Conquer the Chaos: Empowering Families with Executive Function Coaching

Presented by Katie Greenleaf, MA, LPCC

Katie Greenleaf

I'm Katie Greenleaf. Thanks for coming. I am a licensed professional clinical counselor. I have a practice in here on this little farm, but I also practice in Rocky River, and I do coaching as well. We're going to jump right in because this is like a heavy topic. Not heavy, but there's a lot of information.

I would say, in a perfect world, I would love to have three days to teach this. It's my favorite thing to teach, but I tried to give you a good balance of an overview, practical interventions, but also a little bit of the philosophy or research that goes into my interventions so that you can then break off and create your own or modify the way that you need to. I just feel that's empowering. I don't like for my clients to rely on me. I like to pass it off as quickly as possible. We're going to jump right in. If I'm walking around too much, just tell me to stop. I'll try my best, but I do a lot of that.

All right, so executive function. If you're here, I'm assuming that you know something about it, because this would be, I guess, a weird topic to just walk into. But we're going to keep it simple because this can also be a boring slide. The processes that we need to sustain problem-solving, just think of, all right, we've got something to solve, we've got an endpoint. I need to self-manage to get there. A lot of our kiddos just are really lagging in a lot of these self-management capacities, which is why you see some strange things from them. Kids with EF deficits will often appear less mature than their peers.

When I work with kids, I usually age them. Their chronological age is often really different from their executive function age. I work with twelve or thirteen-year-olds who test at like a four to five-year-old in terms of executive capacity. That's so important because a lot of our intervention is telling kids what they should be able to do. You're going to really have to move away from that and recognize, okay, so what can a four-to-five-year-old do? That's where I'm meeting this child.

There's actually, in the resources, there's a chronological versus executive function, like a tool that you can go through and age your own child that you're trying to look into. Any neuropsychological diagnosis, ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, anxiety, depression, anything that we diagnose through our diagnostic manual, will come with some type of EF deficit. Doesn't work the other way around. If you have EF deficits, that doesn't mean you're going to have a diagnosis.

Here's something that's so important. When I talk about executive function, I don't differentiate these two things just because it's not helpful in conversation. But when you're looking at a specific child, you really

need to understand that executive skills and executive functions are actually two different things. They work together, but you need to be able to discern what's actually going on when you're observing a child. Executive functions activate when a child understands when to do something.

If I'm aware of the conditions, I feel, "Oh, the conditions are right. I need to plan right now." That might look like a child's going to school. First class, math, they've got a worksheet for homework. They go to second class, science, and they've got some questions to answer. By the time they get to their third class, which might be like social studies, all of a sudden it's starting to feel heavy because now they got another worksheet to work on tonight for homework.

If your child had really strong executive functioning, they would be like, "This is starting to feel like a lot. I better get my planner out because I don't know if I can juggle all this. Let me see what I can do." A lot of us adults aren't all that strong at that. We think we've got it. Kids usually think they've got it, so the skill is knowing how to do it. Once I get that planner out, I've got to be able to fill it out.

I will say most of the kids that are not using planners that I work with, absolutely know how to fill out a planner. They know when they sit in front of the planner, this is what I'm writing in here. But the function is not activating that way at all. To intervene by saying, "You got to write your planner, you didn't write your planner."

I'm going to sign your planner, your parents are going to sign your planner, teacher is going to sign your planner, and then I'm going to assume that you're going to do the work. It's just the connection is faulty. That's not actually how it works. Understand what's going on, make sure that they know the skill, and then move on to working on the function. I'll show you different ways to do that here.

These slides are wordy because I wanted you to have a lot of this information. I'm not going to read the slides. That would be super boring. I'll just talk about them, and then you have the extra information. I forgot this. When it comes to… I'm going to touch on the planning function as an example. If you notice that the function is not activating using planning, what that intervention would look like is you would be talking these things out loud. You're not directing to use the planner. You're saying, "I want to serve as the thinking process for you. It seems like we've got a lot here."

"You started with getting this worksheet, then you've got those questions to answer. Now you've got something for science. I know you have basketball tonight, too. I'm wondering if all this is going to fit. Let's get our planner out and look at this." We want our children to be thinking that way. So we have to think out loud for them. That's huge. You need to be doing that. That's going to help support the function.

Appropriate EF intervention does not demand independence. What I mean by that is, mentioned it already. You're not saying, oh, and this sounds like nails on a chalkboard when I hear this, "Hey, next year it's going to be more complicated. You're going to middle school. You got to know how to do this. You better do it now."

You don't want to wait till next year. They're going to be really hard on you. You don't want to remind and say, "Why aren't you doing this?" You know this. Just reminding them that they have to do. They know they have to do. You can skip to the next thing and just start to help.

