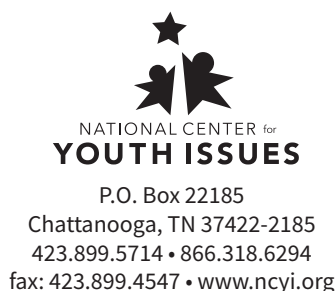


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Introduction

Executive function helps regulate, control, and manage thoughts and actions. It affects key skills like:

- Planning
- Time Management
- Organization
- Task Initiation
- Attention
- Self-Monitoring
- Self-Regulation
- Impulse Control
- Flexible Thinking

Why Is This Important?

Imagine a teacher giving students ten minutes to complete an assignment. One student spends most of that time gathering supplies or getting distracted. When time is up, they haven't finished and feel frustrated. Later, students who completed their work participated in a fun activity, while the students with unfinished work had to complete that work instead, leading to more frustration.

What executive functioning skills could have helped? **All of them!**

- **Time Management** – Understanding how to divide time effectively.
- **Task Initiation** – Starting promptly instead of procrastinating.
- **Organization** – Having materials ready to begin.
- **Planning** – Thinking ahead to complete tasks on time.
- **Self-Monitoring** – Recognizing when we're off-task.
- **Self-Regulation & Flexible Thinking** – Adapting to consequences and shifting mindset.
- **Impulse Control** – Avoiding distractions and staying focused.

About this Curriculum

Designed for **2nd–9th graders**, this program includes 10–12 interactive lessons (30 minutes each) to help students understand and practice executive functioning skills. Lessons are flexible and tailored to different learning styles, ensuring that every student can engage, grow, and apply these essential skills in their daily lives.

The strategic design enables students to empathize, connect with others, and translate their new knowledge into practice. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA®)-aligned curriculum contains an introductory lesson, ten core lessons, and a final closing lesson. Facilitators may include the initial and final lessons as part of the core sessions if they have extra time.

You'll find a range of essential resources in the book's concluding pages. These consist of permission and completion letters, attendance logs, a group expectation form, and a Certificate of Completion. You'll also find pre- and post-group assessments to measure the success of the programming and templates to share the results with interested parties. Moreover, this workbook provides a comprehensive action plan that will integrate effortlessly into your ASCA® evaluation document and facilitate a seamless transition from planning to assessment.

Practical and easy to implement, the activities are designed for both small- and large-group instruction. Most lessons require only basic supplies like pencils, markers or crayons, and scratch paper. A few activities suggest simple, easy-to-find materials to enhance the experience, but no extensive prep is needed. You won't need to spend hours getting ready—everything you need is clearly outlined and easy to gather!

See page 115 for information on Downloadable Resources.

What's Included?

30-Minute Focus: Executive Function offers a comprehensive ten-lesson program and accompanying materials for facilitating group sessions. Following each detailed lesson outline, you'll find practical resources for establishing a small group within your school environment.

Mind Map: Provides an illustrated diagram of the different executive functioning skills or parts of the brain. Students should begin each lesson by brainstorming the skill, considering its meaning or the role of a specific part of the brain. It is optional to write these, but visuals are helpful for many students. Some find it helpful to draw the Mind Map on the board, or you can draw a tree with the concept written on the trunk and the related words on the fruit of the tree.

ASCA® Standards: Each lesson includes success criteria for the learning target.

Lesson Introduction: At the start of each lesson, we will introduce a concept and explain it to provide clarity for the upcoming story.

Circle Time Questions: This section has optional questions for the facilitator to start the conversation. These questions allow students to deepen their understanding of the topic and build community by discussing and sharing their experiences.

Story Time: Provides stories related to the concept that should be read aloud to help children understand the concept.

Coloring Sheets: Allow younger students to visualize the concept. Students can color the sheet while the facilitator shares the initial story, after the lesson is complete, or take it home with them.

Discussion Questions: Students can discuss the questions posed to help them process their beliefs on the subject.

Skill Practice: These interactive and hands-on activities provide students an opportunity to practice the Executive Functioning skills.

Additional Activities: Provides activities to help students practice and apply the lesson concept.

Closing Considerations: This is an opportunity to review the concept and ask students to reflect on their new experience with the material.

