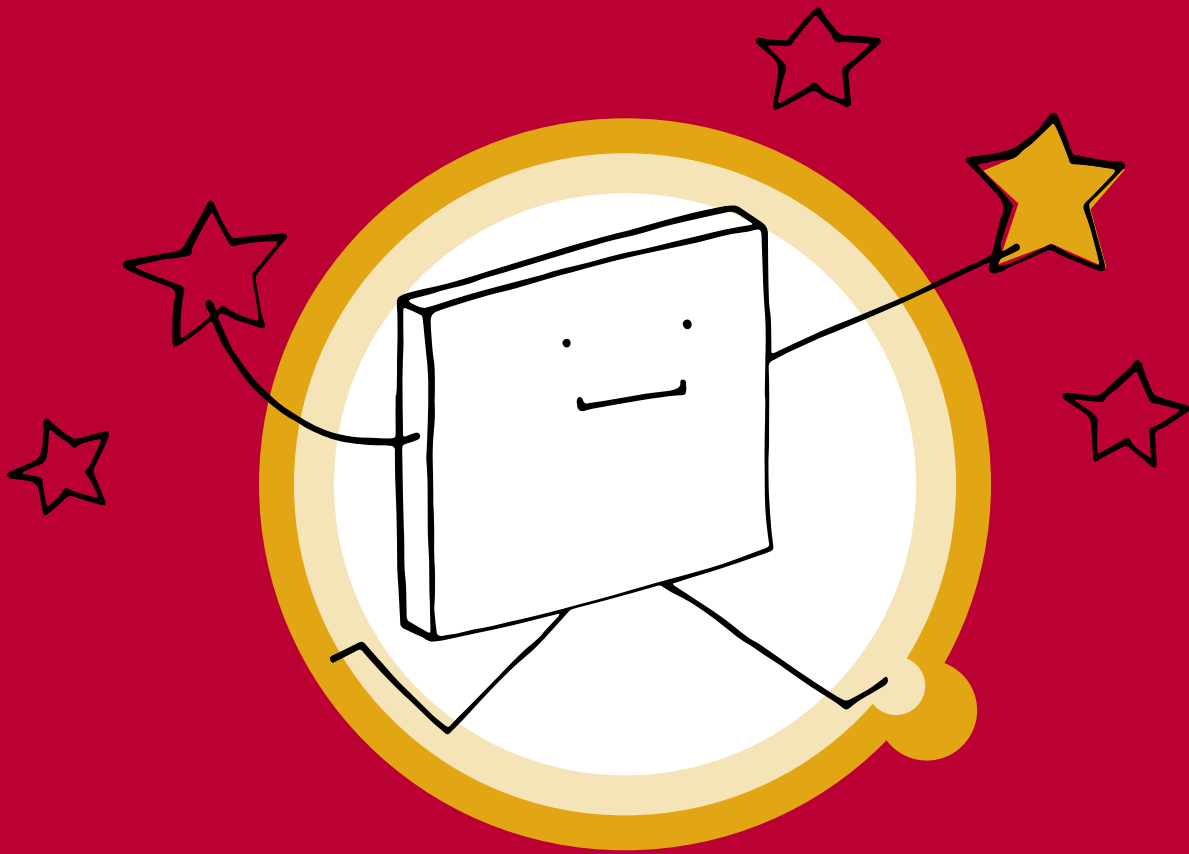


# The EPIC Strategy booklet: A guide for teachers

These strategies apply to all children but are particularly relevant to children with ADHD, autism, Dyspraxia/DCD and those born prematurely.

These strategies can also be used by parents at home.



**Edinburgh Psychoeducation Intervention  
for Children and Young People<sup>®</sup> (EPIC)**



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH



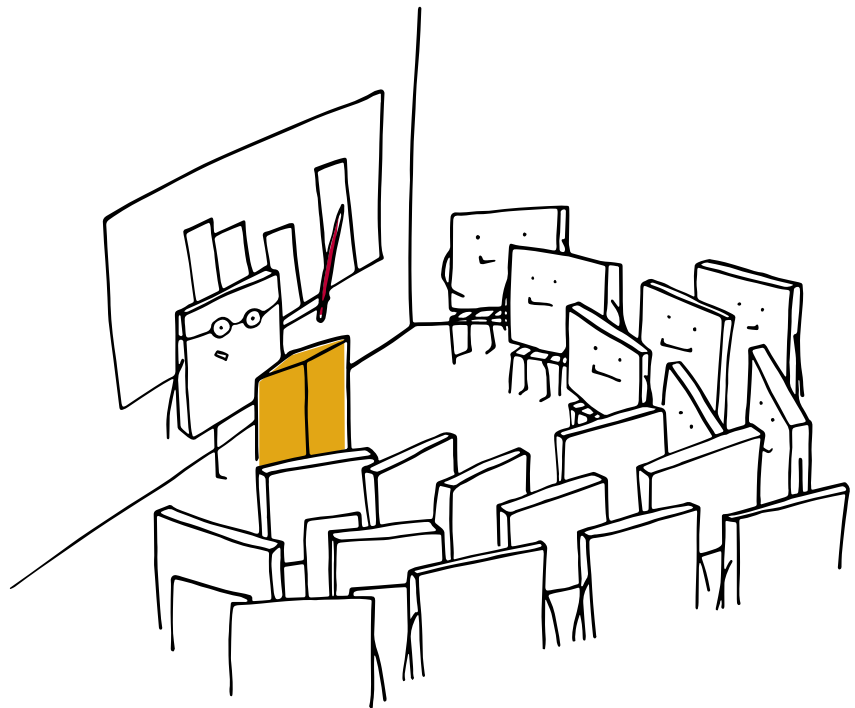
# EPIC Booklets

There are two types of EPIC booklets:

- 1) The **EPIC Strengths and Difficulties** booklets.
- 2) The **EPIC Strategy** booklet.

This is the **EPIC Strategy** booklet

If you would like to read more about ADHD and Dyspraxia/DCD see the **EPIC Strengths and Difficulties** booklets.



# Contents

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# Introduction

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## Who is EPIC for?