Your way of being with your child, when you work on them or when you work on executive function with them, it may feel like coddling. A lot of times parents are like, "Jeez, I can't believe I'm doing this for them." If there are tasks that you're working through, and you want them to think with you, if there's writing, you do the writing.

If you need to pull out something to take notes on. For older kids, a lot of times they need to contact teachers when you're working with them on homework. You just shoot an email real quick. You know what? Let's ask the teacher real quick while we're working on this. You type the email. Stuff like that. I know some of your kiddos are younger, but I'm going to include a lot of school and home examples.

Pitch in, "Hey, time to clean our room." If that activation is not happening, that function, you're going to say, instead of, "Go clean your room, you can go outside when you're done" you're going to say, "Hey, you know what? Let's go work on your room." And there are some other things that I'm going to give you to help with that type of process. But that's the first step. Let's go together. Eventually, you'll see independence. You don't have to worry. You're not doing too much. You're actually serving as a bridge from cant to can. Telling them is not a bridge. Working with them is a bridge.

I tried to put in your questions because some of the answers, especially when we're talking about executive function, may not come in the form that you think they're going to come in. It may be that you wouldn't recognize that this particular slide is addressing your question. That's why if you asked one of these questions, then just listen up, pay attention, and if you have follow-up questions, just note those and we'll talk about them.

Here is why your child sometimes does things that don't make a lot of sense, at least some of our kids. That's why you're here. You say, "Hey, Sally, it's time to leave for school, go upstairs, grab your shoes and your backpack, and meet me at the door. We're leaving."

What Sally does upstairs looks something like," I'm just going to get out my slime and play with it real quick. We've got three minutes. Awesome slime." Or you go up, and they're like, "Oh, well, I'm looking for that baseball card that uncle Tom got me for my birthday. I want to take it to school."

Or, "Hey, I want to get out my bowling passes that you got me for Christmas last year because I want to go bowling this weekend." [inaudible 00:09:18] Are you kidding me? We just ran this marathon this morning. You know how mornings feel. You're like, "Oh, we got to get out the door, and you're playing with slime." Like, always.

Why are we pausing? All right. If you only remember one thing for tonight, if you walk away, and you're like, that wasn't really for me. I think this could be really important if you have kids, if you're exposed to kids, if you interact with kids, just remember this one.

If Sally had really strong executive functioning, this is a perfect world, this is how it would go when you give her this directive. What's about to happen is, I'm going to describe a type of processing. It's called Memetic Ideational Information Processing. You don't need to know that, other than to know, okay, we've identified this as a thing, a processing that has to occur in order for independence to happen. We, as adults, do this probably more often than our kiddos are doing. It works out a lot better for us a lot of the time, and you probably don't even notice, that all day, every day, you're accessing this process.

Hey, Sally, giving you this directive here. What happens first is your nonverbal working memory activates. You hear a lot if your kiddos are assessed for executive deficits, you will hear probably an assessment on their working memory. I mean, memory, I understand memory, right? But working memory is a little bit different than just recall.

We spark a picture, an image. What Sally would do is she would imagine the room that she's about to go to. It would just spark a visual of the time and space that I'm about to enter. I know that I have my shoes and my backpack, and I know where to find them. Got it. You've got the clear picture. Then, and only then, does Sally move to this second part of processing. This is happening in a split second. I'm just breaking it down in steps so that you understand.

Then we go into this "if, then" thinking. Contingency planning. Understanding the conditions, and then what may occur, any adjustments that we need to make. Now, Sally, who's struggling with executive function, might say, "Yeah, so I guess I'm going to go and, oh, my slime's upstairs. I just forgot my slime." Like anything that you said that's not in my visual. I'm thinking upstairs, and I want to get my slime. But strong-executive-functioning-Sally would say, "Okay, if I'm supposed to meet her at the door, it must be time to go. I'm going to hurry." So some type of contingency plan.

Then the third part, we move on if, and only if, we've gone through the first two steps, her verbal working memory would engage. First one is non-verbal, the picture verbal it's in the form of self-directed talk. It's like that voice in our head that we joke about, like, "Oh, the voice in my head told me to do it." You really do have a voice in your head. It's that self-directive voice, and it's saying, to Sally, "Okay, go." So Sally goes. She's not prompted to go, she's not reminded to go. It activates that she goes.

She goes up, she finds her shoes, she sees her backpack, she gets to the space, and without anything, okay, she's supposed to move around there, but some of these animations got messed up in translation. Sally moves around this space independently, successfully, comes downstairs with her shoes and her backpack, and she's at the door with you, ready to go. And you're like, "Sally's amazing." This self-directed talk also looks like a lot of other interventions that are standard for us. They feel very familiar because we use them all the time.

