

NATURAL BORN LEARNERS

A toolkit to help identify and support the development of Executive Functioning skills in Children & Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Compiled by:

Educational Psychology Service (EPS)
Learning Support Service (LSS)
Communication, Interaction & Access
Team (CIAT)



Acknowledgements:

We, the authors, would like to thank the following sources for their contributions and source materials towards the creation of this toolkit:

- North Yorkshire Educational Psychology & Early Years Service
- Gioia, G, A. et al, (2015)
- Dawson & Guare (2010) Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents Second Edition: A Practical Guide to Assessment and Intervention (Adapted with permission of Guilford Press)

Where appropriate, the source materials have been referenced throughout.

Introduction

Those of us who work with children and young people know that all pupils are individuals. Everyone is unique and has their own personality. Everyone is different.

But we also know some are more different than others!

Some pupils can present us with challenges. We know there is “something” but struggle to know exactly what is causing us a concern. If you find yourself using words such as “eccentric” “quirky” “original” “unconventional” “strange” or “odd”, this guide may be for you.

If you work with a child who never seems to be able to get started on a task, who daydreams, loses things, forgets what they have been asked to do this may give you some ideas how you can help develop independence.

If you work with a pupil who has difficulty managing their emotions, has angry outbursts or frequently cries or withdraws when presented with a new challenge this is for you.

This toolkit will be particularly useful for helping to identify and target the executive skills / areas for development of children with social communication & interaction difficulties (including Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD). It will not give you a label for a pupil but it may help you pinpoint the behaviours that are causing you a concern and offer strategies you can try to support the pupil to achieve their potential. For these reasons it would be more helpful to reframe the difficulties from something the child “won’t do” (or defiance on the part of the child) to something they “can’t currently do”.

It will also be a useful tool if you are considering asking for help from outside agencies such as the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), Learning Support Service (LSS), Communication Interaction Access Team (CIAT) or Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH) Team as you will have a great deal of information about the pupil and what helps them work well (and conversely what doesn’t.)

We hope you find this useful and would welcome any feedback.

Please email EPS@wakefield.gov.uk

Executive Skills

What do we mean by Executive Functioning / Skills?

Executive Functioning skills are the mental processes that help us to organise and complete tasks successfully. These mental processes enable people to plan, sort, remember things, prioritise, pay attention and begin tasks. Think of these skills like the body's control centre, a system managing the planning and completion of tasks whilst filtering distractions and controlling impulses (Dawson & Guare, 2010).

The mental processes are divided in to 9 key domains in this toolkit. The domains and the number vary across resources developed by different authors.

What are they? (*adapted from Gioia, G, A. et al, 2015)

Type of skill	Domain *	Definition / behavioural descriptions *
How I think / learn	Plan / Organise	Ability to anticipate future events; set goals and small steps to reach task these related goals. Carry out tasks systematically, understand and communicate main ideas or concepts effectively.
	Organisation of Materials	To keep work space, play areas, materials in an orderly manner. Knowing what is required for the task / activity and where or how to find it.
	Working Memory	To hold information 'in mind' and use this to complete a task or activity e.g. mental maths, reading a sentence from a board and writing this down in a book.
	Task - Monitor	Work checking habits including the ability to assess their own performance against set goals during or after finishing an activity.
	Initiate	Begin a task or activity without undue procrastination, independently generating ideas
How I feel	Shift	To move freely between activities as the situation demands without undue stress. Make transitions and solve problems flexibly.
	Emotional Control	To manage ones emotional responses in different contexts appropriately
What I do	Inhibit	To control ones impulses; stopping yourself from doing / saying something at the right time
	Self – Monitor	To be aware of the effect of ones behaviour on others and make appropriate changes.

How do Executive Skills develop?

Executive skills are built into all of us and are affected by emotional, environmental and physiological factors. Whilst they are built in, we see them develop in infancy and throughout childhood and continue to develop throughout adolescence and into adulthood. By understanding how executive skills develop in childhood, we can determine how much support and structure to provide as they grow (Dawson & Guare, 2010).

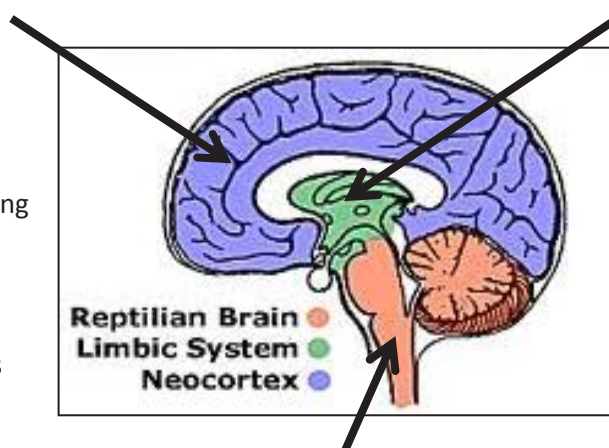
Research indicates that the development of executive skills and brain development is linked (Dawson & Guare, 2010). At different developmental stages (early childhood and just before adolescence) our brains rapidly produce more connections that then become stronger the more we learn and experience. Connections that aren't used as frequently are 'pruned'. This pruning process allows us to consolidate skills increasing their efficiency (Dawson & Guare, 2010).

During these periods (and the periods in between), teachers and parents can play an important role in guiding the learning and development of executive skills. There is a parallel between brain development and the development of the child's ability to act, think and feel. Figure 1 depicts the human brain with the location of the different interacting parts. The frontal lobes of the Neocortex are thought to be the area in which Executive Skills are involved.

