

# Unstuck and On Target!

## *An Executive Function Curriculum to Improve Flexibility, Planning, and Organization*

*Second Edition*

by

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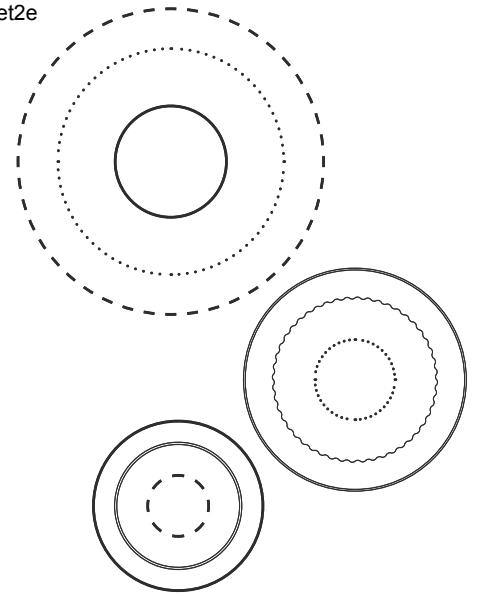
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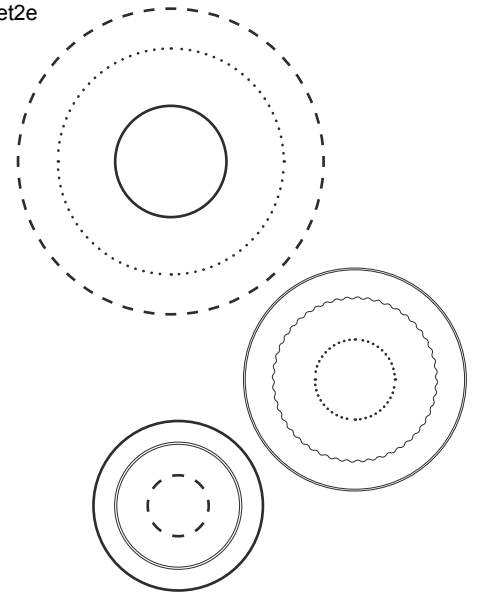
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# Introduction

## GOAL OF THIS MANUAL

*Unstuck and On Target!* is a plan of action for teaching students how to be more flexible, planful, and goal directed. The goal of this intervention is twofold:

1. To increase the cognitive flexibility, organization, and planning abilities of students with executive dysfunction so that they can more easily shift from topic to topic, task to task, and person to person; consider new ideas, alternative beliefs, or another person's point of view; and work independently on multistep tasks in the classroom and beyond.
2. To provide the intervention in a way that works in the classroom and ultimately creates more time for the teacher to focus on teaching and less time managing behavior.

## WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THIS INTERVENTION?

*Unstuck and On Target!* is designed for 8- to 11-year-old students who have difficulties with flexibility, organization, and planning. Specifically, school-age children who may have autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, or other related problems, who also have average IQ and at least a second-grade language and reading level.

## WHO SHOULD PROVIDE THIS INTERVENTION?

*Unstuck and On Target!* is designed for use in a small, school-based weekly group of students led by a professional (teacher, psychologist, social worker, speech-language therapist, occupational therapist, counselor, or highly trained teaching assistant). Those implementing this curriculum should have basic skills in working with students with special needs, including an understanding of positive reinforcement techniques, and should read the entire manual before beginning the curriculum. *Unstuck and On Target!* has also been successfully used by clinicians and parents in small group or individual sessions.

## GUIDE TO THE LESSON PLANS

This manual includes 21 lessons, which are divided among six topics.

### Topics



Each topic begins with an overview page that summarizes the topic, expected outcomes, and background on the rationale for the topic. The information on this page covers the material for all of the lessons included in that topic. Each topic includes a progress report. This is designed to help monitor student progress throughout the curriculum and communicate progress with parents and caregivers.