Lists, verbal prompts, reminders. Put a post it there. Why didn't you do it? I left you with a chore list when I left. I said, "Just get them done when I get home. You had eight hours. Why didn't you do it?" Processes. I always think about kindergarten classrooms. I get really overwhelmed when I walk into a kindergarten classroom because there's just like signs and lists threw up all over the place. They can't [inaudible 00:13:55]. Why are we having the class value? I mean, at least a little bit later probably, but what does that translate into? That's morning work. Like, let's put this list of things that you need to do.

It just doesn't translate because we're intervening on this third step. We're not giving kids a chance to start this process. We have to create conditions where they're encouraged to develop the visual that they're going to be able to work off of.

The more we prompt, the more we remind, the more we make lists, the less opportunity they're going to have to develop this processing. I hear a lot, "Why is this a new thing? I didn't have executive function coaching when I was little." Our worlds are getting more sophisticated. Classrooms are pushed back into preschool. One of my friends asked, when my kid was four, severe ADHD, couldn't sit down, couldn't go to play dates. Just with this one familiar friend that I wasn't embarrassed to go to play dates with, "Hey, do you want to put our kids in Mandarin lessons? At four. I'm like, "Have you met him?"

You know what I mean? It's like when we're sitting kids down at a really early age and teaching and expecting them pay attention, and now you're going to produce, it takes away… That's why imaginative play is so important. We say, it sounds good. I may not know why I'm saying it, but yeah, kids should play. Imagination is good.

Well, that's why. Because you're going to have really strong processing, because you get to constantly go back to this visual. I think about middle school sometimes and makes me cringe now, but it's like we had the pole waiting where you had to click over to the other line. You have a friend call in, and then you'd get, well, if you were fancy, you'd get the three-way calling, and you'd be like, "Oh, my gosh, tomorrow in study hall, I think this boy likes me, if you pass him the note, and then I'll just walk by. You're visualizing this time and space that's not here, it's not occurring. That mental dress rehearsal is so critical.

That's what I'm going to get into here. We want to do mental dress rehearsals with kids, as much as possible. It's probably the most important intervention that we can do, and we'll get into that. Actually, I wanted to mention this because this is another practical intervention that you can go home and use tonight.

"Hey, Sally, it's time to leave for school, go upstairs, grab your shoes, grab your backpack, meet me at the door." That's very directive. We could use that with strong EF, Sally, because she doesn't need the visual. It's happening on her own. But for kids who are not sparking this visual, we need to give them an opportunity to create it.

I would probably say, "Hey, Sally, we're getting ready to walk out the door. When you meet me at that door, what will you look like? What's going to happen?" Well, I have my backpack, my shoes, and you can

have a photo. I use a lot of photos. I'm matching Sally, ready to leave with the current Sally. Does it match? Nope. What's missing? Oh, my shoes, my backpack. I better go get it.

You have declarative language you can be creative with it. "Hey, you know, I know you're going to this birthday party on Saturday. You're feeling a little nervous. What do you think is going to happen when you walk in? Who's going to be there? What kind of mood are they going to be in? Just setting the stage. Let them visualize this scenario. This, I think, is so important because all of a sudden, kids make sense, at least for me. When I learned this, I was like, it all makes sense now. I woke up. It's a new life. I get it.

Hopefully that helps you understand your kids and when you just need to be creative. If I'm not here to tell you what to do instead of the verbal prompts or the list, be creative. Create a visual. Use as many photos or sketches as you can. Clip art does not support nonverbal working memory. When we do visual schedules, and we use all the clip art, it's a missed opportunity because that's not helping to spark that. If you can get real photos, always first choice. Good second choice, if you only have access to it, is like a sketch or a drawing.

If your child can do the drawing, that's even better. But it's not necessary at first. You can provide it if that's where you're leading them. Again, tools and strategies centered around visuals. Again, I like to use planning because it's pretty straightforward when I go for examples, planners.

Here's one that you wouldn't use because look, it's like a glorified list. I think the school planners, I don't think I've ever seen a school planner that is helpful for executive function. It never surprises me. I use planners. I wait to mention planners when I start working with the family because they're such a source of stress and contention.

I think schools, they're beautiful, the planners that the schools give, but it's like they could save a lot of money and just give a blank sheet of paper, and it would work the same. What you want to use is something that facilitates a visual time. We're going to go more into time, but let's start basic need to do, want to do. You'd probably be helping to gather all the tasks thinking that out loud they'd all make it onto the list. Then we want to time block.

I need to make these chunks visual. I need to see how large these chunks are, what they look like in perspective with each other. As soon as I can get that visual, I can do this mental dress rehearsal and walk through the day. When I leave school, I'll get home at whatever time, I've got this. This is my homework. "Oh, wait a minute. I got to leave because I have cheer practice. I better get a snack. I will have been really hungry."