Rational brain

(Neocortex):

- ❖ Creativity + imagination
- ❖ Problem - solving
- ❖ Reasoning + reflection
- ❖ Self-awareness
- ❖ Kindness, empathy and concern



'Reptilian brain' (Brain Stem):

- ❖ Breathing
- ❖ Heart
- ❖ Digestion
- ❖ Response to stress/danger
- ❖ Some basic sensory systems

'The Emotional Brain'

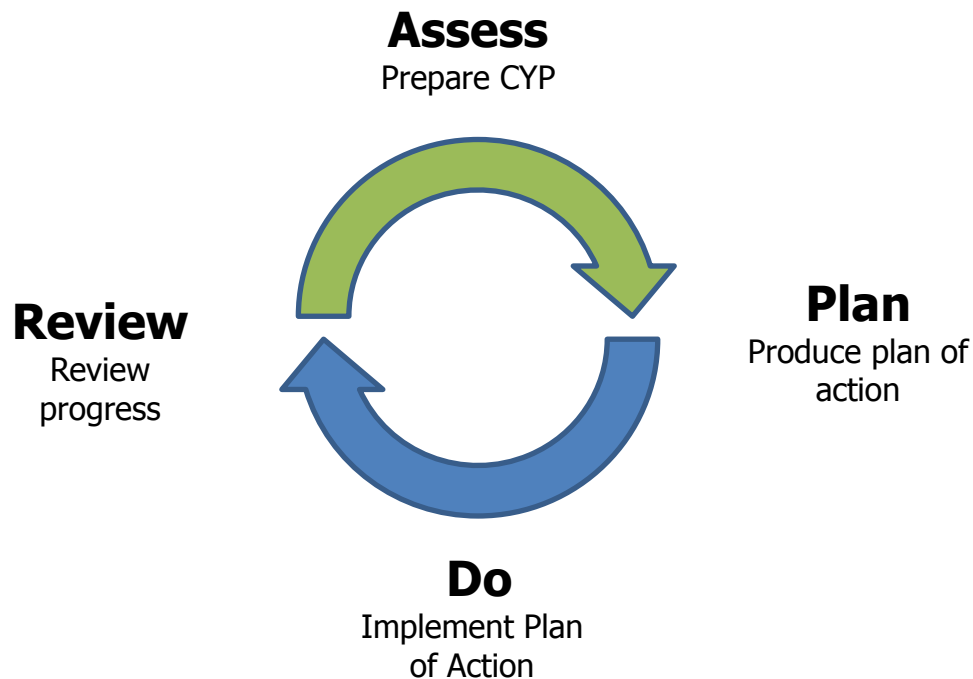
(limbic System):

- ❖ Rage
- ❖ Fear
- ❖ Separation distress
- ❖ Caring + nurturing
- ❖ Social bonding
- ❖ Playfulness
- ❖ Explorative urge

Figure 1. The human brain, with approximate 'parts' and functions

Assessing Executive Skills

Assessment of these skills therefore should include a variety of sources and approaches over time; such as individual work with the child, observation, discussion with those who know the young person best. The information that is gathered can then inform our intervention / approach to supporting the child; and their response to such intervention should also be reviewed using Person Centred Planning (PCP):



Depending on the age or ability of the child and the skills that is being taught, a general process for the teaching of these skills would be (Dawson & Guare, 2010):

1. *Describe the behaviour causing concern* – describe the **behaviour** and why it is causing a concern/problem. This is better than using statements such as “he’s lazy” or “she has a poor attitude”.
2. *Set a goal* – remember to keep these SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, relevant and timed)
3. *Create a set of steps to achieving the goal* – with the child / young person, co-create a checklist that helps them to overcome the ‘problem’
4. *Supervise the child* – initially walk the child through the process step-by-step. Then provide reminders of the procedure, prompts for each step, feedback and praise to develop improved performance
5. *Evaluate* – by monitoring the child’s performance (with the child), gaps or areas for improvement can be identified as well as supporting the child’s problem solving skills
6. *Reduce level of supervision* – the ultimate goal is independence when successfully performing a task that was previously difficult. Gradually decreasing the number of prompts and the level of supervision required builds their independence at the right pace for that child.

Screening Questionnaire (Adult & Child): User guide

Presented in the following pages are examples of Teacher/TA and Child checklists that have been adapted from Dawson & Guare (2010) resources and the BRIEF2 assessment checklists (Gioia, G, A. et al, 2015). These checklists may serve as an initial screening tool to guide you in determining a child's relative strength / area of weakness; and decide on the types of intervention / approaches to be used to support a target child. The child questionnaire would be appropriate for children in Key stages 2, 3, 4 and beyond. Users may need to use knowledge of the child's individual needs to determine whether or not they can access the questionnaire and offer support as required.

Once a checklist has been completed, scores can be totalled in the table at the end. These totals relate to specific executive skills outlined in the table in the previous section. Users can then compare the total scores and determine which executive skills would be appropriate to prioritise and target via intervention. Once an executive skill has been identified, those completing the checklist (usually SENCO or class teacher) can turn to the relevant strategy booklet in this toolkit and decide on the level of intervention required to support the development of this skill for the identified child. The chosen interventions and / or strategies can then be included on the child's 'Supporting me to Learn Plan' or 'One Page Profile' and reviewed as appropriate to monitor progress.

Questionnaire for Parents /Teachers/ Support staff

Please score the statement you feel is a “best fit”

