How to Help Your Middle & High School Child Develop Organizational Skills for Distance Learning and for Life

Sped*Net presentation
5/8/2020
Dr Mary Murphy, PhD

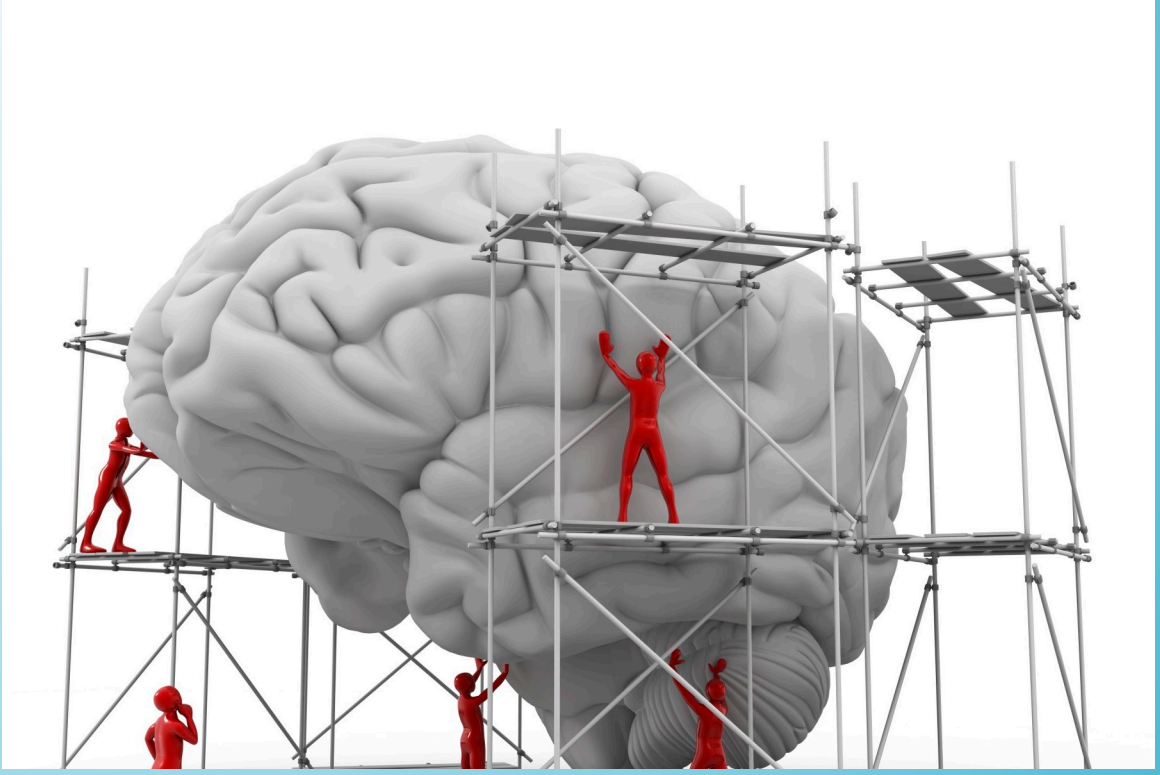
Agenda

Today we'll cover:

- What organizational challenges our kids are experiencing (within the context of executive functioning)
- How distance learning poses unique set of challenges to EF and what we as parents can do to help:
    - Expectations (how we can adjust our view of this; developmental lens)
    - Environment (how we can use tools to enhance learning environment)
    - Approach to learning (what science tells us about how kids learn EF)

Executive Functioning (EF) Defined

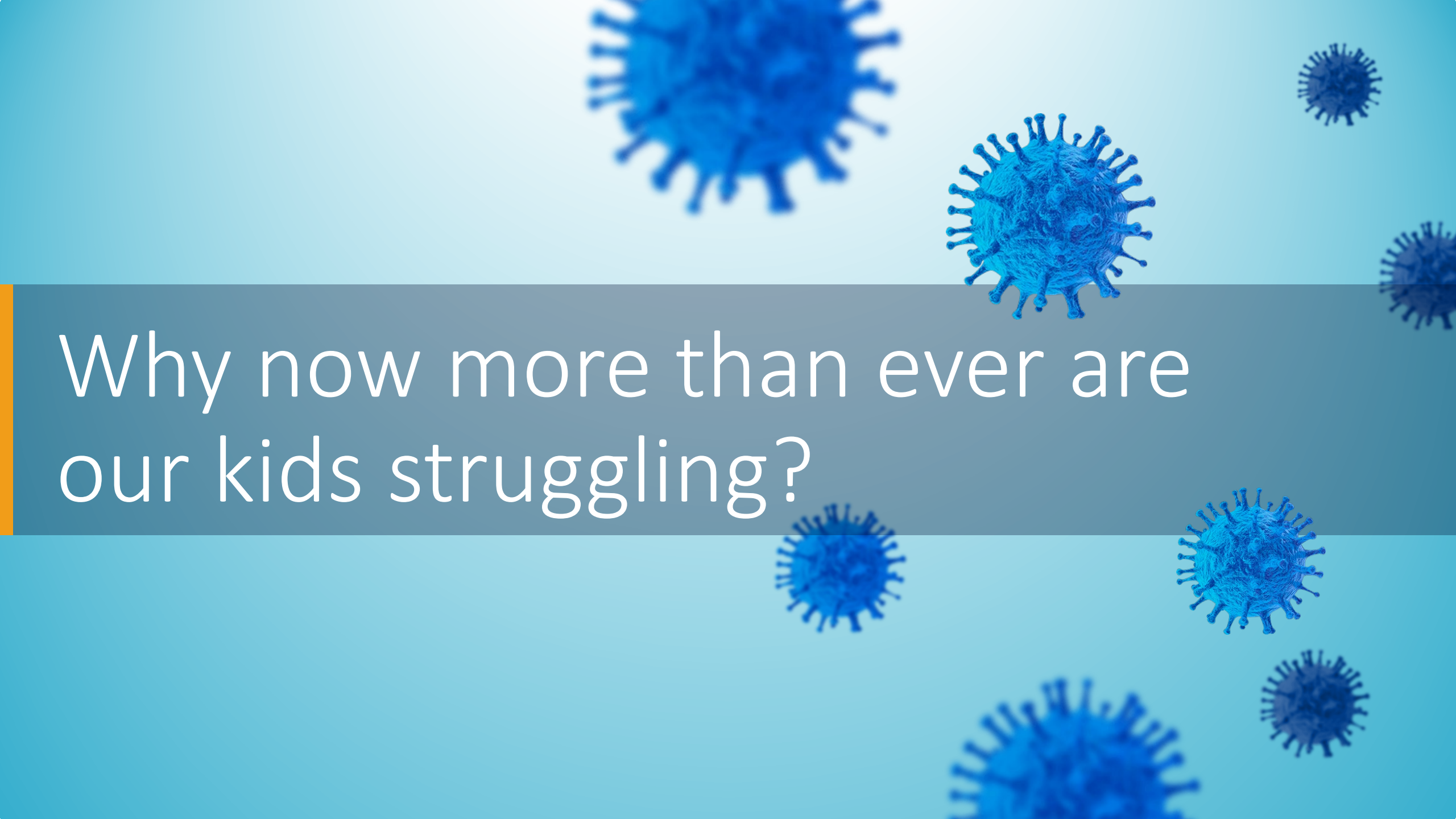
- *Executive functions are the skills we use manage ourselves in order to achieve a goal. It is an umbrella term for neurologically-based skills*
- EF issues are weaknesses in these mental skills that are key to learning. Kids with executive functioning issues often struggle with working memory, flexible thinking and self-control.
- These are life skills and should be under development during this age



A look at specific EF areas

1. Planning (how and when to do assignments),
2. Organization (how to organize & keep things on track),
3. Time-management (how to know how much time something will take and plan accordingly),
4. Task initiation and self-motivation (how to get started with work and stay with it)
5. Flexibility and transitions (how to go with the flow & manage change as they occur)
6. Memory (short-term, working, and long-term),
7. Self-monitoring (how to tame impulsivity, exercise emotional control, & regulate ourselves)

EF age may be as much as 3 years younger than chronological age for kids with special needs



Why now more than ever are our kids struggling?