We just start at that contingency planning. I've got the visual, I'm walking through. All of a sudden I see holes, or I see inconsistencies. Again, for the younger kiddos, you're going to be talking through those. It looks like when you get home, this is what you're going to be doing. What do you think you do? Next. Okay, we have it here. We're creating this together. Again, let's talk through the process. This is one of

my clients. She's gotten really good at it. I'm proud of her. Can I use your planner photos? She's a little bit older.

Again, planning, prioritizing. Young kids can do this. This might look a little too sophisticated. I have parents who, they'll take a roll of that contact paper. Is that what it's called, that big, the brown paper that's on the big rolls? I don't know what it's called, but you know what I mean, craft paper or something and just plaster it on the wall and plaster it.

Then they'll create kind of a schedule there where maybe we have photos of the different things that I'm likely to be doing. Hey, we get home from school and then here's your snack. What do you want for a snack? We've got those pictures, and we're just kind of arranging things. That's a good way to work with the younger kids on this scheduling.

Again, this is just an example of how this works out. Serves as a conversation point to add other interventions on top of this. This is a foundation, a base. If the day goes off track, it's fine. A lot of kids don't want to fill out planners because then they're held to it. I don't know how that's going to play out. If I put that down, you're going to call me out because I'm not going to do that. The idea is, "Hey, this gives us data. Tomorrow, before we start this again, we're going to look at how yesterday went." Self-evaluation is a major principle of executive function.

I don't ask kids a ton of things when I'm evaluating them. I don't want to hear what they have to say, but I know the stock that I take in it because hallmark feature of executive deficit is that kids don't know how to self-evaluate. They don't know how they're doing. They aren't able to say, "Well, I've been working a little bit better within the time that I have." Yeah, I think I've gotten better. It's just not there, understandably. We use it, and we say, what broke down? Where did it go wrong?

Then we have a specific place to problem-solve. Instead of, well, that didn't work, it's, where did it break down. Why? What were the conditions? What should we do differently tomorrow? Kids are more engaged in problem-solving when they recognize the problem. You just get better buy in.

On that topic, internalizing time. We talk about time management when we talk about executive function, really what that comes from is internalizing time. We as adults have developed that to a large extent. We'll talk about adults as well because adults are a little bit different. I just say in general, we adults are more developed in these capacities.

Your time internalization. I'm putting this dinner in the oven. I know it has to cook for 30 minutes. I have a pretty good idea of three chores I can do in that 30 minutes. I can understand that before I test it. I'm going to put the laundry away. I'm probably going to go down and get the mail, and then I'm going to make sure that table is set and whatever.

It's that moment where, "Oh, my gosh, I'm going to pick up my child. I just want to run in and get milk, but I really don't want to drag them in there because it's just going to complain." I'm going to run in really quickly before I pick them up, and it just has to go well because otherwise I'm cutting it close.

You go in, you grab the milk, you get up to the checkout, and all of a sudden the person in front of you gets really chatty with the cashier. We need more people like that. That's fine, but not in this instance. It really doesn't work. You're not looking at your watch probably until you get that feeling in your body like, I'm late. It's too late now. I'm in line, I'm committed, but you know, and then you look, and you're like, how late am I going to be? You have that internalization to some degree. We can feel tense.

We know cool current research that I love is that the way your eyes move around an analog clock helps your brain to start to internalize time. I have high schoolers that don't know how to read clocks. I don't mean to laugh, but it's like for those of us, I think everybody in this room can probably attest the fact that we learned that pretty early growing up, but we don't have them.

Some classrooms, I go into observe, and I look around and there's no way an alarm clock because they've got timers, or they've got digital or we, as adults, check our phones all the time, so we've moved digital, and we're moving further away from where we need to be. That's one piece of this. Then also, there was an animation here.

What we do with the analog clock is we create a visual chunk of time. Some of my slides, I think I said, got messed up in translation. We would say, let's say your kid is starting, has to read for 15 minutes every night. I don't want to read. I'm not doing it just to get distracted. Okay, you know what? Let's look at this. It's 15 minutes. What is that going to feel like? We would mark off a chunk of time? That would kind of be, it's like a wedge, a wedge of cheese. It's 15 minutes.

I use a dry-erase marker. I shade it in so that my eyes are moving around with a sweep of time. Then I say, okay, what's halfway through? 15 minutes? Seven, seven and a half minutes. I set a timer for the seven, seven and a half minutes. Notice I don't just go right for the timer. You got 15 minutes. When it goes off, you're done. That's so stressful for kids who can't internalize time.

I'll go into preschool classrooms, and it's like, timer after timer, okay, when the timer is up, and I'm getting anxious because I'm like, well, what's changed? Before, I set the timer and the timer is off. If these kids are not good at transitioning or managing their time, what's going to change? They still can't do it. Maybe it becomes habit, maybe that helps them, but this is how you want to do long term intervention.

