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Welcome to our SEN Coffee and Chat session

Supporting children with Executive
Functioning

The SEN Register

Speech, language and communication (SLCN)

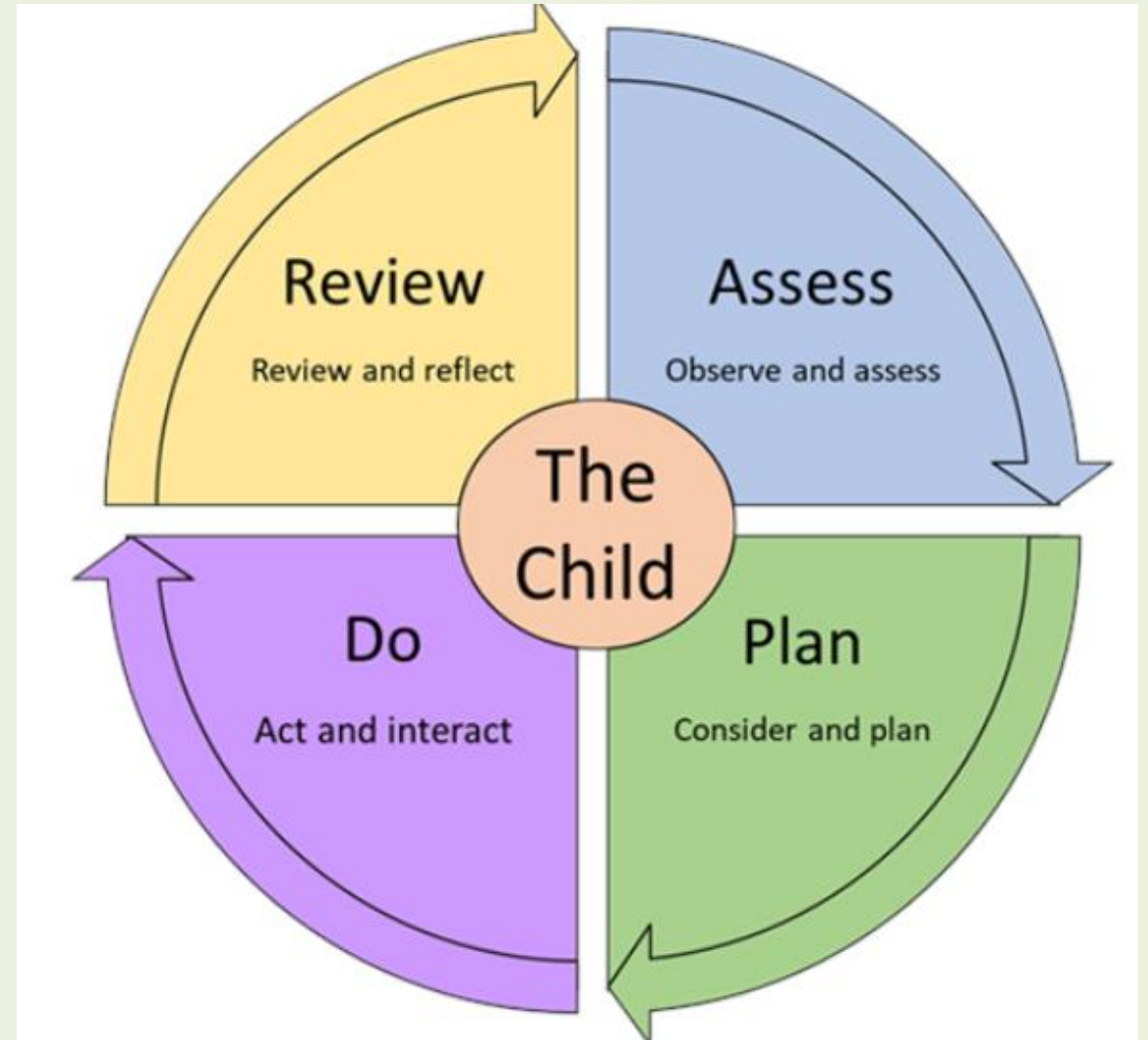
Learning (MLD or SpLD)

Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)