- The principles of EPIC apply to **all children** but are particularly relevant to children with **Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Dyspraxia/DCD and those born prematurely**. They may help a child who needs extra support but does not have a diagnosis.
- The strategies in the booklet can benefit the whole class by maintaining a positive learning environment and supporting every child to access the curriculum. These strategies can also be used at home by parents.
- At the heart of this approach is understanding the individual child's **strengths** and **difficulties** regardless of age, gender, or diagnosis. Co-occurrence, when a child has two or more diagnoses, is common e.g. having a diagnosis of both ADHD and autism. It is also very common for a child to have one diagnosis and have traits of another that might not be diagnosed but still impacts how they learn and interact.
- The strategies described in this booklet are mainly useful for children up to the end of primary school but many may be useful for adolescents.

# Introduction

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## Should the same strategies be used with every child?

---




**EPIC** involves an individualised approach to child development that aims to facilitate learning and positive well-being in children and young people. You can select an area to develop based on what the child is struggling with.

---

## When can the educational professional use the booklet?

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While the educational professional can use the booklet whenever they want e.g. during a lesson, we think the optimal time to read it will be when planning a lesson.

---

## How else might this booklet increase understanding?

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You may have read this booklet with one child in mind, however you may realise there is another child in the class with similar challenges.

# Introduction

---

## How to use the strategies



- 1. Identification:** The strategies can be used to identify the area a child is having difficulty with. Sometimes a child can seem like they are struggling with attention but really it is a memory problem or sensory issue. The strategies can help to work out the underlying difficulty.
- 2. Understanding for the child:** Teachers are already using many of these strategies. We are suggesting them as particularly important for children with difficulties. We are also promoting their use with added dialogue. Using strategies enables you to talk about the importance of things like planning, stopping and thinking and can facilitate the child's awareness of their difficulties and the need to take steps to help them (see example page 41).
- 3. Practise:** Doing the activities encourages the child to practise thinking skills that are not necessarily automatic to them such as the need to stop and think, and identify ways of working in a distracting environment.
- 4. Personalisation:** We encourage teachers to develop their own games personalised to the child e.g. games with a toy they like.

# Which area to develop?

Before choosing which strategies to try out with the child / children, think about:



Which area would you like to focus on developing?

Planning ahead

Sitting still for a long time

Following instructions

Thinking before they speak

Keeping track of the time

Thinking flexibly

Processing emotions

Starting or finishing a task

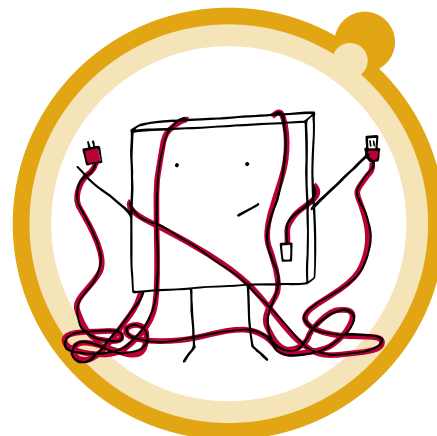
Waiting their turn

Moving from one task to another

Remembering things

Making friends

Staying focused



# Which area to develop?

---

These things can sometimes get in the way of...

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Doing school work

Listening or  
paying attention

Knowing how you  
are feeling

## But...

Understanding **the thinking processes behind these difficulties** can help you identify and then manage the barriers to learning.

It is important to try to understand why sometimes a child wants to leave the classroom, not stay seated, or talk out of turn (sometimes referred to as challenging behaviours). For example, sensory overload, exclusion, or needing a movement break can cause feelings of distress. Recognising and reducing (or removing) triggers can support a child's wellbeing.

## Medication

If a child has ADHD they may be taking medication. Medication helps a lot of children with ADHD but does not tackle all the difficulties experienced by children with ADHD. Children with other diagnoses commonly do not take medication. Strategies, like the ones described in this booklet, are important regardless of whether the child is taking medication. See our website for more information on medication.

**Next, we are going to explore some factors that underlie learning difficulties and affect well-being. We will pair the difficulties with strategies that can help manage and resolve them.**



# Notes on terminology

---

**Executive functions:** a set of thinking skills that include organisation, self-control, self-monitoring, working memory, time management, flexible thinking and planning.

Difficulties with executive function can make it hard to focus, learn, follow directions, and handle emotions.

Some children have **sensory processing differences**.

**Sensory avoiding:** finding bright light, noises, smells, tastes and textures uncomfortable, overwhelming, or painful e.g. leaving the classroom when it is too loud.

**Sensory seeking:** being under sensitive to input and look for more sensory stimulation. Sensory input can help children regulate their sensory processing system and then engage with learning e.g. fidget spinner, or wiggle chair.

A lot of children have a combination of both.

# Inhibition

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## Starting a task – being prepared

---

Before the child starts a task or activity, it is important they **STOP and THINK**. Encourage them to think about what they are going to need to do the task before they start. They can plan out what they are going to need alongside what they are going to do.

---

## Starting a task – distractors

---

Some children find it hard to **STOP and THINK** because they find it difficult to avoid responding to distractors. Often this may feel automatic to the child. This automatic response to a distractor can end up meaning they bypass the **STOP and THINK** process because they are focusing on something else that is not task related.

A key part of starting a task effectively is identifying what may act as a potential distractor(s). This often differs between children.

**Think about:**

With this child, is it a sensory issue such as being distracted by sounds nearby? Does the distraction reflect something else in the classroom? Try using the Body Scan technique described on the next page to identify what are key distractors for the child.

The attention section (page **12**) and games section (page **36 & 39**) of this booklet can also be used to target this difficulty.

# Inhibition

---

## Body Scan



Sometimes there can be so much happening, it's difficult for the child to know **how they are feeling** or what they are **finding distracting**.

The child can be encouraged to try 'scanning' themselves or what is around them. This can make it easier to know **how they are feeling** or what they are **seeing, hearing and smelling**.

### How to do the Body Scan

Ask them to close their eyes so that they can start the body scan.

Start by thinking about your toes. What can you feel?

Move up your body stopping at your legs, tummy, arms, chest and head to think about what you can feel.

Is anything uncomfortable?

Now listen to what is happening around you.

What can you hear?

Is anything distracting you?

# Attention

---

Some children find things around them very distracting. This can make it difficult to concentrate on a task.



This could be things they see, noises they hear, or a feeling that they need to move their body. These distractions can become intense and make it difficult to stay on a task.

Some children's attention difficulty can lie in shifting their attention flexibly from one part of a task to another.

