_"  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_"

Do you remember Michael from the beginning of this chapter, who has meltdowns when things don't go his way?

Here are some ways that his mother and grandmother can use this chapter to help him be more flexible.

Michael is hoping to go to a restaurant today. His mother knows that they have friends to do and don't have enough time to eat at the restaurant, and she knows that Michael loves their French fries. She says, "Michael, I know your **Plan A** is to eat at the restaurant, but this is a **no choice** situation – we have to go to the store. What is your **Plan B**? Maybe we can get some take out fries and eat them while we do errands? You can **be flexible**, you have done it before."

Michael is playing with his cousins and he is starting to get upset that his younger cousin is playing with his action figures. His grandmother says, "Michael, are you **stuck**? Is it a **Big Deal** or a **little deal** that Jordan is playing with your toys? A **Big Deal**? Okay, how can we turn it into a **little deal**? You want to give him just two action figures to play with? That is a great **compromise**. Great job **being flexible**!"



### SUMMARY

In this chapter, you learned...

- What is flexible thinking?
- Why is flexible thinking important?
- The key vocabulary for improving flexible thinking including:
  - "Be Flexible"
  - "Stuck and Unstuck"
  - "Plan A / Plan B"
  - "Compromise"
  - "Big Deal / Little Deal"
  - "Choice / No Choice"
- How to make being flexible fun.



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## Unstuck and On Target Home Practice 10

Your child had their tenth session of Unstuck and the Target today.

D/d

**Session Summary:** Your child learned about the difference between a Big Deal and a Little Deal today in group. A **Big Deal** is a large problem, takes a long time to fix and usually takes a lot of people to solve. A **little deal** is something that is a small problem, can be fixed quickly and doesn't take many people to solve.



What you can try at home:

1. Keep in mind that whether or not something is a **Big Deal** is very personal!
  - Just because something is a **Big Deal** to you, does not automatically mean that it will be a **Big Deal** to your child.
    1. For example, it might be a **Big Deal** to you for the family to go to church together, but it is a **Little Deal** for your child. Or maybe it is the other way around.
    2. Maybe it is a **Big Deal** for your child that they are always on time, but you find like being 5 minutes late is no **Big Deal**. Or maybe it is the other way around.
2. Don't tell your child something is not a **Big Deal**. Instead, try saying something like this:
  - "It is ok if something feels like a **Big Deal**. I'll help you figure out how to turn it into a **Little Deal**."
  - "If you have a **Big Deal** problem you can always ask for help. We all need help with a **Big Deal**."
3. Praise your child for asking for help with a **Big Deal**, or for being able to recognize when something is a **Little Deal**.
  - "It was a **Big Deal** or a **Little Deal** to you?"
  - "You are right, this does feel like a **Big Deal**. Let's figure out who to ask for help."



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7/28/2015

## The Reality about Those Adaptations

### Challenges

- Recruitment issues (need for adaptive design)
- Parent check-ins difficult
- Coordination between home and school

### Successes

- Involvement of school interventionists
- High attendance rate
- Parents who attend the trainings are deeply engaged in change



## Planned Adaptations for Latino families

- Translation of all materials into Spanish
  - Joint efforts by bilingual team (1 native Spanish speaker and 2 native English speakers)
  - Additional teaching around “difficult to translate” words and concepts
- Use of “charla” model
  - PowerPoints used as handouts, rather than projected
  - Emphasis on sharing of parenting experiences





## The Reality

### Challenges

- Low attendance
- Weekend and fill-in work schedules
- Finding meeting sites with easy access to public transit
- Resistance to participation from fathers

### Successes

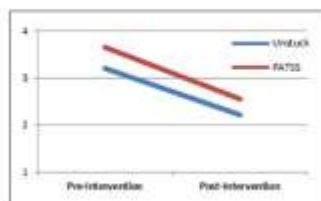
- Enabling parent connections
- Building maternal confidence
- High enthusiasm from engaged parents



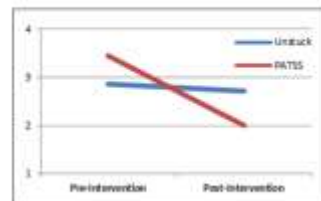
### The Flexibility Project, Year 1: Preliminary Results

Classroom teachers saw improvements in a range of behaviors after students completed either PATSS or Unstuck, like:

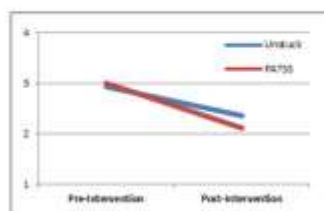
**Getting Started on Assignments  
(Unstuck and PATSS)**



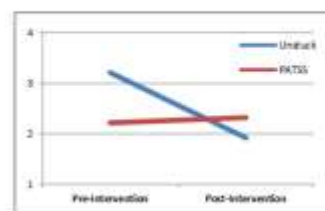
**Completing Assigned Work  
(PATSS)**



**Complying with Teacher's Usual  
Requests or Directions (Unstuck and PATSS)**



**Stopping and Making  
Transitions to Next Period (Unstuck)**



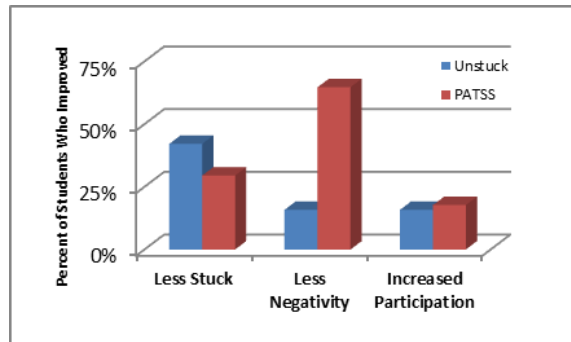
\*On the graphs above, lower scores on the SKAMP indicate fewer teacher-reported behavioral challenges



## The Flexibility Project, Year 1: Preliminary Results

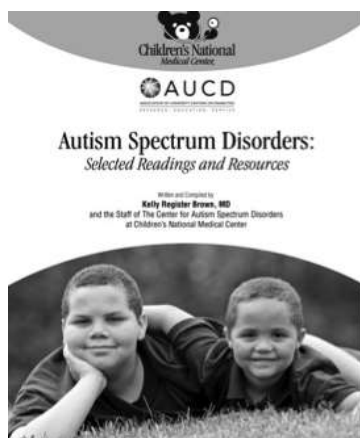
Classroom Observations (N=37)

- More classroom participation
- Less negative
- Less likely to become stuck



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## Resources



[www.childrensnational.org/casd](http://www.childrensnational.org/casd)

- Join the CASD Chat email list  
[autism@cnmc.org](mailto:autism@cnmc.org)
- Autism Internet Modules  
<http://www.autisminternetmodules.org>
- Evidence-based practices briefs  
<http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/briefs>
- Association for Science in Autism Treatment  
[www.asatonline.org](http://www.asatonline.org)

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## Books on Supporting and Teaching Executive Function

- *Solving Executive Function Challenges: Simple Ways to Get Kids with Autism Unstuck and on Target* Kenworthy et al (2014)
- *Unstuck and On Target: Teaching Flexibility and Goal Directed Behavior to Children with ASD* Cannon et al (2011)
- *The Incredible Flexible You & Superflex* Michelle Garcia Winner
- *Smart by Scattered* Dawson & Guare (2009)
- *Late Lost and Unprepared* Cooper-Kahn & Dietzel (2008)
- *Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents: A Practical Guide to Assessment and Intervention* Dawson & Guare (2010)
- *School Success for Kids With Asperger's Syndrome* Silverman et al (2014)