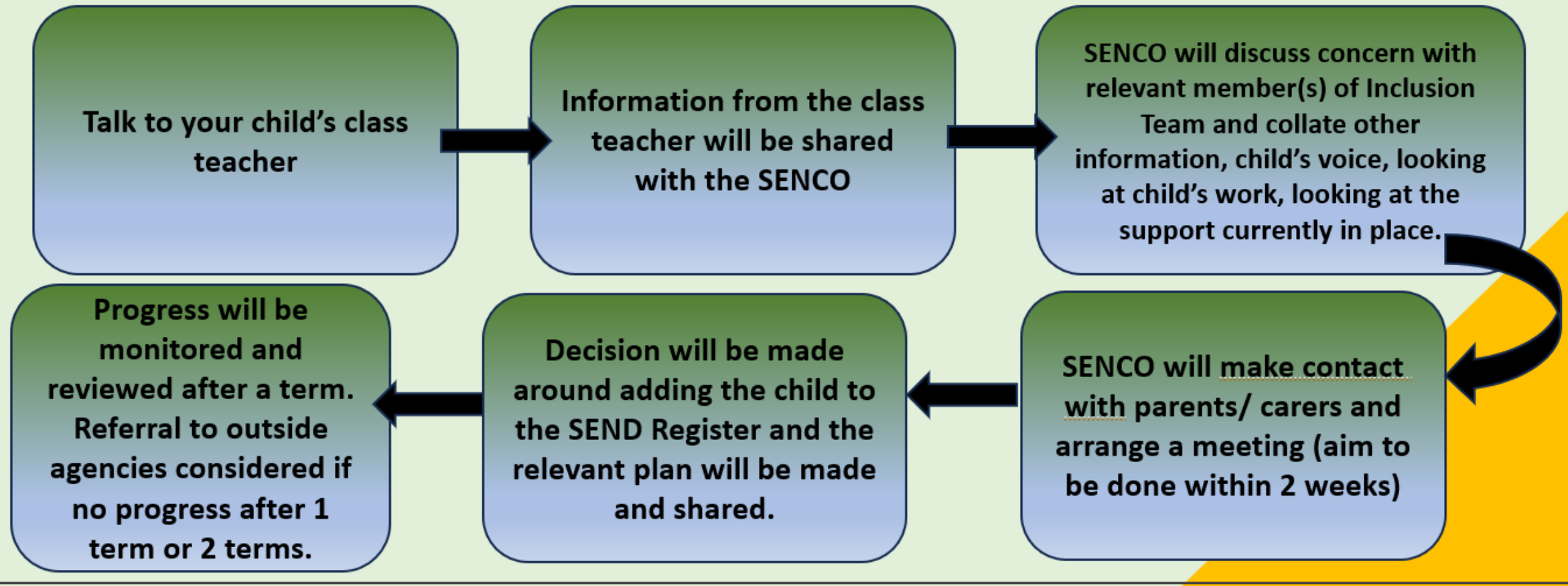
Physical and Medical difficulties (PMD)