Often: 3

Sometimes: 2

Never: 1

1. Acts on impulse. ☐

2. Gets into trouble for talking too much in class or elsewhere. ☐

3. Says things without thinking how others may react. ☐

Total Score ☐

4. When given 3 things to do, only remembers the first or last. ☐

5. Has trouble with tasks that have more than one step. ☐

6. Struggles to remember things, even for a few minutes. ☐

Total Score ☐

7. Gets annoyed when homework is too hard or takes too long. ☐

8. Has a short fuse, easily frustrated compared to others the same age. ☐

9. Easily upset when things don't go as planned. ☐

Total Score ☐

10. Has good ideas, but can't get started to carry them out. ☐

11. Has trouble organising themselves in unstructured time. ☐

12. Needs support to start tasks, even when willing. ☐

Total Score ☐

13. Trouble planning for big assignments (knowing what to do first etc.). ☐

14. Has a hard time estimating how long it takes to do a task. ☐

15. Becomes overwhelmed by long term projects or big assignments. ☐

Total Score ☐

16. Can't select appropriate materials to do a task. ☐

17. Desk or workspace at home or school is a mess. ☐

18. Loses essential items, e.g. bag, coat, lunch. ☐

Total Score ☐

19. If the first solution to a problem doesn't work, has trouble thinking of a different one, likely to give up. ☐

20. Resists changes in plans or routines. ☐

21. Gets stuck on or thinks too much about a topic/activity, struggles to move on. ☐

Total Score ☐

22. Lacks effective study strategies – not sure how to work, study or revise. ☐

23. Doesn't check work for mistakes even when it's important. ☐

24. Doesn't evaluate performance and change tactics to improve their work. ☐

Total Score ☐

25. Poor understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. ☐

26. Is unaware or doesn't notice when their behaviour causes negative reactions in other people. ☐

27. Doesn't modify their own behaviour in response to the environment or the reactions of others.

☐

Total Score

☐

Key		
Items	Executive Skill	Total Score
1-3	Inhibition	
4-6	Working Memory	
7-9	Emotional Control	
10-12	Initiate	
13-15	Planning / Organisation	
16 -18	Organization of Materials	
19-21	Shift	
22-25	Task Monitoring	
26-27	Self Monitoring	

Pupil's / Student's Strengths

Pupil's / Student's Executive Areas for Development

Executive Skills Questionnaire for Students

Please score the statement you feel is a “best fit”

Often: 3 Sometimes: 2 Never: 1

1. I do things without thinking about the consequences. ☐

2. I talk at the wrong time, sometimes this upsets people. ☐

3. I say things without thinking about how others will feel. ☐

Total Score ☐

4. If I get 3 things to do, I can only remember one of them. ☐

5. I struggle with tasks that have more than one step. ☐

6. I have trouble remembering things, even for a few minutes. ☐

Total Score ☐

7. I get annoyed when work is too hard or takes too long to do. ☐

8. I get angry easily compared to others the same age as me. ☐

9. I get upset easily compared to others the same age as me, when things don't go the way I expected. ☐

Total score ☐

10. I have good ideas, but can't seem to carry them out. ☐

11. I have trouble knowing what to do in break times. ☐

12. I need help to start tasks, even when I want to do them. ☐

Total Score ☐

13. I struggle to plan big assignments or projects. ☐

14. It's hard for me to know how much time it will take to do something. ☐

15. Projects and big pieces of work can make me feel overwhelmed. ☐

Total Score ☐

16. I have trouble knowing what equipment to fetch before I start work. ☐

17. My desk or work space is always messy. ☐

18. I lose things – my coat, my bag, my lunch... ☐

Total Score ☐

19. If the first thing I do to solve a problem doesn't work, I can't think of another way to do it and I give up. ☐

20. I don't like it when plans or routines change. ☐

21. I get stuck on one activity or I think a lot about one topic; it's hard to move on. ☐

Total Score ☐

22. I don't know how to study or revise. ☐

23. I don't check my work for mistakes when it is finished. ☐

24. I don't try different ways of working to improve my work. ☐

Total Score ☐

25. I don't really know what I'm good at, or what I need to improve at. ☐

26. I don't always notice when other people are affected by what I do. ☐

27. I don't change how I act in different places, or if other people react to me. ☐

Total Score ☐

Key		
Items	Executive Skill	Total Score
1-3	Response Inhibition	
4-6	Working Memory	
7-9	Emotional Control	
10-12	Task Initiation	
13-15	Planning Prioritisation	
16 -18	Organization	
19-21	Flexibility	
22-25	Task Monitoring	
26-27	Self Monitoring	

My Strengths

My Areas for Development

Domains and Recommendations

Strategy Booklet



Strategy booklet ①

Strategies to develop

Planning /
Organisation

Important
points to
remember in
planning and
organising
instruction



Definition:

The ability to anticipate future events; set goals and small steps to reach these related goals. Carry out tasks systematically, understand and communicate main ideas or concepts effectively

Behaviours you might observe:

- Problems getting started, with sequencing, even on tasks the child likes or enjoys
- Difficulties working independently or solving their own problems
- Wanting to do well but cannot get going
- Inability to foresee the consequences of their own actions
- Inability to anticipate situations despite having the capacities which would enable them to do so
- Thinking skills appear haphazard and ineffective, their actions can be poorly conceived and inefficient when trying to problem solve or carry out routine actions
- Needing teacher intervention like a much younger child
- Appearing unmotivated



Strategies:

Always 'teach' planning skill following a Model → Lead → Do approach. For example introduce questions to prompt each stage of a plan. The more skilled / independent the child becomes at this the more general the prompts might become. Visualise the project / task as a road map with a clear 'destination' / goal. Visualise each step along the way. You may also involve the child in developing more than one plan for a task to increase their awareness of alternative approaches.

Wave 1 – Whole class



Think about the classroom environment (set a good example!)

- Is it clutter free? Can pupils move around easily?
- Do you have visual prompts and or timetables? Give lists of equipment needed for specific subjects e.g. PE, Cookery, Literacy, Numeracy etc.?
- Give pupils ways of storing information so they can recall it
e.g. timetables, diary, homework list post – its, note book , mind maps
- Colour code information such as timetables, home work schedules, to highlight priority, subject, date etc.
- Break long term projects into clearly defined subtasks and attach deadlines to each subtask
- Get the child to organise something simple, involve the class in a project.
- Structure short term tasks and define time/ amount limits

Think about your teaching style

- Ensure classroom routines are consistent and clear to pupils (visual)
- Model good planning skills – think out loud as you demonstrate
- Break instructions and explanations into small chunks
- Teach pupils how to read through and skim for important information - especially in relation to exam techniques.

- Give writing frames and proformas
 - Allow plenty of time to organise thoughts and complete a task
- Praise and encourage when the pupil does well. “You remembered all your homework – good girl.”

Wave 2 – Small Group



- Engage peers in finding solutions/ talking about a range of strategies for stopping and thinking in social and classroom situations for example:
- Plan co-operative tasks involving the child organising, planning, doing and reviewing together
- Create a to-do list - encourage pupil(s) to tick off tasks as they achieve them to manage their time well.
- Teach and practice sequencing skills using games and pictures e.g. getting dressed, changed for PE
- Create a to-do list - encourage pupil(s) to tick off tasks as they achieve them to manage their time well. Define amount of time needed for parts of task and teach pupils how to manage their time well.
- Define amount of time needed for parts of task and teach pupils how to manage their time well.

