



**Digital Magazine for Pediatric
Occupational and Physical Therapy**
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MINDFUL BREATHING FOR KIDS



What is mindful breathing for kids?

First, let's start with what is mindfulness? In simple terms, mindfulness can help children to increase happiness, decrease anxiety and live in the moment. Mindful breathing for kids is when children take the time to pay close attention to their breathing during that moment of time.

Conscious breathing is simple to learn.

Start integrating 4 different mindful breathing for kids activities below into your day – at circle time, mealtime, transition time, drive time. Support children in regularly practicing by pausing periodically and taking the time to breathe consciously.

Encourage them to notice and name how the different breathing exercises affect how they feel and think and behave.

Remind kids to use conscious, mindful breathing to help them manage their feelings and shift their own mind-body state, the same way you would other healthy habits such as tooth brushing, saying “please” and “thank you,” lining up for recess, cleaning up after themselves, etc.

As adults, we can learn mindful breathing and model connecting with the power of conscious breathing in order to encourage your students and children to explore it for themselves. This gives children a way to cultivate their own inner wisdom and strength.

Four Types of Mindful Breathing for Kids

Flower Breath

Imagine smelling a beautiful flower, breathe in through the nose and out the mouth, releasing any tension. Stop and smell the roses, daffodils, daisies or any other flower they like. This is a simple way to connect kids to their breath and how it helps them to feel. You can download a [free printable to provide a visual for this activity here.](#)

Hissing Breath

Breathe in the nose, long deep inhale, and out the mouth on a hissing sound, slow and long. Extending the exhale will allow kids to slow down their inner speed. It's wonderful to connect kids to their exhale to help them learn to slow themselves down, mentally and physically.

Bear Breath

Inhale through the nose, pause; exhale out the nose, pause. Breathe in for a count of 3 or 4, pause for a count of 1 or 2; breath out for a count of 3 or 4, pause for a count of 1 or 2. Repeat a few times. This will help ground and settle kids. Wonderful for restful, reflective time. Imagine a bear hibernating. Helpful before nap time, storytime or any creative activity.

Bunny Breath

Just 3 quick sniffs in the nose and one long exhale out the nose. Invite kids to pretend to be bunnies, sniffing the air for other bunnies, carrots to eat, or safety. It can be a lovely cleansing breath when you use it in this way. You can also use it when kids are very upset and can't find their breath, because it will help them connect to their exhale so that they breathe instead of spin out.

A Life-Long Tool for Managing Stress

When we teach mindful breathing to kids, we give them a life-long tool for [managing their stress](#) and cultivating inner peace. Each and every one of us has the ability to feel calmer, more relaxed, and more alert at any given moment. This ability is called "Conscious Breathing". Whenever we use it, we are less stressed, more mindful, more creative and just plain cooler and kinder.

When we focus on breathing fully and deeply, we move out of our sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight) into our parasympathetic nervous system (relaxation and receptivity). When we consciously connect with and manipulate our breath, we plug into the communication highway, linking body and mind, with the messages we want to send. With specific breathing exercises, we can calm, soothe, support or energize our emotional state as needed. You can go to this [website](#) to listen and complete mindful breathing for kids.

This blogpost was originally written by Leah Kalish, MA

Resources on Mindfulness and Breathing for Children

Movement and Mindfulness Bundle

Includes 9 videos and 16 self-regulation flash cards



Do your children/students struggle with behavior, weight or emotional issues?

Do they have trouble focusing, settling down, staying on task, managing stress or dealing appropriately with their feelings and impulses?

Wish you could afford more movement enrichment and teach them effective self-regulation tools?

Let the award-winning [Self-Regulation Videos and Flash Cards](#), called Scooter & Me movement stories, help your kids/students become more physically fit, emotionally stable and learning able! And watch them thrive...

Taught by experts and developed with kids, these self-regulation video classes combine exciting stories with creative movement, yoga and Brain Gym®. Kids get the fun of acting out the story through movement – being a scooter, a jet boat, a storm, a butterfly, a lion and so much more – while learning easy-to-do, self-regulation techniques called Adventure Skills.

Adventure Skills are simple exercises with cool names and images, such as Monkey Wisdom and Humming Breath, that kids can use to calm and center themselves when angry, frustrated, confused, scared or sad.

This [Self-Regulation Videos and Flash Cards Bundle](#) includes 9 Videos & 16 Self-Regulation Flash Cards to provide you will everything you need to support your students/children in being physically fit, emotionally stable & learning able. [FIND OUT MORE.](#)

Breathing Breaks

16 breathing break posters or cards and 3 tip sheets

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[Breathing Breaks](#) deep breathing exercises digital download is a collection of 16 deep breathing exercises and 3 tip sheets. Deep breathing exercises can help to decrease stress, reduce anxiety, remain calm, strengthen sustained attention, sharpen the ability to learn and more! This packet includes 16 full-page breathing exercises and 3 tips sheets in color or black and white.

IS THERE A LOSS OF SPATIAL AWARENESS IN CHILDREN?



Are Smartphones Creating a Loss of Spatial Awareness in Children?

Have you seen children who bump into their peers? Maybe they have trouble determining their left from their right? Perhaps you ask them to walk somewhere and they are completely unfamiliar with how to get there even though they have been there many times before?

More and more children are using smartphones for longer hours and at a younger age. Overuse of technology in children has been associated with many negative factors such as decreased physical activity, decreased social skills, and poor sleep quality. Is it possible that smartphones are creating a loss of spatial awareness in children?

How Can Smartphones Create a Loss of Spatial Awareness in Children?