There are lots of things you can do to help them with this:

- 1. Getting up and moving around**
- 2. Fiddling with an object**
- 3. Taking a sensory break**
- 4. Using attention flexibly: play games/activities for awareness and practise**

# Attention

## 1. Getting up and moving around

---

Sometimes a child might feel it is hard to stay sitting at their desk for a long time e.g. needing a **movement break**.

---

You could talk to the child about when it is ok and not ok to **move around the classroom**.

When a child feels like they need to move their body, ask them to put your hand up and ask you if they can run an errand for them like returning the register or collecting some printing.

Giving the child the opportunity to stand while working can also help. They can place a book on a higher level while they work.

### Story time

For children who need to move around, story telling time can be difficult as children are expected to sit still. An alternative is to ask some of the children to act out the story allowing for movement.

# Attention

## 2. Fiddling with an object

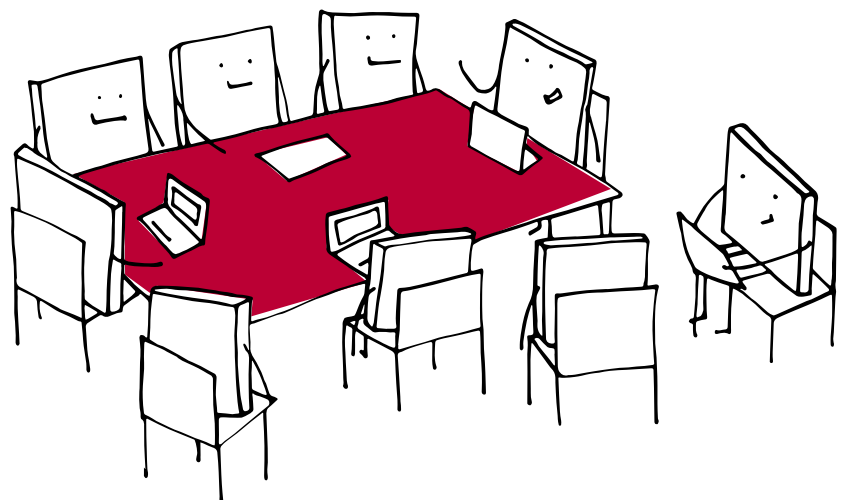
If the child has lots of energy, they might feel like they need to move their arms, legs or move in other ways.

Having an object to fiddle with can be a useful way of managing the distraction of feeling like they need to move.

It is important to choose the right object for the child to fidget with. It is also important to talk to them about when it can be used.

A toy should be chosen that does not distract other children – avoid one that makes any noise.

Think about whether it will distract the child from the task they are doing. The intention is the opposite but it needs to be the right toy for the child.



## 3. Taking regular sensory breaks

Sometimes a child will need a **break** from what they are doing or where they are working because the classroom is becoming over stimulating or they need to get up and move.

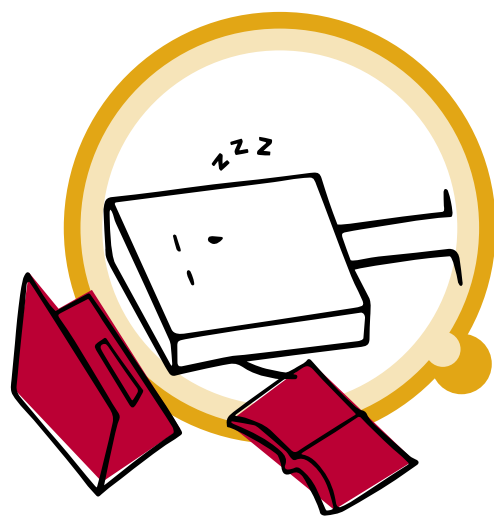
This is something that happens to everyone. Some children need more breaks than others.

A sensory break or “brain break” is taking a short break from seated learning activities. This can help the child to **stay alert, on task, and focused**. For this reason, it is important a child is not taken out of PE class or playground time.

Try using the body scan activity to work out if the child needs a break.

The body scan will help because then they can explain to you why they feel that they need a break. See page **11**.

If they do need a break, encourage them to ask you.



## 4. Using attention flexibly

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Some children's attention difficulty can lie in shifting their attention flexibly from one part of a task to another.

---

Playing Games for Awareness and Practise.

On page **36** we detail games and activities that can be used to help with attention flexibility such as switching the rules for snakes and ladders, noughts and crosses, or Connect 4.

The games can be used to practise being flexible with your attention and modelling how the child can be flexible with their attention and complete tasks more efficiently.

Also, playing the game may also help the child become aware of and understand their difficulty and learn which strategies they need.



# Self-regulation

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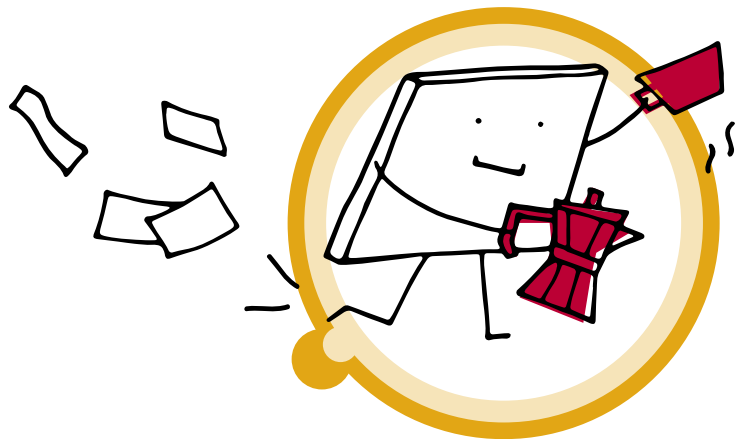
Some children can find it difficult to know how long it takes to do a task, or how much time has passed.

They can also find it hard to notice when they are doing something well or see how they have got better over time.

There are lots of things you can encourage them to do to help them plan ahead and be more organised.