Would You Rather? Game: Provides an opportunity for students to consider what they would “rather” do related to the lesson’s topic. The facilitator can cut out the cards and let students discuss or read aloud while moving from one side of the room to the other to communicate their preferred answer.

Accompanying Group Documents

Action Plan: Provides the necessary information required to complete the ASCA® National Model’s Classroom and Group Mindsets & Behaviors Action Plan.

Permission Form: The permission form is used to gain the permission of the student’s caregivers for the child to attend the Executive Functioning Group. Be sure to send this home about two weeks before the group starts.

Group Expectations: These provide basic expectations for the group process. The form has space for the facilitator and group to collaborate on adding additional expectations to fit their group.

Group Attendance Form: This is a blank form that allows the facilitator to track which students attended each session and what topics were discussed.

Group Attendance Form (Example): This form is an example of how to best utilize the group attendance form.

Mindsets & Behaviors Pre- and Post-Assessment: Provides an opportunity for students to share what they know of the concepts before and after they’ve completed the curriculum.

To measure the progress of students who participate, use the same assessment for both the pre-group and post-group assessment. Administer the pre-group assessment at the start of the instructional period, followed by instruction and practice opportunities for measured skills or knowledge.

At the end of the instructional period, administer the post-group assessment and compare the results of both assessments to identify areas of improvement and areas that need further instruction. Then calculate the average score of the pre-assessment and post-assessment and determine the percentage of improvement by subtracting the pre-assessment average from the post-assessment average and then dividing the result by the pre-assessment total. Use this pre-assessment average improvement to measure the students’ progress effectively.

Percentage of Improvement Formula

$$((\text{Post-Assessment Total} - \text{Pre-Assessment Total}) / \text{Pre-Assessment Total}) \times 100 = \text{Percentage of Overall Improvement}$$

Example:

$$((30 \text{ Post-Assessment Total} - 18 \text{ Pre-Assessment Total}) / 18) \times 100 = 66.67\% \text{ Overall Improvement}$$

Look at your data to determine who should attend your group. Review referrals, attendance data, and achievement metrics and look for students with challenges. Consider also tracking students’ academic achievements, absences, and discipline referrals. You can better see the impact of your small groups when strategically selecting students and closely monitoring their academic, attendance, and conduct metrics. Be sure to share the results of your intervention with your advisory council.

Results Report: The Results Report shows one way to share your data with interested parties. Remember, we want to be sure to use graphs and charts because they show our data, which has more impact than a paragraph of text. Use whatever platform you prefer to show your data, but be sure to complete the data following the group, and then share it with interested parties.

Results Report (Example): The Results Report (Example) shows what your data might resemble following the completion of the groups. You can use this form to share your data.

Certificate of Completion: Present students with a certificate to congratulate them on completing the curriculum.

Executive Function Group Completion Letter: This Letter is written to the caregivers/guardians of students following the completion of the group. Provide students with their certificates and their group review letters during the last session.

Additional Materials: We promised to provide everything you need in this workbook, and we have. However, you will need to make copies of the pre- and post-group assessments, the activity sheets you choose to use, and print the coloring sheets, if appropriate for your group. You might also print and cut out the “Would You Rather?” game or facilitate that activity verbally. We recommend having crayons and pencils readily available on the table. It might also be helpful to have some fidgets accessible for your students during their group session.



Other optional materials include:

- Chapter three lesson on planning/prioritizing: Highlighters or crayons in yellow, green, and pink and a stopwatch (or use your phone)
- Chapter four lesson on organization: colored sticker dots, Washi tape, and have students bring their own backpacks
- Chapter five lesson on focus: windchime, cups (2 per student), and colored pom poms in a variety of colors
- Chapter seven lesson on mindset: bubbles and a mini shredder
- Chapter eight lesson on self-regulation: music of your choice
- Final session: note cards and pom-poms

Good luck with your group! We hope you have a fantastic experience!

Introductory Group Session

Directions & Overview

Conduct this introductory session before starting the regular lessons. This initial meeting will acclimate students to the program's structure, expectations, and foundational tools. They will learn the brain model and check-in process that they will utilize in each subsequent session.

Directions: Begin by extending a warm welcome to all participants. Communicate the group's objectives and generate enthusiasm for learning and collaboration.

Introductions: Foster a sense of community by encouraging students to share their names and something about themselves, or by playing a quick game of "Two Truths and a Lie."