### Lessons

Each lesson plan has the same structure and includes:

- A statement of the purpose of the lesson
- A list of required materials
- Suggestions for modifications
- Descriptions of each activity
- Handouts

Every lesson has a standard opening and closing routine. The lesson is introduced to the students in a Goal, Why, Plan, Do, Check (GWPDC) format in order to reinforce a key script taught in *Unstuck and On Target!* for completing any multi-step task. Each lesson also begins with a summary of the previous lesson (i.e., Lightning Round), highlighting the vocabulary students have learned. Each lesson ends with the review and completion of the GWPDC.

It is critical that you completely understand the lessons before beginning them with the students. Read through the entire topic before beginning instruction in order to gain a full understanding of the skills being taught and how the lessons fit together, as well as prepare and gather materials. You know your students best, and an overall understanding of the lessons will allow you to pace and adapt lessons as you deem appropriate. Note that some lessons may require you to gather additional materials not typically found in a classroom or school. Those lessons are marked with  throughout the manual. For other lessons, you may need to spend a bit more time preparing (e.g., cutting materials out), and those lessons are marked with .

### Home and Classroom Practice

Each lesson includes a Home Practice handout (available in English and in Spanish) and a Classroom Practice handout. The goal of these handouts is to:

- Provide additional practice opportunities
- Share key scripts, vocabulary, and concepts with families and classroom teachers
- Promote generalization across settings by encouraging families and classroom teachers to use similar language and practice concepts at home and in the classroom.

The students will benefit from going over their Home Practice handout before they take it home. To promote generalization you are encouraged to share the Classroom Practice handout with school personnel who interact with your students.

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## OVERVIEW OF *Unstuck and On Target!*

The *Unstuck and On Target!* curriculum has the following major goals:

- Teaches *what* flexibility is through concrete, hands-on experiments with physical and cognitive flexibility, and a specific vocabulary (e.g., *flexibility*, *Plan A* → *Plan B*, *stuck*), which is then used consistently throughout the intervention.
- Explains *why* it is important to be flexible. The curriculum provides explicit instruction to students on the benefits of being flexible (e.g., it gives them more choices, it helps them become a better friend).
- Teaches students *how* to be flexible by emphasizing routines and self-regulatory scripts that are continuously practiced and reinforced until they are automatic.
- Teaches *what* goals are and *how* to achieve them. The curriculum contains lessons to help students focus on what their goals are and distinguish major or target goals (e.g., getting good grades, making a friend) from distractors.
- Teaches a routine and script for setting a goal and completing any type of multiple step activity, project, or assignment. GWPDC is a universal strategy that improves executive functioning, efficacy, and independent work habits for a variety of tasks. It promotes goal-directed behavior, sustained effort, problem solving, self-monitoring, and flexibility. It is such a critical strategy that we use it as the framework for every lesson and embed it in activities as often as possible. We invite you to do the same, and we often find that educators experience such success with GWPDC that they integrate it throughout their teaching.
  - *How does GWPDC work?* It makes goal setting explicit and easy to understand. Making the plan explicit helps students learn to plan more effectively and provides an opportunity to build flexibility through the use of Plan A, Plan B, Plan C, and so on. Being explicit about checking the plan fosters self-monitoring and flexibility by detecting when a plan is not producing the desired results and adjusting the plan when needed.
- Teaches students how to cope when being flexible and using goal-directed behavior is hard. Positive reinforcement and humor are embedded throughout the curriculum, as they both have magical powers for shaping the behavior of students. The curriculum also teaches coping strategies for those times when being flexible is especially hard.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

### What Is Executive Function?

Executive function is a set of brain-based abilities that help people control their behavior (e.g., stay seated at desk) and reach their goals (e.g., finish something with multiple steps, like getting ready for school). There are many different brain-based abilities that make up executive function, including:

- **Initiation** (getting started on something quickly and easily)
- **Inhibition** (impulse control, “putting on the brakes,” and “thinking before acting”)
- **Flexibility** (shifting from one activity or idea to another, accepting a different way of seeing or doing things)

#### 4 *Unstuck and On Target!*

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- **Working memory** (keeping information in mind while performing a task, e.g., remembering directions someone told you while you drive to your destination)
- **Organization** (keeping track of materials, understanding what the main point is, seeing the big picture, and knowing what is top priority at any given time)
- **Planning** (developing, carrying out, and modifying a plan of action, e.g., science fair project)
- **Self-monitoring** (tracking your performance, e.g., “How am I doing?,” “Am I doing what I am supposed to be doing?”)

