

Unstuck and On Target, Ages 11-15 (Unstuck/11-15)



**Your Guide to
Executive Functioning:
Helping your teen achieve
their goals**

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For Home Extensions for each class, ask your teacher for copies or the code to use at the Brookes Download Hub at <https://downloads.brookespublishing.com/resource/unstuck-on-target-ages-11-15/>



Chapter 1: Introduction

Welcome to *A Workbook to Make **Unstuck/11-15** a Way of Life: Your Guide to Executive Functioning!*

THIS WORKBOOK IS A RESOURCE FOR YOU!

If you are a mom, dad, stepparent, aunt, uncle, grandparent, foster parent, or any other relative or friend of the family of a child who is in *Flexible Futures* classes – this workbook is for you!

Our goal is to help you and your teen get the most out of Flexible Futures. This workbook will help you do that!

WHY?

Loving and caring adults are key members of the *Flexible Futures* team. If we are all doing and saying the same things at home and at school, we can make a bigger impact. The more you use *Flexible Futures* skills and language, the more you will be able to spend enjoyable time with your family rather than dealing with your teen's difficulties. We have tips that can help make life better for you and for your teen.



WHAT MAKES Unstuck and On Target SPECIAL?

Many teens have trouble with **executive functioning (EF)** and that is what is getting in the way of their ability to be flexible and **effectively plan, organize and set goals**. Flexible Futures helps improve this very important set of skills.

How to Use this Workbook

1. Read this **Introduction and Overview Section** to learn about the foundation of the *Flexible Futures* curriculum.
2. After your teen receives each *Unstuck* lesson, review the one-page summary and use the **Home Extension sheets** to practice skills at home.
3. For *in-depth explanations* of the content, read the following **Unit Sections**:
 - Unit 1 **Learning About Flexibility and Neurodiversity**: Lessons 1-5
 - Unit 2 **Preparing to Achieve Your Goals**: Lessons 6-9
 - Unit 3 **What is Needed to Achieve Goals**: Lessons 10-15
 - Unit 4: **How to Plan for Goals** Lessons 16-24
4. Use the *Unstuck* language and skills often! Use the practice worksheets in the **Appendix** to plan fun activities and outings at home.

Resist the urge to use these skills to get your teen to clean their room or do their chores until they've mastered the skills in situations that are fun for them. It might take a little longer, but we promise it will be much more successful this way!



What is the Focus of *Unstuck/11-15*?

Unstuck is specifically designed to help with:

- Improving flexibility, planning, and organization
- Helping teens calm down when they get upset
- Reducing stress at home for both parents and teens

What kind of problems will we focus on?

- Getting motivated
- Setting goals
- Thinking about the future
- Compromising
- Getting excited about the future

We will not focus on teaching schoolwork skills like spelling, math or reading, BUT teens may do better in school because they are learning flexibility, planning and organizational skills.

We will not be teaching social skills or friendship skills, but teens may do better in their relationships as they are more flexible.



What Tools Does *Unstuck/11-15* Use?

1. TEACH SCRIPTS

Memorizing and repeatedly using a set of key words or phrases

Your teen needs to hear the same words and phrases over and over before he will be able to use them to change their behavior. See the Glossary of Flexible Futures Scripts on page 93 for these key words.

2. LEARN BY DOING

Using the scripts and showing the behavior that they are learning

When teens see a role model doing what they are doing, they will pick up the skills more easily.

3. MAKE LEARNING INTERESTING

Practicing through interactive activities, games, and discussion

We all learn better and teach better when we are having fun.

4. USE VISUALS

Providing reminders that teens can see for themselves rather than constantly being told what to do

You can help by putting the scripts up in your home.



What Will Your Teen Learn in Each Lesson?

UNIT 1: FLEXIBILITY, POWER, AND PLANNING

1: *Flexible Thinking*

2: *When to Compromise*

3: *Try out your compromise skills*

4 -6 *Plan and Review Event Using Compromise*

UNIT 2: COMPROMISE

7: *Compromising a win-win*

8: *When to Compromise*

9-11: *Try out your compromise skills*

12: *The Second Event*

UNIT 3: EFFICIENT PLANNING

13: *Maintaining Excited About a Future Goal*

14: *Compromise to choose a goal*

15: *Eyes on the Big Picture*

16: *Keeping Your Eyes on the Clock*

17-19 *The Long Term Event*

UNIT 4: MAKING EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS WORK IN YOUR LIFE

20: *Review EF Skills*

21: *EF Skills for Success!*

22: *Checking our Plans*

23 & 24 *Celebrating our Skills*

Each Unit Is

structured around a series of engaging group planning events to increase motivation for planning, and goals start general and become personal:



How does *Unstuck and On Target* Work?

Unstuck teaches teens key skills to get more more choice, freedom and Power by breaking down the skills they need to reach their goals. The Power Equation has all of the key language/skills and provides a framework for both making and evaluating plans.

Power Equation

Be Flexible

- Use Plan A/B
- Be Polite
- Compromise
- Get Unstuck



Think about the **Big Picture**

Am I **stuck on a detail?**

What's the **Goal?**



Make a **plan** for reaching my **goal**

Do I have a **plan?**

Am I ready to deal with frustration and disappointment?