Begin the group by asking members to share a **Peak** and **Pit** from their week.

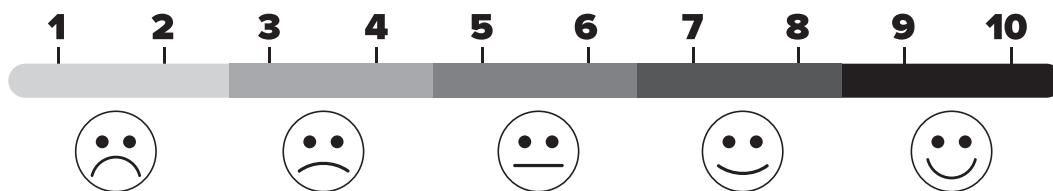


Share a positive or high moment from the week. Something that made you smile or feel good.



Share a low from the week. How did you get through it?

Alternatively, students can use an emotion scale to rate their feelings on a scale of 1 (not feeling great) to 10 (feeling their best).



Explain the Group Format: Explain how often the group will meet, when you will meet, and the list of topics students will be learning about. Each week, it's important to review the schedule of activities you have planned with students (e.g., reading, sharing, playing a game). If run as a lunch bunch, clarify with students that they will eat while engaging in an activity like listening to a story or working on a coloring sheet. Each session should end with a student reflection—a one-sentence summary of what they learned and how they plan to apply it.

Review Group Expectations: Print a copy of the Group Expectations. Review the expectations together with the students and answer questions as they arise. Collaborate with your group to determine whether you need to modify or add expectations.

Assessment: Before proceeding, read the pre-group assessment instructions aloud to the students and have each student complete the form. Carefully examine the completed forms to verify that all questions have been answered.

Group Conclusion: Ask each student to share how they are feeling about being part of the group. Students may share with their partners or the group.

Scaling Fist to Five: Ask students to reflect on today's session. Using their hands, ask them to put up the number that represents how they are feeling

- 0 (fist): I feel totally overwhelmed and scared.
- 3: I feel okay, a little nervous but also excited.
- 5: I feel confident and enthusiastic.

Note to Facilitators: You can customize the material to fit the needs of your group. If your students are not yet readers, you can read the “Would You Rather?” game questions aloud and have students move to different sides of the room to show their answers. If you’re working with students who are quiet or take time to feel comfortable, consider having them write their responses instead of sharing out loud, or break into smaller teams for discussion. Depending on your schedule, you can include as many or as few of the suggested activities as you’d like, add extra elements such as games or read-alouds, or skip certain parts to fit your time constraints better. Remember, the workbook is just the framework—you bring it to life.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION GROUP EXPECTATIONS

BE A MINDFUL LISTENER.
Listen from your heart. When others are speaking, we all must do our best to focus on what others say with all our senses, left ear from information, and keep our minds in the present without trying to recede into our old way of life.

ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE
We are here to work together so it is expected that each one of us is sharing our part to participate with anyone. You will help us develop our understanding of the topic, practice, and our abilities. When we fully give into listening and participating, we will get more out of the group and grow stronger together.

SHOW KINDNESS TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS
It is okay to disagree, but we won't yell or call each other names. We can support each other in keeping the group safe. This means we respect each other's, not ourselves. We work hard to respect and receive our membership if there is a conflict or disagreement.

BE WILLING TO LEARN AND GROW
Once in a while we will provide a safe space to share, make mistakes, and learn from each other.

WHAT IS SAID IN HERE, STAYS IN HERE
In our group, we will keep what we talk about confidential. Confidentiality means keeping what is said in the group private and not discussing it outside of the group. We share our own things, our privacy, and not everyone needs to know about them. However, because we are a group, we can't promise that everyone will keep what you say private. If you think that you can't trust yourself to someone else or that someone is talking you, I will keep you safe, but telling someone who needs to know can help keep you and others safe as well.