New reality – New challenges

- We are facing unprecedented and prolonged period of time with our kids having to learn exclusively at home
- We are our children's primary source of organizational and executive functioning support now
- Anxiety hijacks our children's learning brain
- Different reality (screen use, seeing self on screen, grading, supervision, no special services)
- Different organizational challenges than before (different skills before – HW planner & bookbag, now computers & different platforms)
- We as parents are under stresses like never before

What can parents do?

Structure,
Predictability,
&
Routine

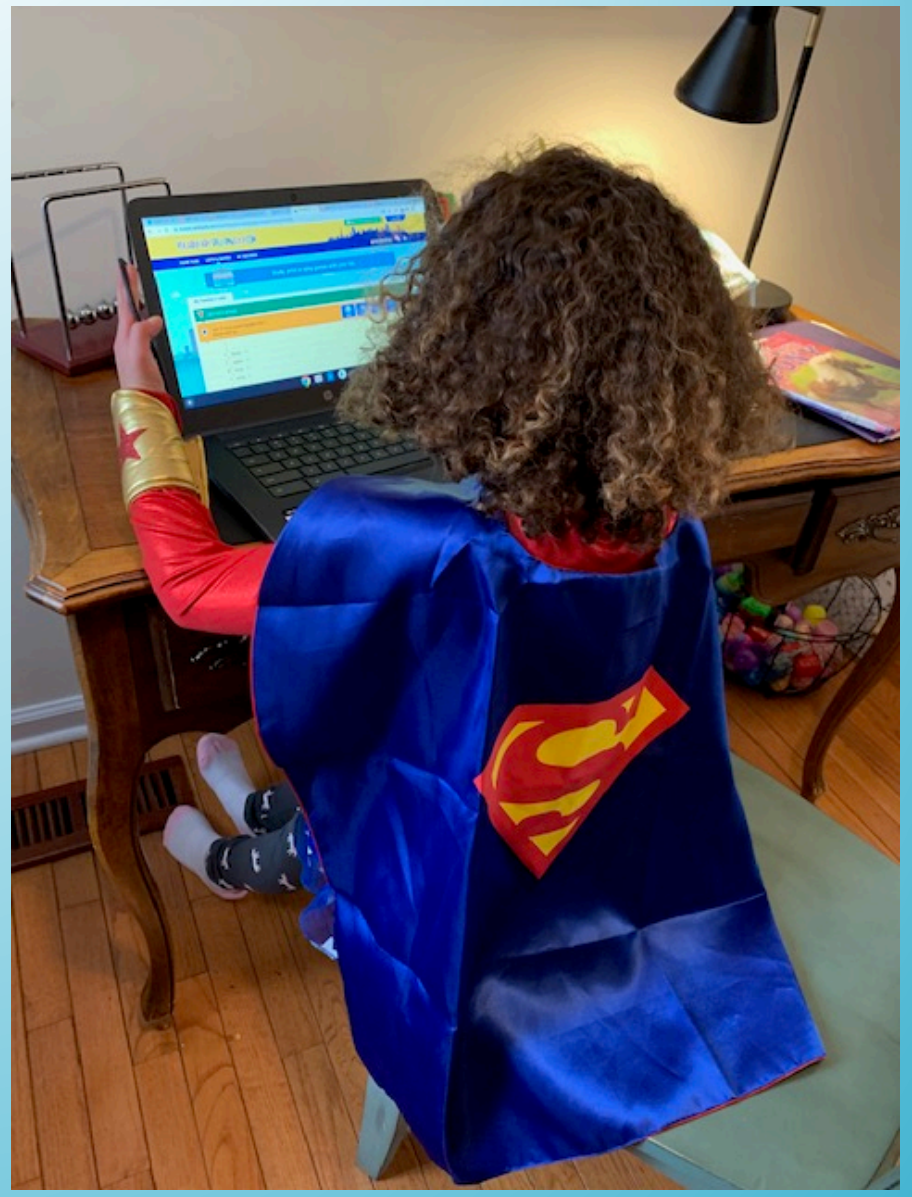
Adjusting our expectations

- Structure & routine are key
  - -Every morning do the same thing
    Get up brush teeth, dress for the day before starting any work
  - - Keep same schedule- sleep and wake times (this is not a “corona-cation”)
  - - Add in exercise breaks
  - - Start the day early and have less in afternoon

- Bring them snacks and keep them fueled and energized
- Consider the environment
  - - Location of work (bedroom?)
  - - Different workstations for specials
  - - What is your child’s internal environment at any given moment
- Screens are no longer the enemy- use for social connection for us & w friends & family

Keep it fun!

- Use apps and websites to use alternatives to teach the materials (khan academy, photo math, etc.)
- Use google meets and zoom sessions with family and friends daily
-Use a reward to give them something to look forward to
-Distance learners sometimes wear capes



Adolescent Development

- Largest period of change we ever go through (physical, emotional, cognitive, brain, & moral development)
- Critical Tasks:
  - Increased sense of autonomy
  - Firmer sense of identity & personality
    - self-concept --perception of one's talents, goals, and life experiences. It can also relate to identity as part of ethnic, religious, and sexual identity groups.
    - Self-esteem- how one evaluates self-worth

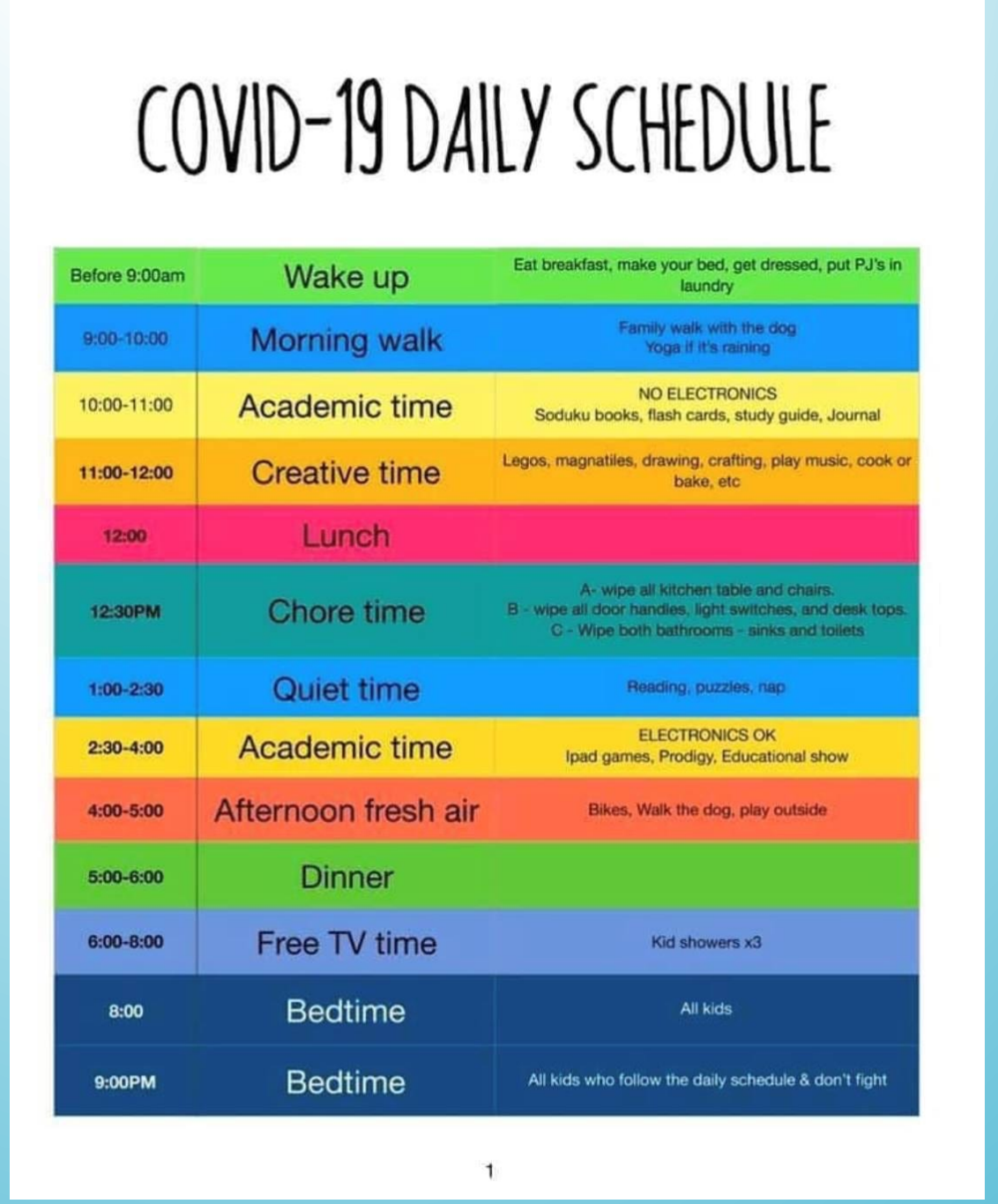
Brain Development

- At 6 years, a brain is 90-95% of adult size
- But it still needs a lot of remodeling
- Intensive remodeling: adolescence thru 20s