There is no research yet to back these hypotheses, but here are topics to ponder regarding the potential effects of smartphone use and spatial awareness in children. Association does not mean causation and this blog post is opinion/speculation:

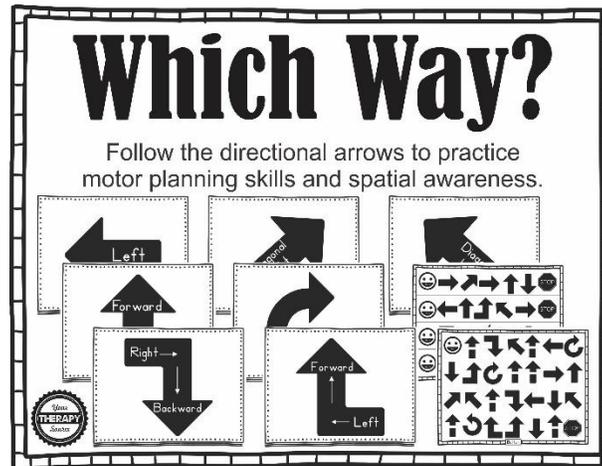
Focus and Attention is on the Smartphone and Not Their Surroundings

When children are constantly looking down at their smartphones, they are not observing their surroundings. They can not see what is next to them, behind them, to the right and to the left. App developers have done an excellent job of sucking our attention into video games, social media, and video clips. It can be hard for adults to pick their head up, so can you imagine a developing brain?

How about the visual-spatial skills of teenagers and smartphone use? According to [Safe Kids](#), every hour in the United States a pedestrian teenager is injured or killed after being hit by a car. Teenagers who have been hit or nearly hit, report that they cross the street listening to music, texting, or talking on the phone.

Voice Activated Directions and Body Awareness

Many of us use GPS to get from here to there. When we follow the audio directions, “turn left here” or “take exit 9” we are not looking at a map we are simply following verbal directions. Looking at the map helps us to relate where we are and we are going. It gives us visual-spatial awareness of our surroundings. I can visually see that at the next block I am taking a left versus just waiting to be told to do it.



The Vestibular Ocular Reflex and Phone Use

The vestibular ocular reflex helps us to maintain the orientation of the eyes in space during head movements so that we can keep visual images within our focus. In simple terms, it is necessary to stabilize our vision. Children today often ride in cars while on their smartphones. Short rides, long rides, whatever the case, children are often head down, eyes focused on the phone. When we never pick our head up to look out the window to let the body know we are sitting in one place but actually moving forward, our vestibular ocular reflex can be affected. This can result in feelings of nausea and deficits in balance.

Developing Peripheral Vision

Think of how hyperfocused you can get when you look at your phone. Sometimes it can literally feel like no one is around you and you tune out people talking to you. We are not focused at all on our peripheral vision. [Research](#) indicates that peripheral vision may continue to develop into the teen years.

When you process what you are viewing in your periphery, your spatial awareness increases. If children are constantly focused on their cell phones, do they experience deficits in peripheral vision and spatial awareness?

Development of the Vestibular System and Loss of Spatial Awareness

The vestibular system is a set of sensory organs in the inner ear that link to the brain and spinal cord. It helps us to detect motion and gravity. In addition, the vestibular system initiates movements to maintain balance and orientation. This system is crucial in providing us with information about where we are in space.

Excessive cell phone use has been associated with decreased physical activity. When we do not move we can not develop our vestibular system to help provide us with information regarding spatial awareness.

Lack of Play and Cell Phone Use

When young children are observing screens, they are missing important opportunities to play, practice, and achieve social, motor, and communication skills. In order to develop spatial awareness, children need to participate in active motor play to practice going under, over, near, far, in between, next to, behind, etc. When children move during physically active play, this helps to develop body awareness and spatial awareness. Skills that most likely will NOT be learned sitting down focused on a screen.

From motor learning theory we know that you have to practice the skill in the environment in order to be able to be independent with that skill. Constantly living on a 2-dimensional screen will not translate to the spatial awareness needed for our real 3-D world.

How Can We Help Children Prevent a Loss of Spatial Awareness?

Reduce Excessive Screen Time in Children

The most important step is to follow the [American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations](#) for screen time in children. This will allow more time for play and active exploration of the environment to develop spatial awareness. The recommendations are as follows:

- *For children younger than 18 months, avoid the use of screen media other than video-chatting.*
- *Parents of children 18 to 24 months of age who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming, and watch it with their children to help them understand what they're seeing.*
- *For children ages 2 to 5 years, limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.*
- *For children ages 6 and older, place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health.*

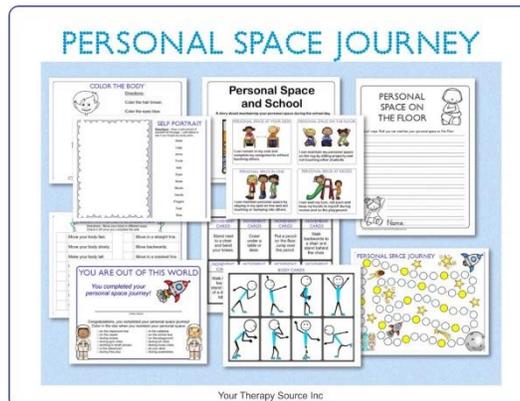


Provide Activities to Encourage Spatial Awareness

Here are several ideas to prevent a loss of spatial awareness in children:

1. Go to the playground.
2. Complete obstacle courses.
3. Take walks and hikes outdoors where the environment is constantly changing.
4. Play games like tag where children have to run around each other and objects.
5. Use [Legos](#), [blocks](#), and puzzles. Try [Tangam puzzles](#). Try this free [visual spatial puzzle crossing paths](#). Research has shown that parents who participated in guided block play with their children had significantly higher proportions of spatial talk. Guided block play consisted of playing with the blocks along with guided instructions for how to build different structures. Read more in a previous blog post on [block play and spatial awareness](#).
6. Practice completing patterns. You could try [Follow the Path](#) or [Patterns, Patterns, Patterns](#).
7. Movement Games: Participate in any type of movement games where children have to move around obstacles or friends. The ability to move around stationary objects is quite different than around moving objects which are unpredictable. If you need ideas, try [50 Sensory Motor Activities for Kids!](#) Check out [Which Way?](#) to challenge motor planning and spatial awareness.
8. Play games that require children to learn right and left discrimination. Try the [Right or Left Games](#) to practice.

Additional Resource for Learning About Spatial Awareness



[Personal Space Journey](#) is a collection of activities to teach children about personal space. You can choose how to utilize the materials. Some children may benefit from reading the story first with follow up. Others may need to work on body awareness activities in order to maintain personal space.

The activities are reproducible to use over and over again with all the children that you teach. [FIND OUT MORE](#).

HOW TO GET CHILDREN WITH AUTISM TO SLEEP



Did you know that almost one half of 2- to 5-year-old children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or a neurodevelopmental disorder (NDD) with some autistic features have significant sleep difficulties? Parent survey results suggest that number to be much higher (more than 80%) for children with autism! Here are tips on how to get children with autism to sleep.