This curriculum focuses specifically on four aspects of executive functioning: flexibility, organization, planning, and monitoring skills.

### What Is Flexibility?

Students who have biologically based rigidity and inflexibility can have difficulty with the following:

- Making transitions
- Tolerating changes and unexpected events
- Responding to feedback
- Coming up with new ways to approach a problem
- Accepting flexible interpretations of rules or events
- Managing an intense emotional feeling
- Responding to the needs or interests of friends
- Negotiating with others
- Accepting differing viewpoints

In general, flexibility skills are essential for school and social success, and are a primary focus of this curriculum. Sometimes, however, inflexibility is adaptive. For example, most of us have a morning routine that we more or less follow when getting ready to leave the house. This prevents us from leaving the house before realizing we forgot to brush our teeth. Sometimes inflexibility is essential for students with executive functioning problems, who can be easily overwhelmed in social, group, and novel situations. Once overwhelmed, children with executive function difficulties get more anxious, impulsive, or otherwise behave inappropriately. The risks they run at such times are profound, given the social isolation, teasing, and bullying they can experience at the hands of peers and even adults. Ari Ne’eman, co-founder of the Autism Self-Advocacy Network, offers this analogy to explain the protective function of inflexibility:

“In a mine field, anyone would be very cautious and resistant to making any sudden, unplanned moves. This is similar to what it is like in social situations for those of us with autism.” (personal communication)

Thus, inflexibility serves a role in limiting the amount of unexpected events to which the student must respond. For this reason, it is imperative that adults provide predictable structure and routine as described in the Prerequisites for Successful Implementation of *Unstuck and On Target!* section later in this Introduction.

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## What Is Planning and Organization?

Students who have biologically based problems with planning and organization can have difficulty with the following:

- Setting realistic goals
- Predicting how long something will take
- Following a series of steps to reach a goal
- Integrating information into a unified understanding
- Showing what they know in a timely manner without undue effort
- Understanding that completing homework today will be important for getting a good grade in the future
- Turning in work that has been completed
- Getting started on a multiple step project
- Showing how they calculated an answer when completing a problem
- Supporting ideas in writing
- Following directions in class (especially when they aren't written down)
- Knowing what steps and materials are needed to complete a project
- Drawing inferences

This curriculum shows you how to teach key organizational and planning skills and routines, like goal setting. In addition, just like with flexibility, students also need specific accommodations for these problems. Just as the inflexible student needs to be warned when a change will occur, the disorganized student needs an extra visual reminder in the classroom to turn homework in. Increased communication with parents to help them organize their children at home is also often needed (e.g., an email letting a parent know when a student has not brought homework to school). Breaking a big task down into a series of smaller steps and checking in with the student after each step is completed is another important accommodation for most students with organization/planning problems.

When inflexibility and disorganization combine with other executive function challenges, like problems with self-awareness and self-monitoring, it makes it very hard for children to get even basic tasks done. The following short stories about Michael and Lorraine show what this looks like in real life.

Michael and Lorraine are smart 10-year-old twins. Michael has ADHD. Lorraine does not. Here is an example of how Michael and Lorraine's executive function abilities affect them in school during a reader writer workshop class. They are both articulate children with good spelling and grammar skills. They both generally express good ideas in class discussion and clearly have the verbal knowledge to tackle today's assignment. They are starting a new unit on biography and the assignment is to pick a hero that they want to read and write about. **Table 1** describes what happens when they try to put their knowledge into action.

6 *Unstuck and On Target!***Table 1.** What does flexible, organized, and goal-directed planning look like at school?