**1. Using a timer**

**2. Keeping a diary**



# Self-regulation

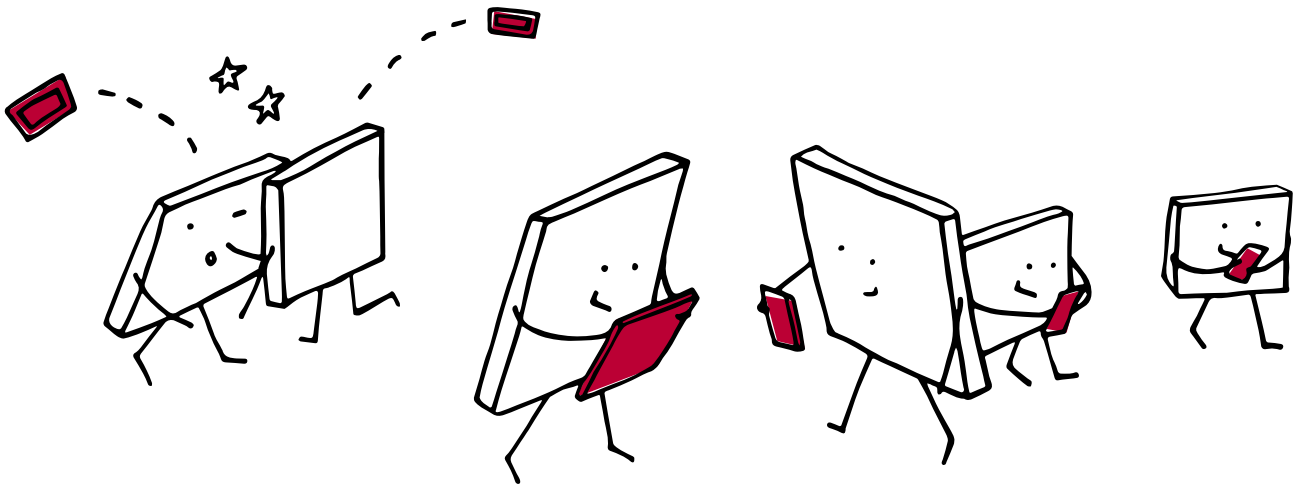
## 1. Using a timer

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A timer can be useful for some children so that they can visually keep track of their progress.



Sometimes if a child knows someone else is timing them, it can make them feel stressed or anxious. The child **having control of their own timer** can help them to get used to **sticking to time** and make it easier when they do not have control of the time.



# Self-regulation

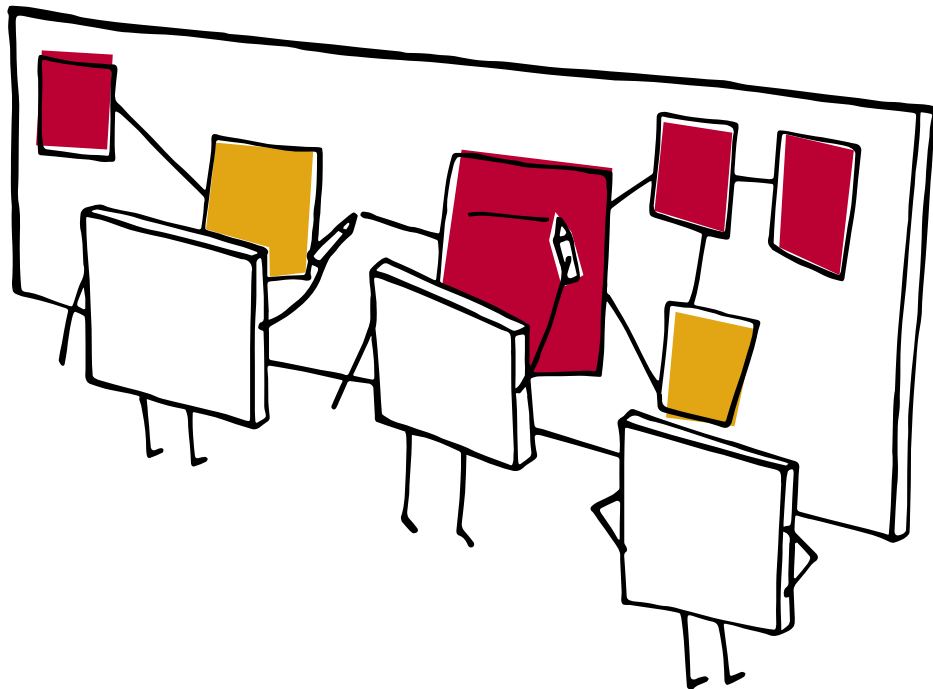
## 2. Using a diary or planner

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A good way to learn to keep track of time is to **use a diary.**

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A diary or planner can be useful for planning a day and for breaking down tasks into multiple steps using colour coding or other similar grouping techniques.



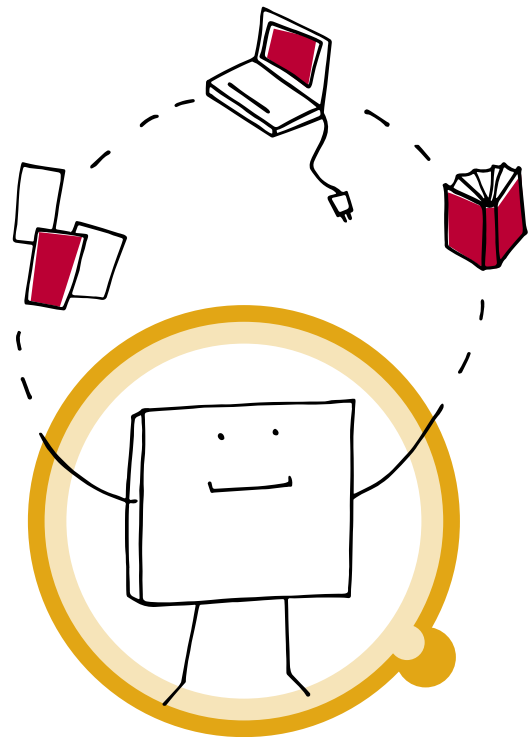
# Planning and being organised

Some children “live in the moment” and focus on what is happening now. This means they can sometimes find it hard to think ahead into the future.

This can make it difficult to plan what is coming next. Children who have these difficulties can also find it hard to be prepared as they do not know what they need to complete a task or goal.