The Graduated Approach

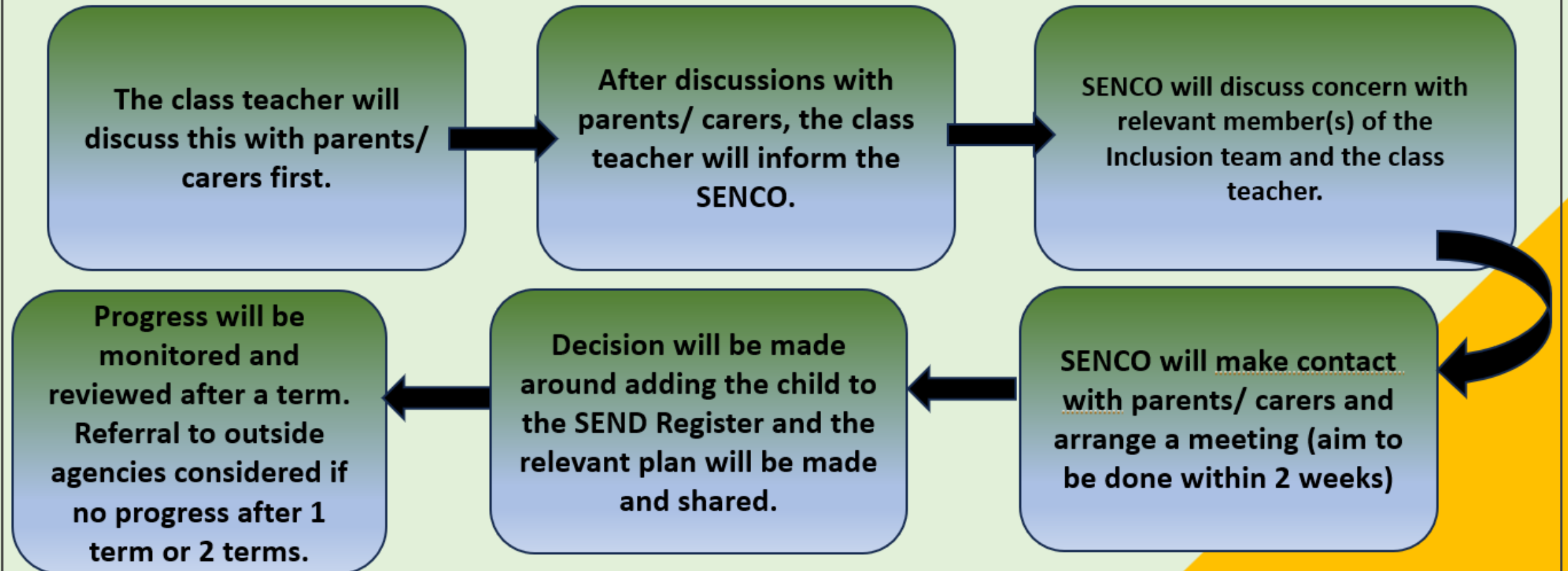
- Assess
- Plan
- Do
- Review
- 3 cycles per year
 - Cycle 1 – October to end of January
 - Cycle 2 – February to end of May
 - Cycle 3 – June to end of September
- The SEND Code of Practice (2015)



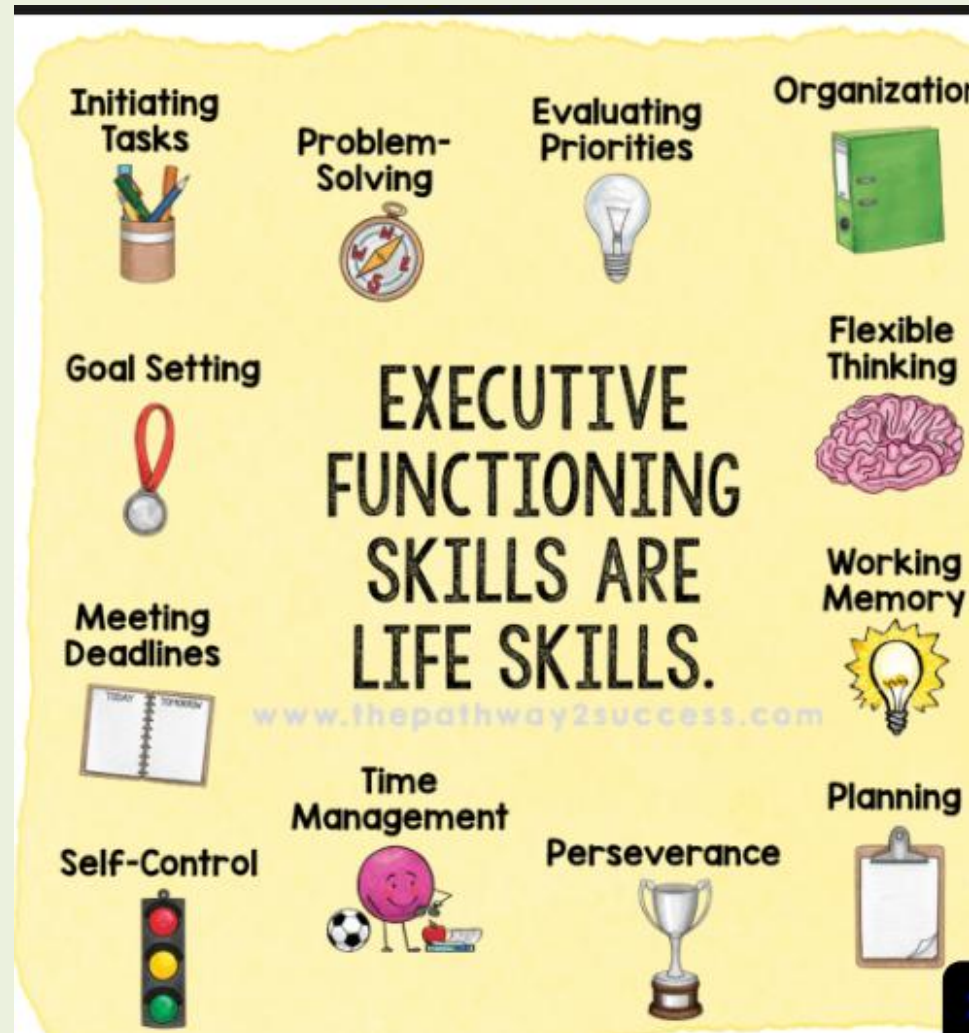
What should I do if I have a concern?



