

# ADHD In Plain Language

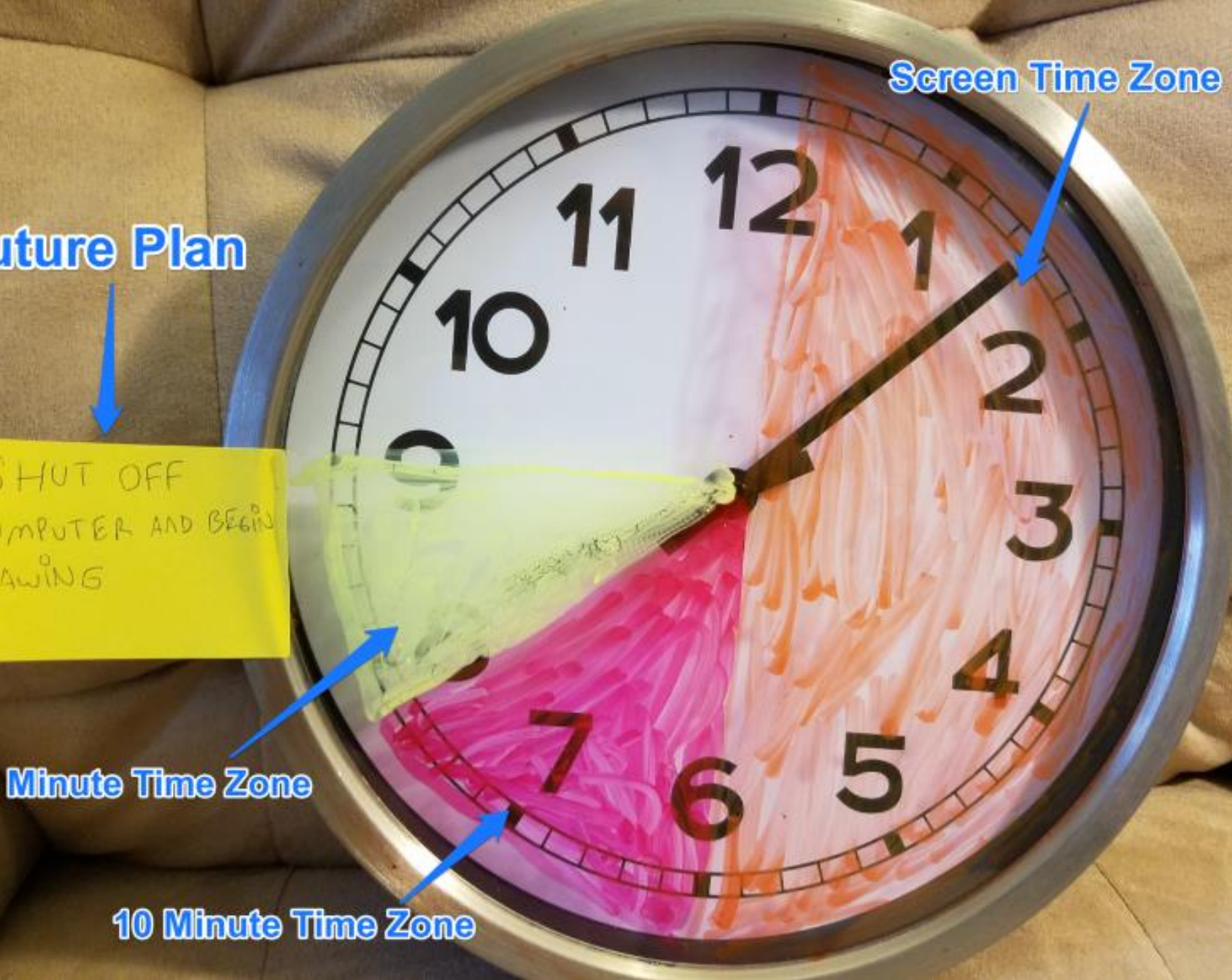
Ryan Wexelblatt, LCSW

**2023 ADHD and Related Concerns Conference**



ADHD  DUDE

REAL HELP. RIGHT NOW.



## What I hope you'll take from this presentation:

- Develop a practical understanding of ADHD, that you haven't heard before.
- Learn what helps to build skills, and what does not work.
- Learn some practical strategies you can begin implementing immediately.