There are lots of things you can do to help a child plan ahead and be more organised:

1. Setting goals
2. Step by step planning
3. Mapping it out
4. Using a planner or journal
5. Practising planning



# Planning and being organised

## 1. Setting goals

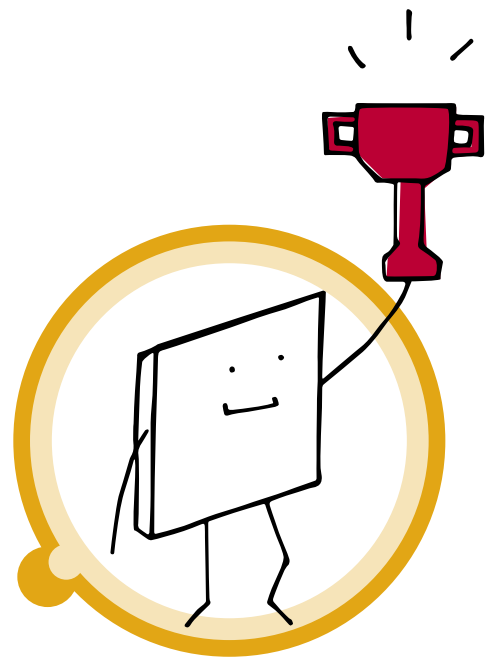
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**Setting goals/targets** before starting activities can help a child complete a task.



**These goals can act as reminders if they get distracted.**

1. Encourage them to focus on just one or two goals at a time.
2. Make sure they are realistic goals that you think they could achieve.
3. Set a realistic time to check in and see how close they are to achieving the goal.



# Planning and being organised

## 2. Step by step planning

---

You can encourage a child to **break down a task** in to smaller, more manageable chunks.



It shows the **order** in which steps need to be done to **reach the end goal**.

**If the instructions are in one block of text, encourage them to chunk it into steps.**

1. First do this...
2. next do this...
3. then finally do this.

Encourage them to tackle each part one step at a time.

# Planning and being organised

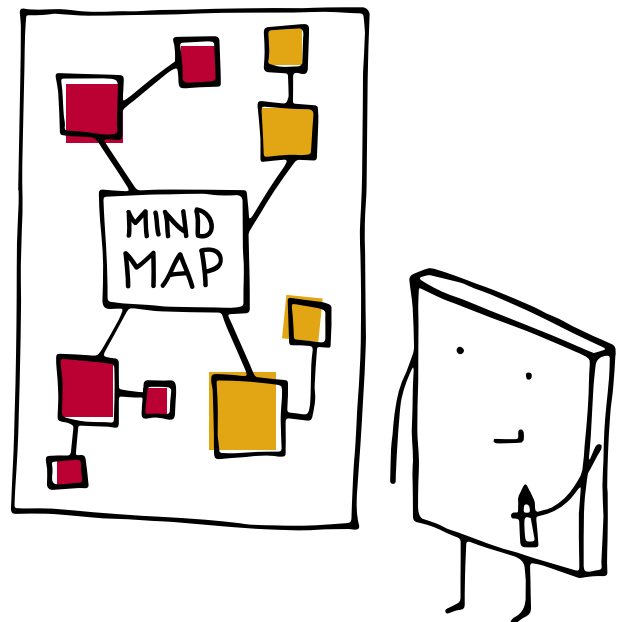
## 3. Mapping it out

A mind-map is a visual way to organise thoughts and ideas.

A mind-map has a main focus in the middle, with **ideas/themes** branching out from it. Using these branches can represent relationships between ideas.

Encourage the child to use a mind map to plan a story. Write “My Story” in the middle of your page and have branches for:

Beginning, Middle, End,  
Characters, Setting.



# Planning and being organised

## 4. Using a planner or journal

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A planner can be used to write down notes to remind the child as to what is coming up next.

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## 5. Practising planning

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Page **38** gives some examples of games and activities which give the child a chance to practise planning.

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Activities which involve thinking ahead like baking, building Lego, or crafting are a great way for the child to practise planning.





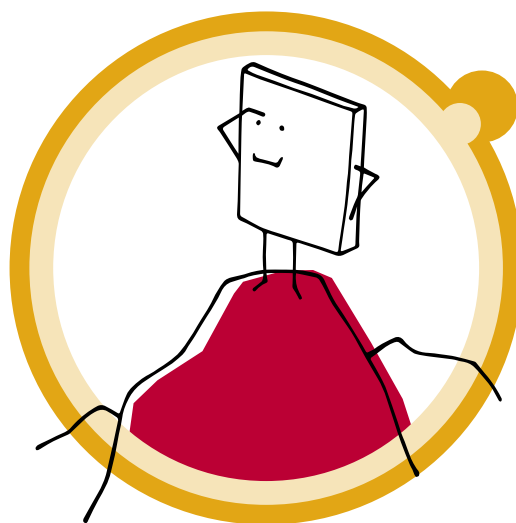
# Memory

Some children find it difficult to remember lots of things at once, or they forget things easily.

This can make school work difficult if the child can't remember what they need to do next or forget what came before.

There are lots of things the child can do to help themselves with this:

1. Breaking it down (chunking)
2. Writing it down
3. Rehearsing or repeating
4. Representing items visually
5. Active learning
6. Visual aids
7. Mental imagery



# Memory

## 1. Chunking (breaking it down)

---

Chunking is breaking down or grouping information to make it easier to manage.



Chunking allows the child to take smaller bits of information and put them together to make more meaningful and memorable wholes. Take bigger bits of information and break them down into easier to manage pieces.

Chunking can be used generally to help the child organise themselves such as when following instructions. Chunking can also be used when doing reading and number work.

### **Example: Following Instructions**

If a child finds it hard to remember or process instructions for a task, they can chunk it.

If the instructions are in one block of text, try chunking it into steps.

1. First do this...
2. Next do this...
3. Then finally do this.

Tackle each part one step at a time.

### **Example: Reading**


Ask the child to find all the 'th' words or the 'ing' words on a page when reading so they learn to group or chunk as a way of remembering (as well as practising phonics).

# Memory

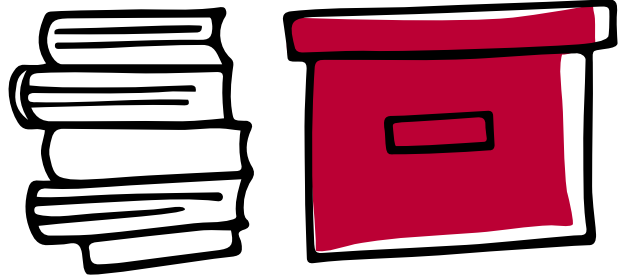
## 2. Writing it down

---

If a child finds it difficult to remember things, encourage them to write it down.



A mini-whiteboard, personal folder, or notebook can be very useful for a child with memory difficulties. When doing a task they can write the steps down and keep looking back to remind themselves what they are doing.