They start, you say, okay, 15 minutes, halfway through, set the timer. I'll be right back. The timer goes off, and you say, all right, that's halfway through. Do you feel like you're halfway through? I guess this is like minutes. You're halfway through the minute. Let's say they have to read 10 pages. Are you five pages through? No, I'm like, one page through. Okay, we didn't estimate right. Let's fix it. Then so we keep adjusting. It's okay that the child's not performing in that chunk of time again. We're gathering data to use the next time. So repetition, repetition, repetition.

Okay, planning. Think about multistep assignments, even multistep direction routines. How do we usually present the requirements to kids again? Lists. I see these packets coming home from school where you're going to do this project. When I look at the packets, I just want to be like, I can't.

When I see middle schoolers who are like, for the last three weeks, it's been on their to-do list to work on the social studies project, working on it does not spark a good image. All it feels is like, it's too much. I don't even know. I'm just going to do something else. We say, you had three weeks to do it. Why isn't it done? Well, because we had three weeks to do it. We didn't intervene appropriately. We just said, okay, you got more time.

Well, if I couldn't manage with day 1, I'm not going to be able to manage day 21. We plan backwards. We start with the finished. What's this going to look like when we're done? What's this finished product? You got to get creative with that because sometimes it's hard to create a visual. I'll do papers with kids, like essays, when they start to learn the one-page essay. Well, let's draw it. Kids will often just scribble on that. It's like, we need to actually visualize this paper. We're going to organize this, and it's going to look like a piece of paper, as though it's real sitting in front of us.

In this example, you can't see this. You'll see it on your slide. Basically what it is, it's a diorama assignment, which kids have no idea these days what dioramas are. I feel almost guilty. I don't use this example in my sessions very much because they're like, what's that? Then I got to show them a picture, which is fine, but it defeats the whole purpose. Anyway, this is a diorama project. Before we even start, we go through the criteria, and we make sure all of it's depicted.

You're reading a book. This is how many pages are in it. How long do we think that's going to take? I'm going to note that. I have to make this box. I have to label the lid like this. I have to write an essay there, and I have to note some page numbers. This is more complicated than a lot of what our kids have to do. I show you this because it's pretty straightforward. Use this at home. What's your room going to look like when it's clean?

We can take a picture of that. This is your clean room. Okay, now we got to match pictures, and we'll get to an example in a second, but after we do the visual, then we move to steps. Kids who are struggling with executive function want to move to steps so quickly, they have a really hard time pausing on that visual because that's how you know it's not sparking. You know what I mean?

You're giving it to them. It doesn't feel natural. They know. They just need to think, okay, what do I need to do? Have them pause on that, and then we go, and we match the steps to the visual. You can see like, I like to close the loop, so it's finished.

Then, when I ask my kids to vacuum, it brings about a little bit of a rage response in me because I'm like, well, now I got to put the vacuum away. It's all over the place. That's one of my little pet peeves, is I should have just done it myself, and now I got to clean that up, and that's really what I wanted to avoid.

I vacuumed. This is what it looks like. Here's my vacuum track, mark. Then I wrap the cord around the vacuum, and I put it back in the closet. That's closing the loop. I always make a note of what that looks like, the steps, and then the maybes are like contingency plans.

Well, I don't know. If it takes me longer to read the book, then I probably am going to have to expand my plan. Just whatever comes up. Make a note, again, you're helping a child create a visual. I know some of this stuff. I'm giving you so much. What I'm giving you tonight is an overview of probably six weeks of coaching. Keep that in mind if it's a little bit confusing, you'll have my contact information. Just call me. We can talk through some of it, so try not to get frustrated, some of it is hard.

Again, example, cleaning your room. This is probably I would be surprised if a family didn't come in to work with me, and I'd be surprised if they didn't bring up the room cleaning. It's such a source of contention. I realized firsthand at home, and it seems obvious, but I'm thinking it looks clean to me when it's a certain way. How can you not see that that's not clean? I think that, what do you mean kids saying it's clean, and you're like, it's not. Then you're arguing about the fact that it's not done. What you're really arguing about is the fact that you see clean differently. My version is not your version. This isn't funny. I just felt like this was funny because what if you asked your kid to do that? That would be funny.

I say that because I'm going to probably sit down with my child. I'm going to look at the after photo as much as you can, sketch it, or maybe it was clean at one point, but that's going to be like, you have to back up sometimes. If you're like, you got to clean this room, and it's actually like you got to clean this room, take a photo of it, and then we go, and we start like, okay, let's talk about cleaning this room.