Michael	Lorraine
<p>Michael arrives a few minutes late to his class because he is generally <b>disorganized</b> with his materials, had forgotten his notebook, and had to go back and get it.</p> <p>He doesn't hear the teacher's full introduction but sees on the blackboard that the students are to select a hero to read and write about. He doesn't understand or note the importance of the required task sequence, write anything down about the assignment, or <b>plan</b> the steps he needs to take to complete it.</p> <p>He <i>does</i> decide immediately that he will read all about dolphins. He loves sea mammals and thinks that dolphins are his heroes because they are surviving against all odds.</p> <p>Michael's teacher saw that he arrived late so she checks-in individually with him about whether he understands the assignment and has picked a topic.</p> <p>Michael says yes, although he hasn't written down any details. He says he will write about dolphins and is <b>inflexible</b> when his teacher says that the hero has to be a human being. He argues with the teacher <b>impulsively</b>.</p> <p>His teacher spends 5 minutes helping Michael calm down, and with her help, Michael agrees to pick Jacques Cousteau, a famous sea explorer who had a special fondness for sea mammals.</p> <p>Without a <b>plan</b> for completing the assignment and still <b>stuck</b> on dolphins, Michael heads straight for the tiny classroom library, which has a book on dolphins he has been wanting to look at. He knows he needs to investigate Cousteau, but figures that there might be something in this book about him.</p> <p>As he reads the book, however, he is quickly <b>distracted from the goal</b> of writing a biography and enjoys the pictures of dolphins. He is surprised when the teacher says class is over and is upset because he hasn't finished the book.</p> <p>The teacher sees his distress and again comes to his desk and works out a plan with him so he can take the book home overnight. She also tells him that for homework he needs to research Cousteau on the internet to find 3 sources about him.</p> <p>Michael arrives to class the next day without the homework. He is <b>distracted</b> and starts chatting with a tablemate about dolphins until the teacher checks in 1:1 with him again, and asks if he has found 3 sources yet. He says no, he forgot—so she asks a parent volunteer to help him find 3 books on Cousteau in the library.</p> <p>He finds the books and starts to take notes on one of them. However, he has trouble <b>organizing</b> and separating the details from the main point. He also hates to write and writes down very little.</p> <p>The next day Michael leaves the books at home. He gets upset and is <b>stuck</b> on the idea that he can only read the books at home when the teacher sits down with him to suggest getting 1 other book to read that day in class. The teacher e-mails Michael's parents and asks them to help him work on the project over the weekend.</p>	<p>Lorraine is on time to class, is well <b>organized</b>, and has a notebook with a section for reader writer workshop in which she writes down the directions as the teacher is both saying them and writing them on the board.</p> <p>Lorraine also writes the draft due dates in her agenda book and makes a <b>plan</b> about when she needs to complete specific parts of the assignment.</p> <p><i>She initiates (gets started on)</i> the project easily and thinks about who she could pick for her hero. She considers several options and <b>flexibly</b> considers each in terms of how easy it will be to get information on the person and also how interesting the person is to her. She picks Marie Curie.</p> <p><i>Lorraine checks/monitors</i> time and sees that she has 20 minutes left in the class period. She asks the teacher if she can go to the library to search for sources. Lorraine gets permission and uses her library time effectively because she remains <b>focused on her goal</b> of finding 3 books on Marie Curie. She returns with 3 books as class is ending.</p> <p>Lorraine arrives at class the next day with the 3 books she has checked out and continues to follow her plan. She reads through 1 of the books and takes notes. Class comes to an end and she <b>checks/monitors</b> how far she has gotten in the assignment and realizes that tomorrow she will have to complete notes on the other two books, which she does.</p>