What the negative consequences of a lack of sleep for children with autism?

Research has shown that sleep difficulties for children with autism can have significant consequences such as:

- exacerbating the social communication deficits in ASD.
- increasing repetitive and restrictive behaviors.
- contributing to behaviors such as aggression and self-injury.
- more difficult family life.

Will Typical Suggestions Help Children with Autism to Sleep?

Children with autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders experience similar sleep problems as neurotypical children. The difference is that research indicates that children with autism may have a greater number of different kinds of common sleep problems. This means that simple interventions may not always work for all children.

How to Get Children with Autism to Sleep

Try Multiple Interventions

Since simple interventions may not always work for all children, researchers recommend trying multiple interventions for the different phases of sleep such as going to sleep, night waking or ending co-sleeping. In addition, addressing gastrointestinal or respiratory issues may have to occur at the same time. Read more on [Interceptive sensory strategies to induce sleep](#).

Behavioral Approaches to Sleep

Research indicates that for children with neurodevelopmental disorders, behavioral programs have been successful with suggestions such as:

- bedtime fading (start by setting the bedtime at the time the child usually falls asleep and gradually make the bedtime earlier).
- positive routines.
- teaching healthy sleep practices.
- increasing a child's physical activity during the day.

Caregivers will need ongoing follow up to carry out these behavioral approaches.



Caregivers Need to Help Determine What Is Possible

Health care providers can educate parents on the importance of sleep. This must be done hand in hand with caregivers determining the behaviors they need to address in their children and themselves, considering they are the ones that have to carry out the techniques. If the initial strategies are not helpful, work together to try new strategies.

Melatonin or No Melatonin?

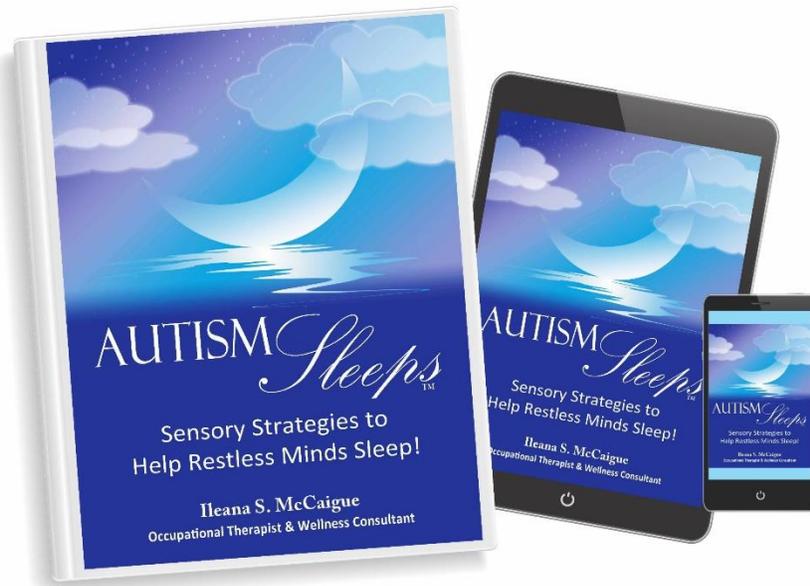
Melatonin has been shown in multiple studies to improve sleep initiation and duration for many neurotypical children. Families of children with autism or other neurodevelopmental disorders report that children who were taking melatonin continued to have significant sleep problems. The researchers recommend that families try behavioral programs before trials with melatonin.

References:

Lord, C. (2019). Taking Sleep Difficulties Seriously in Children With Neurodevelopmental Disorders and ASD. *Pediatrics*, 143(3), e20182629.

Wallis, Claudia. *How to get children with autism to sleep*. Retrieved from the web on 8/10/19 at <https://www.spectrumnews.org/features/deep-dive/get-children-autism-sleep/>.

Need more ideas on Helping Children with Autism Sleep?



AUTISM Sleeps - Sensory Strategies to Help Restless Minds Sleep!
Available for immediate download or print version at YourTherapySource.com

Get more sensory strategies to help restless minds sleep in [Autism Sleeps™](#). This is a thorough resource of sleep sensory strategies and suggestions for preparing the “sleep environment”. Sample bedtime and wake-up routines are provided as templates, especially to guide parents of children with sleep difficulties. Also includes checklists to identify which of the six sensory area(s) are impacted by poor sleep. A menu of sensory strategies in each of those affected areas is available for use in preparing a person to sleep, stay asleep and transition to wake up. Additionally, a diary and graph are available for logging the impact of the strategies implemented to determine those that are most effective in helping restless minds sleep. [FIND OUT MORE.](#)

Read more:

[10 Tips to Teach Children Self Help Skills](#)

[Sleep, Bedtime Routines, Anxiety and Autism](#)

[10 Tips to Help Children with Toileting](#)

[Important Information Children Should Know](#)

[Teach Life Skills to Learn Responsibility and Independence](#)

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SCHOOL BASED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY – TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY



Do you work with students who you refer to school-based occupational therapy? Perhaps you are a parent whose child will be receiving an evaluation for occupational therapy in the schools? Or maybe you are an Occupational Therapist needing guidance on how to provide effective services in the school setting? Whatever the case may be, you all most likely want to help children succeed in school. When students struggle with [fine motor skills](#), [self-regulation](#), [sensory processing](#), [handwriting](#), [organization](#), or other [activities of daily living](#), they may need extra support to function in the educational environment.

Six Steps of Effective Service Delivery of School-Based Occupational Therapy

This process varies from school to school and state to state. The suggestions below are meant to be an outline not a step by step guide. Check with your local school district regarding specific regulations.

Offer Support in the Classroom

Before a student is referred for school-based occupational therapy, usually the teacher or school staff has tried offering support in the classroom perhaps using multitiered systems of support. For example, maybe changing the student's seating or offering a different type of pencil to see if the student is more successful. After strategies have been tried without success the school staff may request help from the team and recommend the student to be reviewed by the instructional support team. Additional strategies may be discussed and implemented. If there is no progress, an occupational therapy evaluation may be necessary.