# About me and how I got into this work

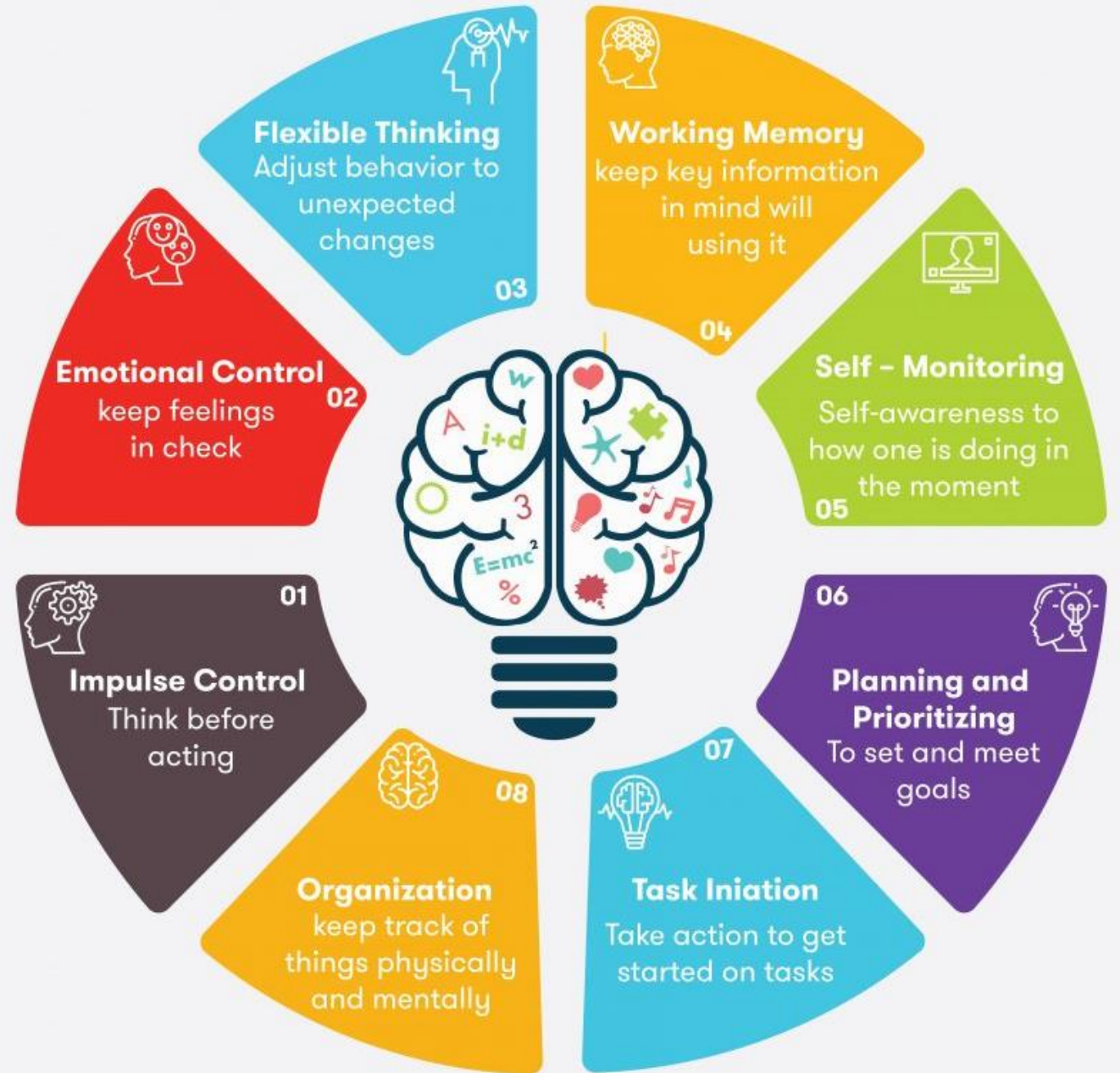
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- Licensed Clinical Social Worker, School Social Worker, ADHD-Certified Clinical Services Provider and father to a son with ADHD.
- Founder of ADHD Dude & Trip Camp.
- ADHD Dude YouTube channel.
- Create content/webinars for ADDitude Magazine.
- I am originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and now live in Tucson, Arizona.
- You can read about my training at [adhdude.com](http://adhdude.com)