Wave 3 – Individual



- Present long term in chunks and attach deadlines for each chunk
- Use planning formats e.g. story or task boards
- Provide well-organised, closed ended and structured tasks and use examples of your expectations of the finished work. Information should include ‘What will

it look like?', 'how much do I need to do?', 'how will I know it is finished?', 'what will I do when I am finished?'

- Break work down into small units or chunk tasks
- Develop child's metacognition/understanding of what helps them to remember and recall.
- Teach the skill of prioritising so that the pupil is not overwhelmed by too many tasks
- Involve the child in setting a goal for the activity or task. Encourage them to generate a prediction regarding how well they expect to perform. Structure the plan around the stated goal. Ensure the plan is realistic and the child has not attempted to take on too much
- Provide pre-learning opportunities (pre-teaching), e.g. offer an outline or list of major points, what to listen for prior to the lesson
- Reinforce key learning points as part of the learning objectives at the beginning and end of the lesson - personalise these according to the child's needs
- Teach the skill of storing and retrieving notes and assignments, colour coding can help with prioritising and organising by date, subject, priority etc.



Strategy booklet ②

Strategies to develop

Organisation of materials



Definition:

The ability to keep work space, play areas, materials in an orderly manner. Knowing what is required for the task / activity and where or how to find it.

Behaviours you might observe:

- Untidy desk, school bag, locker, bedroom
- Difficulties in organising materials or cleaning up after a task
- Loses or forgets books, pens, dinner money, bus pass
- Forgets homework assignments
- Fails to keep track of projects
- Copies other children excessively with work or classroom routines



Strategies:

Always 'teach' organisational skills following a Model → Lead → Do approach. For example introduce self-monitoring techniques (rating scales for achievements/ attempts). Introduce book marks or cards for planners with reminders of techniques "what do you need today/ for this task". Introduce reward charts (organising materials, self-management, planning what they will need).

Wave 1 – Whole class



Think about the classroom environment

- Is it clutter free? Can pupils move around easily?
- Are resources all labelled and readily available? Can you colour code to make it easier for pupils to access materials?
- Do you provide pencils, rulers, coloured pencils, dictionaries etc. for each table? Are they all in good condition, ready to use?
- Do you have visual prompts and or timetables? Give lists of equipment needed for specific subjects e.g. PE, Cookery, Literacy, Numeracy etc.?
- Give pupils ways of storing information so they can recall it e.g. timetables, diary, homework list post – its, note book , mind maps
- Does the child know what they need to do a task? Can they go and get it? Do they know where to start in task?
- Is dinner money, PE kit, etc. remembered? Do notes and letters go home?
- Do you set a good example!

Wave 2 – Small group



- Teach and practice sequencing skills using games and pictures e.g. getting dressed, changed for PE.
- Create a to-do list - encourage pupil to tick off tasks as they achieve them.
- Define amount of time needed for parts of task and teach pupils how to manage their time well.
- Set aside a small amount of time for child to prepare and get organized for the following week.