CREATE YOUR OWN

Pre- and Post-Assessment

My name is _____
Date: _____

Executive Function Assessment

Circle ☐ 1 if the statement is true for you.
Circle ☐ 2 if the statement is NOT true for you.
(There are no right or wrong answers)

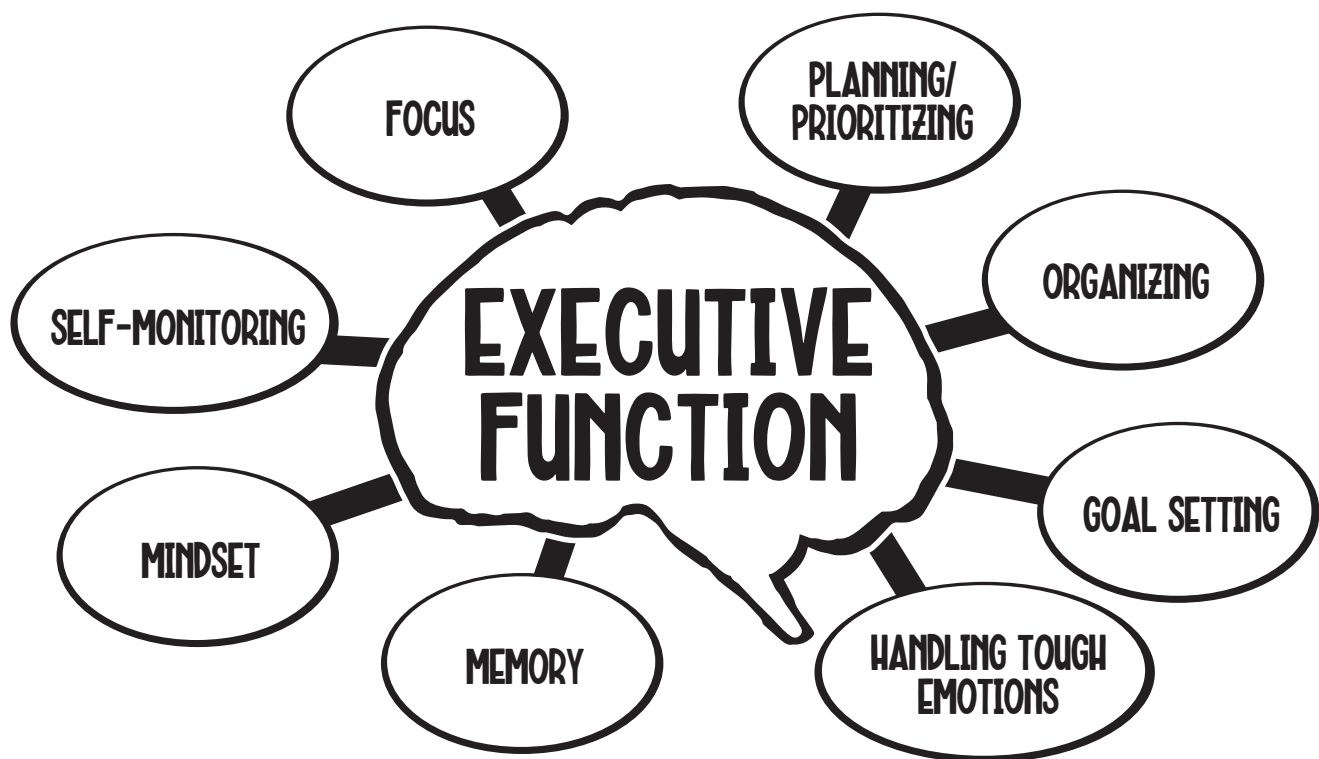
I understand what executive functioning is	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I can make plans and keep them going and stick with them, even when it gets hard	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I usually know what I want something new	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I use a system to keep my desk, backpack, and classroom organized	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I can usually focus on what I'm doing and ignore distractions	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I am good at remembering information and details	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I sometimes forget to keep going when things get difficult, or when I make a mistake	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I am usually calm when I need to focus	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I can keep my mind focused on my activities. Not too often	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2
I have time to think how things are going and make adjustments if needed	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2

Anything else you would like to share about the group? Write it below:

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE FUNCTION?

MIND MAP

On the board, draw a Mind Map and ask students to consider the meaning of *Executive Function*. Ask them to also brainstorm different areas in their life where they can set goals or work on improving.



ASCA® STANDARDS

- **M 1.** Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional, and physical well-being
- **M 3.** Positive attitude toward work and learning
- **B-LS 4.** Self-motivation and self-direction for learning

DIRECTIONS

- Begin the group by asking members to share a **Peak** and **Pit** from their week.