What will school do if they have a concern?



What is Executive Functioning?



Executive Functioning

- Practical ways parents can support your child at home.
- Key point – to understand the skills behind everyday behaviour and build in supportive routines to help skills to develop.



Things your child might do to suggest they find executive functioning Skills difficult?

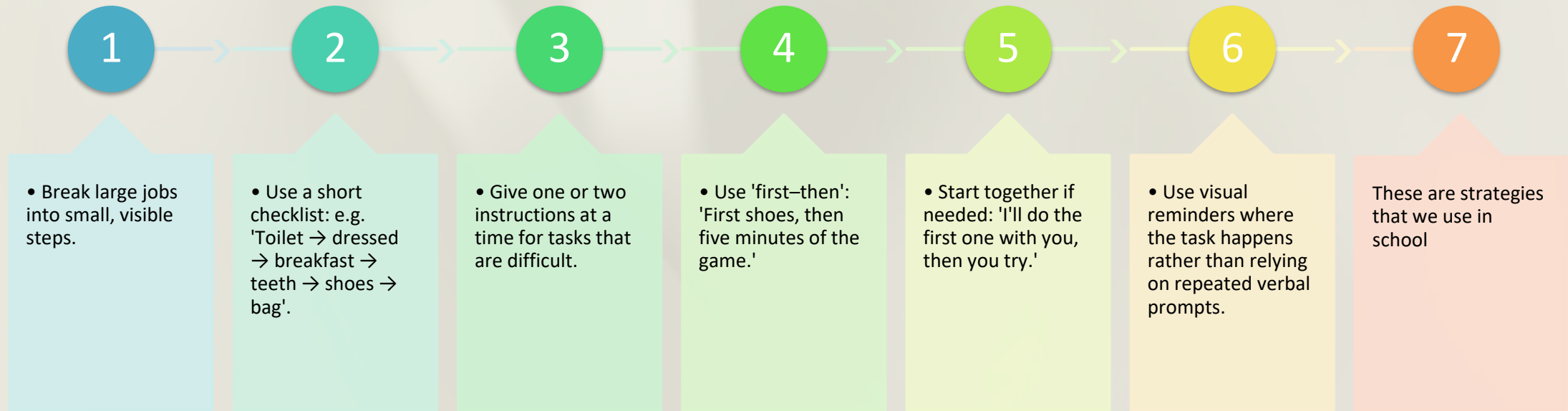
- Forgetting instructions— they need to be repeated
- Starting homework, getting dressed or packing – lots of repetition/ prompting needed.
- Losing equipment, forgetting where things were put, or leaving tasks unfinished.
- Becoming stuck when plans change or when a preferred activity has to stop.
- Big reactions to small frustrations, especially when tired, hungry or rushed.
- Appearing to 'not listen' when the real difficulty is holding and acting on information.

A useful mindset: behaviour is communication

What skills or support does my child need to help them?

- When do these difficulties happen – think about time of day, task type, transitions, tiredness, hunger or sensory demands.
- Reduce demands before adding consequences.
- Teach and practise skills when everyone is calm—not only during a crisis.
- Praise them at times when they start to remember things, try things again and use strategies you have taught them.