Brain Development

- Teenagers rely on the **amygdala** to make decisions and solve problems.
- The amygdala is associated with emotions, impulses, aggression and instinctive behavior
- Frontal lobes are not fully "online" until age 25
- Gas with no brakes

Changing our environment



COVID-19 DAILY SCHEDULE

Before 9:00am	Wake up	Eat breakfast, make your bed, get dressed, put PJ's in laundry
9:00-10:00	Morning walk	Family walk with the dog Yoga if it's raining
10:00-11:00	Academic time	NO ELECTRONICS Soduku books, flash cards, study guide, Journal
11:00-12:00	Creative time	Legos, magnatiles, drawing, crafting, play music, cook or bake, etc
12:00	Lunch	
12:30PM	Chore time	A- wipe all kitchen table and chairs. B - wipe all door handles, light switches, and desk tops. C - Wipe both bathrooms - sinks and toilets
1:00-2:30	Quiet time	Reading, puzzles, nap
2:30-4:00	Academic time	ELECTRONICS OK Ipad games, Prodigy, Educational show
4:00-5:00	Afternoon fresh air	Bikes, Walk the dog, play outside
5:00-6:00	Dinner	
6:00-8:00	Free TV time	Kid showers x3
8:00	Bedtime	All kids
9:00PM	Bedtime	All kids who follow the daily schedule & don't fight

1

Organizational tools

Checklists/
Schedules

Highlighters

Clocks

Post its

Trifold cardboard & neat desk to block distractions

Calendars/ Printed schedules

headphones

Focus on building EF micro skills

- How do you structure an email to a teacher /coach
- How do you use assertive communication to respectfully correspond with teachers (and parents)
- Self advocacy
- Problem solving (narrate everything)
- How to track activities

Spreadsheet Organizers

		Current Assignments										
English		Finished reading Macbeth, working on the essay, completing daily assignments on GC N/M										
Spanish		Quias now required daily lessons (N/M) , all missing work is in, all quias are in, mom has emailed teacher and 75% on quias is new goal										
Chem		N/M, new unit starting this week										
Gym		weekly forms w exercise										
History		completeing daily assignments-current module is about Apartheid in Africa										
Pers Finance		completeing daily lessons on GC, N/M										
Algebra		completely daily assignments of watching videos and exit slips, teacher graded my work, now a C-, all missing work is inN/M										
Daily Tasks:		Check GC, DL Website, PS, enter attendence, check email										
N/M= nothing missing								**DATES**	**LETTER DAY**			
N=nothing due								**May 4-7 (Mon-Tl**	**C, D, E, F Days**			
								May 8 (Friday)	**Flex Day**			
Long Term Projects:		weekly practice test for drivers permit, PSAT prep,						**May 11-14 (Mon**	**G, H, A, B Days**			
		Driving practice monday, wed, friday						**May 15 (Friday)**	**Flex Day**			
To Do:								**May 18-21 (Mon**	**C, D, E, F Days**			
		working on practice/mock driving permit test, done by Friday						**May 22 (Friday)**	**Flex Day**			
								May 26-29 (Tues	**G, H, A, B Days**			
		send parents updated spreadsheet monday, friday						**June 1-4 (Mon-T**	**C, D, E, F Days**			
		send parents weekly update fridays- group text						**June 5 (Friday)**	**Flex Day**			
		google career opportunties with FBI						**June 8-11 (Mon-**	**G, H, A, B Days**			
		go through assignments and look at quias and fix to 75% if are not already there by 5/11						**June 12 (Friday)**	**Flex Day**			
		summer job interview Thursday 5/7 @ 1:45						**June 15 (Monday**	**Flex Day (All student work due)**			
								June 16 (Tuesda	**Flex Day (Teachers close out grades; grades are stored for Semester 2)**			

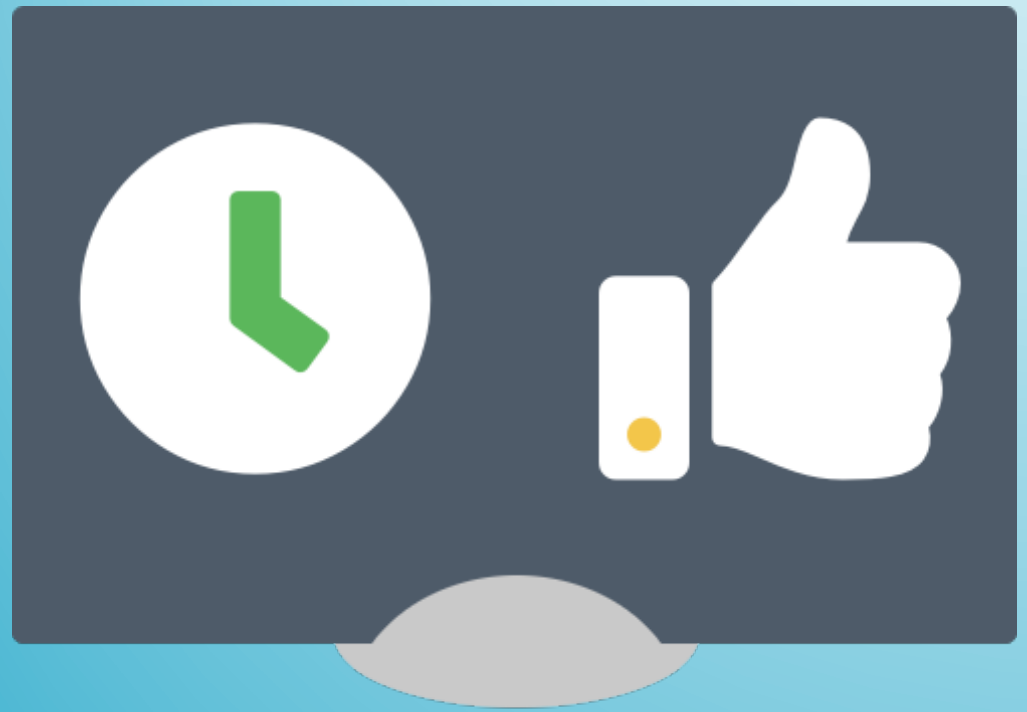
Powerschool tracking

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Spanish							DONE:		
L10 Repaso del la unidad: 31 El Futuro (April 6) - Missing							done		
L9 U3-L1 Preuba del futuro (April 3) - Incomplete							done		
L8 U3-L1 Practica de gramatica (April 2) - Incomplete							done		
L7 U3-L1 Practica de Vocabulario (March 31) - Incomplete							done		
L6 U3-L1 Practica del futuro #3 (March 30) - Incomplete							done		
L5 U3-L1 Prueba y Practica del Futuro #2 (March 27) - Incomplete							done		
Quai's 1-17 - Incomplete							done quias 15, 16, 17		
L2 U3-L1 Presentacion del Vocabulario (March 12) - Missing							done		
L1 U3-L1 Practica de vocabulario #1 (March 11) - Incomplete							done		
U3 Quizlet: Spell + Games (March 10) - Missing							done		
U2-L1 Repaso de la Unidad (march 3) - Incomplete							done		
Quia: Write (Feb 4) - Missing									
English									
IR part 1 (April 6) - finish and resubmit- not sure what this means because i finished							Monday 5/11		
Personal Finance									
Econolockdown: Time Value of Money (April 1) - marked both late and missing with a grade of 0 of 20? i emailed her weeks ago bc there was a problem									
Math									
KA SAT Practice (March 9) - Incomplete							done		