POWER

Power to make the world better

Power for what you need in life

The Power Plan

Skills are consistently reviewed and the process of making Plans that are workable—and avoiding getting unstuck—are established as the key to getting more power and independence.

Plan on Trial

Goal: Short term?
Long term?

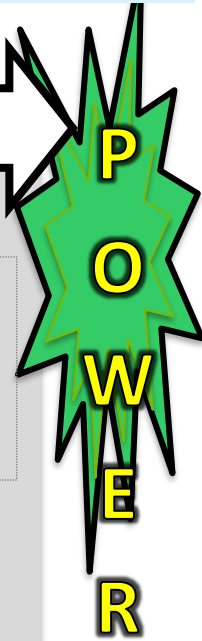
Why:

Plan: Think about: who, what,
where, when, how?

Plan B?

Check:

✓ x



What Can You Do at Home?

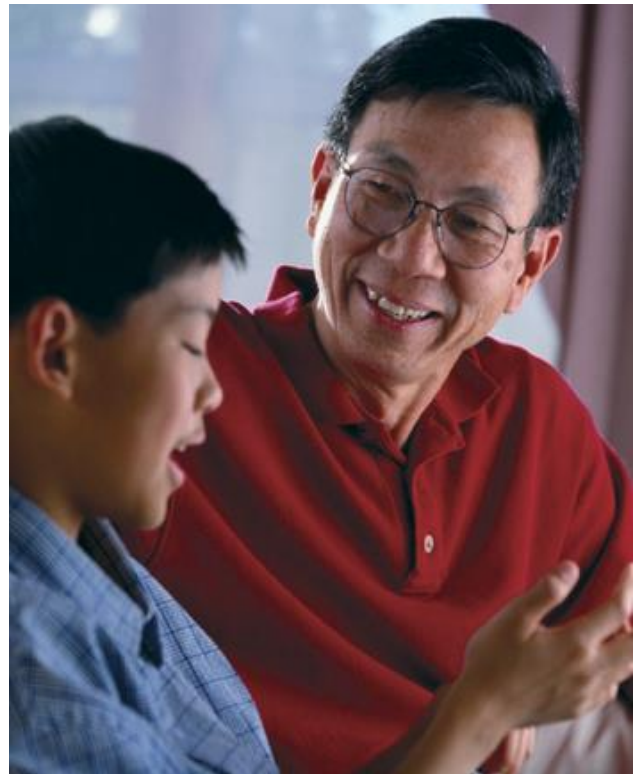
1. Set Your Child Up for Success

There are many times when it is important that we change the environment to make it easier for teens to be successful so they don't get overloaded. That may mean making sure a room is quiet, bringing headphones, giving your teen breaks from homework, writing down directions so your teen doesn't have to keep track of them, letting your teen do homework and then eat dinner, etc.

Teens who feel overloaded or overwhelmed find it more difficult to learn anything and will keep having the same problem behaviors. The "Troubleshooting" chapter of this book, *Making Flexible Futures Work at Home*, will give you lots of ideas about how to make things easier on your teen and yourself.

2. Help With the *Unstuck* Home Extensions (Homework)

As with other assignments at school, you will be asked to help your teen at home to understand and practice the scripts. The content your teen receives at school is also provided in this workbook, so you can see how the *Flexible Futures* school work links to what you do at home.



3. Live Out Loud: Model How the Scripts Help You

There will be times when your teen needs to be more flexible, and you will be your teen's best teacher by showing how you can be flexible when you get frustrated or disappointed. Show your teen how you cope with your grown up responsibilities. Do you make lists? Do you ever get stuck when things don't go your way?

Let your teen see that you all are using the same skills in your day-to-day life. Use the right script for the right situations. The more you use the scripts, the easier it will be for your teen to learn when and how to use these words.

You do not have to be perfect. Try to let your teen help you with flexibility and planning. And don't forget to celebrate the successes that both you and your teen have as you build these new skills.

Remember: This is an investment. It is hard work to teach these skills, but doing so will save time in the long run and help your teen to grow up to be happy and independent in the future!



The Link Between Flexibility and Planning

Remember: Teens with executive functioning difficulties often have trouble with seeing the **Big Picture** if they are feeling **stuck**. This can really affect your teen's ability to set **goals** and **plan** how to achieve those goals. **Flexible feelings** and **flexible thoughts** are important when working towards a goal in case **Plan A** doesn't work and your teen needs to come up with a **Plan B**.

In Unstuck/11-15, we want to set students up for success by practicing planning. To do this, your teen is being taught about checking his/her plan. Here are some things that you could do to help.

- ❖ Practice planning together. You and your teen to can set a goal together (ex. a special outing), then come up with steps for how you are going to make it happen. Remember to practice thinking about Plan B's and where you might need to compromise.
- ❖ Talk to your teen about a time when you had to be flexible when planning. How did you feel? What compromises did you have to make? How did you make a Plan B?

The **Goal-Why-Plan-Do-Check** model of the Power Plan is a great tool for organizing, setting, and planning goals!



A Story You Might Recognize...

James's Project

James is 12 years old. He wants to do well in his science class, but the teacher just assigned a group project. James has a great idea for the assignment and wishes he didn't have to work with other classmates. He doesn't know the people in his group very well and trying to coordinate the project with them just sounds annoying. When James tells his group about his idea, they aren't sure if they want to do it. By the end of class, James feels irritated and complains about the assignment to his family at dinner that night. James's parents want him to feel better, but they aren't sure what they can do to help him succeed.