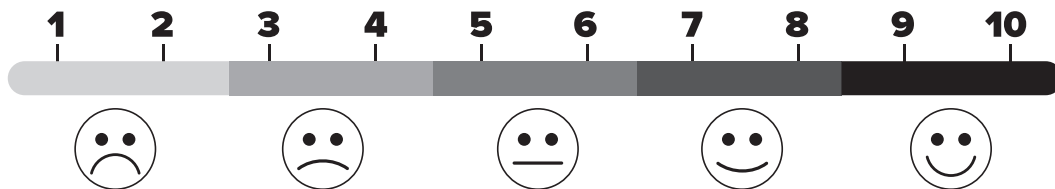


Share a positive or high moment from the week. Something that made you smile or feel good.



Share a low from the week. How did you get through it?

Alternatively, students can use an emotion scale to rate their feelings on a scale of 1 (not feeling great) to 10 (feeling their best).

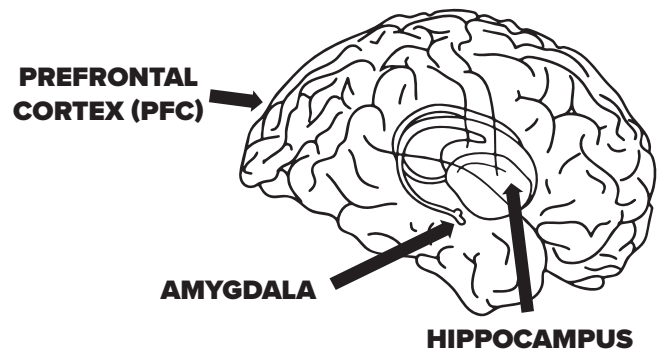


- Review the Group Expectations.
- Read the Lesson Introduction and ask the Circle Time Questions before reading the Story and asking the Discussion Questions. Students can share individually or turn and talk to share their answers in pairs.
- Complete one of the Skill Practice Activities. If time allows, complete the Would You Rather? cards (in a group or pairs) and any of the Additional Activities.
- Be sure to complete the Closing Considerations with each lesson.

LESSON INTRODUCTION

When you hear the word “skills” you might think about skills like being able to dribble a basketball or being a talented artist who can paint. But did you know there are other skills, skills that will help us both now and as we get older? These skills help us succeed in school and will help us when we get a job.

These skills are called executive functioning (EF) skills. EF skills help us get things done. They help us stay on task, keep organized, and regulate our emotions.



Skills like handling strong feelings (self-regulation), thinking positively, planning ahead, setting goals, organizing materials, remembering information, and staying focused are all executive functioning (EF) skills. These skills happen in the front part of our brain, called the **Prefrontal Cortex (PFC)**.

The PFC is like a thoughtful turtle or wise owl that helps us think before we act and make decisions we are proud of.

There are two other important parts of the brain you should know about:

- The **amygdala** is a tiny, almond-shaped part of the brain that feels and responds to our emotions. It's like a guard dog that keeps us safe.
When we face challenges like a hard test or experience a strong emotion like disappointment, our amygdala might mistake the feeling as a danger and react. This can lead to us doing or saying things we regret.
- The **hippocampus** helps us remember. This is our memory-saver. It helps us learn and remember new things. It also allows us to recall things we have learned in the past.
Just as we can work out to build stronger muscles, we can also do things to help “train our brains.” In our group we are going to help build our EF skills and strengthen our PFC.

CIRCLE TIME QUESTIONS

Ask students to reflect and share their answers to the following questions with the group. Larger groups may need to be broken into smaller groups to give students ample time to share their answers and deepen the conversation.

Use the Mind Map for reference.

- Which skill do you think is your strongest?
- Which skill do you think you need the most help with?
- Which skill are you the most curious about?
- Why do you think you need these skills?

STORY TIME

Hand out the Coloring Sheets and crayons or markers to younger students while the facilitator reads the story, if desired.

Brooklyn's Ruff Day

Brooklyn the puppy was so excited for her first day of puppy school! She jumped out of bed, wagging her tail, and ran straight to the door—knocking over her water bowl with a big splash. While she was cleaning it up, she got distracted by the puddles and started splashing around. “This is so fun!” she thought.

Suddenly, she heard her mom call, “Brooklyn, it’s time to go!” Uh-oh! Brooklyn raced around looking for her leash and treats, but her bed was a tangled mess of toys, blankets, and chewed socks. By the time she found what she needed, she was already late. When she got to puppy school, she realized she had missed the morning games and felt grumpy. “What a ruff morning,” Brooklyn thought.