This is just another example. I don't really need to suffer on that. I'm looking at, this is a current situation. Here's a finished situation. What do we do to match these photos? Again, working backward. Things like planning, staying on track, mastering routines, identifying and removing what is hard for your child, it takes a lot of conversation. You don't want to jump to assuming that we want to have conversations with our kids as much as possible.

Again, help your child do mental direct rehearsals. Look, this is a chance for you to go through this in your head. If we make mistakes, there's no consequence, nothing breaks down. We get to pick out times where it might be hard tomorrow.

When you go to do this, 90% of our tasks occur in our minds first before we get to the time and space where it's going to occur, we as adults. For kids, they get to the time and space, and then they think, what am I doing? Because they're not doing that mental dress rehearsal. They're going to be much more successful, or likely to be more successful, especially over time, if you do that mental dress rehearsal first.

Tapping out. When you start routines, like I like to do this especially for morning routine, evening routine, before you start every single day, you're going to take out a visual that you've created, which I'm not an arts and crafts type person. I left that up to preschool. Just really, that wasn't my strength.

Sometimes this is hard for me, creating some type of visual that resonates. Whether it's like, and you could do a blueprint of your house, but that doesn't translate. I would go take photos, try to arrange them: this is upstairs, this is downstairs for the spaces that your child is going to be navigating. Before they do the routine, before they start, we sit down, we're like, "Okay, what's this going to look like? Show me what you're going to do? Where you're going to go."

You want to have them tap. Okay, so I get up, I go over to my dresser, get my clothes on. I go get my shoes on. I go brush my teeth. I go downstairs. I get my breakfast, like over and over, every morning, every morning, every morning. Mornings are already chaotic, but think about if I put these interventions in place, then eventually they're not going to be chaotic. Or I could keep trying to tell them more and more, and it's just going to be like this indefinitely.

You're adding a step to your morning in order to be able to subtract a lot of steps from your morning over those. I just give you some examples of things that we've used. The desk is messy. Parents go in and clean the desk just to make sure that, like, oh, look at my kids looking messy.

You can clean the desk, take a photo, print it out, laminate it, stick a little picture inside of the desk. When it's time to clean the desk, your child can match the photos. Hey, does it match? The teacher can prompt match. You can do that all around the house.

When you do, I should have mentioned this, when you clean rooms, break them down into zones. It's too much to walk and be like, I got to clean my room. Maybe I'm doing my visual schedule today. Maybe you do the sleeping zone, which includes the bed and the nightstand.

How are we going to match the picture? Have a picture in the zone. A picture next to the bed where the bed is made, the nightstand is cleaned off. We're just going to do the sleeping zone today, or we're going to do the dressing zone. Be creative with that.

This is one that we do. I'm showing you a teacher one just because it's so effective, and you have the visual. You can do this a lot at home. Just think about your routines. Instead of this sign posted in the classroom, kids come in, "Hey, guys. Hang your coats up, hang your backpacks up. Hey, Johnny, did you turn your homework in? Hey, Sally, you got to get your morning work. You're sitting there doing nothing." Constantly prompting every day it's exhausting.

What we did was we took that list and replaced it with visual prompts for each one. This is one that's not, like I didn't take actual pictures because I didn't really want kids to be in there. "Hey, here's your menu." You walk into the classroom, everybody gets a menu. Here you go. Menu looks like this. What's first? I'm

matching the picture. What's second? Where do I go? Okay, cool. All of a sudden, kids are navigating their space, and the teacher doesn't have to say each prompt to every single kid.

Do this at home. Hey, whenever it's time to go up for bed, what does it look like for you to do each step? Follow it along until you get to six. Hand it into me, and it looks like we're done now. Takes a while to get there. I'm not saying just because you make this and hand it to your child, that's going to be like swimming. It's just not. You get that repetition, repetition, repetition. This is what tapping out looks like. I like to use, especially for younger kids, they love pointers.

I had a kid that was like, "I just want to buy a bunch of pointers." We need one. What can you do with a bunch of them? It's like, point. Argue with that. Just a little like, here's where I'm going to go. Move it around and locker example. Just safe. Just translate it to whatever environment you're looking to address.

Keep this in mind. Behaviors, meltdowns, defiance. When your kid looks bad, just not at their best by any means, it's a red flag. You consider it a red flag. The demands of the environment, this expectation is too much. It's basically a kid is biting, but really what they're saying is, this is too much, I can't handle this. What you're asking is too much.

Okay, let's back up. Let's meet you where you're at. Let's figure out what skills are at play here, and we're going to intervene differently. I say that because a big question. I feel like for a lot of what I do talks about behavior and people will always say, "Yeah, but…" We're looking to prevent it. Problem solve. Yeah, but what do I do when they're melting down?