The Power of Flexible Futures Scripts

Here is a way that his parents can use scripts from this unit to help him:

*"I know you want to do well in your science class. Let's write down a **plan** so you can figure out how to work with your group. You can make a list of what you need to do—that's a great idea! Do you think you should plan a time to meet with your group after school to work on the project? Let's think about what you should do if they decide they want to do a different topic. I know doing your idea is your **Plan A**, but what can be your **Plan B**? Is there any way to **compromise**? What kind of **compromise** do you think you'll need for your **Plan B**? Ok, now that you have a **plan**, do you know what might get you **stuck on a detail**?"*

Chapter 2: Before We Begin...

What is Executive Functioning?

Executive functioning (EF) is a term used to describe skills that help people control their behavior and reach their goals. Each person's brain controls how well these skills operate. These skills are important because they help us manage all of our life activities. Executive functioning helps us to keep track of time, decide whether or not an idea is good or bad, change our minds if we get new information, handle more than one thing at a time, know when to ask for help, and know how to use that help when we get it!



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS: FLEXIBILITY, PLANNING, & ORGANIZATION

Our brains are always at work as we go through our day. Our brains help us to manage our daily activities.

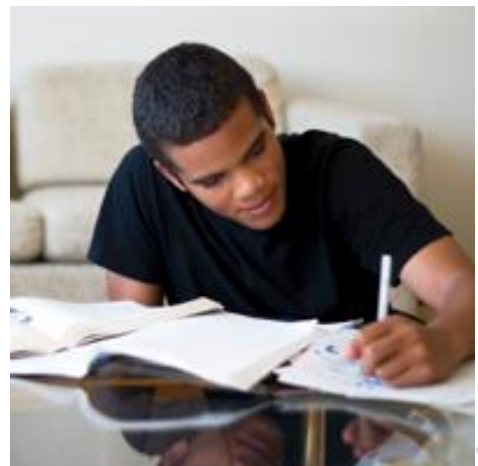
Think “Can’t” Not “Won’t”

A lot of times, teens with executive functioning problems fool people. It looks like they are being bad on purpose, sometimes even saying they are doing something on purpose, when really they are doing their best. For example, teens could seem to be acting stubborn when their brains are actually stuck. It can seem like they are not trying when really they are disorganized, but they actually don't know how to get started, or they could seem defiant, when in fact their brains are being impulsive. They may look like they won't do something when really they *can't* do it.

Once you understand your teen's strengths and challenges better, you can explain them to other people, like teachers and ministers, so that they will not confuse the “can'ts” with the “won'ts” and help your teen know what strategies to use.

Be a detective to figure out what causes your teen's behavior.

If punishing your teen for doing something wrong doesn't work, then maybe s/he *can't* do what you want without support. Get help in telling the “can'ts” from the “won'ts” – Evaluations from professionals can help sort out what behavior is attached to executive functioning difficulties and which are not.



EF Problems: What Looks Like “Won’t” May Really Be a “Can’t”

Your child is *not*

Instead, they may have brain-based difficulty with EF in the area of...

“Volatile” “Aggressive”
“Mean” “Demanding”
“Spoiled”

Inhibition:

- Controlling impulses; stopping behavior

“Stubborn” “Obstinate”
“Inconsiderate”

Shifting:

- Moving from one activity/situation to another; flexible problem-solving

“Immature”
“Overreactive” “Overly sensitive” “Volatile”

Emotional Control:

- Modulate emotional responses appropriately

“Procrastinator”
“Unmotivated”

Initiation:

- Starting activities; generating ideas

“Spacy” “Inattentive”
“Unmotivated”

Working Memory:

- Remembering information for purpose of completing a task

“Lazy” “Erratic”
“Giving up” “Sloppy”
“Underperforming”
“Messy” “Careless”

**Planning/
Organization:**

- Anticipating future events; setting goals; grasping main ideas

“Careless”
“Inconsiderate” “Lazy”

Self-Monitoring:

- Checking work; assessing own performance

Next, read a story about Susana and Sid and see how they use the executive functioning skills of **flexibility, planning, and organization**.

A Story You Might Recognize... Andrea's Day

Susana is 13 years old and has a hard time with executive functioning. And if her mother tries to help her, she becomes irate, saying she's "not a baby." She is running late today, and has to get dressed quickly. Andrea has planned to wear a certain shirt today, but it is in the wash. Andrea refuses to wear a different shirt and has a meltdown (Problems with **Flexibility** and **Emotional Control**). Andrea's mom ends up yelling at Susana that they had discussed her putting her shirt in the dryer last night but she didn't so this is the logical consequence.

Now Andrea needs to get her school materials ready. Andrea has a book bag, but her homework isn't in it (Problems with **Planning** and **Organization**). She searches the apartment for her homework and stuffs it into the bag. When she arrives in her classroom, she complains loudly to her classmates that she couldn't find her shirt (Problems with **Flexibility**) and doesn't notice that everyone else is listening to the teacher. Her teacher gives her a warning look. The day has just begun and Andrea is already tired.

Now let's see what Sid, a 12 year old without EF issues, might do.