Distraction blocking

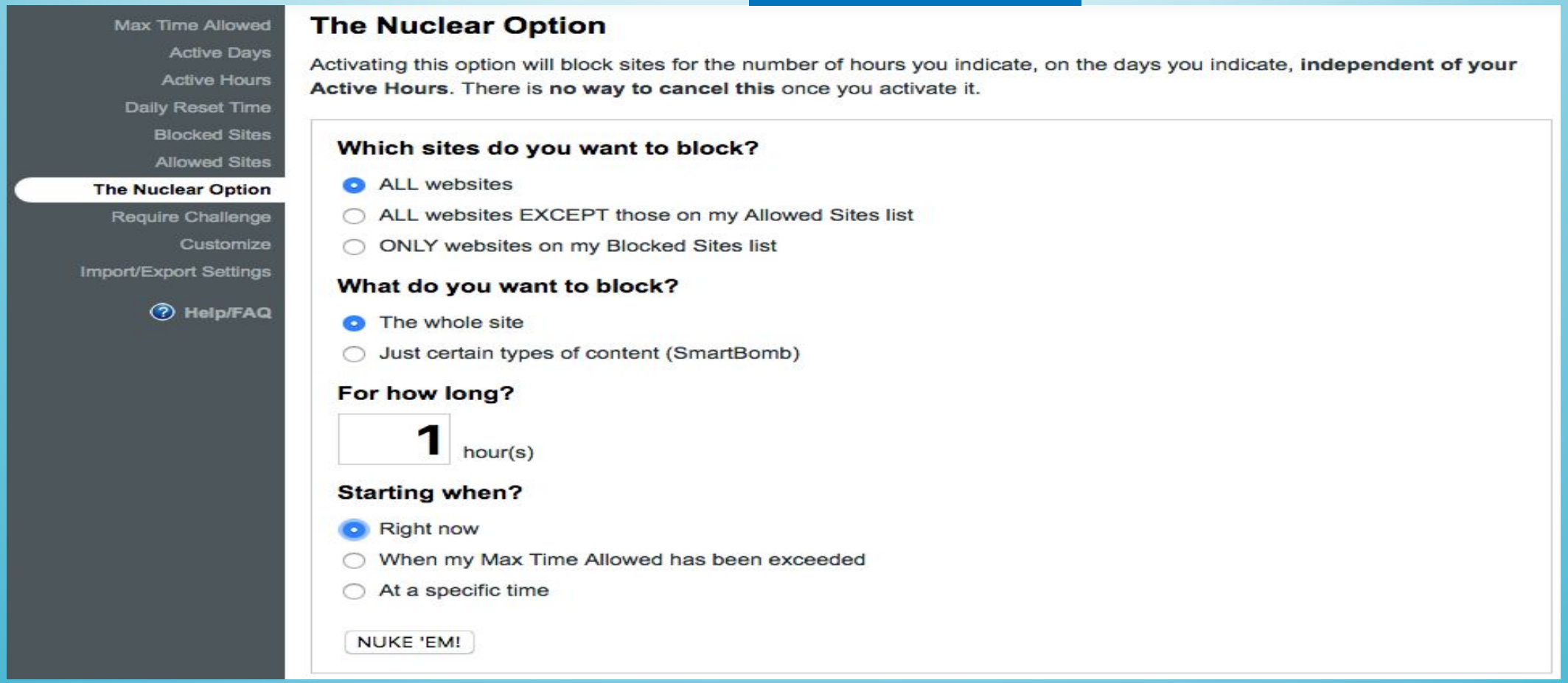
Stay on task app

Cold Turkey website blocker



Revibe watch- reminders to stay focused

Stay focused app



Productivity apps

My homework app

myHomework (iOS and Android)
This app is geared directly to students of any level and focuses specifically on homework/assignment planning. Users can set up times, due dates, and calendars for homework assignments. You can also input your course schedule, along with reminders for classes.
Price: Free

Evernote app

Evernote helps you focus on what matters most and have access to your information when you need it. Input typed notes or scan handwritten notes. Add to-do's, photos, images, web pages, or audio ... and it's all instantly searchable. Organize notes any way you want and share with anyone. And Evernote syncs across your devices so your information is always with you, everywhere you go.