You ease up. I guess your only option, you're not going to correct it in the moment. Once your kids define it, once they're melting down, it's not going to be, "Let me implement this strategy. It's just not." You're going to say, oh, ease up, ease off the gas. What's going on here? Give the kid a cookie. I want a cookie. No cookie. We're about to use it. Melt up. Here's a cookie.

You're not teaching them that that's how they get a cookie. You're going to go back and address it. What's going on here? What's leading up to this? How do we prevent this? It's a long process, but in the moment, you just got to ease up and get through it. In the same vein, how many of these things do you often say? I'm not asking for much. It's a simple chore. It's the least you can do. See through fit. Put it off, made a big deal out of it, and then it only took you 10 minutes to actually do it. The next day you're like, remember, it only took you 10 minutes.

Well, that wasn't the problem. That's not addressing the actual problem. This really shouldn't be so hard. I admit to going to that when I'm tired and frustrated. Come on. Not to other people's kids, just my own. It's not that that's better. Anyway, we get it. Again, that thing where it's like next year, when I hear that, I almost lose my breath. That's fine if we expect that next year, but can we help you get the expectations met this year so that it's a little bit easier and just speaks to punishing.

If you have these questions, we're going to go into information that speaks to these questions. You need to know this. One of the more technical pieces here, but so important. When you understand neuroplasticity, I feel like a whole world opens up in terms of what the brain can do, our hopes, and dreams, and expectations for what we can do when the brain changes.

There were studies done, and this is actually in another country because we would have a lot of limitations. We probably couldn't execute this here. But patients who had suffered traumatic brain injury, catastrophic stroke, underwent… This project was doing rehab with these patients who probably otherwise, before this would be considered, "Well, this is it. This is an injury. We're not going to expect much. There's a loss here. We just wouldn't expect recovery."

The way they were able to get recovery in these studies that they did… Because what they did was they implemented rehab all day, every day. To an extent where it's almost [inaudible 00:41:11] you'd look at it and be like, it's almost torture to do to somebody. But what they thought was, with what we know about the brain and neuroplasticity, if we do this enough, and we know we're doing the right thing, these people are going to recover. There were just massive amounts of recovery that we didn't otherwise know was possible.

If you think about it, up until the '90s, we were testing rat. We didn't have a way to look at the brain, and so we were going off of rats to interpret what we feel like the human brain can do. With enough repetition and intensity, change is possible.

Again, your brain has a miraculous ability to change. Everything that you do changes the brain, everything that you don't do, everything that you feel, your brain changes from the minute you're born until the day that you die. This idea that the brain is fully developed at a certain age is almost silly now. We still say that. People are like, "Well, isn't it true that the brain…" Developmentally, in general, we should expect to be, to a certain point, in mid-20s. But that doesn't mean that as we get further and further into adulthood, that trauma, stress, like chronic stress and anxiety as adults, which I think a lot of us experience at some point, changes the brain.

I may regress on a lot of these skills, things that I was really good at when I only had myself to manage. I may not be on time anymore. I may not remember everything when I leave the house or, this is mine, I don't remember if I closed the garage door. Going back, now I'm late. I put a camera in the garage, so that was fine.

Anyway. Chemical, functional, structural change. Short-term change is chemical change. If you do these interventions sporadically, if you're not committing to doing them, you're just going to see a short-term change. Chemical. They'll go back. We'll regress back to where we are. But after a while, we've got functional change. So the way your brain works, you develop these neural connections where your brain wants to work for you. It's like, "What do you want me to do? I'm listening, I'm watching. Show me, show me." We do something over and over again, it's like, "Got you. I'm going to make that easier for you. We're going to do that automatically."

It works for bad habits, too. "You want a taste of beer after work? Cool. We want that really bad now." That's why I sit there like, but I don't want it, but I need it, and I'm going to do it. Like addiction. Your brain can't discern if something's good for you or not, so it's not going to give you a pep talk "Are you sure you want to do that?" It's like, "No, I know you want me to do that. So we're doing that." That's functional change. We can back out of these things, but it's harder. That's why doing the work proactively is so important.

Then structural change. If I looked at your brain before, all of this repetition, versus after, you might see that the frontal lobes are stronger. They're actually bigger. The emotion-centered parts of the brain do not work well with those frontal lobes. The logic parts of the brain. Emotion is like the bully on the playground. It's like, "Okay, I'm thinking, I'm thinking, I'm reasonable, I'm reasonable. I'm anxious, I'm upset, I'm frustrated, I'm escalating." The frontal lobes are like, "We're just going to take a nap. You let us know when you're ready for us, but you go do that." I always think, if nothing else, keep your kids as calm as possible, as often as possible. Which means maybe like giving six extra cookies. Fine, but-

Audience Member

Double sugar.