When Peter woke up this morning, they decided to get up, take a shower and get dressed. When they went to get the shirt they had planned to wear, they realized that it was still in the wash. Even though they had thought it was already clean, they did not yell because it was still in the laundry – Sid just wore a different shirt instead (**Flexibility**).

Before going to breakfast, Sid packed their bag with their book and assignment for their class to make sure it was ready to go (**Planning** and **Organization**). Knowing that it was going to rain after school when they had track, they packed a rain slicker for practice (**Planning**). They arrived at class just as everyone was sitting down for the lecture, and Sid quietly took out their book and assignment so they did not disturb their classmates and the teacher. When practice was cancelled and they had to lift weights instead of running, Sid shifted to the new activity even though they didn't have the right gloves for lifting (**Flexibility**).

The BIG 3 Executive Functioning Skills That *Unstuck* Focuses On:

1. FLEXIBILITY

Shifting from one activity to another, accepting a different way of seeing or doing things, and going with the flow when unexpected things happen

Things do not always go as we hope or plan. At times like these, we have to adapt to these changes, even if it is not exactly what we wanted. It is hard for inflexible people to accept unexpected changes, stop arguing, and accept rules they disagree with.

2. PLANNING

Developing, carrying out, and modifying a plan of action

Many times we have a plan for our activities, such as getting ready for school or work in the morning, getting homework done, cleaning the house or taking care of the yard, or bigger projects like planning a birthday party or family reunion. People with planning problems often fail to complete tasks that have more than one step.

3. ORGANIZATION

Keeping track of materials, understanding the main point, seeing the big picture, and knowing what is the top priority at any given time

Some people have trouble managing a lot of information at once. They can do very well with step-by-step tasks, but get overwhelmed when they have to do big projects or get things done without someone helping them. They have trouble knowing what is important to focus on and are easily distracted.

If our teens can do well in these 3 areas, they will have a better chance for success in school, joy with friends, and happiness at home. The **Home Extensions** that follow give you an idea of what your teen is learning in *Flexible Futures*. You can use the extensions as a way to extend what they're learning to the home setting. These include a **brief lesson summary**, a list of **relevant scripts**, and **ways to apply concepts at home**.

Home Extensions 

Chapter 3: Using the Vocabulary

Overview:

In this chapter you will learn:

- What is flexible thinking?
- How to use “stuck on a detail” and “big picture”
- A way to get things done: Goal, Why, Plan, Do, Check
- Power = more choice

See the Glossary of Unstuck/11-15 for a complete list of terms used in the intervention.

What is Flexible Thinking and Why is Being Flexible Important?

- Physical flexibility allows to bend and stretch our bodies without breaking.
- **Flexible thinking** allows teens to think of new solutions to a problem and keep their cool when things don't go the way we planned.
- Flexible thinking also helps teens to compromise when they can't have exactly what they want.
- For many teens, developing flexible thinking helps them with making friends, learning in school and getting along in the family.
- As teens become more flexible, they will get better at handling stress or disappointment, and they won't have to depend on adults so much to solve problems.

Teens who struggle with mental flexibility may struggle with:

- Change in plans
- Rules they disagree with
- Challenges that they were not expecting
- Having to compromise or negotiate
- Trying a new skill
- Working on things that are difficult

“Flexible”

Being flexible means you can change your ideas, do something different than what you thought you would do, think about something differently, and keep an open mind.

When teens are flexible, they will have many choices.

You can use phrases like:

- *“Let’s think of a way we can be flexible in case our Plan A doesn’t work out.”*
- *“You can’t always get what you want so you need to be flexible.”*
- *“You can be flexible you’ve done it before!”*
- *“When you shared your game, you were being flexible, and it worked!”*

Some Examples of How to use “Be Flexible”

Rainy Day

Your teen wanted to play basketball outside after finishing his homework, but it started to rain. You could say, “How can you **be flexible** and come up with something else to do until it stops raining?”

Going out to Eat

You could say, “I really wanted to go to get pizza, but they were full. I had to **be flexible** and get a sandwich instead.

Your Turn!

Your teen wants to watch TV after school but the power is out.

You could say, _____

“Plan A/Plan B”

Plan A is the way you want to do something. But Plan A will not always work out. So, you need a **Plan B**! It is normal that things don't go exactly as you plan, and the problem is the Plan, not the teen. A Plan B allows your teen to keep an open mind, avoid getting stuck, and reach goals.

To model Plan A/Plan B you can use phrases like:

- *“What’s your Plan A? Do you have a Plan B, so we can reach our goal?”*
- *“Can you help me come up with a Plan B? I’m stuck.”*
- *“Your Plan A may not be working. Do you need a Plan B?”*
- *“I love that you have a Plan A and a Plan B! That’s great planning and thinking ahead.”*

Some Examples of How to use “Plan A/Plan B”

Breakfast

You could say, “there is no milk for my cereal, and I’m stuck. I guess I need a **Plan B**. I’ll make toast—not the best, but at least I won’t be hungry. And I’m buying milk on way home from work today!”

Making a Mistake During a Chore or Errand

You get all the way the grocery store and you realize you don’t have your list! “Ugh. I need to **be flexible** and come up with a **Plan B**. Any ideas?”

Your Turn!

Your teen wants to go shopping but the store is closed. You could say, _____

“Stuck on a Detail” versus “Big Picture”

Being Stuck on a detail is when you are focused on one idea or topic. Focusing on the **Big Picture** is very powerful, and helps you reach your goals. While getting stuck on a detail can be very interesting, we need to make conscious decisions about how long we stay on that detail, and shift back to the Big Picture.