	Write your OT or PT evaluation reports in a fraction of the time	Use code DTD20 and get 20% off your 1st payment!	FREE TRIAL <small>No credit card required</small>
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School Based Occupational Therapy Evaluation is Completed

Once approved, the school-based Occupational Therapist will conduct an evaluation. It should be comprehensive and include the screening of all areas of occupation, record review, interviews, observations during natural routines, and assessments (if needed).

Analyze OT Evaluation Findings

After the evaluation is complete and documented, review the findings to hypothesize why participation challenges are occurring for the student. Using the findings from the evaluation, try stating the educational difficulties that the student is experiencing and attempt to determine what skills (or lack of) are affecting the student's success.

Teamwork is crucial!

It can be hard to find the time but it is crucial that the team works together to determine the student's needs. Work together (include the student) to [create IEP goals to address these needs](#).

Begin the OT Services

Once approved, the school-based Occupational Therapist can begin to provide valuable occupational therapy services in the school setting.

Collect Data

One of the most important steps is to [collect frequent, quantitative data](#) to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. When therapists, teachers, staff, and students collect data it helps to determine what works best for the student.

Use the Data

Remember to USE the data! Work together with the team to make data-driven decisions. This will help decide whether to continue with the plan of care, make changes, or discontinue services.

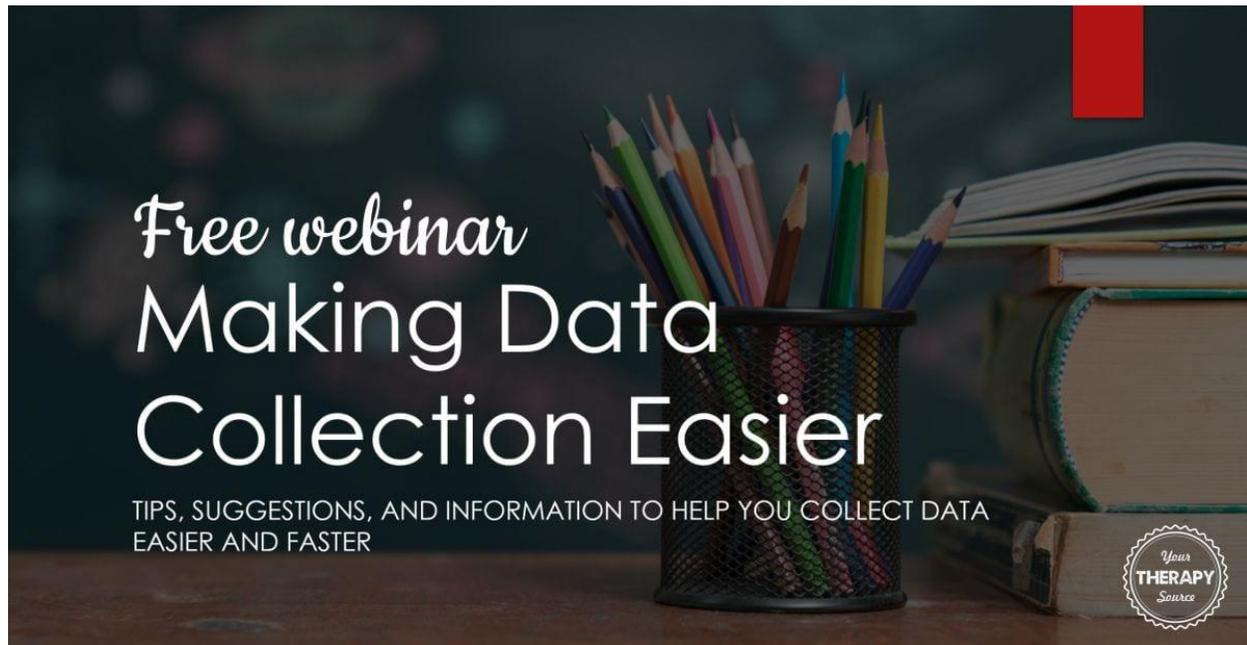
References: Clark, G. F., Watling, R., Parham, L. D., & Schaaf, R. (2019). [Occupational Therapy Interventions for Children and Youth With Challenges in Sensory Integration and Sensory Processing: A School-Based Practice Case Example](#). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 73(3), 7303390010p1-7303390010p8.

Need resources for school based occupational therapy?

[Data Tracking Forms for School-Based Occupational and Physical Therapy UPDATED 2019](#)

[Functional Evaluation of Fine Motor Skills](#)

[FREE WEBINAR ON DATA COLLECTION IN SCHOOLS](#)



Give me a D!

Give me an A!

Give me a T!

Give me an A!

What does it spell?

DATA!

Put what in the cell?

DATA!

Let's get excited about DATA!!!! Woohoo!

Join the “party” and watch this informative FREE webinar on data collection in schools, ***Making Data Collection Easier***.

Let's face it, data can be boring but it is important! Many of you probably loathe it and some of you tolerate it. Personally, I love it – data provides tangible, real results indicating whether our interventions are helping a student or not. It helps to guide our practices and decisions of how we teach children new skills.

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What you will learn during the webinar on data collection in schools?

We asked what questions you had about data collection and many of you responded! Thank you! This webinar answers the questions that we received. You will learn ideas and suggestions to help with:

- progress monitoring
- collecting data for IEP goals
- data decision making
- providing documentation to justify or discontinue services.

How long is the webinar?

The webinar is 31 minutes and 58 seconds to be exact.

Is it boring?...because data collection can be boring

No way! It is super exciting and you will want to watch every last second of it... OK maybe if you find data collection dull you will not be that hyped up, but you will learn tips and tricks to help SAVE YOU TIME when you collect data – that’s not boring right?

It is not boring to show that the interventions you are providing are helping your students to succeed and reach their goals right? Collecting data and “proving” that something “works” is very satisfying. When we are able to do this, it improves our abilities to help all students!

Will I earn CEU’s for watching the webinar?

No, unfortunately, this webinar will not earn you CEU’s. BUT we are looking for feedback. If this is something you would like in the future, let us know by sending us an email at info@yourtherapysource.com after you watch the webinar.

How do I access the FREE webinar on data collection in schools?

[Sign up here.](#)

What products are used in the webinar?

Throughout the webinar, we provide examples of forms and templates that you can use to streamline your data collection. You can always create your own forms that are similar or start with ours that are ready to go (and you can edit).