## 3. Rehearsing or repeating

---

Rehearsal is a simple memory strategy that involves repeating information in order to get the information processed and stored as a memory.



There are lots of different ways the child can use rehearsal to help in school. It is important the child understands they may need to repeat instructions in their head in scenarios where their peers may not.

### **Playing memory rehearsal games.**

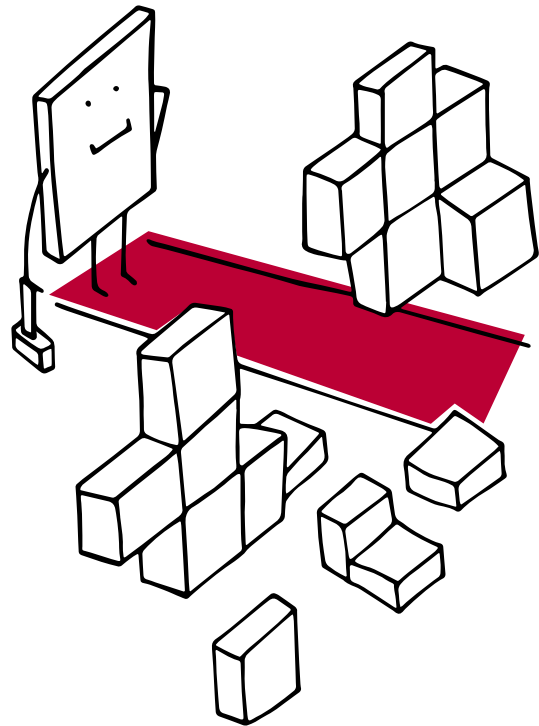
Playing games that use rehearsal can help a child to practise rehearsal, such as the shopping list game or the tea towel game. See page **37** and **40** for more examples.

# Memory

## 4. Representing items visually (using manipulatives)

If a child finds it difficult to remember things, think about whether visually representing items could be useful.

Examples include using toy figures or lego for number work. Items that are personally of interest to the child may be especially effective to use. Personalisation can help motivate the child to participate.



# Memory

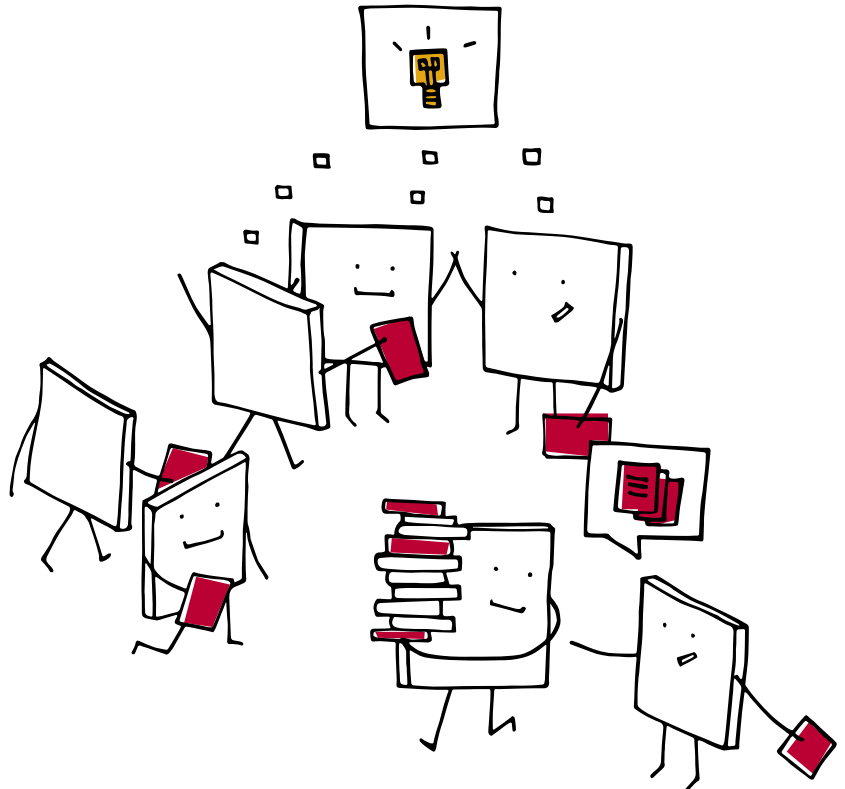
## 5. Active learning

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Teachers encourage all children to be an active participant in their learning.



Active learning may be **especially** useful for children with memory difficulties. See page **35** for other examples of active learning such as rainbow writing, step writing, singing activity ideas, and using visual aids.

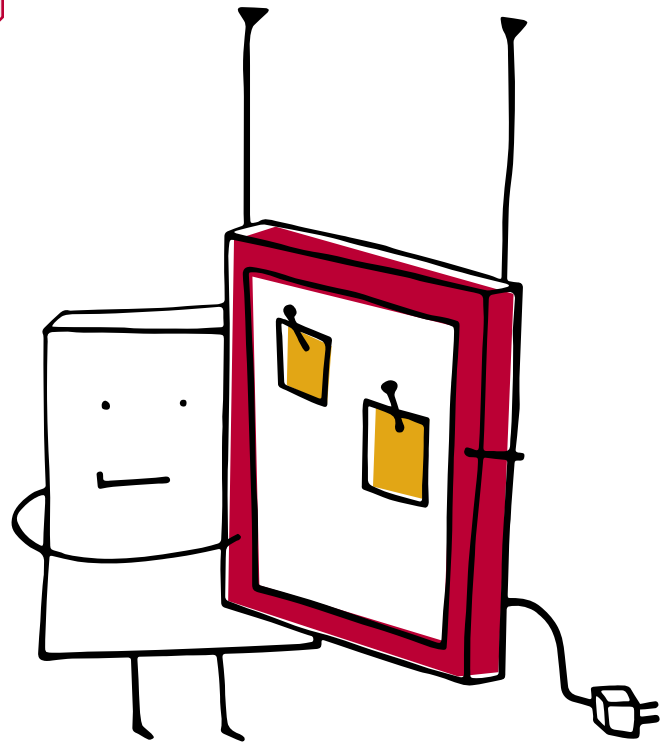


# Memory

## 6. Using Visual Reminders

If a child finds it difficult to remember things think about whether a visually aid such as a mini white board, diary or iPad could be useful.

