



Oxfordshire Adult Autism Diagnostic and Support Service



# Executive Functioning

ASPiration Workshop



# What we will cover



- What is executive functioning?
- How do differences in executive functioning affect daily life
- How to improve executive functioning



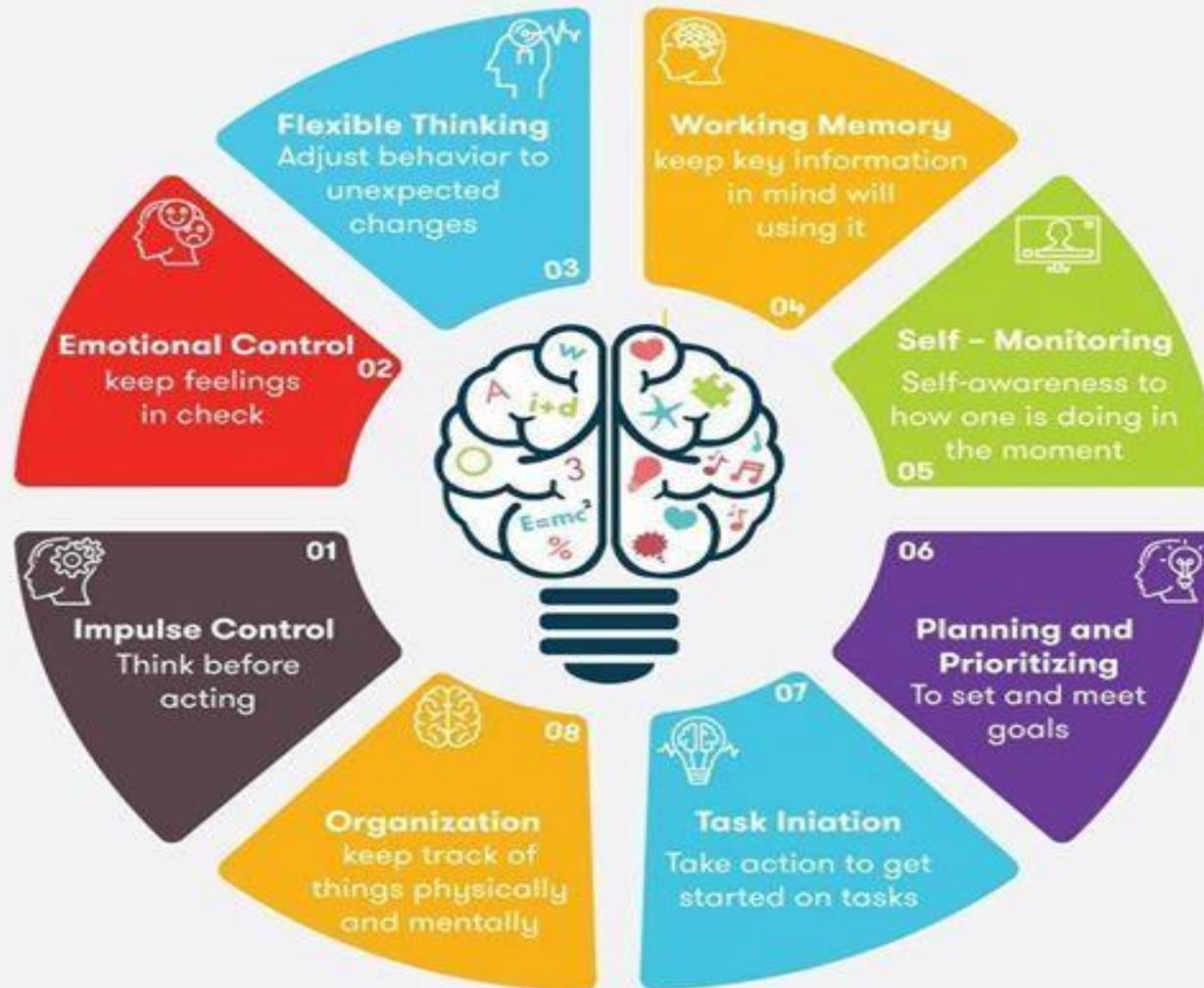
# What are executive functions?



- Executive functioning is an umbrella term which includes the ability to plan, organise, manage time, multi-task, reason, solve problems, and inhibit behaviours.
- They can be used daily to establish predictability and offer a foundation for interpreting, processing and understanding the world with flexibility.
- There are eight executive skills that help us to regulate, control and manage our thoughts and actions



# EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING



# Why is Executive Functioning important?



- **It enables the following:**
  - Adaptability
  - Effective decision making
  - Working in a team
  - Working towards a goal
  - Multitasking
  - Filter distractions
  - Prioritise tasks
  - Remember information



# Impulse Control



## What is it?

- The ability to be able to think before you act or consider the consequences of an action or behaviour

## What might it look like?

- Weak impulse control can lead someone to being unable to hold themselves back from something they feel they need to do
- Unable to sit still and focus
- Monopolise or interrupt conversations
- Binge eating
- Unpredictable or unsafe behaviour
- Difficulty taking turns



# Emotional Control



## What is it?

- The ability to feel, identify, label and know the difference between different emotions.
- The ability to self regulate or control those emotions in a variety of social situations and interactions.
- It's the ability to stay calm if you're anxious or bounce back from a setback without letting disappointment or frustration take over.