Just then, her Doberman friend, Bindu, wandered over. “Are you ready for the sit-and-stay test?” he asked. “What test?” Brooklyn yelped. She had completely forgotten about it! She remembered telling herself weeks ago to practice every day, but she never did. Now it was test day, and she wasn’t prepared. She felt so upset that she started to cry and told Bindu all about her terrible morning.

“Don’t worry, Brooklyn,” Bindu said gently. “There are special skills that can help you remember, plan ahead, and stay organized. They’re called executive functioning skills. Think of them like ‘sit’ and ‘stay’ commands for your brain. If you want, I can help you practice them.”

So, each week, they worked on a different skill, like keeping track of time, making checklists, and staying focused. Six weeks later, Brooklyn had learned how to manage her time, remember important tasks, and keep her things in order. She felt so proud on the day she earned her Good Canine Citizen award. “Now I’m ready for anything!” she barked happily.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What feelings did you hear in the story?
- What do you think Brooklyn could have done differently to get ready for school?
- What EF skills do you think Brooklyn needs help with (refer to Mind Map if needed)?
- What do you think Brooklyn could do next?
- What advice would you give Brooklyn?

SKILL PRACTICE

Give each student a piece of paper and some coloring supplies. Ask them to think quietly about a time when they felt frustrated because something went wrong—like when they lost something important or forgot their homework at home.

Next, have them draw a picture of that memory. Afterward, ask them to reflect: *Was there something I could have done to prevent that outcome? What skills would have helped me in this situation?* If they have an idea, they can draw a second picture showing what they could have done differently and how it might have changed the outcome.

Allow quiet time for drawing and reflection. Afterward, invite students to share their ideas if they feel comfortable.

Ask students to think about the memory they just recalled and identify which parts of their brain were involved:

- Which part helped you remember the experience? (Hippocampus)
- Which part felt the frustration or strong emotion? (Amygdala)
- Which part helped you reflect and think about how you could have responded differently? (Prefrontal Cortex or PFC)

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES



ELEMENTARY

MY BRAIN

Share these scenarios. Ask students to point to the part of the brain on their coloring sheet or call out the part of the brain that helps with this activity.

- You read a book and when a friend asks you about it you can tell them all about it. (hippocampus)
- Your teacher gives you a big project and you make a plan to do a little each day so you're ready. (PFC).
- You get to a hard question on a test and throw your pencil on the floor. (amygdala)
- You clean your backpack so it's ready for school on Monday (PFC).
- You learn a new idea. (PFC).



MIDDLE/HIGH

IDENTIFYING SKILLS

Share this scenario with the students and ask which executive function (EF) skills could have helped:

Imagine this: You get a big project that's due in two weeks. Since it seems like you have plenty of time, you decide to wait a week before starting. When the week is up, you sit down to begin—but you can't find the

materials you need. Frustrated, you give up and start watching videos instead. The next day, you try again, but phone notifications keep distracting you. The following day, you finally start the project, but it turns out to be more complicated than you expected. Overwhelmed and frustrated, you just want to give up.

- Focus
- Planning/Prioritizing
- Organizing
- Goal setting
- Handling tough emotions (or self-regulating)
- Memory
- Mindset
- Self-Monitoring

CLOSING CONSIDERATIONS

Today we talked about three parts of our brain: our Prefrontal Cortex, Amygdala, and Hippocampus. Executive function skills happen in the front part of our brain, called the Prefrontal Cortex (PFC). Skills like handling strong feelings (self-regulation), thinking positively, planning ahead, setting goals, organizing materials, remembering information, and staying focused are all executive functioning (EF) skills.

Scaling Fist to Five

Ask students to reflect on today's session. Using their hands, ask them to put up the number that represents how they are feeling

- **0 (fist):** I feel totally overwhelmed and confused. I need lots of help.
- **3:** I understand it, but I need some support and practice.
- **5:** I feel confident. I could teach someone else all about this and how to do it.

“WOULD YOU RATHER?” GAME

Playing the “Would You Rather?” the game is a fun and engaging activity for students to develop their critical thinking skills. Students will reflect on their experience, evaluate their options based on their preferences, and reflect on the opinions of others, which provides different perspectives and strengthens the group’s sense of connection to one another.