Busy therapists and teachers can benefit from the easy to use forms and templates that are mentioned in the webinar to get meaningful results, make data-driven decisions, and help students succeed! The three products mentioned are:

1. [Data Collection for Special Education – Templates and Forms](#)
2. [Data Tracking Forms for School-Based OT and PT](#)
3. [Google Forms for Special Education](#)

HANDWRITING VERSUS TYPING AND WRITING SKILLS



Recent research in *Reading and Writing* answered the question of handwriting versus typing and writing performance. To begin with, they examined the contribution of handwriting fluency to writing performance. The second part of the research explored the relationship between handwriting and keyboarding and compared their contributions to writing.

Results of the Study on Handwriting Versus Typing and Writing Quality

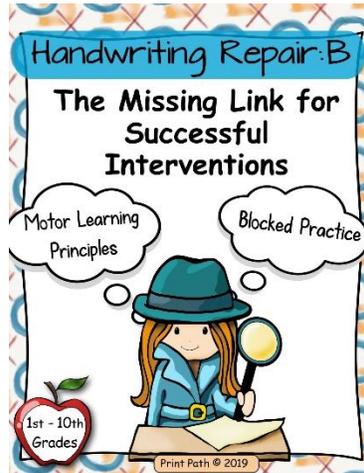
The researchers determined the following:

- handwriting fluency contributes to writing significantly and consistently.
- handwriting fluency also significantly contributes to specific writing measures (e.g., writing quality, writing fluency, substantive quality).
- fluency of handwriting and keyboarding were significantly related, particularly on speed.
- the writing quality whether handwritten or use of a keyboard were relatively competitive.
- keyboarding did allow for faster writing.

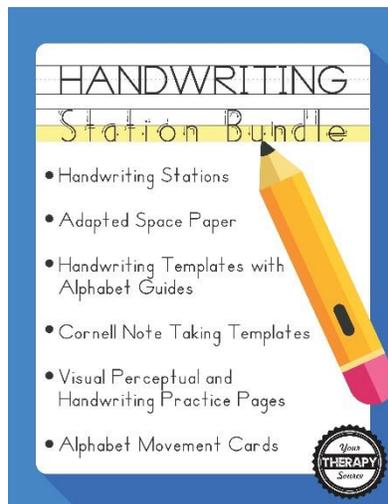
Conclusion About Handwriting Versus Typing

The researchers concluded that handwriting is important for writing development even though keyboarding is accessible.

Resources to Improve Handwriting



Handwriting Interventions – Occupational Therapy tool for blocked handwriting practice helps you to utilize Motor Learning stages and principles to make substantial changes in handwriting habits with students up to the 10th grade. Created by school-based Occupational Therapist, Thia Triggs, this “blocked” practice at the word level is immensely helpful as a method to bridge the gap between a student’s learning how to form letters and starting to develop new handwriting habits. [FIND OUT MORE.](#)



Do you receive referral after referral for students with handwriting concerns? Are the teachers you work with feeling frustrated and overwhelmed with so little time to offer handwriting practice?

This [Handwriting Station Bundle Deal](#) will save you TONS of time with these NO-PREP activities that encourage handwriting practice for your students. Set up a handwriting station in the classroom or at home so students can practice handwriting throughout the day in the classroom. Great for early finishers!

Resource Guides for Students with Written Output Disorders

Available in 2 versions



This [bundle](#) includes both Handwriting Problem Solutions Resource Guides. Click on each title below for more details:

[Assistive Technology, Implementation Methods & Educational Resource Recommendations for Kids with Written Output Disorders](#) – This digital download is a resource guide for parents and professionals working with students with educationally significant handwriting challenges that make it difficult/impossible for them to complete written schoolwork with paper and pencil.

[Special Edition for Kids with ASD](#) – This digital download is an assistive technology resource guide for parents and professionals working with students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, over 50% of whom have educationally significant handwriting challenges that make it difficult/impossible for them to complete written schoolwork with paper and pencil.

Read more about handwriting and keyboarding

[Keyboarding Versus Handwriting Speed and Learning Disabilities](#)

[Read 5 Evidence-Based Factors that Effect Handwriting Speed.](#)

[Read results from the handwriting versus keyboarding survey.](#)

[Download FREE Keyboarding Words Per Minute Goal Tracker.](#)

[Read more on workstation positioning.](#)

[Read research on Manuscript, Cursive or Keyboarding.](#)

Reference:

Feng, L., Lindner, A., Ji, X. R., & Joshi, R. M. (2019). The roles of handwriting and keyboarding in writing: a meta-analytic review. *Reading and Writing, 32*(1), 33-63.

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND STAFF THIS SCHOOL YEAR

There are many members of the special education team such as students, parents, teachers, teachers assistants, administrators, and related service providers. Occupational and physical therapists usually make up a small but important group of the special education team. Some team members, especially therapists, can have a varied caseload with students from different classrooms, grades and even schools which translates into working with many school staff members. This can make it very difficult to [communicate effectively](#) with all team members for each student. Each team member brings a different perspective on the student. Therapists don't have the benefit of seeing most students daily as teachers do, therefore [communication with the therapist and the student's parents and teacher](#) is crucial to determine a student's on-going progress. It can be a struggle for parents from year to year. Parents may encounter new teachers, staff, and therapists from school year to school year which can be frustrating. School staff, parents and school-based therapists can help to forge stronger relationships by following five simple steps. Here are some steps to increase positive [communication](#) with parents and school staff this school year:



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INTRODUCE YOURSELF

The most important step to improving communication is to introduce yourself to as many of the members of the student's special education team as possible including their primary instructors, teaching assistants, physical educators, computer teacher, etc . By forming relationships with the school staff, you will be more likely to hear about therapy concerns that a teacher may have about a student. Therefore, you may be able to address those concerns before they impact the student's educational abilities further. If you do push in therapy, you will most likely be more comfortable with the staff members. If some of your students are pulled out of the classroom for therapy sessions, frequently observe them in the classroom as well making yourself more visible and available to other staff members.

Many times the parents are the true team leaders. They can provide all the past medical and educational history and the best overview of the child. Therapists should always remember to introduce yourself to the parents of the student. Send a letter home or make a phone call to provide the parent with your contact information if they should have any questions. Ask the parents what their concerns are regarding the student's current therapy services. Make sure that you have current phone numbers and email addresses for each parent.