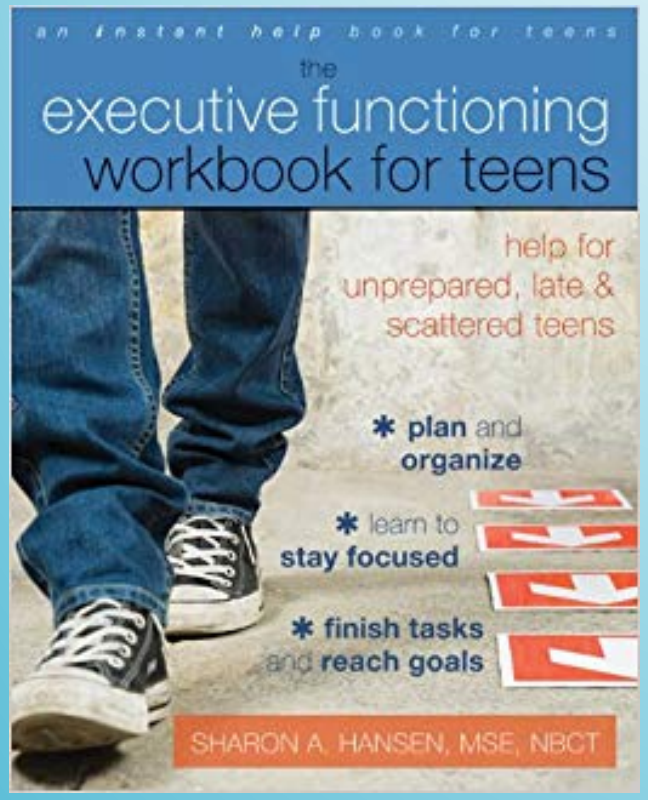
Productivity apps

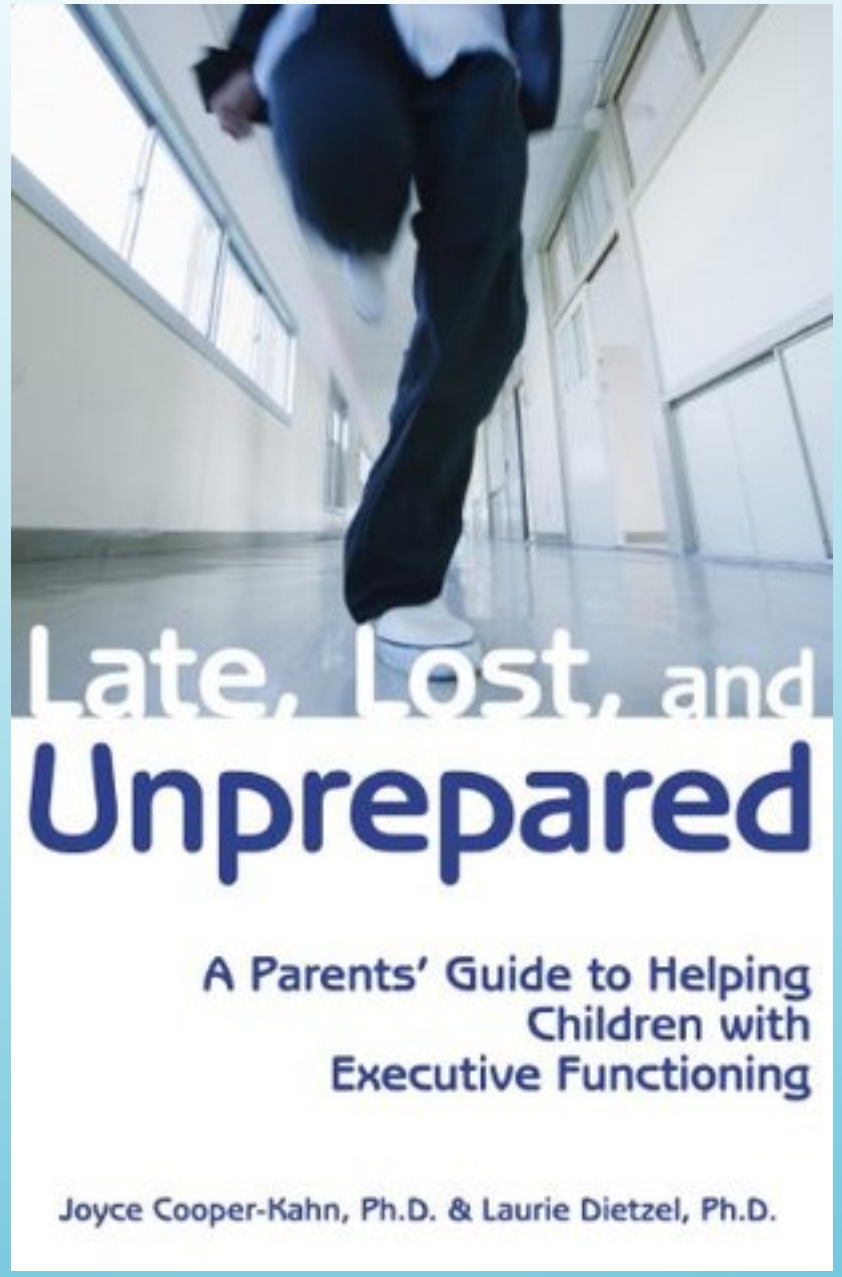
Flashcards apps

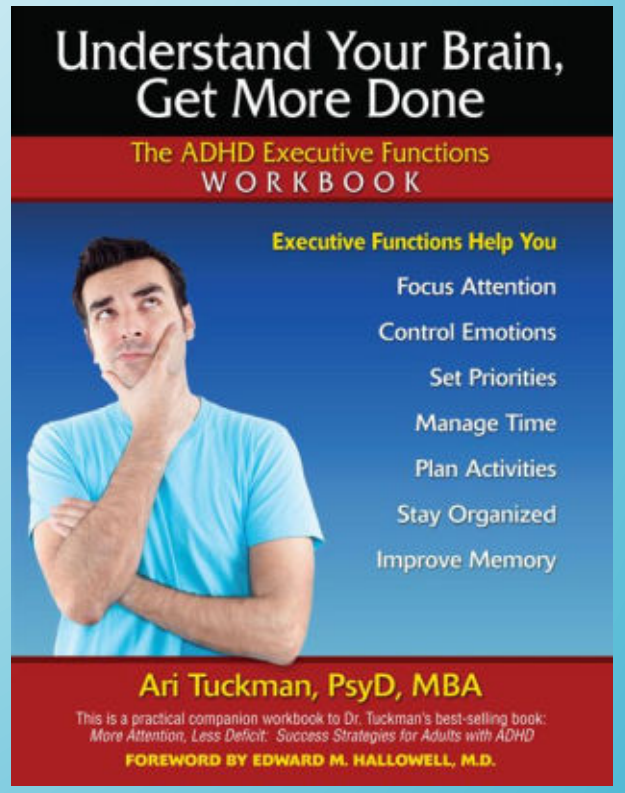
Elisi app

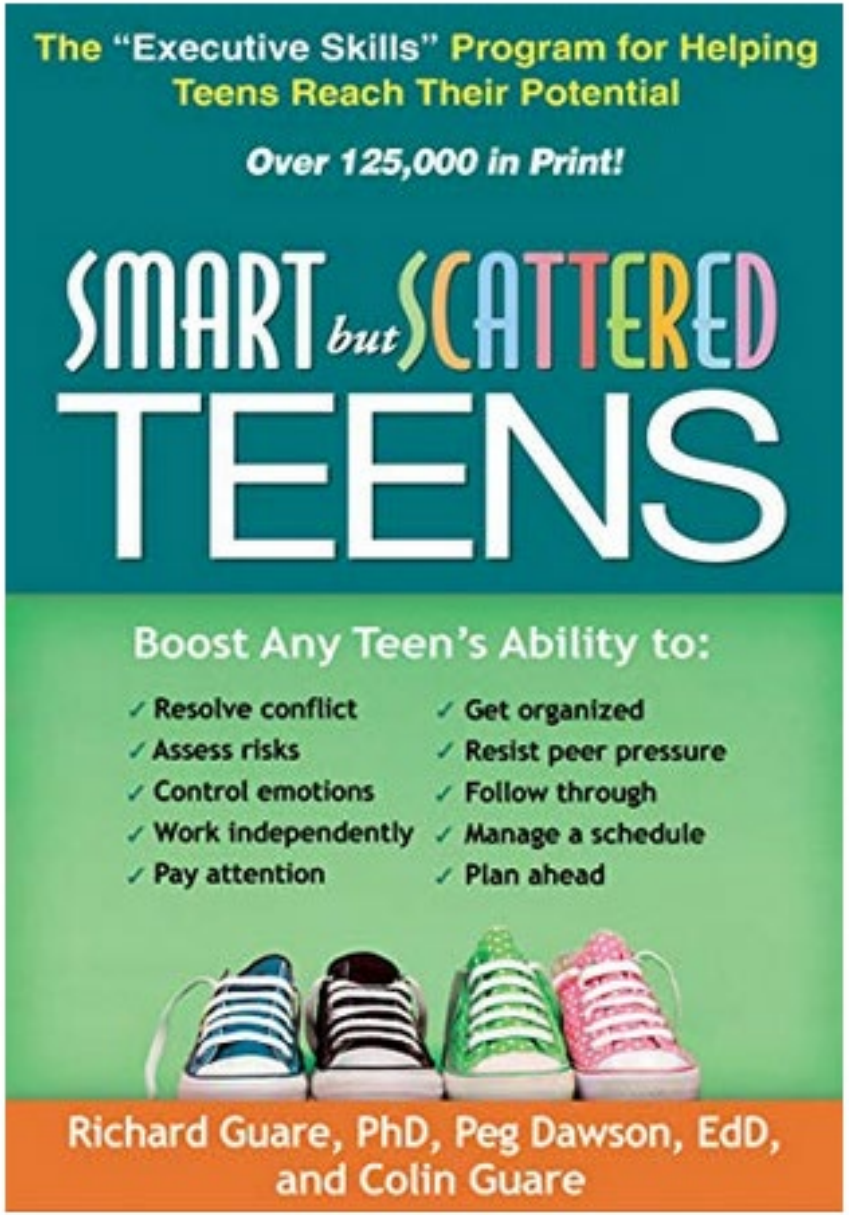
Week at a glance planner, to do list, integrates & syncs across desktop and phones