Wave 3 – Individual

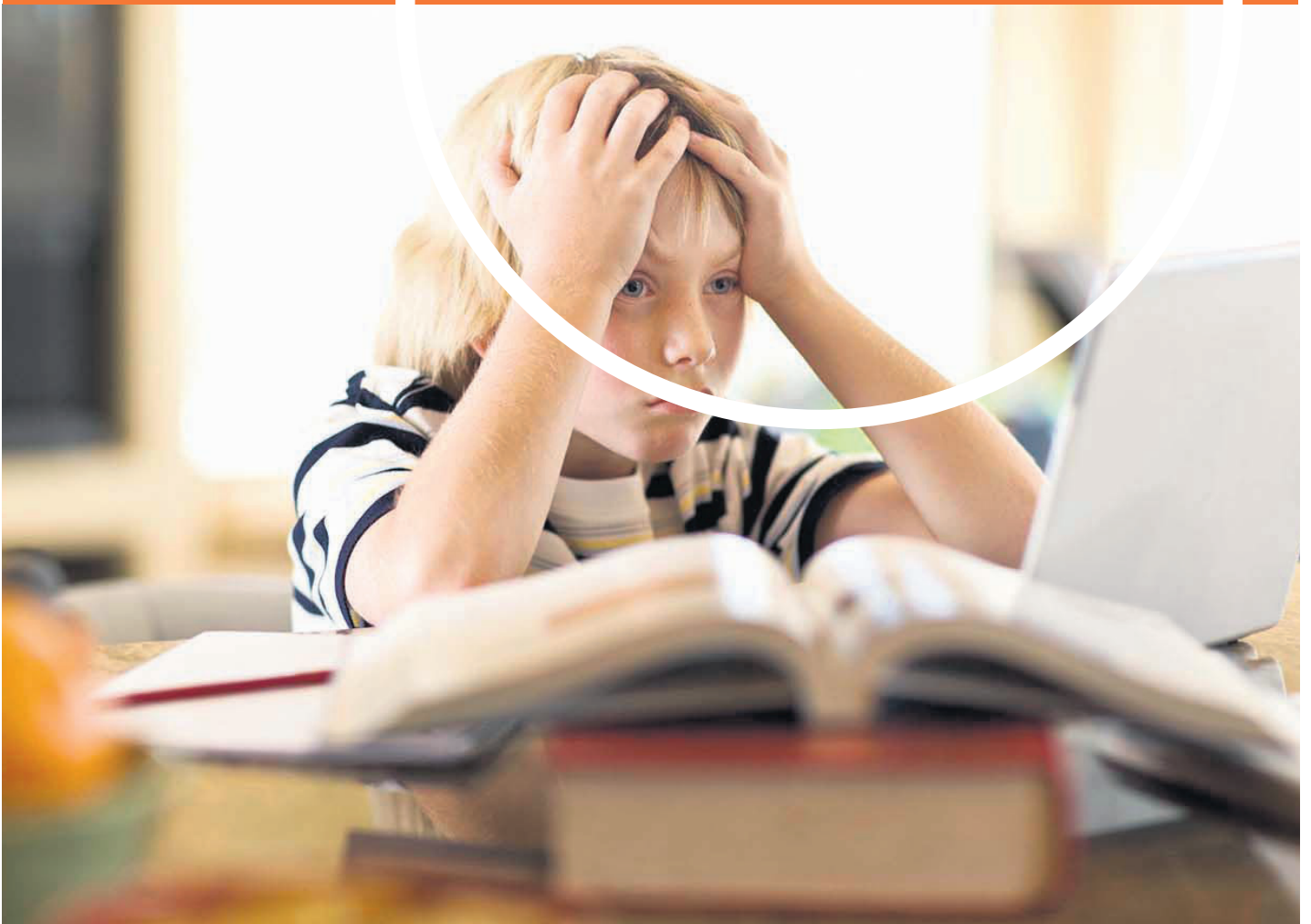


- Develop child's metacognition/understanding of what helps them to remember and recall.
- Teach the skill of prioritising so that the pupil is not overwhelmed by too many tasks
- Support the pupil to make a plan and follow it. Make sure tasks are specific and time bound.
- Teach how to keep things tidy.
- Provide pre-learning opportunities, offer an outline or list of major points, what to listen for prior to the lesson
- Reinforce key learning points as part of the learning objectives at the beginning and end of the lesson - personalise these according to the child's needs
- Teach the skill of storing and retrieving notes and assignments, colour coding can help with prioritising and organising by date, subject, priority etc. Teach the skill of storing and retrieving notes and assignments, colour coding can help with prioritising and organising by date, subject, priority etc.

Strategy booklet ③

Strategies to develop

Working Memory



Definition:

The ability to hold information 'in mind' and use this to complete a task or activity.
e.g. mental maths, reading a sentence from a board and writing this down in a book.

Behaviours you might observe:

- Distraction, difficulty paying attention or staying focussed for long periods of time
- Attention switching between activities
- Task abandonment
- Incomplete recall
- Difficulty with mental arithmetic or remembering tables or spelling even after they have been learned
- Failure to follow instructions especially multi step tasks
- Difficulties with activities that combine storage and processing information
- Failure to keep their place when reading or copying
- Good social integration but can be reserved

Wave 1 – Whole class

Think about the classroom environment



- Is it quiet so that children don't have to filter out background noise?
- Do you have word lists, visual timetables times tables etc.
- Are there regular opportunities for multisensory learning?
- Evaluate tasks for content, are they unfamiliar? Are they meaningful? Are they too long? And are they over demanding on the child's mental processes?
- Ensure the child is paying attention, cue with their name, check for eye contact, listening
- Keep language simple and speak slowly and clearly
- Don't give too many instructions at one time
- Use visual prompts
- Give extra time to process information.
- Give pupils ways of storing information so they can recall it e.g. timetable, diary, homework list post – its, note book , mind maps
- Provide word lists, visual timetables times tables etc. for tables as well as displayed around the room
- Give verbal/.visual reminders and clues
- Time should be allowed for thinking and planning.
- Instructions and explanations may need to be repeated.
- Ask the pupil what they have to do – repeat back instructions to you
- Minimise unnecessary copying of the date and learning objectives etc.
- Sit close to an adult so that there can be regular check-ins.

Wave 2 – Small group



- Consider pre teaching – give key words to listen for.
- Regularly review learned facts.
- Teach the child to develop their own strategies that will support them in their learning e.g. mnemonics, rehearsal, note taking, scanning and skimming for information
- Reduce memory load by chunking e.g. as we do with telephone numbers 01924-307-403
- Play games to improve memory Kim's Game, Pairs, "I went to the shop and I bought..." Be aware memory games will need strategies to be explored explicitly, practised, rehearsed and verbalised

Wave 3 – Individual



- Opportunities for overlearning and pre-teaching can aid a child's familiarity with the subject and help guide their attention as to what to listen for if the child is struggling to capture new material
- Develop child's metacognition/understanding of what helps them to remember and recall. Rehearse steps in how to solve a problem or learn a list or complete an everyday activity until it becomes automatic. Short and frequent practise is more effective than long periods of practice
- Personalised learning / approaches .Change tasks more frequently to restore focus as this is more likely to fade more quickly for the child with WM difficulties e.g. a rotation of 10 minutes on one task before changing to another and then back to the first activity Give quick breaks when the child's focus begins to wane, these are most effective when they include a motor activity or a relaxation activity e.g. complete an errand, take a drink, 1 -2 mins..

Strategy booklet ④

Strategies to develop

Task – Monitor



Definition:

Work checking habits including the ability to assess their own performance against set goals during or after finishing an activity.

Behaviours you might observe:

- Does not check or review work to see if they have made errors or achieved their goal
- Rushes through work
- Work may be careless and shoddy
- Takes a minimalist approach to work Difficulty problem solving and self-evaluate, asking “how and I doing?” or “how did I do?”

Strategies:

Always ‘teach’ task-monitoring skills following a Model → Lead → Do approach. The focus will be to develop strategies with the child to enable them to monitor and evaluate their work and their approach to learning. For example, help the child to define the problem, identify the skill they need to learn or apply, help them define steps to achieving a goal using the skill and then help them practice the skill providing reminders / prompts and rewards. Gradually fade the amount of cues and reinforcement you use as skills are embedded

Wave 1 – Whole class



- If a child is on a personalised programme to help them to monitor their behaviours, ensure all staff are aware of this, they understand why and accept the need for a differentiated behaviour management strategy
- Introduce whole school regimes for self-assessment e.g. traffic light systems, thumbs up, three smiley faces card
- Encourage strategies to support the child to mark and evaluate their own work. Ask them to highlight areas which need consideration or revisiting i.e. the use of highlighters or underlining
- Share expectations and definitions of what good work looks like and includes
- Make all praise explicit and acknowledge that some children find it difficult to accept praise

Wave 2 – Small group



- Engage peers in finding solutions/ talking about a range of strategies for checking and reviewing work and behaviour through whole class and small groups e.g. use of work buddies and role models