To model Stuck on a Detail or Big Picture you can use phrases like:

- *That’s a cool detail. How long do you want to stay stuck on it and get back to the big picture?*
- *Am I stuck on a detail? I’m sorry, that might be annoying to you.*
- *Wonderful job—you focused on the big picture. You helped me get unstuck!*

Some Examples of How to use “Stuck on a Detail”

Projects at Work

You could say, “today at work I had three projects and I got stuck—I didn’t know what to do first. I asked my boss to help me see the Big Picture.

Conversations

You could say, “I was putting gas in the car and I got stuck on the detail of which kind of gas to use. I finally just put in regular—the big picture is I need gas to get to work!”

Your Turn!

Your teen can’t find his/her/their favorite pair of shoes and they are getting late for school. You could say, _____

“Goal”

A **Goal** is something your teen wants or needs to do, know how to do but wants to do better, or wants to learn to do.

Goals should be specific and meaningful for your teen. They can be long term, or short term.

When working on a Goal you can use phrases like:

- *“This looks like something you should make into a Goal.”*
- *“I need to set a Goal.”*
- *“Do you have a Goal?”*
- *“My Goal is to...”*
- *“Wow. That’s a cool Goal.”*

Some Examples of How to use “Goal”

Going to the Movies

You could say, “your **goal** is to have good time with your friends. Let’s make a plan about what to do if someone has a different opinion about the movie and you feel personally criticized.”

Learning to Play an Instrument

You could say, “You said you had a goal of learning to play an instrument this year. We better make a goal to practice—so let’s make a plan for that!”

Your Turn!

When your teen wants to save money for something. You could say, _____

“Why”

Why is the motivation behind the Goal.

Most of us only work on new skills when they make sense. We need to think they will help us in some way to maintain motivation.

When thinking about “Why,” you can use phrases like:

- *“Why is that goal important to you?”*
- *“Why did you choose that goal?”*
- *“Why does that goal help you?”*

Some Examples of How to use “Why”

Bedtime

You could say, “I am setting a **goal** of going to bed by 10 pm. **Why?** Because if I don’t get enough sleep I don’t feel well.”

Exercise

You could say, “I am setting a **goal** of going for a walk three times a week. **Why?** Because I feel better when I get some fresh air.”

Your Turn!

Your teen has set a Goal to join the school play. You could say, _____

“Plan”

A Plan is how your teen gets to their goal.

Plans need to be specific, and because sometimes plans don't work, your teen should always have a Plan B—or more. Emphasize that good planning is not about getting it right the first time, but about being flexible and changing the plan when needed. Remember the problem is always the plan, not the teen!

When thinking about “Plan,” you can use phrases like:

- *“My plan is...”*
- *“What is your plan?”*
- *“Do you have a Plan B?”*
- *“This is a big project. We should make a plan to break it down day by day.”*
- *“I think that plan might work!”*

Some Examples of How to use “Plan”

Cleaning the Kitchen

You could say, “Your **goal** is to go out and meet your friends. Let's make a **plan** to quickly do the dishes so I can take you.”

Errands

You could say, “My **goal** was to do all of the errands after work, but there was a huge line at the first place. Can you help me make a **Plan B?**”

Your Turn!

Your teen wants to build a cool spaceship for his sibling's birthday. You could say,

“Compromise”

Compromise means that two people each give up part of what they want so that they can reach an agreement. It does not mean giving up all of what you want.

There are four types of compromise: Each get part; Combine ideas; Take turns; Something different you both like. (See the useful visual at the end of this handbook)

When thinking about “Compromise,” you can use phrases like:

- *“We can both compromise so we can each get some of what we want.”*
- *Compromising with your friend meant you got some of what you want and met your goal of having a good time together!*

Some Examples of How to use “Compromise”

Playing Video Games

You could say, “You have a different game you like than your friend. If your **goal** is spend time together, what kind of **compromise** do you want to make?”

Teen Doesn’t Want to do Something

You could say, “You look stuck. My plan was to have you clean up the living room and help me cook dinner. Can we make a compromise? How about you clean up and I do the cooking?”

Your Turn!

Your teen wants go out for pizza and their sibling wants Mexican. You could say, _____

“Eyes on the Prize”

Keeping your **Eyes on the Prize** means you stay motivated about your goals.

Internal/Intrinsic motivation happens when you are motivated because you find something personally rewarding. Outside/Extrinsic motivation is when you are motivated to earn a reward or to avoid punishment. Both have their place in maintaining motivation.

When thinking about “Eyes on the Prize,” you can use phrases like:

- *“What strategies can you use to keep your eyes on the Prize?”*
- *“I noticed that you kept your eyes on the prize by remembering your Why and the Big Picture.”*
- *“Keeping your eyes on the prize when your schedule was so busy this week must have been hard work!”*

Some Examples of How to use “Eyes on Prize”

Studying for a Test

When a teen wants to get a good grade so they can play sports or join the debate team, but he really doesn't like the subject, you could say, “I know this class isn't your favorite. But let's **keep your eyes** on the prize so that you will have the choices you want.”

Balancing Homework and Leisure

You could say, “Both are important. How can you keep your eyes on the prize and meet both those goals and make sure that you build power in your life?”