Michael	Lorraine
<p>On Monday, Michael comes in with notes he dictated to his mother and his teacher gives him a second copy of the writing prompts for the biography. Michael writes a 4-sentence paragraph with short sentences.</p>	<p>On Monday, Lorraine brings her notes to class, using both her agenda and her good <b>working memory</b> skills to keep track of the fact that today she will work on her rough draft. She writes a well-<b>organized</b> rough draft using the prompts the teacher has provided and gives it to the teacher to review.</p>
<p>The next day, Michael refuses to make any edits based on the teacher's feedback. His teacher decides to try a new strategy and lets him dictate to a classroom volunteer. He produces much more information this way, but is still <b>poorly organized</b> and does not follow the rubric.</p>	<p>Lorraine <b>flexibly</b> incorporates the teacher's edits and turns in a final version of her biography that includes all components described in the assignment rubric.</p>
<p><b>Outcome:</b> Michael did little reading, learned no new material, and did not respond to the writing prompt. His writing was below grade level and his verbal abilities. His teacher is concerned by his "lack of effort" and motivation to succeed in her class.</p>	<p><b>Outcome:</b> Lorraine got an opportunity to explore a new hero in her area of interest, science. She gained research skills, and practiced her free writing and revising skills. She also enhanced her reputation with her teacher who sees her as an intelligent, hard-working girl.</p>
<p><b>Amount of 1:1 teacher time required:</b> 60 mins.</p>	<p><b>Amount of 1:1 teacher time required:</b> 10 mins.</p>

## PREREQUISITES FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF *Unstuck and On Target!*

This curriculum will teach kids like Michael the skills that made Lorraine so successful on her assignment, but specific supports have to be in place before Michael will be able to learn new skills. Next, we describe basic supports that should be in place within the school, classroom, and teacher–student interactions.

### A Flexible and Supportive School Team

**Students learn best when there is a good fit between their brain-based abilities and the environmental and task demands of school.** When this doesn't occur naturally, there are three possible solutions:

1. The student learns new skills and adapts to the environment. The *Unstuck and On Target!* curriculum is designed to teach students new flexibility, goal setting, and organization skills so that they can be more effective independent learners at school.
2. The school team adapts or adjusts the environment to accommodate the student. Because many students with executive dysfunction are in inclusive environments that are designed for people who are naturally organized and flexible, the match between their brain and the demands of the setting is frequently poor. Just as a student in a wheelchair is entitled to accommodation, so is the student with executive function difficulties. These children need to develop the self-awareness and self-advocacy skills to determine when to ask for accommodation. Mastering these self-awareness and self-advocacy skills is a long-term process that begins with adults providing basic accommodations such as those described below.
3. Selected, unacceptable environments are avoided. There are some situations or tasks that pose unacceptable levels of risk for the student with executive dysfunction. They may require such levels of effort that the student is then incapable of further work. They may overwhelm the student and create high risk for inappropriate behaviors, or they may create high levels of anxiety. The student needs to learn how to recognize these situations and avoid them. For example, it is sometimes best for a student to eat lunch in a classroom rather

than in a large, crowded cafeteria. Early in a student's educational experience, an adult will need to identify these situations or tasks and create suitable alternatives. With time and development, the student will be better able to recognize these moments on his or her own.

**A supportive school environment includes these features:**

1. The school team doesn't blame or punish a student for a behavior that is not within his or her volitional control. We know that it is not effective to blame a child with dyslexia for not learning to read because it will not successfully change the behavior or foster meaningful progress and it creates a toxic atmosphere that contaminates other teaching activities. In other words, we know that the child *can't* learn to read through typical strategies, not that he *won't* or chooses not to read. The same is true for executive dysfunction, and it's important for educators to approach executive function difficulties with the same "can't" not "won't" understanding. **Table 2** lists some commonly confused sources of behavior in students with executive dysfunction.
2. The school team provides important accommodations. Commonly needed accommodations include:
  - Preferential seating
  - Maintaining predictable routines, posting schedules
  - Extensive use of priming and visual cues (see next section)
  - Helping with organization of desk and work materials
  - Offering choices whenever possible
  - Reducing the number of staff involved with a student
  - Respecting self-soothing, repetitive routines (e.g., sticking to a schedule, following favored eating rituals) that are not otherwise harmful.
  - Extra contact/collaboration with parents
3. The student has at least one coach or "safe" adult at school. A safe person understands the student and is available to the student on an as-needed basis to review difficult interactions with others, explain confusing situations, and advocate for the student's needs. The safe person also seeks the student out regularly to monitor, teach, and actively coach executive skills.
4. There is a structured behavior management system based on positive behavior supports. A schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports system is ideal.
5. The school team works together to reinforce the *Unstuck* vocabulary and scripts and behaviors. The intervention will be successful only if it is consistently implemented throughout the student's environment.