Self guided workbooks for EF

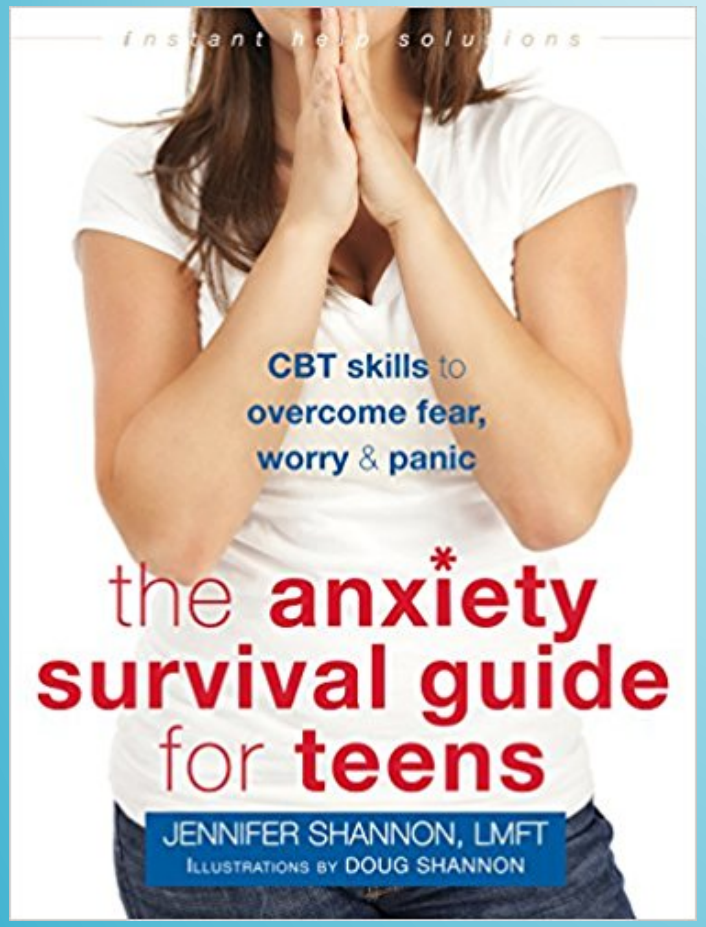


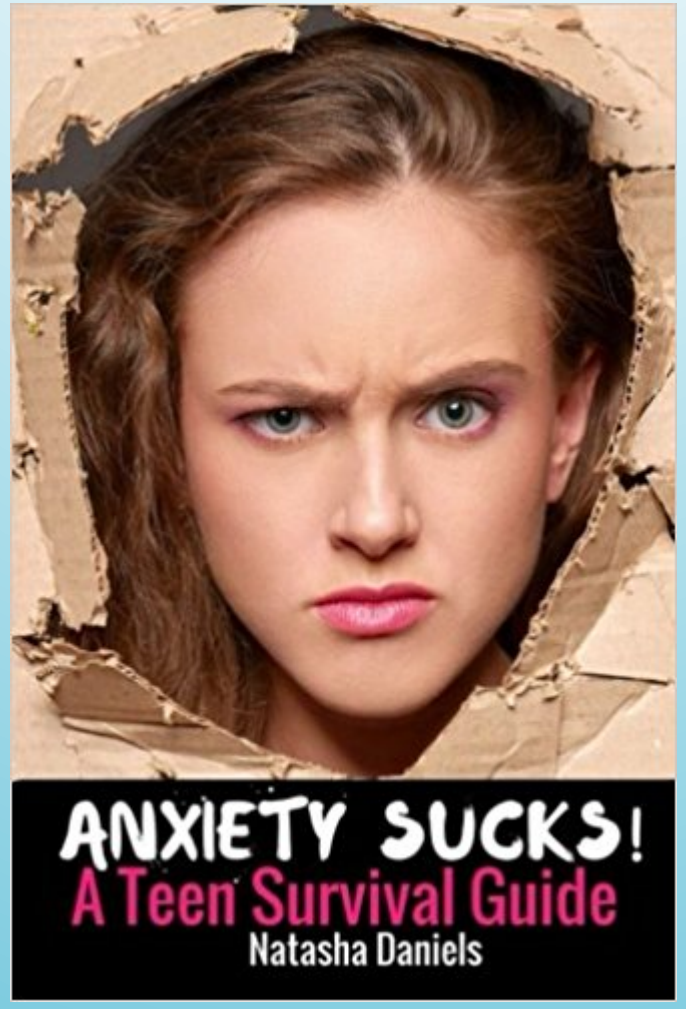


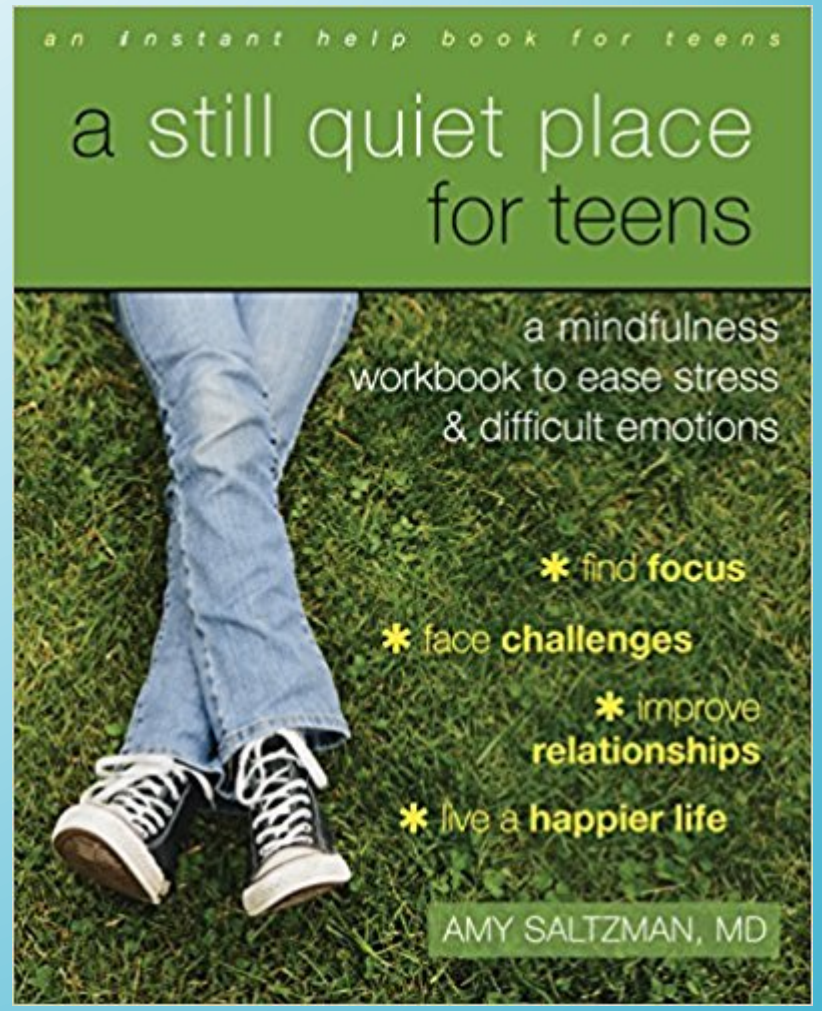



The "Executive Skills" Program for Helping Teens Reach Their Potential
Over 125,000 in Print!
SMART but SCATTERED TEENS
Boost Any Teen's Ability to:
✓ Resolve conflict
✓ Assess risks
✓ Control emotions
✓ Work independently
✓ Pay attention
✓ Get organized
✓ Resist peer pressure
✓ Follow through
✓ Manage a schedule
✓ Plan ahead
Richard Guare, PhD, Peg Dawson, EdD, and Colin Guare