Encouraging the child to have a visual reminder of steps in a task or the different parts of an instruction is a good life skill.



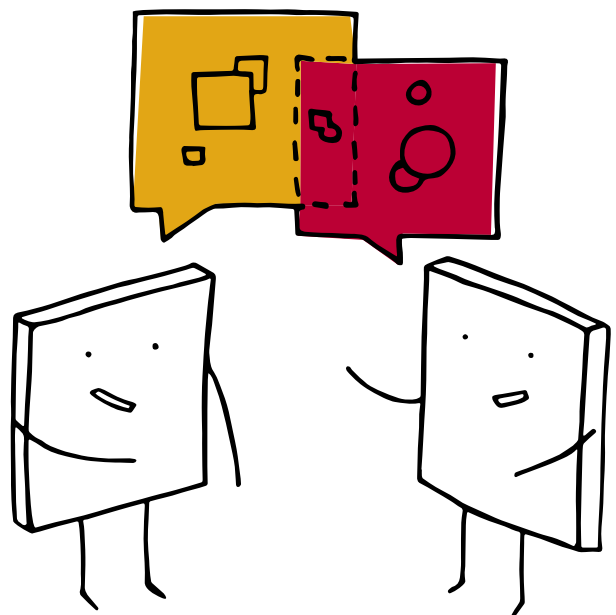
## 7. Mental imagery

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Creating a mental image in your mind to remember an item or a set of items is known to help memory.

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An example is remembering lines in a poem or a nativity song. Encourage the child to picture any items in the text in their mind – the more dramatic images they create the better.





# Emotions

## Reactions to the environment

It is important to be aware and to try to understand why sometimes a child wants to leave the classroom, not stay seated, or to talk out of turn (sometimes referred to as challenging behaviours). For example, sensory overload or needing a movement break can cause feelings of distress. Recognising and reducing (or removing) triggers can support a child's wellbeing.

## Monitoring responses

Some children are able to stop and think when they get upset and before they act. Others find it difficult to stop and think.

### Using the car and brakes analogy

You can explain that everyone gets angry, sad, or overwhelmed from time to time. The analogy of a person being like a car can be used to help the child understand this.

Encourage the child to think of some children having good working brakes that allow them to stop and think when they get angry, before they act. Other children's brakes don't work so well, they might not let them stop at all. What we need to do is work on improving our brakes which involves developing internal (thinking) and external strategies to help this, when our internal ones don't allow us to stop and think.

# Emotions

## Supporting emotional well-being

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### **Supporting self-reflection**

The child can be encouraged to use techniques that effectively pause their responses and allows them to stop and think. This gives them time to reflect on what is going on around, how they are feeling, and how they are responding. These techniques can help lead to identifying the next strategy to use e.g. doing the body scan. They can be used throughout the day.

Also, when the child is upset, these techniques can be calming and relaxing.

### **Examples of these strategies are:**

1. Body scan (described on page **11**)
2. Breathing (page **43**)
3. Visualisation (thinking of a calm situation)
4. Stretching/yoga poses/tensing and relaxing muscles
5. Grounding technique (page **43**)

### **Other examples of calming items and toys:**

Fidget toys, stress ball (e.g. squishy), listening to music (if school has resource/capacity), using ear defenders and glitter bottle (they can shake when angry, but also watch glitter falling to calm down).

### **Supporting well-being**

Examples of strategies for supporting a child to process their emotions and reframe their thoughts are on page **42**.

# More useful activities and games

## Active learning examples

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- Use lego pieces to remember number bonds – put the answer on one brick (e.g. 10) and two bricks underneath with smaller numbers (e.g. 4 and 6).
- Rainbow writing (each letter in a different colour), stepped letters (e.g. s, sh, sho, shoe) and bubble writing for reading and spelling words.
- Use strategies for spelling that encourages the child to chunk information e.g. Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants. The first letter of each word spells BECAUSE. Or they can sing the song Mrs D, Mrs I, Mrs FFI, Mrs C, Mrs U, Mrs LTY for DIFFICULTY.
- Use visual resources e.g. lego or toy figures to represent numbers for times tables and division personalised to the child's interests.
- Items can also be visually represented using a mini whiteboard, notebook, play clock for time, purse of money for money work.
- Do singing activities for numbers and letters (e.g. Geraldine Giraffe YouTube).

# More useful activities and games

## Planning, thinking flexibly, inhibition, and strategy use

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### Snakes and Ladders – Switching the Rules

Play snakes and ladders as you normally would. After a while, **switch up the rules** so that you go down ladders and up snakes. If they make a mistake, use it to talk about how it can be difficult to think about something from a **different perspective** when you are used to one perspective

This game can be used to support counting and adding abilities, as well as changing the rules to encourage thinking flexibly

Use two dice and encourage them to add these up themselves before they make their move. Comment on the different pairings (e.g. five and five, that makes ten – but six and four also makes ten)

### Noughts & Crosses / Connect 4 – Planning and Switching the Rules

Noughts & Crosses (aka Tic-Tac-Toe) and Connect 4 are fun games you can play to help your child practise planning and talk about planning

When playing with them, tell them out loud what your strategy is for winning and encourage them to do the same **to promote strategy use**.

Ask them where they think you might place your next counter **to promote planning**.

Half-way through ask them to switch colour counters with you. Chat through with them the difficulties around switching rules during a task.

Remember to play a few games without doing this as well to **keep it fun!**

# More useful activities and games

## Memory games

### Tea Towel Memory Game

Place a few items on the table and give the child 20 seconds to remember them, then cover them over with a tea towel.

Ask them to list the items that were there.

Increase the number of items to increase difficulty and demonstrate that we can only remember a few things at once.

Encourage the child to use a strategy to remember the items, for example:

Group them together in meaningful chunks (e.g. by colour, item type).

Make up a story to describe all of the items (e.g. the car drove to McDonalds and bought a burger with some money).