Wave 3 – Individual

- Support the child to create monitoring checklists and prompt them to use them
- Devise with the child a set of questions to ask them self when confronted with a problem e.g. What is the problem? What is my plan? Am I following my plan? How did I do?
- Introduce a 'plan, do, review sheet' to enable the child to reflect on their work
- Ensure the child understands the objectives of the task. Describe clearly the targets and learning objectives of the lesson to enable the child to monitor their progress against them
- Set goals based on accuracy rather than speed to increase attention to errors. Reward the child for accuracy to support continued focus on monitoring of work
- Ask the child to predict how well they think they will do on a task, and then compare that prediction with the actual outcome in order to increase self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses. Encouraging a child to chart his performance [or behaviour] can provide a tangible record of achievement
- Break the task down into easier steps, get the child to focus on one area to monitor which has been identified as the child's target to improve
- Embed questions designed to elicit monitoring into daily classroom instruction, e.g.: "how did you solve that problem?", "Can you think of another way of doing that?", "what can you do to help remember that information?", "nice job on that maths problem, Tell me how you figured out the answer?"
- Build error monitoring into task assignments, for example show their working out, proof reading checklists
- Charts can be used to support task monitoring (either simple or more complex). E.g 'When I finish my number/writing/reading work I colour one square GREEN. Or graded evaluation (Excellent, Good or Even Better If) e.g. work is self-evaluated on content (what it says), neatness, organisation/layout, diagrams, earning coloured squares for each outcome they felt they achieved.

Strategy booklet ⑤

Strategies to develop

Initiate



Definition:

The ability to begin a task or activity without undue procrastination whilst independently generating ideas and problem solving strategies. .

Behaviours you might observe:

- problems getting started even on tasks they like
- difficulties working independently or solving their own problems
- wants to do well but can't get going
- difficulty generating ideas or plans
- requires teacher intervention like a much younger child
- unmotivated
- difficulties initiating activities with friends
- difficulties getting started on physical activities or appear lazy

Strategies:

Always 'teach' the skill of initiation via a Model → Lead → Do approach. There are two types of task initiation, beginning a task straight away when it is given, and planning when a task will be done and starting promptly at a predetermined time.



Wave 1 – Whole class



- Consider the environment and any sensory distractions
- Be aware of the natural tendency of staff to do things for the child, rather than supporting their participation. Which encourages 'learned helplessness' in the child
- Present information / tasks in small chunks
- Demonstrate how to use mind maps or writing frames
- Support the class or child to make a plan before beginning
- Use timers to know when a task should start / stop
- Prompt regularly to ensure child is using still focussed (but avoid nagging)
- Use visual prompts – pictures taped to desk, opening sentences , vocabulary
- Use rewards and motivators for each section completed
- Plan for pupils to engage in co-operative work
- Practical and interactive tasks may support pupils better than more sedentary activities
- Provide structured tasks with a start and finish time and use examples of expectations of work, e.g. what will it look like, how much do I need to do, how will I know it is finished

Wave 2 – Small group



- Sit the child with children who are good role models, paired work is a useful strategy
- This skill can be reinforced by incentives for practising the skill successfully, for example team points, points charts leading to agreed rewards
- Use group work with peers to solve problems

Wave 3 – Individual



- Guide the child through the beginning of a task, demonstrating how to begin and what steps to take next
- Break down work into small units or chunk tasks, tasks which seem too large or complex can overwhelm the child.
- Help the child make a written plan for doing the task. This may include writing down the task and deciding on a start time. For longer projects, it may mean breaking the task down into subtasks and assigning start times to each sub task
- Have the child determine what cue will be used to remind them to begin the task. This could include having a parent or teacher or sibling or friend or peer provide the reminder, setting some kind of alarm, or use a naturally occurring event as the cue

- At the point when the child is expected to begin the task, make sure they do so promptly rewarding the child when they do not require cues beyond those they built into the plan. Gradually fade the supervision
- This skill can be reinforced by incentives for practising the skill successfully, for example team points, points charts leading to agreed rewards
- Teach the child to follow instructions – play games
- Teach the child how to ask for help when they need it,
- Demonstrate and model how to generate ideas and plans
- Show how to create a to do list (paper, computer or mobile phone)
- Block out time for homework
- Tick off tasks when they are completed

Strategy booklet ⑥

Strategies to develop

Shift



Definition:

The ability to move freely between activities as the situation demands without undue stress. The ability to make transitions and solve problems flexibly.

Behaviours you might observe:

- A difficulty moving from one task to another
- A difficulty moving from one emotional response or perception to another
- Difficulties in revising plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information or mistakes
- Difficulties dropping a topic
- Difficulties in responding to new demands or conditions
- Problems getting over a set back or disappointment
- Difficulties getting through stages of a task or finishing a piece of work
- Thinking there is only one right answer
- Becoming confused, agitated, angry or frustrated if tasks and scenarios are not as they expect

Strategies:

Always 'teach' flexibility (Shift) skills via a Model → Lead → Do approach. Show the child their inflexibility; explain what inflexible means and explore a range of options to overcome any given task or situation. You may also need to teach strategies for coping and managing their emotions (see Emotional Control). This might involve modelling, practice, verbal feedback/praise and generalising to real situations.

Wave 1 – Whole class



Be aware, a child's lack of shift could be an emotional or anxious response to a situation, if so think what is making the child anxious? (links with Emotional Control)

- Remain consistent and predictable in all environments
- Introduce changes one at a time to reduce anxiety
- Use visual organisers/ timetables / planners / calendars to show children the sequence of events before they happen
- Allow a few minutes of “down time” or leisure activity between the end of one activity and the beginning of the next, to support transitions

Wave 2 – Small group



Engage peers in finding solutions/ talking about a range of strategies for managing changes and being flexible in social situations, e.g.:

- Circle Time [small groups]
- Buddy systems
- Good role models – working collaboratively with children who can shift and think flexibly
- Peers can model and cue when it is time to change