# Emotional Control



## What might it look like?

- Weak emotional control may make someone over react when they are in certain situations
- It might be difficult to manage an unexpected change of plans.
- It might be challenging to accept criticism from another person.
- A weak emotional control may allow our emotions to take control rather than logical thinking or problem solving.
- Limits our ability to recall information
- Limits our ability to make decisions.



# Flexible Thinking



## What is it?

- The ability to be able to adjust to the unexpected
- The ability to be able to consider another's opinions and perspectives
- The ability to 'shift gear' and think about something in a different way
- Key to problem solving – 'how can I solve this problem if my first attempt doesn't work?'



# Flexible Thinking



## What might it look like?

- Being rigid when thinking about a problem, a social situation or social interaction
- Struggling to adjust to an unforeseen situation
- Be confused about how an event or social interaction may turn out – not as expected
- Difficulties accepting a perspective that is different from own
- Not being able to seek alternatives when trying to solve a problem
- Being frustrated when a solution to a problem doesn't go well



# Working Memory



## What is it?

- The ability to hold a limited amount of information for a time limited period of time – a temporary storage system
- Think about or process this limited amount of information
- Important in helping to problem solve and make decisions
- The ability to remember what someone has said in a conversation and decide what to say in response
- The ability to remember and follow instructions accurately and in the correct order



# Working Memory



## What might it look like?

- A person with weak working memory may find it difficult to remember things
- Challenges in keeping appointments – this may impact on the development of a social life
- Poor general organisation
- Starting a task and not completing it
- Making an unexpected response when in a conversation
- Not remembering all the steps in a process or doing them out of sequence



# Task initiation



## What is it?

- Helps you to get started or take action

## What might it look like?

- Struggle to start a task or an activity
- Part of the struggle may be not knowing what the task involves , not remembering what the task involves, not being able to split the task down into smaller steps



# Planning and Prioritising



## What is it?

- Prioritisation allows us to make decisions about what is important and what is less important. This allows a person to focus on the most important so they can plan effectively.
- Planning is the ability to create a 'road map' on how to reach a particular goal.

## What might it look like?

- Find it difficult to identify which steps of a task should be completed first.



# Planning and Prioritising



## What might it look like?

- Find it difficult to identify which steps of a task should be completed first or which steps are the most important
- It may be a challenge to plan a meal, plan the chores that need to be completed
- Planning a social event with a friend can be overwhelming
- Completing tasks can be a problem
- There may be an assumption that a person with poorly developed planning and prioritisation are lazy or incompetent
- Disorganised
- Freeze and achieve nothing

# Organisation



## What is it?

- Organisation is keeping track of your belongings. However it involves more than this, it also enables the organisation of our thoughts, management of the time we spend on different things and knowing how to get things done.

## What might it look like?

- Easy to lose your train of thought
- May lose items
- May be late for appointments
- Miss deadlines at work
- May appear unreliable
- Difficulty imposing structure and order in their own ideas



# Self-monitoring



## What is it?

A skill used to keep track of our own actions – ‘how are we doing?’

## What might it look like?

- Can say the ‘wrong’ thing in a social interaction.
- Interrupt others in a conversation
- Behave in an unpredictable way
- Tendency to misjudge own efforts



# Executive Functioning



- Air traffic controller

- Conductor



# What can you do?



- “Wait 5” strategy—counting to five before verbally responding to an input in your workplace, and a “Wait 3” in personal conversations to think before speaking in pairs or groups.
- Break tasks down into smaller more manageable steps.
- Ask a friend or family member to help you prioritise the steps.
- Write down instructions that are given to you in your workplace.
- Ask your colleague/ manager to send you an email or list of exactly what they expect you to do.
- Ask your colleague/manager to help you plan how much time should be spent on each element of a task.

# What can you do?



- Use lists,
- Daily, weekly and monthly planning resources diaries.
- Set reminders on your phone, tablet etc to help remember appointments.
- Create lists for items you need to take to different events/activities e.g. list in your bag for gong swimming; list of things to take and bring back
- Plan backwards , execute forward
- Use colour coding in the diary/calendar to signify the importance of different events
- Make use of your phones recorder to record instructions that you can play back

# What can you do?



- Store work or belongings in set places to help remember where they are. Have a work box for items related to work etc.
- Use days of the week to help organise – e.g. Friday is the day for the supermarket, Monday is swimming etc.
- It can also be useful to split the day into three parts; morning, afternoon and evening to help organise tasks
- Utilise online shopping to minimise anxiety or have specific lists when going shopping
- At work using colour coded files to help schedule, plan and prioritise tasks



# What can you do?



- Make clear to do list at the beginning of the day
- Ask manager at work for regular meetings to ensure you are keeping to time schedules, keeping on task and that you continue to work within the task expectation
- Use online diaries to colour code and prioritise emails and appointments.



# What works for you?