Your Turn!

Your teen gets distracted while doing chores. You could say, _____

“Power”

Power is what teens gain when they use the executive function skills in Unstuck/11-15 because they are more effective, enjoy a better reputation, and are meeting their goals. Being kind, polite, and flexible are key to increasing power with others.

When thinking about “Power,” you can use phrases like:

- *“Your power went way up when you did....”*
- *“I noticed you were really flexible there. Your power went way up—and more power means more choices!”*
- *“I can see your power increasing when you are compromising and keeping your eyes on the prize studying for that test and cutting back on Minecraft.”*

Some Examples of How to use “Power”

Talking with Friends

If your teen complains that he doesn’t like to listen to his friend talk about soccer, you could say, “Soccer seems important to your friend. How can you increase your **power** with your friend? Being kind, polite, and **flexible** help. Can you **compromise** and talk some about his interest?”

Your Turn!

Your teen thinks his teacher is being mean and unfair. You could say,

Chapter 4: Troubleshooting: Making Unstuck/11-15 Work at Home

Are you and your teen too stressed out to use scripts and routines for flexibility, planning and organization?

These tips will give you ideas about tricks that help a lot of parents and teens work together, help teens behave better, and reduce stress!

Having executive function problems, like inflexibility and disorganization is hard. It is stressful for teens with these problems, and for their parents, too. Learning the scripts and routines will definitely help everyone in your house. Most parents also need to learn some tricks for managing their teen with executive function problems. Tricks that help everyone relax more and have more fun together.

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, you will learn these tips to make the journey easier:

- 1. Keep it Positive*
- 2. Avoid Overload*
- 3. Break it Down*
- 4. Talk Less, Write More*
- 5. Take Care of Yourself First*
- 6. Think “Can’t” Not “Won’t”*



1. Keep it Positive and Make it Fun!

Don't forget to have fun with **flexibility** and do everything in your power to keep it positive. Here are some suggestions:

1. Praise whenever your teen uses the flexibility scripts.

You can praise with your words, a text, or a thumbs up.

2. Praise your teen for *being flexible*:

How to praise: Praise has to be specific and true. Don't tell your teen they are the smartest kid in the whole world. Tell them they are doing a great job getting started on their homework.

*"I know you were hoping for pizza, and I love how **flexible** you're being with the change in plans."*

3. Once your teen knows the vocabulary, ask before giving your opinion:

*"How can we be flexible?" "Do you have a **Plan B**?" "How does this fit in with the Big Picture?"*

4. Use these scripts to praise and instruct, not criticize.

Instead of saying: "You are **stuck**!" ask "Are you **stuck**?" or "How can we **be flexible** about this?"

5. Look for flexibility in others.

While watching TV together, talk about a character's flexibility and point out how it is helpful to getting what they want.

6. Find examples of role models *being flexible*.

Teens often have role models or celebrities who they admire. Use examples of what this hero does to be **flexible**. Talk about how flexible thinking has helped your own role models, yourself, or your family members.

1. Keep it Positive and Make it Fun!

Don't say "don't."

You will be more successful when you say what you want your teen TO DO rather than telling your teen what NOT to DO. The fact is that telling a teen what s/he is doing *right* works better to get him/her to behave rather than telling him/her what s/he is doing wrong.

Test this out for yourself.

Mark on your right hand every time you praise your teen, and mark on your left hand every time you correct your teen. Try to give **four praises for every correction**. Do this during homework time. Does it feel better? Does your teen behave better than when you don't praise as much?

Pick your battles - success comes in small doses.

Don't try to fix everything your teen does wrong. Choose a couple things at a time. Start with problems you think your teen can fix. Success in some things will make it easier to have success in other things.

Be realistic and don't place too much pressure on teens.

At the same time, show that you expect them to do their best. Knowing you believe in them will help block doubts they may have about themselves. Be sure to have fun together!

Build on strengths.

Make a list of strengths and hang them up for the household to see. Use these strengths as a starting place to learn new things.

2. Avoid Overload/ Accommodate

Teens with executive functioning problems get overwhelmed easily because their brains are bad at handling a lot of information at once. Once they get overwhelmed they are just like the rest of us, they can't think or behave well.

You can help them to not get overwhelmed by trying these ideas:

- ❖ **Parents can be detectives to help teens to not get overwhelmed.**

You can figure out what situations overwhelm your teen, and also what clues s/he gives when s/he is feeling that way. Does your teen fall apart when s/he is hungry? Then always carry crackers with you.

- ❖ **Avoid situations that ALWAYS seem to overwhelm your teen.**

For example, if spending a whole day with extended family always seems to overload your teen, then just stay for half the day until he gets a bit older.



- ❖ **When you see the warning signs that your teen is getting close to overload, DO SOMETHING!**

Choose an action that will help your teen calm down BEFORE it becomes a problem.

- ❖ **Try to control some things that you know make it hard for your teen.**

Maybe it is too much noise, or being hungry, or being with too many people. Maybe your teen can't come home from school and start on homework right away. S/He may need free time to run around first.

2. Avoid Overload/ Accommodate

- ❖ **Make sure your teen knows what's going to happen beforehand as much possible.**

Establish routines for day-to-day activities (getting ready for school, eating dinner, doing homework, brushing teeth). If there's a new situation coming up, go over the details as much as you can. Tell your teen as much as you can about what will happen each day, and write it down when you can.