EDUCATE AND BE EDUCATED

More and more students with special needs are being included in regular education settings, resulting in many teachers not being fully aware of the role of school-based occupational and physical therapists. Educate team members about what your role is in the educational setting as early as possible. You want to avoid situations where three months into the school year a teacher asks the physical therapist why the student is not working on handwriting. Therapists can try giving an inservice to the staff members answering the basic questions of school-based therapy such as: What is occupational or physical therapy? What is the difference between school-based and medically based therapy? What type of activities will you be working on? Define for teachers and parents frequently used therapy terminology. Simplify complex topics such as sensory integration, neurodevelopmental treatment and muscle tone. Provide [hand-outs](#) describing what skills you are working on and why. Schedule the inservice during school hours and evening hours as well so that parents can attend.

Parents and school staff offer so much knowledge and insight on a student. Tap into that knowledge and learn from other team members. Therapists see just a snapshot of a student's daily life and they need to see the whole picture. This can be accomplished through observation, listening and asking questions about a student's overall daily life.

ESTABLISH HOW TO PROVIDE POSITIVE COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS AND STAFF

You will need to determine how you will communicate with all the team members. Establish this as early in the school year as possible and with a positive attitude. Perhaps a monthly meeting with a teacher or phone call home would be an effective way to address current goals or concerns. Maybe sending weekly or monthly progress reports to the teachers and parents may be a suitable option for some students. E-mail can be a simple way for many parties to communicate at one time by carbon copying your email to all members of the team. Don't always offer criticism or problems. If a student does particularly well on a task during therapy let the teachers and the parents hear about it. For students with many team members, one option is a daily or weekly log that allows for quick, simple written documentation from a student's parents, teachers, therapists, and other staff members. [School and Home Communication Forms](#) have several daily and weekly logs.

TIPS ON POSITIVE COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

Parents are an integral part of the special education team. They know the most about their children's strengths, weaknesses, and personal preferences. Therapists and other school staff need to include parents in all decision making for children. Here are some tips on improving your communication with parents:

1. Always start off a conversation **stressing a [child's strengths](#)**. No one wants to hear only negative comments.
2. **Be very specific** about your concerns for their child without using any medical terminology.
3. **Do not be judgemental**. If the child is the firstborn in a family, parents may not always recognize delays in the child's development.
4. **Be patient**. You may be the first person to tell the parents that their child may need some extra help. Give them time to digest the information and schedule a time to talk again.

5. **Allow plenty of time for questions.** Make sure you have the time to address any questions the parent may have. Do not run off to your next scheduled appointment with unanswered questions.

6. **Listen!** Make sure you listen to the parent's comment or concerns. They usually have the best insight into their own child.

PROVIDE CARRY OVER ACTIVITIES AND IDEAS

Therapy is only provided for a limited amount of time for each student. In order for therapy goals to be met, most [therapeutic activities and ideas](#) must be carried out throughout the student's entire day. Teachers and parents are the primary instructors in the student's life. By providing teachers and parents with carry over activities this ensures that the student is maximizing his/her potential.

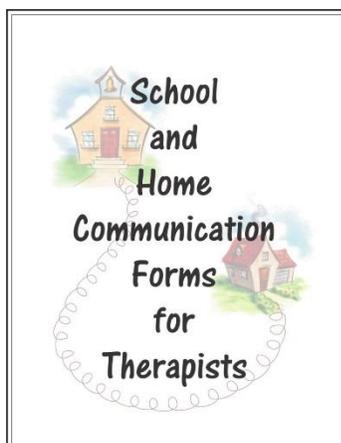
Offer [activities](#) that are easy to perform throughout the course of the day rather than "therapy homework" which adds one more thing for a teacher or parent to supervise. Try providing parents and teachers with [fun, easy, therapeutic games](#) that can be played with the child. Keep in mind that the activities should be written in simple format with no medical terminology.

Check with teachers and parents for ideas and activities that they need carried over during therapy sessions. If a student is following a certain behavior plan you will want to know what that entails. If a student is working on a specific subject matter that needs reinforcement, perhaps you could incorporate academic material into the therapy session.

FOLLOW THROUGH

All members of the team should always respond promptly to any issues or concerns that arise. Make sure to answer any notes or questions that you receive in a timely manner. This allows the special education team members to know that you have read and validated their comments. Fulfill all the requests made of you, that way you can expect the same in return from the special education team. If you make a suggestion during a team meeting, be sure to follow through on the suggestion and be available to offer feedback on how it went at the next meeting.

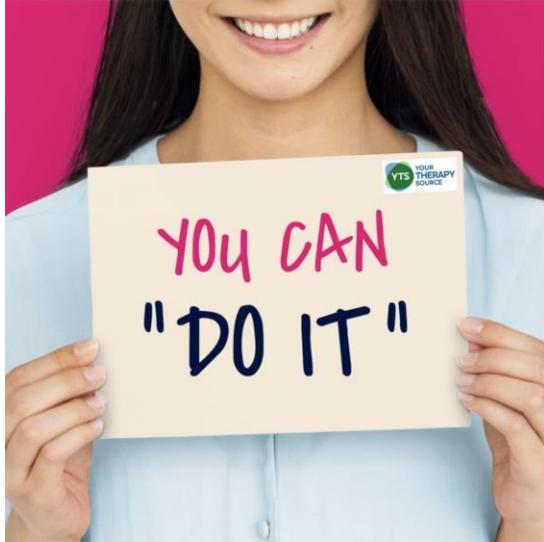
By following these five steps, everyone's voice will be heard on the special education team which is of great value to a student's overall success.



[School and Home Communication Forms for Therapists](#)

Summary: Therapists, school staff and parents are all so busy it can be hard to communicate. Positive communication with parents and school staff is so important! This collection of forms will save you loads of time. Therapists can review schedules, report on daily or weekly progress, track behavior, review IEP goals, track communication and more. It is suitable for all school-based therapists. Parents can request the therapist to complete daily or weekly updates especially beneficial for non-verbal children. [FIND OUT MORE and download a sample form](#)

STUDENT STRENGTHS IN THE CLASSROOM – FIND THE POSITIVE



We have all witnessed it. Students with special needs often receive negative comments or misconstrued negative comments. Day after day, students or parents are frequently told to fix this, increase this or improve that. How about finding the positive and looking for student strengths in the classroom? When we encourage students that they can do it because they are capable it is so important. They know we are on their “team” and that we believe in them.