Wave 3 – Individual



- Develop a mechanism for preparing the child for change from the usual routine. Alert the child to any change before it happens, e.g. use the “2 minute warning”. when one activity is about to end and another will begin. This can also be done with a signal and a clear transition process, i.e. putting away materials from one task before acknowledging the next task and bringing out the next materials
- Present and focus on only one task at a time
- Restrict choices to a limited number e.g. 2
- Set time limits can help, a timer can support this
- Break down the routines into subroutines. The child’s day can be seen as a sequence of routines. A child may be able to learn new subroutines, which they can interchange, so building in some flexibility. i.e. different ways of walking to school
- Help the child practise shifting e.g. rotating two or three familiar tasks at regular intervals can build in the appearance of greater flexibility and help the child become more accustomed to shifting
- When developing coping strategies, consider giving the child plans or rules for managing specific situations that arise frequently and cuing them to follow the plans or rules until they become internalised
- Help students develop ‘default’ strategies they can fall back on
- Provide scripts that can be used in problem situations (possibly social scripts)
- Teaching relaxation strategies, thought stopping or attention diversion strategies (i.e. through the use of visual imagery)
- Teaching child the concept of an “error factor” to reduce absolute thinking. For instance, some children become very upset in sports situations when an umpire or referee makes a call that they think is wrong. Preparing a child in advance for this by letting them know that those officials (even teachers) are allowed” to make mistakes may reduce unhappiness when perceived bad calls are made.

Strategy booklet 7

Strategies to develop

Emotional
Control



Definition:

The ability to manage ones emotional responses in different contexts appropriately in order to achieve a desired goal or complete tasks.

Behaviours you might observe:

- May over-react to minor events or criticism
- Emotional outbursts
- Sudden or frequent changes of mood
- Stays upset for a long time
- May be bullied
- May 'join in' with other's bad behaviour
- May cry easily
- May be class clown
- Can have 'toddler' tantrums
- May have difficulties with a loud or angry teacher

Strategies:

Always 'Emotional Control' skills following a Model → Lead → Do approach. For example teach the child a coping strategy for emotional control. You may need to provide a commentary on your own emotional responses and those of the target child. Explain emotional control to the child. Include the child in devising a plan to manage a situation by possibly breaking the problem into manageable chunks. Reward the child for practising well. Adults should cue and provide support which is gradually reduced as the child achieves more success. Have the child incorporate practising emotional control into something they do routinely every day. i.e. writing a journal or telling a parent about their day, where the child can positively describe using emotional control

Wave 1 – Whole Class



Think about the classroom environment.

- Is there enough space for children to sit comfortably without bumping into each other?
- Are resources readily available without the need for moving around the classroom?
- Are there transparent systems of class/school rewards and sanctions?
- Are there consistent rules and expectations?
- Are there personalized, team or class reward systems?
- Can pupils have a quiet place to go if they feel themselves becoming anxious or upset. Provide time out/ chill out space as a positive choice
- Make organisational changes within the classroom , plan interventions that limit stress inducing situations/settings i.e. moving away from a peer, allowing early entry to the classroom, alternative arrangements for playtimes
- Is the environment providing certainty/consistency in routine and relationships?
- Is there access to regular pastoral/counselling support from a named member of staff to offer guidance and re-assurance?
- Is there consistent and regular feedback about work and / or behaviour?
- Are staff ensuring those tasks given are at an appropriate level for child's abilities?

Think about your teaching style

- Is work differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils? Have tasks been explained simply and clearly so that pupils know what to do? Provide regular opportunities for collaborative working.
- Anticipate problem situations and modify accordingly e.g. put the child at the front or rear of the line to minimise disruption, consider grouping of pupils – ability, friendship groups, balance of boys and girls. Let children go early or wait till last.
- Have the adults model the practise of making positive self-statements and encourage the child to us them, i.e. “I know this will be hard for me, but I am going to keep trying. If I get stick after trying hard. I will ask for help”.
- Think about your own response. Keep calm. Listen. Give the child time to calm down before trying to talk to them.
- Do adults model and reward the required behaviour? Be positive! “Well done for coming in quietly” **not** “Be quiet! “

Wave 2 – Small Group



- Use circle time to learn how to takes turns, share and learn from peers.
- Create opportunities for the pupil to experience difficult situations and manage their emotions so that the can practice the skills they have earned. E.g. Play games so that children can learn how to lose without becoming upset.
- Use drama and literature to teach emotional control. Metaphors in stories can help externalise a ‘problem’ therapeutically.
- Use of key worker approach to make sure pupil has a trusted adult to offer support during vulnerable times.
- Support the pupil to recognise and understand physical changes linked to emotional responses.
- Teach coping mechanisms such as counting to ten, deep breathing, removing

yourself from a difficult situation.

- Reward pupils for using emotional control successfully.
- Peer Modelling of behaviour; identify those pupil(s) whose emotional control is having a disruptive effect. Identify a similar number of pupils as "models" (socially mature / reliable). Target pupils are told how and why their behaviour can sometimes be disruptive. The models are invited to assist in modifying these behaviours. Each target pupil is paired with a model. They sit together and the model demonstrates the appropriate behaviour but also reminds the pupil when s/he is behaving inappropriately. The target pupils are asked to watch their partners, behave as they do and ask them what to do if they are uncertain. The models offer praise to their partners when they work well. This method can be used during the greater part of the school day or reserved for special occasions, e.g. P.E. lessons, school trips or practical activities.



Wave 3 – Individual



- Teach students coping strategies so that they don't get out of control e.g. use 'The Incredible 5-Point Scale', 'Zones of Regulation', or Emotional Literacy intervention. Using a 5 point rating scale with a child to score their emotional reaction means the positive aspects of the situation can then be discussed, they can then explore what may need to happen to achieve a higher/lower rating
- Have the child practise emotional control. This is most effective when done in real situations. Cue the child to use emotional control for real life situations [classroom, playground and home]
- Reward the child for using emotional control successfully. Child and adult should review the process, outcomes and discuss any changes to the plan
- Use self-statements or a script to promote a positive emotional response or an effective coping strategy
- Have the child verbalise a goal behaviour –“Today I will....” Before entering the situation where the child can display the goal behaviour
- Assist child to recognise and understand physiological changes relating to emotional responses. Use visual imagery / social stories. Teach the child to visualise themselves managing the problem situation successfully

Strategy booklet 8

Strategies to develop

Inhibit



Definition:

The ability to control one's impulses; stopping yourself from doing / saying something at the right time. The capacity to 'think before you act'; developing this skill allows you to resist and suppress the urge to perceive, feel, think or act on first impulse.