### Post-its

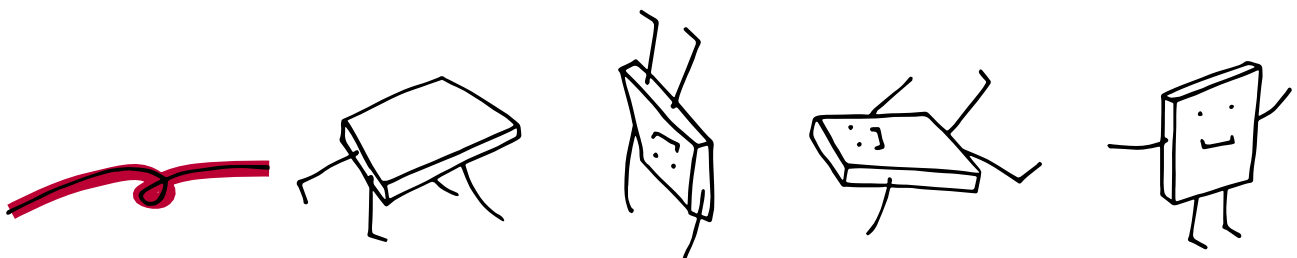
For children with learning difficulties, repeating information in different contexts helps them learn. For example, having post-its up around at home with spellings means the child is learning in two contexts. You can encourage the child and parent to use post-its to do this.

### The Shopping List Game

One person starts and says “**I went to the shops and I bought...**” and adds an item to the list. Let’s say they chose “**apple**”. The next person says “**I went to the shops and I bought an apple...**” and adds a new item to the list.

Most people can only remember 5 or 6 at a time!

Playing games that use rehearsal can help a child to practise this skill.



# More useful activities and games

## Practice planning

---

### **Activities with instructions:**

This activity is suitable for any task that needs instructions, Examples include: baking recipes, Lego building, crafting

### **Before you start, encourage the child to check:**

- What the end goal is (i.e. what are they making?)
- What they need before they can start (e.g. ingredients, equipment)
- Take the instructions step by step, covering up every step except the current one if needed. This will help them to ignore information that is currently irrelevant

### **Book Review**

Reading a book in the context of conducting a book review is a great way to help the child practise recalling information and organising and using it flexibly.

All of these skills are important for planning. These activities will help the child to think about planning in other contexts.

## Practising inhibition control

---

### **Practising inhibiting an automatic response with ‘Simon Says’**

The popular ‘Simon Says’ game can be used to model and practise the ability to stop what the child may experience as an automatic response.

In ‘Simon Says’ the child/children are only to respond with an action instructed by the teacher if the instruction starts with ‘Simon Says’. If the instruction is made without ‘Simon Says’ they do not follow the instruction.

When playing the game talk through the difficulties there are in paying attention to the instruction e.g. ‘put your hands in the air’ and responding quickly to that instruction while also paying attention to whether the instruction was preceded with ‘Simon Says’.

Practise the game without encouraging a fast response at first so that the focus is on inhibiting the automatic response at all costs.

Speed up the game by encouraging fast responses perhaps putting children in teams and having a winning team for accuracy and speed. Talk through the difficulties there are at being accurate and fast and how this maps on to doing tasks in the classroom.

# More useful activities and games

## Practising remembering sequences

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### **Twister**

Lay out the Twister mat and give the child instructions one by one (e.g. right hand on blue, left hand on green)

Then ask them to start again but this time give them two or three actions in a row to remember before they are allowed to act them out

Talk to them about how we can only hold a certain number of things in memory at once and that it is important to take it one at a time.

They can try starting with a sequence they find easy to remember (e.g. two in a row) and then build up to three or four as they improve!

### **Clapping sequences**

Make up a sequence of claps and practise it with the child/children. Once you know it well, reverse the sequence for added difficulty!



# Using dialogue

## Using dialogue to support psychoeducation

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**We encourage the use of the strategies in this booklet with the adult adding dialogue to promote awareness and understanding of difficulties.**

**Here is an example of an adult talking to a child about remembering instructions.**

The adult could say:

“Do you notice remembering instructions is something you find hard?”

“How do you find remembering instructions?”

We would suggest avoiding using comparison language like “do you find this harder than your friends?”

The adult can validate the child’s experience by saying, for example:

“That sounds tricky.”

“Yes, remembering instructions is hard.”

“Sometimes ADHD/DCD (or other relevant diagnosis) makes remembering instructions hard.”

The adult can then explain there are strategies which can help by saying, for example:

“You know, there are things you can do to make it easier. You can repeat the instruction in your mind until you have written it in your diary.”

# Supporting well-being

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## **Supporting balanced thinking**

The child can write down their negative thoughts. This activity allows the child to get the thoughts off their chest and feel heard. Then, the child and adult can write down some positive thoughts too.

## **Encourage a child to express their emotion in another way**

The child can use colours to express emotions, like scribbling black for angry or drawing blue waves for happy. The adult can explain to the child that it is okay to experience a range of emotions, e.g. feeling scared, angry, or sad. The activity can help them express these feelings.

## **Using a worry monster**

The child can write down or draw their worries and then pop it in the monster's mouth. This helps the child get it off their chest and process what is worrying them.

# Supporting well-being

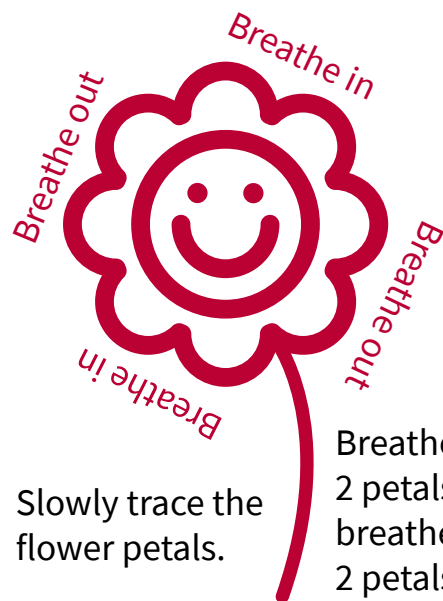
## Grounding Technique

Encouraging the child to focus on sensory experiences and their surroundings helps them process how they feel and helps with relaxation.

- 5 Things you can see
- 4 Things you can feel
- 3 Things you can hear
- 2 Things you can smell
- 1 Good thing about yourself

## Flower breathing

Encouraging the child to use a visual aid to do deep breathing can help them focus



# The EPIC Strategy Booklet

## Edinburgh Psychoeducation Intervention for Children and Young People<sup>©</sup> (EPIC)

### A guide for teachers

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We hope this guide has been useful in giving you some ideas of how to help a child with their strengths and difficulties.

We very much welcome feedback on our resources: please contact Dr. Sinead Rhodes at [sinead.rhodes@ed.ac.uk](mailto:sinead.rhodes@ed.ac.uk) with any comments.

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