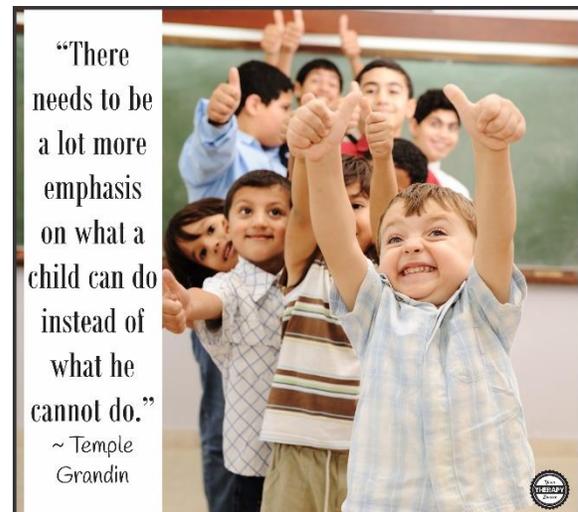
We all know every student has strengths. It is our job as teachers, therapists and parents, to help students utilize their strengths and talents to the best of their abilities. Temple Grandin says it best – “There needs to be a lot more emphasis on what a child CAN do, instead of what he cannot do.”

Need Help to Determine Student Strengths in the Classroom?

When we help students find their strengths it can help with motivational level and internal drive to improve. For example, if a student has a wonderful imagination utilize that when teaching new skills.

If you need some help to determine positive attributes and talents in students finish some of these statements (with the student and parents help):

1. This student is best at...
2. This student has an amazing ability to...
3. This student is frequently recognized for...
4. This student smiles when...
5. This student is happiest when...
6. This student participates the most when...
7. This student does this better than any other student...
8. This student is highly interested in...
9. This student is highly motivated by...
10. This student always takes pride in his/her work when...



Try Being More Specific About Student Strengths

If you need more suggestions to pinpoint student strengths in the classroom, then consider some of these character traits to help guide you.

- energetic
- loving
- kind
- creative
- outgoing
- determined
- adventurous
- cooperative
- trustworthy
- leader
- playful
- courageous
- funny
- smart
- helpful
- bossy
- confident
- persistent

Read more [character traits here](#).

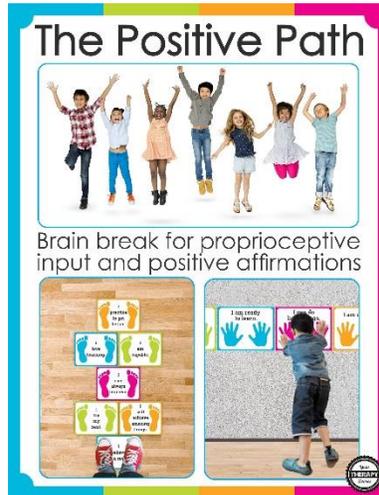
Use Positive Affirmations to Support Students

Positive affirmations for children (and mantras) are terrific tools to teach to support students. They help them develop a healthy sense of self as well as a positive mental-social-emotional mindset.

Affirmations are short; positive “I am” statements that call you into an intentional way of being. They should be accompanied by a visual image and inspire visceral sensations. When you use an affirmation, you should experience yourself as you are declaring.

You can read more about [teaching positive affirmations to children here](#).

Positive Affirmation Resources



Support student strengths in the classroom by combining positive affirmations for kids and proprioceptive input with [The Positive Path](#). Children can jump along the path or do wall push-ups while they read words of encouragement. Students can benefit from proprioceptive input to help get their bodies ready to learn.

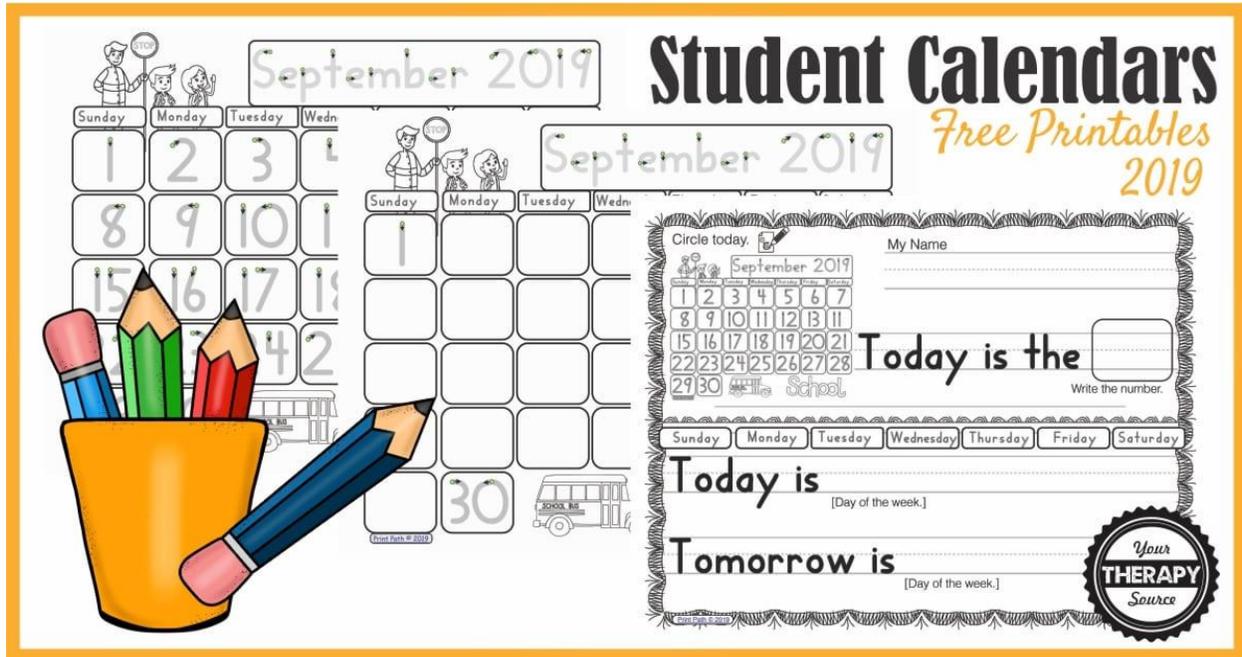
Using the power of positive thinking with daily affirmations and physical activity can help students get their brain and bodies ready to tackle the school day. [FIND OUT MORE.](#)