Behaviours you might observe:

- May have difficulty resisting the urge to immediately do things when working alone or when others are present
- May have difficulty resisting the urge to act upon sensations, objects or events occurring around them in the environment
- May have difficulties resisting the urge to act upon physiological or emotional responses
- May shout out in class
- May Interrupt / disrupts group activities
- May persist with behaviour after being told to stop
- May be hyperactive
- May hit out without thinking
- May repeat the same mistake even when disciplined

Strategies:

Always 'teach' the skill of inhibition using a Model → Lead → Do approach. Explain the skill of response inhibition. Positively re-frame the child's intent and discuss the target behaviour ensuring the behaviour you are encouraging meets the same need for the child as the one you are seeking to replace i.e. recognition or affirmation. E.g. 'I think you shout out because you want me to know you know the answer, we are going to work on raising your hand before you speak'.

Wave 1 – Whole class



- Have class rules that are clear and consistent.
- Restrict situations where the child can get into trouble e.g. place at the front of the line to avoid disruption, proximity of materials, seat him/her in an area as free as possible from auditory and visual distractions.
- Be aware children can experience anxiety when they cannot see what is going on in class. Some children need to face the rest of the class or sit at the back as to avoid turning and reduce anxiety
- Sit close to the teacher so you can easily use non- verbal clues to modify behaviour
- Make sure impulsive pupils have an adult close by to monitor and support when necessary
- Use positive reinforcement - well done you remember to put your hand up
- Have visual clues for good listening, good sitting, etc
- Reduce triggers that result in outbursts
- Try not to get into a confrontational situation. Give choices.
- Ignore times when pupils might forget the new skill, 'active ignoring' of certain behaviours
- Introduce whole class breaks, drinks/ snacks, Brain Gym and other short physical activities, deep breathing and relaxation times and 'time out' requests [i.e. Traffic light card systems]
- Attempt to create a quiet area/chill out corner/ low arousal space in one area of the classroom [take down displays, provide cushions, toys, head phones etc]

Wave 2 – Small group



- Teach a response to replace the unwanted behaviour e.g use Social Stories
- Use Circle Time to teach required skills. Taking turns, not shouting out, keeping hands to self.
- Consider Circle of Friends, SEAL materials to support children who have difficulty controlling impulsive behaviour.
- Use role play to practice skills learned,
- Sit the target child near children who can model good practice

Wave 3 – Individual



- Embed questions designed to elicit self-monitoring into daily classroom instruction. For example;
“What can you do to keep yourself from?”, “what can you tell yourself whilst you are To stop yourself from?”, “is there something we can give you to hold to help you to remember to...?”
- Encourage child to recognise feelings and take a break or seek adult intervention when they feel overwhelmed
- Give time to talk about outbursts and how they might do things differently next time
- Teach relaxation strategies
- Make all praise explicit and acknowledge that some children find it difficult to accept praise
- Help others to ignore interruptions, teach appropriate interruption skills
- If the child struggles to remain seated when it is expected, ensure that legitimate seat leaving is permitted and planned in to the lesson

Strategy booklet ⑨

Strategies to develop

Self – Monitor



Definition:

To be aware of the effect of ones behaviour on others and make appropriate changes.

Behaviours you might observe:

- Work may be careless and shoddy
- Takes a minimalist approach to work
- Has little awareness of how their behaviour affects others

Strategies:

Always 'teach' self-monitoring skills following a Model → Lead → Do approach. The focus will be to develop strategies with the child to enable them to monitor and evaluate their social behaviours. For example, help the child to define the problem, identify the skill they need to learn or apply, help them define steps to achieving a goal using the skill and then help them practice the skill providing reminders / prompts and rewards. Gradually fade the amount of cues and reinforcement you use as skills are embedded



Wave 1 – Whole class



- Tell all staff what techniques are being used so they can give reminders and repeat key messages in short scripted sentences
- Use Inclusion Passports to record the strategies being used
- If a child is on a personalised programme to help them to monitor their behaviours, ensure all staff are aware of this, they understand why and accept the need for a differentiated behaviour management strategy
- Introduce whole school regimes for self-assessment e.g. traffic light systems, thumbs up, three smiley faces card

Wave 2 – Small group



- Engage peers in finding solutions/ talking about a range of strategies for checking and reviewing work and behaviour through whole class and small groups e.g.:
- Circle time and small group discussion groups where behaviour can be discussed and its effects identified. This can provide not only direct training but also opportunities for helpful feedback from others
- Social skills groups

Wave 3 – Individual



- Explore the use of visually recording an activity or situation and then review it together. This allows the child to see themselves from another's perspective. This should not be a punitive exercise but a therapeutic based one; it should be considered carefully and approached collaboratively with the child, their parents and consent sought from other parties involved. Whilst recording the child can be a powerful tool for change, there is also potential for emotional consequences and negative effects on self- esteem
- Break a social situation into easier steps, get the child to focus on one area to improve
- Embed questions designed to elicit self-monitoring into daily classroom instruction, e.g.: “how did you solve that problem?”, “Can you think of another way of doing that?”, “what can you do to help remember that information?”
- Share expectations and definitions of what social behaviours are expected / looks like and includes
- Make all praise for successful instances explicit and acknowledge that some children find it difficult to accept praise



References

- Executive Functions: a General Overview for parents and Teachers, [2008] by G McCloskey and L A Perkins, Taylor and Francis
- Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents 2nd ed [2010] by P Dawson and R Guare The Guilford Practical Intervention in the Schools Series
- Anger Management: A Practical Guide (David Fulton Books) [Paperback] by Faupel et al
- BRIEF2 professional manual, by Gioia,et al, 2015 (***Domain names and behaviour descriptors adapted from the Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive functioning 2 (BRIEF2), Gioia, G, A. et al (2015)**)
- BRIEF2 reports generated by the BRIEF Assessment Materials