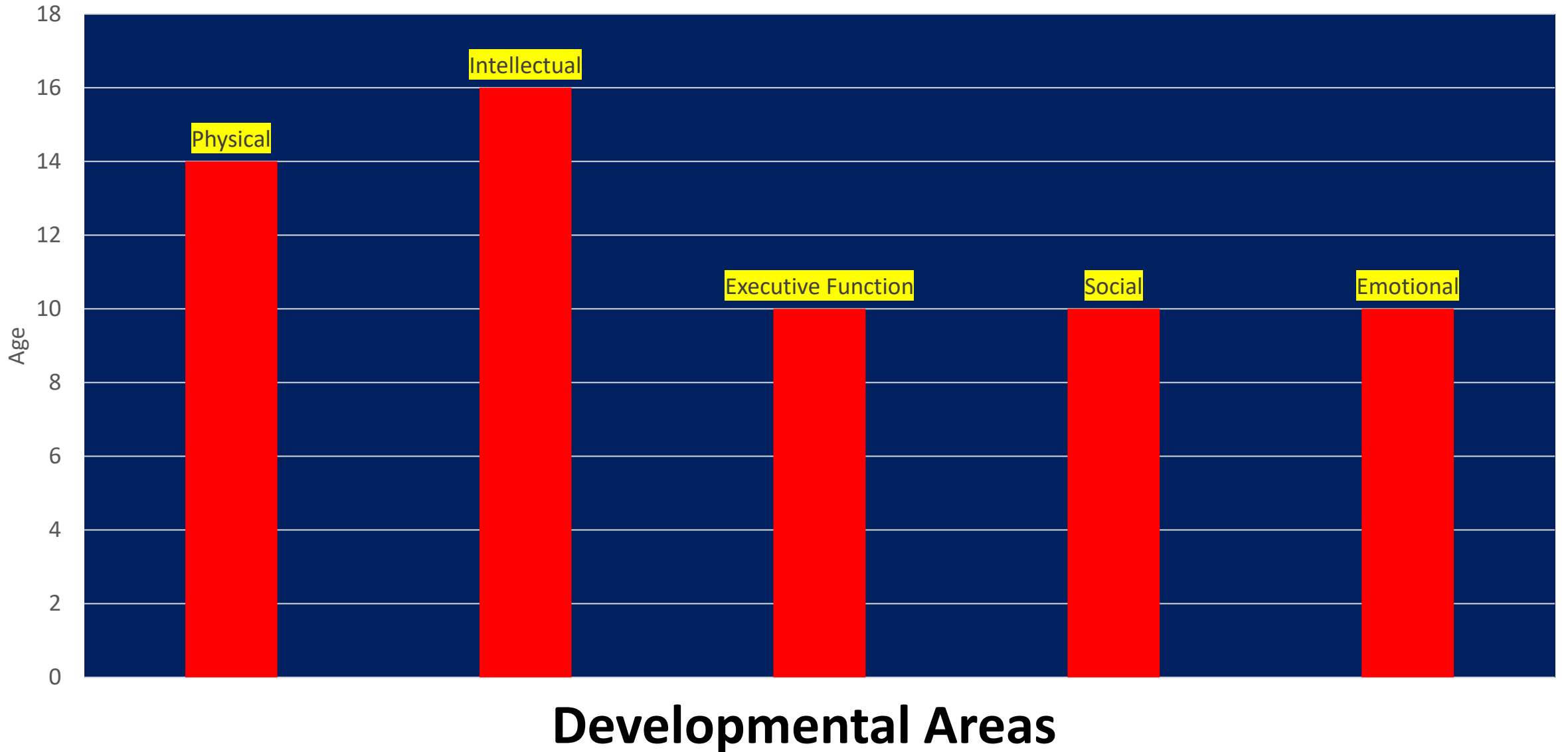


# ADHD is an executive function developmental delay.

- A delay in the development of the pre-frontal cortex (frontal lobe) results in executive functioning delays.
- Kids with ADHD have a 2–3-year gap between their chronological age and “executive functioning age”.
- There is no such thing as “executive dysfunction” or “executive function disorder”; those terms are not formal diagnoses.