**Table 2.** Willful misbehavior or different brain?

What looks like "won't"	May actually be "can't"
Opposition, stubbornness	Cognitive inflexibility, effort to avoid being overwhelmed
Lack of will ("He can do it if he wants to")	Difficulty in shifting, variable attention, disorganization
Rudeness	Difficulty controlling impulses
Self-centeredness	Impaired social cognition/ability to take another's perspective
Lack of effort ("She doesn't try")	Poor initiation, impaired planning, or attention
Inability or refusal to put good ideas on paper	Poor fine motor skills, disorganization
Sloppy, erratic work	Poor impulse control, self-monitoring, overload
Refusal to control outbursts	Overload, poor impulse control
Lack of sensitivity to others ("He doesn't care what others think")	Impaired nonverbal social cues, impulsivity
Lack of interest in school	Impaired attention and working memory



## A Flexible, Organized, and Supportive Educator

Every educator has an opportunity and a responsibility to establish the culture for his or her classroom. Flexibility and planning, like laughter, are contagious. Children are most likely to thrive and acquire flexibility and planning skills in a classroom culture in which educators and students alike consistently demonstrate and value flexibility, goal setting, and planning. While good teachers may use many of these strategies already, specific ways that educators can explicitly increase their use of these skills in the classroom include the following:

- Make smooth and calm transitions between tasks, activities, and expectations; respond flexibly when changes and unexpected events occur.
- Avoid power struggles. For example, when a teacher makes a request and a student refuses to obey, the teacher refrains from making a second, more demanding request or imposing a consequence that the student refuses.
- Use a high ratio of praise to corrections (target 5:1). Facilitate better performance through positive actions such as instructional scaffolding (providing the supports needed for success), elaboration (expanding on a topic to increase understanding), and modeling (demonstrating a new skill for students to learn by watching) *before* trying to stop inadequate performance with consequences and corrections (**Table 3**).
- Provide active priming, or warnings that something is going to happen. To be effective, priming should occur at least several minutes before a student has to make any change, such as stopping work, changing classes, or interrupting an activity. When priming, it is

**Table 3.** Positive versus negative: Positive teacher responses can help change the direction of an interaction; negative teacher responses can lead to negative student responses and, ultimately, an entrenched negative cycle.

	Keeping it positive or neutral	Keeping it negative
Teacher	(Calmly) The class is ending in 10 minutes. I'm going to get your schedule so we can prepare for your next class.	(Urgently) Hurry up and finish your worksheet. You need to get your materials for the next class.
Johnny	I'm still working.	I'm still working.
Teacher	You can keep working. Here is your checklist. What do you need to do next?	You should have thought of that when you were talking in class earlier.
Johnny	(Looks at list and puts math book and homework in backpack)	I was bored! I hate math!
Teacher	Great. While you're putting your homework in your backpack, I'll read the next item—check to make sure there are no papers in your desk.	You haven't even put your math work away! You have to hurry up!
Johnny	(Checks desk and puts pencil in backpack)	I hate school. I don't even want to be here.
Teacher	What's next on your checklist?	Fine. Then maybe it's time for you to visit the principal's office.
Johnny	Get out your English book.	(Feeling overloaded) No!
Teacher	Yes! Do you know where it is?	You need to lower your voice inside!
Johnny	Great! Right where it should be! Good thinking, putting it back in place yesterday.	That's it. I can't take this anymore! (Storms out of the class)
Teacher	Bye! (Johnny goes to next class)	(Escorts Johnny to the principal's office)

important to provide concrete and explicit direction about what a student needs to do to prepare for the upcoming change. For example, a student may have an easier time stopping a writing task if he or she is directed to finish the specific sentence he or she is working on and is told when he or she may have time to finish the activity.