Katie Greenleaf

Exactly. If there's one thing you take from this presentation… No, I'm just kidding. I use that as an example because for some reason, and I get it, it's like when I'm working with parents, there seems to be a line that you can get parents to get to, where they're like, "Yeah, I could be flexible with that," and you're like, "What if he wants six cookies?" He's melting down, give him six cookies. He'll deal with it tomorrow. He'll go back. But do you want to die on that cross? It almost feels like allergic or something, [inaudible 00:45:12]. Anyway, I'm getting off-topic.

Bottom line, any intervention used to improve executive function, repeated, consistent, that's how we change the brain. You will see independence. You don't have to be like… This is hard because schools will pull accommodations because things improved. I always say, make sure you look at conditions that may be present, that's actually maybe masking the difficulty, and make sure that we're pulling interventions. At the appropriate time you will see independence. The brain change will lead to good functioning, stronger functioning, and then the kids will do.

Let me see, I have to go a little bit fast. ADHD, a lot of people ask about ADHD. I think these are important things to know when you're connecting the two. Most common form is ADHD combined presentation. Inattentive, hyperactive. There's no ADD. I noticed that a lot of people will come in and say… He has ADD, not ADHD. Just so you know, it's all ADHD. Just depends on what presentation. 60% to 75% of people diagnosed with ADHD will be placed in this category at some point.

Observable signs of ADHD present the same way as executive function deficits. I have some resources on the last slide that speak to this. Russell Barkley is known as like the grandfather of ADHD. We kind of defer, I think, in the field to Russell Barkley a lot of the time, and he advocates for us to change ADHD to self-management disorder. That's essentially what it is. If there was a diagnosis, executive function deficit disorder, then really we can say self-regulation deficit disorder, it's the same thing. We say, what about ADHD? When you're talking about executive function. It's not all that helpful to differentiate it. It is the same thing.

Counseling versus coaching. I want you to take time with this slide whenever you get your slides, there's a lot of information. But in general, a good coach will understand that again, repetition, intensity, working with your child on doing things differently, it's not tutoring, it's actually implementing processes that are going to lead to long-term change.

We've got the question, what about counseling, coaching? When do I do one or the other? Coaching is good if your child is not struggling with anxiety, depression. If that emotional component is getting in the way of the logic, then you're probably going to need to work on things in counseling, either concurrently with executive function or before your kid is going to be in a good place to develop these skills and capacities. In general, a counselor who's not strong in executive function could probably make enough progress to get your child to a state where coaching would be effective, but you really want to treat root causes. This is tricky. I almost feel like this just brings up something that's more confusing.

What about insurance? I know we got that question. Insurance won't cover coaching. There's no diagnosis. There's no executive function disorder or deficit disorder, so you're not going to get insurance coverage. But what you could do is if you need that counseling component, a lot of the diagnoses that you probably encounter could lend itself to maybe a referral or a recommendation for ADHD coaching or something like that.

I always say if you can't get coaching because the finances is the prevailing factor, then look into counseling because probably if there's a diagnosis that's going to be covered, and we want a good counselor that can address executive function. It's a little bit harder to find.

I'm going to let you go over that. I really mentioned a lot of things that I think will probably make this intuitive. But biggest thing, it's not tutoring. I want you to be able to help your child as soon as possible, so I'm going to teach parents intervention. I never work with just a kid unless they're in high school or college, but even then a lot of the parents participate. Not in every session, but I want to be able to hand this off so that when they're strong enough, at least they have somebody around them that's going to be able to remind them, "Okay, remember, we need to adjust. Go back to how we were doing things before," because as soon as we stop coaching, it's easy to revert back to how we used to do things.

I think a good coach works with a student for an entire semester or a quarter, kind of like going through that whole… It's like a cycle. If you can identify cycles where a kid's going to have to address certain tasks predictably, you want a coach that can take you through that entire process. Every brain is different.

I really want to hear that a coach is upfront and honest with you about results. If you hear a coach say, "You'll see results in 3-4 weeks or something." I'm not saying they're wrong, but I would probably ask questions about that, just because it really is not a predictable way to say whenever you'll see progress and resources.

That's a lot of stuff on the ADHD because I think if your child is diagnosed with ADHD, we're always looking into that. We want to learn as much as possible, so I get a lot of questions about ADHD, and I think there was some on the list here, so I'm going to refer you to that. There's the EF age versus chronological age calculator on there.

Then if your child has anxiety, or if you have anxiety, I think that Jessica Minahan is a really amazing resource because she understands anxiety and executive deficits really well. I think she may have some free trainings, but I know that she also does a lot of webinars regularly, so you can just Google her. Okay, that's it. I just threw a lot at you, so…

Connecting for Kids Facilitator

Thank you so much. We're so grateful. Thank you so much.