WOULD YOU RATHER?

Review cards before playing and remove any that may not be relevant or developmentally appropriate for your students. Copy and cut out the questions for small groups to discuss. You can also have students sit/stand or have each person stand in the center of the room and move toward one side or the other to show their vote for either option as the facilitator reads the questions aloud.



**HAVE AMAZING PLANNING SKILLS
OR STAY CALM UNDER PRESSURE?**

**BE REALLY GOOD AT MANAGING
YOUR TIME OR HAVE A GREAT
MEMORY?**

**BE ABLE TO PLAN EVERY TASK
PERFECTLY OR ADAPT TO ANY
CHANGE RIGHT AWAY?**

**NEVER GET DISTRACTED OR
ACHIEVE A GOAL?**

**LEARN ABOUT A NEW IDEA BY
WATCHING A VIDEO OR READING
ABOUT IT?**

**HAVE A SUPER MEMORY OR
UNSTOPPABLE FOCUS?**

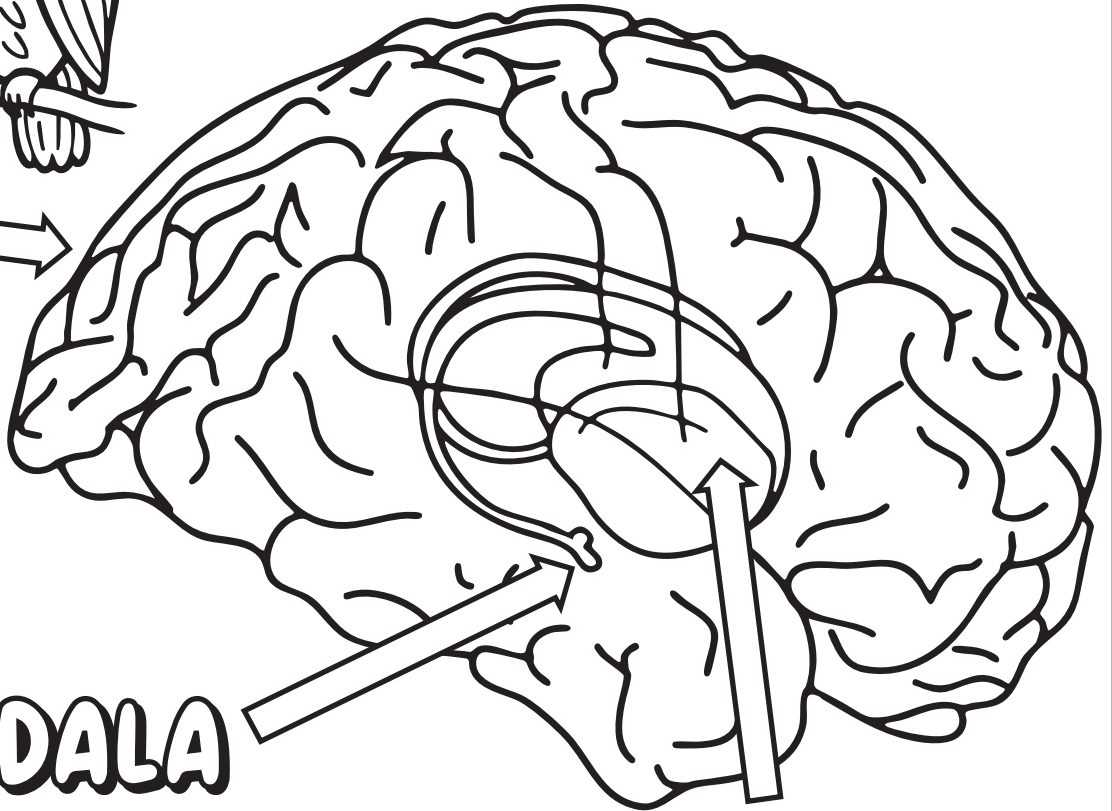
OUR BRAIN!



PFC



The pre-frontal cortex helps us make wise and thoughtful decisions. It helps us think before we act, solve problems, and set goals.



AMYGDALA

The amygdala is our “guard dog.” It is always trying to sense danger and keep us safe.



HIPPOCAMPUS

The hippocampus is our memory saver. It helps you remember things you’ve learned and experiences.