Make tasks easier to start



Support working memory and organisation

Visuals really help children to learn and remember.

- Ask the child to repeat back the key instruction in their own words.
- Keep a consistent place for school items, PE kit, homework and shoes.
- Use a simple morning/evening routine chart.
- Pack bags using a checklist rather than memory alone.
- Colour-code or label items if that helps the child find them quickly.
- Build in a short 'reset' routine for tidying and preparing for tomorrow.

Support attention without turning everything into a battle

Children will only pay attention to something if they are motivated and have the energy to do something.

- Remove avoidable distractions before asking for sustained attention.
- Use short work periods with planned movement breaks.
- Alternate less-preferred tasks with motivating activities.
- Make the goal concrete: 'Let's do these three questions' rather than 'Finish your homework.'
- Notice effort and re-engagement: 'You came back to the task after your break.'
- Check whether the task is too hard, too long, unclear or poorly timed.

Help with flexibility and transitions

Transitions can be really challenging for children – even the simplest of transitions which as adults we may not even think about.

- Give advance notice: '10 minutes, then 5 minutes, then time to stop.'
- Use a timer or visual countdown when helpful.
- Keep transition routines predictable.
- Offer limited choices: 'Shoes first or coat first?'
- Acknowledge the feeling while keeping the boundary: 'You really want to keep playing. It is still time to stop.'
- Practise small changes when the child is calm so flexibility becomes a skill, not a surprise test.

Emotional regulation: co-regulate before you expect self-regulation

Children often need an adult's calm support before they can use their own strategies.

- Stay calm and use fewer words when emotions are high.
- Name what you see without judgement: 'Your body looks very frustrated.'
- Reduce demands temporarily if the child is overwhelmed and safety allows.
- Teach calming strategies outside the difficult moment: breathing, movement, quiet space, sensory tools or talking.
- Afterwards, repair and reflect: 'What helped? What could we try next time?'
- Aim for skill-building, not shame.

Praise and reinforce the skills you want to grow

Specific feedback is more useful than general praise.

- Instead of 'Good boy/girl', try: 'You checked your list without me reminding you.'
- Notice small steps: starting, stopping, switching, remembering, asking for help or trying again.
- Use encouragement before a task as well as after it.
- Keep rewards simple and predictable when you use them.
- Avoid comparing siblings or classmates.
- Celebrate progress over time: executive skills develop gradually.

A simple home plan

Choose one routine and one skill first—small changes are more sustainable.

- 1. Pick one problem routine (for example, getting ready for school).
- 2. Identify the main skill demand: memory, planning, inhibition, flexibility, attention or regulation.
- 3. Add one external support: checklist, timer, visual cue, routine or choice.
- 4. Practise for up to 2 weeks and notice what changes.
- 5. Adjust the support rather than increasing pressure.
- 6. Share successful strategies with school so adults can use consistent approaches.

When extra help may be useful

Executive-function challenges are common, but persistent difficulties can have many possible causes.

- Talk with your child's teacher if difficulties are frequent, significant or affecting learning, friendships or daily life.
- Ask what the school notices and which strategies already help.
- If concerns persist across settings, consider discussing them with your GP or an appropriate child-development professional.
- Avoid assuming a diagnosis from one behaviour or one checklist.
- Seek urgent help if there are immediate safety concerns or a child is at risk of harm.

Key messages to support at home – supporting the skill not just the Behaviour.

- Make expectations visible and manageable.
- Use routines, prompts and supports to reduce the memory load.
- Teach skills when calm; support regulation before problem-solving.
- Praise specific executive-function behaviours and effort.
- Work collaboratively with school and adjust strategies for your child.
- Progress is often gradual - needing support is not the same as lacking ability.

Useful resources and discussion prompts

Use these as starting points for further conversation with school or professionals.

- What executive-function skill is hardest for my child right now?
- When does the difficulty happen most often—and when does it not happen?
- What already works at home or school?
- What one small environmental change could make the task easier?
- What can we practise when my child is calm?
- Resource ideas: your child's school/SENCO, NHS guidance, local authority SEND services, and reputable child-development organisations.