- Communicate clear, explicit, and specific expectations for the work to be done, expected behavior, and how students should set and achieve goals.
- Provide clear, written, step-by-step instructions for any multiple-step task. Keep white boards near to quickly “make it visual.”
- Maintain an organized classroom so that clutter and visual distractions are minimized and there are clear routines for turning in work, getting ready to go home, and making the transition between classes.
- Provide specific visual reminders to students who have trouble following classroom routines.
- Exhibit a calm demeanor, an empathic understanding, a positive outlook, and high expectations. These personality traits are critical for any educator, but especially so for those working with students with executive function difficulties.
- Problem-solve both internally and externally (with students) to detect when and why student performance breaks down. For example, say that a student refuses to write a paragraph on his or her summer vacation. Instead of assuming noncompliance, the educator acknowledges the student’s difficulty and works to discover why the student has refused the task. Maybe the student doesn’t know where to start, has trouble with fine motor tasks, or doesn’t have a pencil. Finding solutions and compromises (a writing rubric, providing a pencil, or allowing the student to work on a computer) are easier once a specific reason has been identified.
- Have self-knowledge. To be an effective educator, you must know yourself in the classroom. What upsets you? Are there certain students or behaviors that are triggers for you? Are you ever rigid or disorganized in the classroom? When? What do you do when you are rigid? Learning your own early signs and applying strategies that work for you will increase your flexibility, organization, and efficacy.
- “Think out loud,” or provide explicit instruction. Students with executive function difficulties may not realize that being flexible and setting a goal or following a plan will increase their chances of making a friend or getting better grades, particularly since they have difficulty learning from their own experience or from watching other people. These students do better when key concepts are taught explicitly and are continuously reinforced through the technique of making the implicit executive function demands of situations explicit. By highlighting your own experience of situations that require executive function skill and explicitly identifying flexible, organized responses, you can provide your students with a working framework for how they can resolve other difficult situations. For example, you might say, “I was hoping to use the projector to show you this worksheet, but the bulb is burned out. I am going to be flexible and give you each your own worksheet instead.”
- Treat students with respect and as active partners in their education. Collaborative relationships do not require teachers to give in to students or give up their expectations. In fact, they often facilitate increased effort and output from students. Collaborative relationships do require a willingness to give choices within the framework of clear expectations (e.g., allowing a student to choose the topic of an essay). They also require both parties to listen to what the other has to say. One student noted that he really wanted “teachers to

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listen to what kids say and not assume things about us, and also take our opinions into account” when appropriate.

- Empower students. As you identify those times of day when a student would benefit from an accommodation (e.g., taking a 5-minute reading break after lunch) or those environments that are a poor fit for the student (e.g., a loud cafeteria), support the student in discovering for him- or herself what he or she needs. This is an essential first step to teaching effective self-advocacy skills. Here are some examples of what you might say:
  - “I noticed that the cafeteria is very loud and you cover your ears when you are in there. That makes it hard for you to talk or eat your food. Can you help me think of a spot that would be less noisy where you could have lunch?”
  - “You have told me that you are really tired when you come in the morning. After you went on the swings yesterday you had a lot more energy and you were able to start your work. What strategy should we use when you come in feeling tired in the morning?”
- Provide an optimal level of support through just-right cuing techniques. Use guided practice with faded cuing to gradually build new skills, one step at a time. Guided practice begins with concrete tasks and a high level of teacher support (i.e., verbal prompting and redirection). The role of the adult is to scaffold behavior only as much as the student needs in order to be successful, not to serve as a crutch or to create a dependency. Thus, teachers should gradually fade support and guidance as soon as students can demonstrate the skill independently. In the case of the *Unstuck and On Target!* intervention, teachers must be prepared initially to prompt the use of scripts and routines but should reduce prompting over time, providing just the level of support needed for success. In this regard, it is helpful to use the Socratic method of asking questions in place of providing answers (e.g., “What do you need to get started?”) to find out how much information the student can generate without staff input. This process will enable the student to become independent and automatic in using the new vocabulary and scripts. Automaticity takes time, however, and repeated practice should be expected. Think of it as similar to the model of athletic coaching or music instruction, in which students perform the same drills and routines repeatedly before gaining mastery.

For students with executive function challenges, problems with flexibility and goal-directed behavior can be a major obstacle to success. With this enhanced second edition of this popular curriculum—**now in a new format that’s optimized for both in-person and virtual instruction**—you’ll have everything you need to explicitly teach executive function skills in today’s educational environment.

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