- ❖ **When you recognize that your teen is overwhelmed, the next step is to back off until your teen gets calmer.**

No more correcting or coaching, just give your teen a chance to cool down. Talking to your teen won't help. Let him/her go to a quiet place to calm down.

- ❖ **Give your teen a break.**

We all need to take breaks. Your teen does too. Having executive functioning problems makes school a stressful experience. Give your teen time and space to be comfortable without having to "work" at learning new behaviors.

- ❖ **When your teen is overloaded, be understanding.**

Understand that some things will just be tough. School field trips, assemblies, holidays, vacations all include so many new situations, that even with preparation, your teen may still become overwhelmed.

- ❖ **Recognize when your teen might feel overwhelmed.**

This could be when they get too many spoken directions, have to sit still for too long, are with lots of people, or are asked to write a lot by hand. Clues that they are overwhelmed might be they get anxious, angry, hyper or stuck.

- ❖ **Stand up for your teen.**

Request accommodations and supports. Reach out to your community family/friends, etc. to help the other adults in your child's life know how to support him/her.

3. Break it Down

Teens with executive functioning problems can be very successful when **big jobs are broken down into small steps**, but they have a hard time with big jobs that are not broken down. For example, teens may not be able to do all the laundry and put it all away, but they can collect all the dirty clothes. Once the clothes are collected and washed, ask your teen to fold it.

Getting started is one of the executive functioning skills that can challenge teens. **Get to the smallest step that your teen can manage successfully.** Once s/he has completed that, then s/he can do the next step and so on, until the job is done.

Remember to provide the right amount of support.

Not too much and not too little. For example, when your teen was learning to zip his coat, you didn't also ask him to tie his shoes. As soon as he learned to zip, you stopped helping him with that job, and taught him to tie his shoes.

Figure out what parts of a task are most difficult for teens and then focus on helping your teen with that task.

Use the 3R's of multi-step tasks –“Recipes”, “Rules” and “Routines”.

When you think that your teen can't or won't do something, try this before giving up: write the task down in small steps and see if that helps your teen to complete the task. Put up a sign in your house that lists important rules, like no hitting. Practice doing a new thing the same way over and over before giving up.

Break any task that is hard for your teen into progressively smaller chunks until your teen is successful.

For example, if getting dressed in the morning is a problem, try laying out your teen's clothes and ask your teen to get dressed one step at a time.

4. Talk Less, Write More

Believe it or not, sometimes when your teen won't listen to you or won't follow directions, it is because your teen needs to SEE what you mean in addition to HEARING what you say.

The visual is a reminder, especially for teens who struggle with the ability to hold on to the "memory" of the instruction you just gave.

Write a chart, or list on a white board or a piece of paper that shows what you want your teen to learn or do.

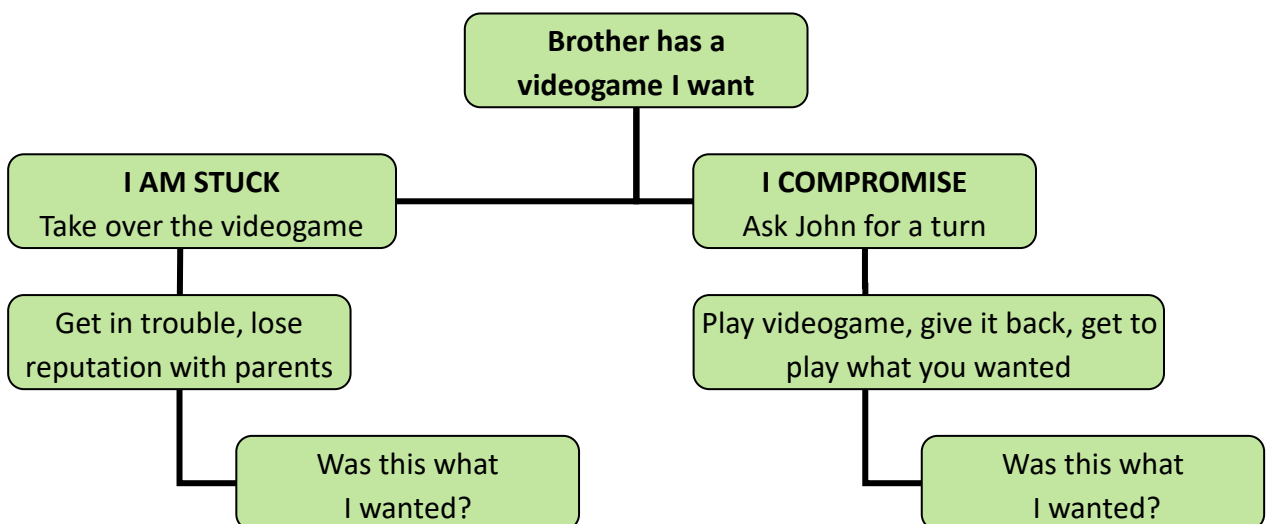
If you find yourself nagging and repeating instructions, try writing them down.

Use as few words as possible, as consistently as possible to help your teen remember specific things.

That's why we have developed the scripts that you and your child have been learning like "Plan A/ Plan B" or "Eyes on the Prize."