Workbooks for emotional needs







Distance Learning Accommodations

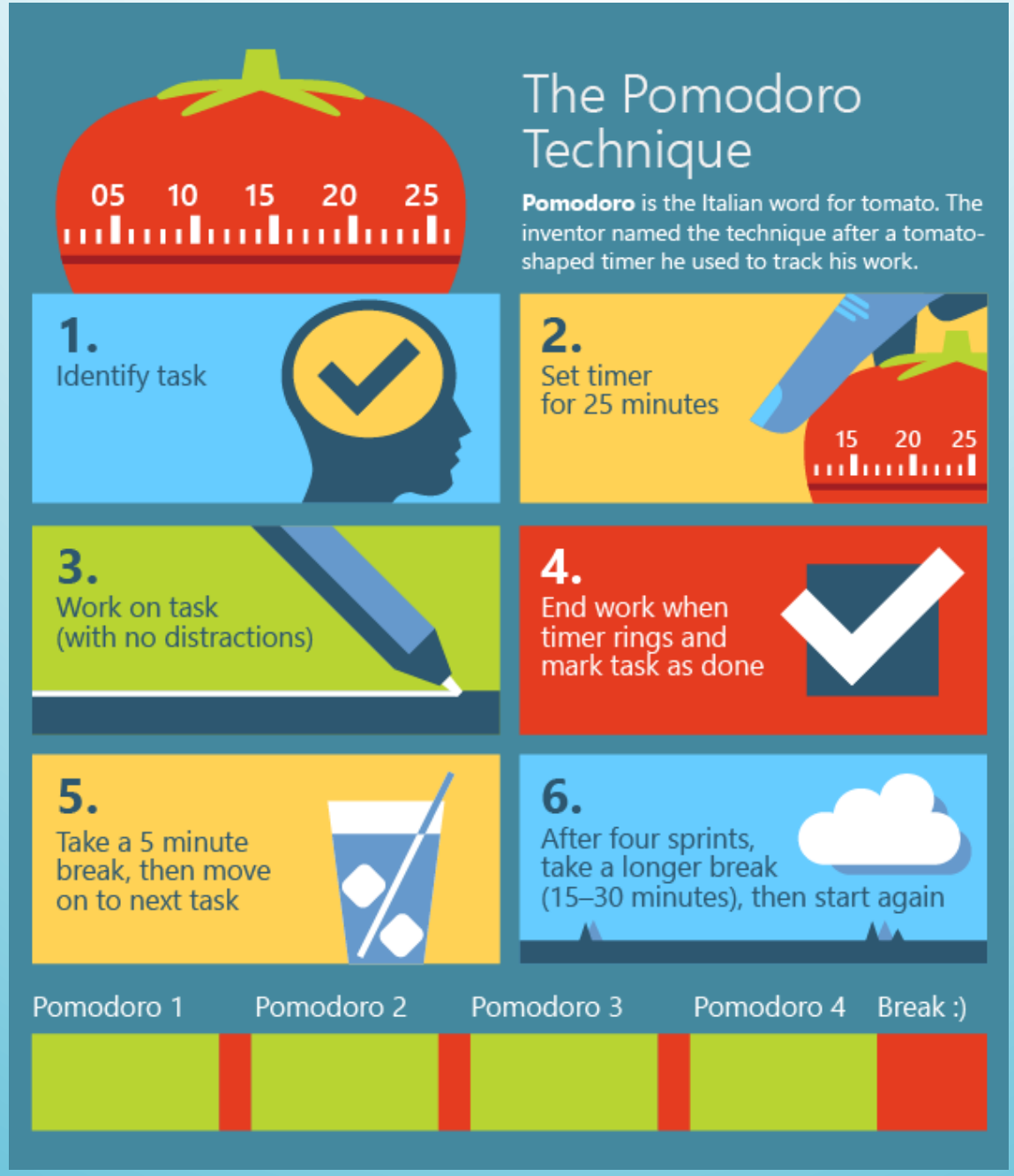
Questions to consider:

- How do they interact with materials best? (print, screen)
  - Are they distracted by using the computer or veering off into websites
  - Use website blockers, place school station in sight line of parents so they're supervised
  - Do they need a combination of paper and pencil and typing ?
- Questions to parents all the time?
  - Try saying they can have parent check ins at the end of a subject or end of each hour
- They still have sensory, attention & emotional needs (private services, tutoring, etc.)
- Try viewing kids as collaborators (They might be right about what they need, may need to be transitioned into zoom sessions, etc.)
- Are they challenged enough ? (enrichment, classcentral.com)

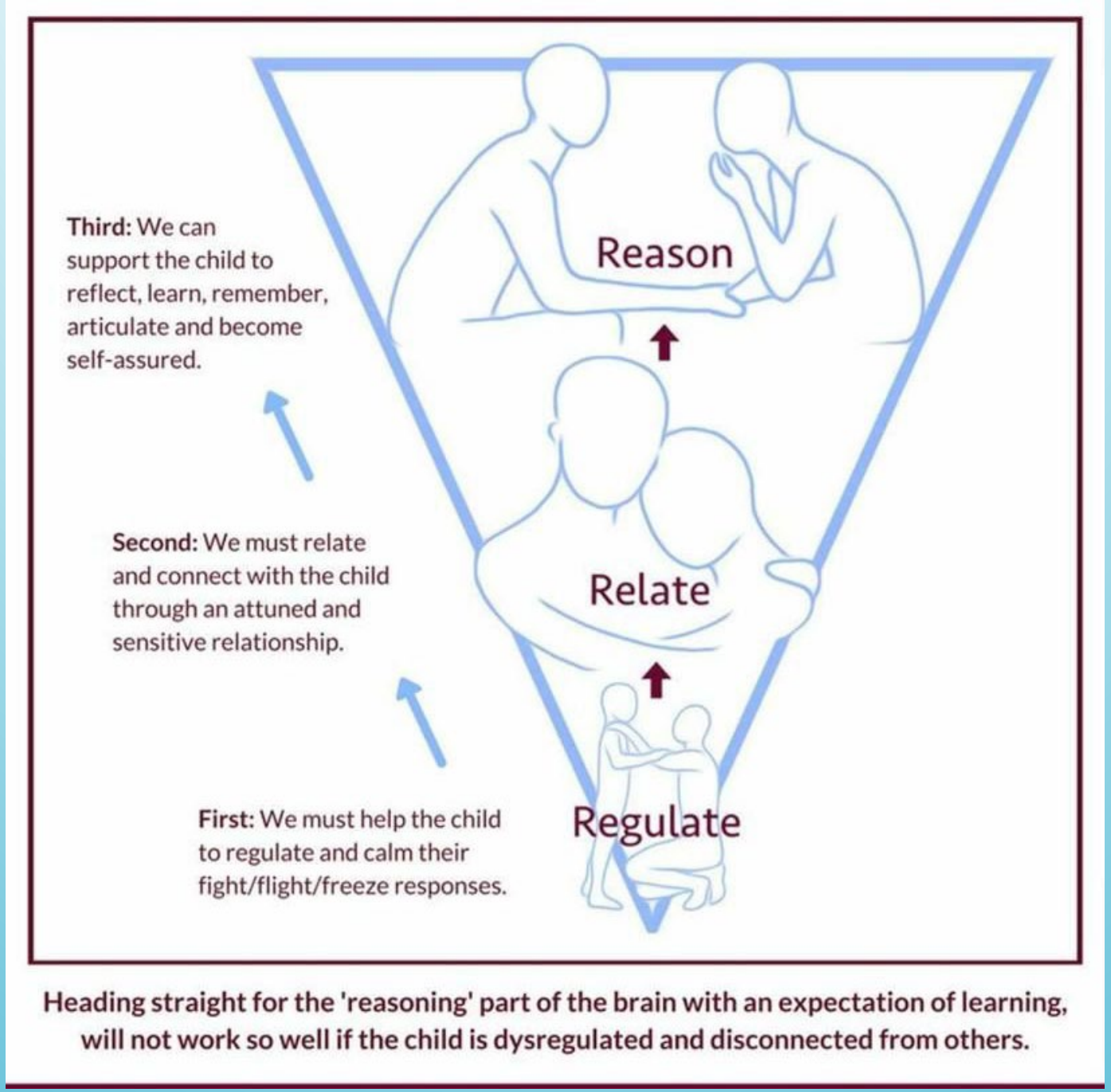
Listen to science

- We know how children learn best
  - Primacy and recency (short blocks like interval exercise training)
  - Pomodoro technique (25 min blocks with 5 min breaks)
- Goal is to prevent regression
- Scaffolding (Vygotsky)
- Support mental health first so they can be available for learning (Fight/ Flight/ Freeze- no one can learn when hijacked by emotion)
- Use co-regulation
- Model your EF (narrate everything)