[Positive Affirmation Posters and Cards for Children](#): This is an electronic book of 25 positive affirmation posters (8.5" x 11") and smaller cards of the posters (4.25" x 2.75"). Empower children to realize all of their talents. All too often, children with special needs are told what they are unable to do, how about teach them what they can do!

www.YourTherapySource.com

FREE DIFFERENTIATED MORNING MEETING CALENDAR TIME PRINTABLES



Free Differentiated Morning Meeting Calendar Work Printables

These FREE morning meeting calendar work printables, created by school-based Occupational Therapist Thia Triggs, provide differentiated instruction for students to participate during calendar time and morning work. This freebie is great for individual, group and contextually based therapy sessions. Reinforce your student's IEP math and ELA goals while focusing on your own therapeutic objectives.

These printables are from the [Calendar Bundle 2019-2020](#). The bundle includes 3 levels of calendars – blank, start dots and traceable and all the materials to create a calendar notebook for 2019-2020. [Find out more details here.](#)



[Download your FREE calendar work printables here.](#)

Need more activities to help with number writing and counting?

Check out

[Multisensory Number Writing Bundle,](#)

[Shape, Number, and Alphabet People Craftivity](#)

[Cardio Skip Counting.](#)

POOR EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SKILLS? TRY USING CHAINING



Do you work with clients who struggle with working memory, focus, organizational skills, planning, impulse control or shifting from one task to another? This may be a sign of poor executive function skills. It can be very difficult to manage the day to day tasks or learn new skills when executive function disorder is present.

Have you ever tried using forward chaining when you are teaching new skills? Perhaps you utilize backward chaining or total task chaining? Or maybe it all sounds confusing?

If you use task analysis, then you most likely use forward chaining. This method of teaching new skills helps to put the task analysis into action.

What is forward chaining?

When clients have difficulty achieving a goal or poor executive function skills, frequently the goal is broken down into smaller steps to work on each part at a time. When using forward chaining, the client completes the first step, a reinforcer is provided and the adult completes the remaining steps.

On the next attempt, the client completes the first two steps, receives reinforcer, and adult completes the remaining steps.

This is repeated until the client can complete all the steps and achieve the goal.

Example of Using Forward Chaining in School

Many times students with executive function deficits can struggle with completing large projects. This approach can help make the task more manageable. Here is an example of using forward chaining in occupational therapy or with any school staff at school.

Student needs to independently transition from the classroom to lunch. Task analysis indicates getting the lunch box from the backpack is the first step and starting to eat lunch is the final step. Student can complete step one (getting the lunch box from the backpack) and receives a reinforcer. An adult or peer assists or prompts for the steps such as line up with class, walk in hallway, locate lunch table, sit and lunch table, and open lunch. On day two, the student will get the lunch box and line up with the class and then receive a reinforcer. Assistance continues. Day three student gets lunch box, lines up, walk in hallway and then receives a reinforcer. This continues until the student is independent with the entire task.

What is Backward Chaining?

With backward chaining, the process is reversed. The adult or peer provides assistance throughout several steps until the client can complete the last steps independently. Once the last step is completed by the client the reinforcer is provided.

Example of Using Backward Chaining in School

The goal is for the student to independently bring homework home to complete. Task analysis indicates that the first step is to write down each assignment and the last step is to pack up the backpack with the correct books, notes, etc to complete the homework. The student must bring the homework home but can not complete all the steps. The student would complete the last step of actually packing the backpack but throughout the day the adult or peer would provide prompts or support to complete each earlier step.



What is Total Task Chaining?

The client completes all steps with prompts and reinforcers for each step. This is used when the client can complete parts of every step but needs some assistance and encouragement along the way to achieve the goal.

Example of Using Total Task Chaining in School

The goal is for the student to independently organize and complete a large school project. Task analysis indicates that the first step is to choose a topic and the final step is to turn in the complete project. The student has the skills to complete parts of every step of the task analysis with teacher prompts. After each step is completed with the prompts, the student receives the reinforcer until the entire project is complete.

When to Use Forward Chaining, Backward Chaining or Total Task Chaining to Help with Poor Executive Function Skills

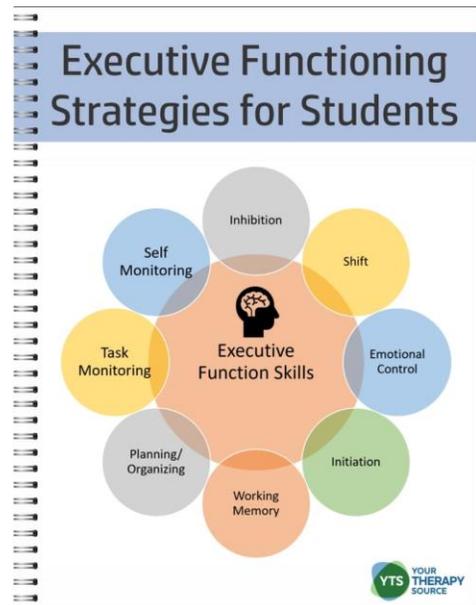
When clients or students present with poor executive function skills, using chaining to achieve new skills can be very helpful. Choosing forward, backward or total task chaining is based on each individual client or student's abilities and the skills being taught.

Chaining helps students to organize materials, plan for each step, and receive prompts when necessary to complete academic tasks and functional skills at school.

Need More Information on How to Help Students Poor Executive Function Skills?

Do you work with students who struggle with working memory, organization, impulse control, and focus? Are you searching for executive functioning strategies to help your students succeed?

The [Executive Functioning Strategies for Students](#) digital workbook is a step by step guide to help boost your student's working memory, impulse control, focus, emotional control, organization, planning, and self-monitoring!



Reference:

Gist, C. (2019). From Frazzled to Focused: Supporting Students With Executive Function Deficits. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 51(5), 372-381.