Draw flow charts (example below) that explain what happened in a bad situation and how it could have gone better.

For example, if your teen grabs something from his/her brother and a fight starts, you and your teen can talk it through with the flow chart.



5. Take Care of Yourself First

Taking care of a teen who struggles with executive functioning is especially can be hard. Sometimes you might feel overloaded or inflexible yourself! The lessons you learned in your own family do not necessarily work for teens with executive functioning problems. In fact, you are being asked to teach some things that you might never have learned yourself! The following are some ideas to help you take care of yourself FIRST:

1. Participate in things that interest you that have nothing to do with your teen. Take part in activities that you enjoy and help you to feel more relaxed. The more relaxed you feel, the more able you are to support your teen.

3. Remember your teen is unique. Sometimes your teen's behavior will remind you of someone you know or a family. Those could be bad or good memories. Remember that any inherited characteristics include both the good and the bad.

5. Don't forget other members of your family. Your teen with executive functioning challenges isn't the only person in your world who needs and loves you.

7. Give yourself downtime. Make the effort to do something that will recharge you. Find a person who will take care of your teen while you do something that is good for you. If you can, do self-care activities while your teen is at school. During school breaks, look for special camps. Our support staff can give you information about how to get respite services so you can get a break.

2. Create a circle of support – build a team for you and your teen. That includes all of the adults in the teen's family, friends, school, physicians and therapists, support groups, and so forth. Share your feelings and experiences – joys and sorrow! You can also teach all of these people about your teen—your teen's special strengths and special areas of need.

4. Ask for help. Learning, using, and teaching these skills can be hard. Don't hesitate to reach out to family, friends, and others who can help you.

6. Sometimes it is OK to split up. You may need one adult with the teen who is having trouble with executive functioning while another adult is with the other teens.

Glossary of *Unstuck/11-15* Language

Flexible (Flexible thinking): When we are flexible we have more choices and we are able to feel less bad than where we are stuck. To be flexible we need to be calm(ish) and make a Plan B.

Plan A/Plan B: We always have a way we would like things to go, which is Plan A. Plan A will not always work out, so we will also need a “back-up” plan, Plan B.

Stuck / Unstuck: When we are stuck, we are doing the same thing over again, and this is unlikely to get us out of the situation. Changing what we are doing (making a Plan B) can get us unstuck.

Big Picture: This is keeping your focus on your goal and not getting distracted by more immediately interesting things or small details that take you off track.

Stuck on a detail? Getting stuck on a topic or missing the main idea can lead to interesting digressions or “rabbit holes,” but can also cause us to lose our focus on the big picture. We shouldn’t criticize the interest in the details (it can be a strength) but point out that it causing us to lose focus on the big picture.

Goal – Plan – Check: This (with the Why, below) is the backbone of our planning process. It make sure we are working towards the same goal, making realistic and flexible plans, and evaluating (check) those plans.

Why: The reason that the goal is important, or the motivator to the child. That motivator may be internal (a value or ambition) or external (a tangible reward).

Compromise: We compromise by giving up a little of something and making sure the other party is getting something. We decide how important something is to us and to the other person before we

Efficiency = Doing a good job quickly. This means you may have to avoid getting stuck on a detail and you need to **keep your eyes on the prize** (goal) and **keep your eyes on the clock** (time).

Managing frustration and disappointment. We experience these emotions when we encounter unexpected obstacles and when what we expect doesn’t happen. We need to use coping strategies and make a Plan B.

Power Skills Checklist

___ **Flexible thinking**

___ **Getting Unstuck**

___ **Plan A/Plan B**

___ **Realistic Power**

___ **Big Picture**

___ **Stuck on a detail?**

___ **Goal Why Plan Check**

___ **Putting the plan on trial** (checking your plan)

___ **Approval boosters**

___ **Flexible feelings** – letting go of disappointment

___ **Planning isn't perfect, and that's ok**

___ **When to compromise:**

Who cares more? You can't always be a 2!

0 = Little deal, don't really care about it

1 = Care a bit

2 = Big deal, care a lot (it is really important to me)

___ **How to compromise:**

1. Each gets a part

2. Taking turns

3. Combine Ideas

4. Try something new

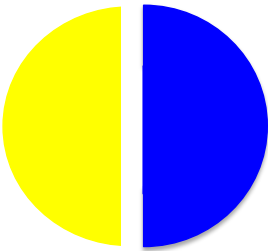
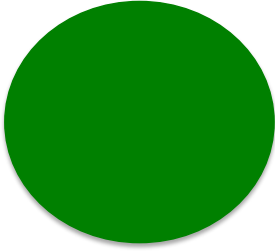
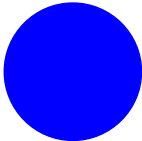
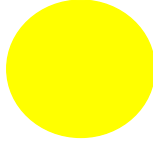

___ **Efficiency** = Doing a good job quickly

___ **Eyes on the prize** – staying excited about your goal

___ **Eyes on the clock**

___ **Making the skills work in your life** (using the skills in your life)

4 Ways to Compromise

<p>?</p> <p>EACH GET PART</p> 	<p>?</p> <p>COMBINE IDEAS</p> 	<p>?</p> <p>TAKE TURNS</p>  <p>Then</p> 	<p>?</p> <p>SOMETHING DIFFERENT YOU BOTH LIKE</p> 
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