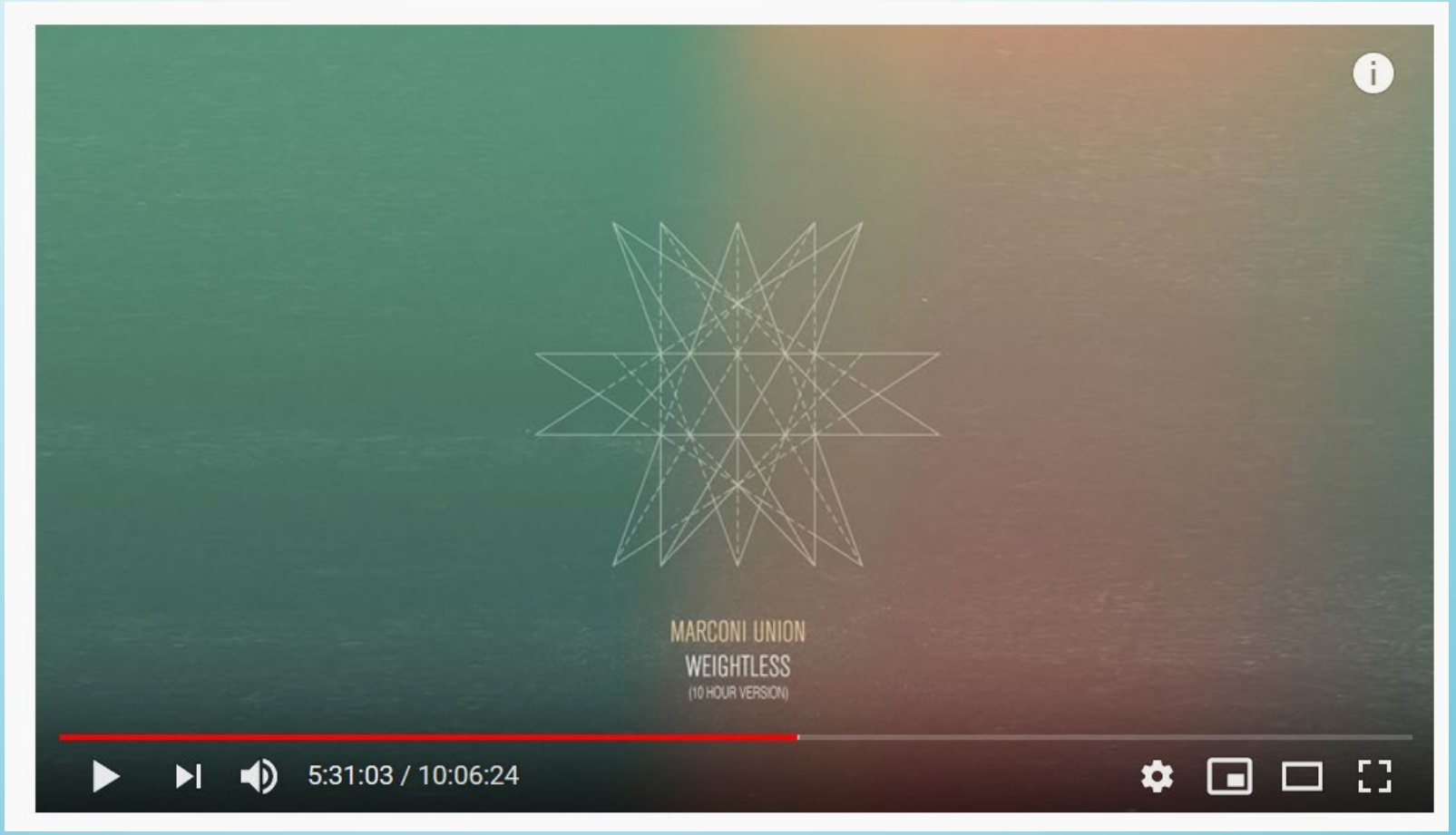
Tomatotimer.com



Co regulation

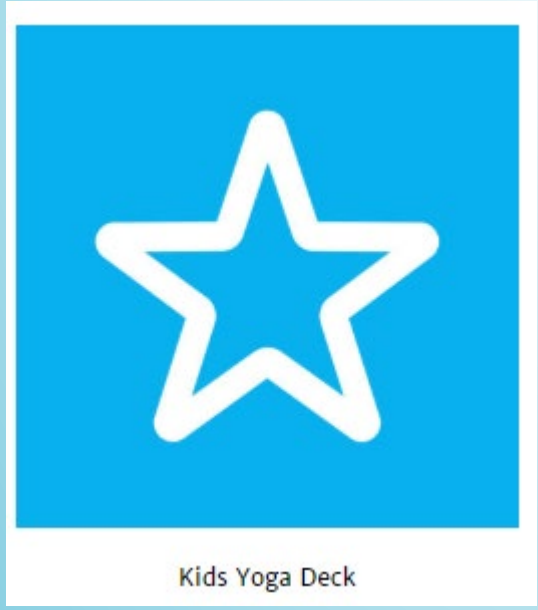


Sleep

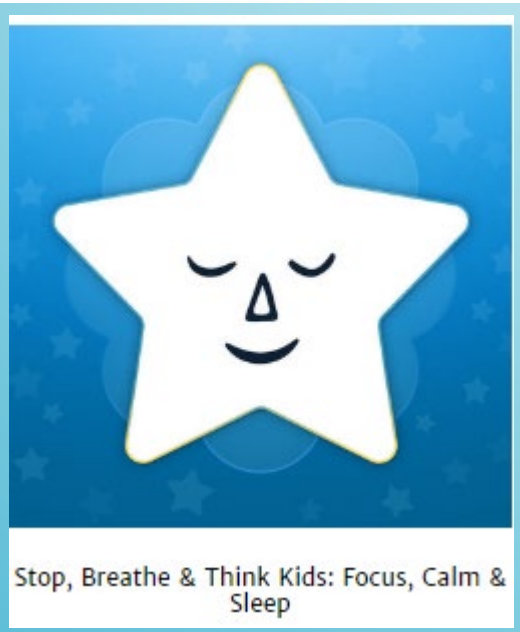


https://youtu.be/qYnA9wWFHLI

Stress management apps



Children will love to move their bodies as they flip through their very own yoga deck. With clear pictures and step-by-step instructions, these yoga poses are fun, child-friendly, and great for every body!
What it Costs: $1.99 (iOS)



Whether they need to mellow out before bed, develop positive relationships or simply have a peaceful moment, Stop, Breathe & Think Kids offers children a fun and easy way to identify and process their emotions. From counting breaths to friendly wishes or frog jumps, each activity brings fun rewards to keep them engaged.
What it Costs: Free (iOS)

Stress management for older kids ..... and parents

Guided meditation sessions are available in lengths of 3, 5, 10, 15, 20 or 25 minutes so you can choose the perfect length to fit with your schedule.
Free (iOS and Android)

Stress Guide (iphone) or Stress check (Android). By measuring your heart rate through the camera and light features on your phone. Allows you to quantify your level of psychological or physical stress and provides an estimate your level of stress in real time.

Biofeedback apps

Welltory (iPhone and Android). By measuring your heart rate through the camera and light features on your phone. Allows you to quantify your level of psychological or physical stress and provides an estimate your level of stress in real time. (Free)

Stress Guide (iPhone). Same as above. (Free)

Biofeedback Apps

Inner Balance /EmWave by Heart Math.
Free (iOS and Android)

Guided meditation sessions are available in lengths of 3, 5, 10, 15, 20 or 25 minutes so you can choose the perfect length to fit with your schedule. Free (iOS and Android)

Focus on our needs as well

- How do we work best? Morning, afternoon, after an exercise break. When are you most available and able to be attentive
- Are we being flexible?
  - School was 9a-3pm but does not need to be
  - If working from home maybe do school work w your child after your peak business hours
- Are we making use of “low supervision-need tasks” where you can put them in front of your child during times you’re not as available or attentive (go noodle, math games, zoom calls with friends for breaks, recess times)

Summary
How parents can help encourage EF skills

- Create daily routines and rituals to provide structure.
- Practice self-regulation skills.
- Model calm.
- Have them talk through difficult tasks. Model thinking aloud during planning and problem-solving situations.
- Emphasize importance of sleep (everything worsens with sleep deprivation)
- Know when to get help from teachers & other professionals
- Understand that if we get through this period of time with our kids learning these life skills we're all in a good place in the end

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- Licensed Clinical Psychologist
- Private practice in Newtown, CT (currently telehealth only)
- Heart Math certified biofeedback practitioner
- Specializing in biofeedback, therapy, executive functioning, and psychological testing (504/IEPs)

Resources

- www.childmind.org
- www.understood.org
- www.nimh.nih.gov
- www.kidshealth.org
- https://confessionsofanadoptiveparent.com/5-coping-skills-that-help-kids-regulate/
- https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2015/10/28/6-books-about-anxiety-for-families-with-special-needs/
- https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/12-books-for-kids-and-teens-about-stress-and-anxiety
- https://www.socialthinking.com/free-stuff?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=nl-2020-apr-30&utm_content=nl-fs-all&utm_term=-
- **Books:**
  - **How to Talk so Kids Will Listen And Listen So Kids Will Talk by Adele Faber**
  - **The Out of Sync Child by Carol Kranowitz**