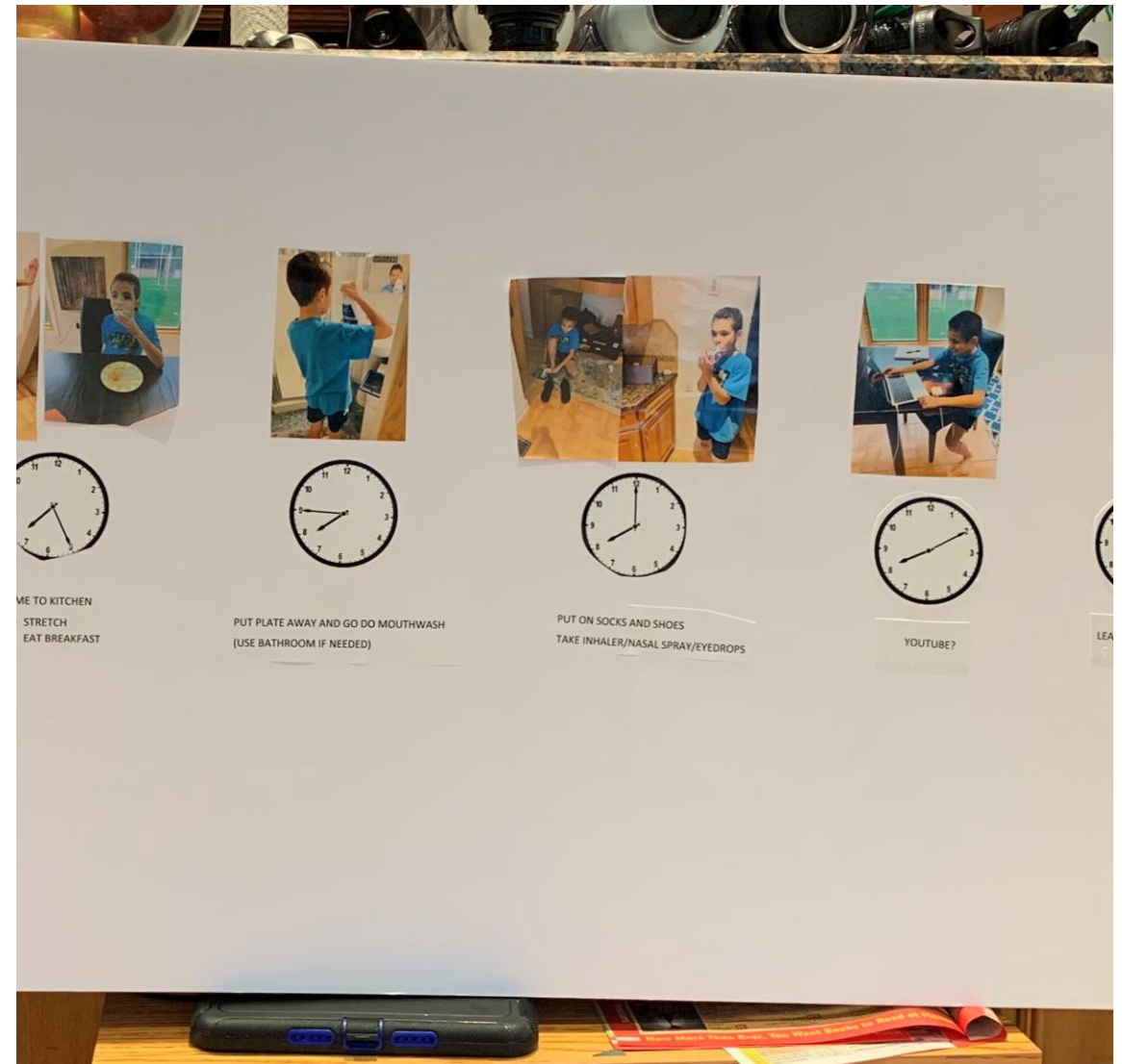
# Sample Developmental Chart of a 13 Year Old Diagnosed with ADHD





# ADHD can be summarized as:

- Lagging *future thinking skills* (non-verbal working memory).
- Inconsistent use of internal dialog (“Brain Voice”).
- Difficulty sustaining attention to non-preferred tasks and subjects.
- Sensing the passage of time.
- Difficulty with age-expected emotional regulation skills.
- Cognitive flexibility, ability to adjust as-needed.
- (For some) inconsistent use of *social executive function skills*.



# ADHD “disconnects” verbal working memory from non-verbal working memory



Verbal Working Memory  
(Self-Talk & Stated Intentions)



Non-Verbal Working Memory:  
(Visualizing yourself doing something in the future)

This is where kids  
with ADHD live,  
which is why we  
need to teach in the  
moment.

**Episodic Memory**

**The Present**

**Non-Verbal  
Working Memory  
(Future Thinking Skills)**

*Difficulty recalling  
emotions/information  
from past experiences &  
applying what was  
learned from those  
experiences to the  
present or near future.*

*Ability to visualize oneself  
doing a task in the near  
future. Has everything to  
do with motivation since  
motivation is an "emotion  
of the future".*

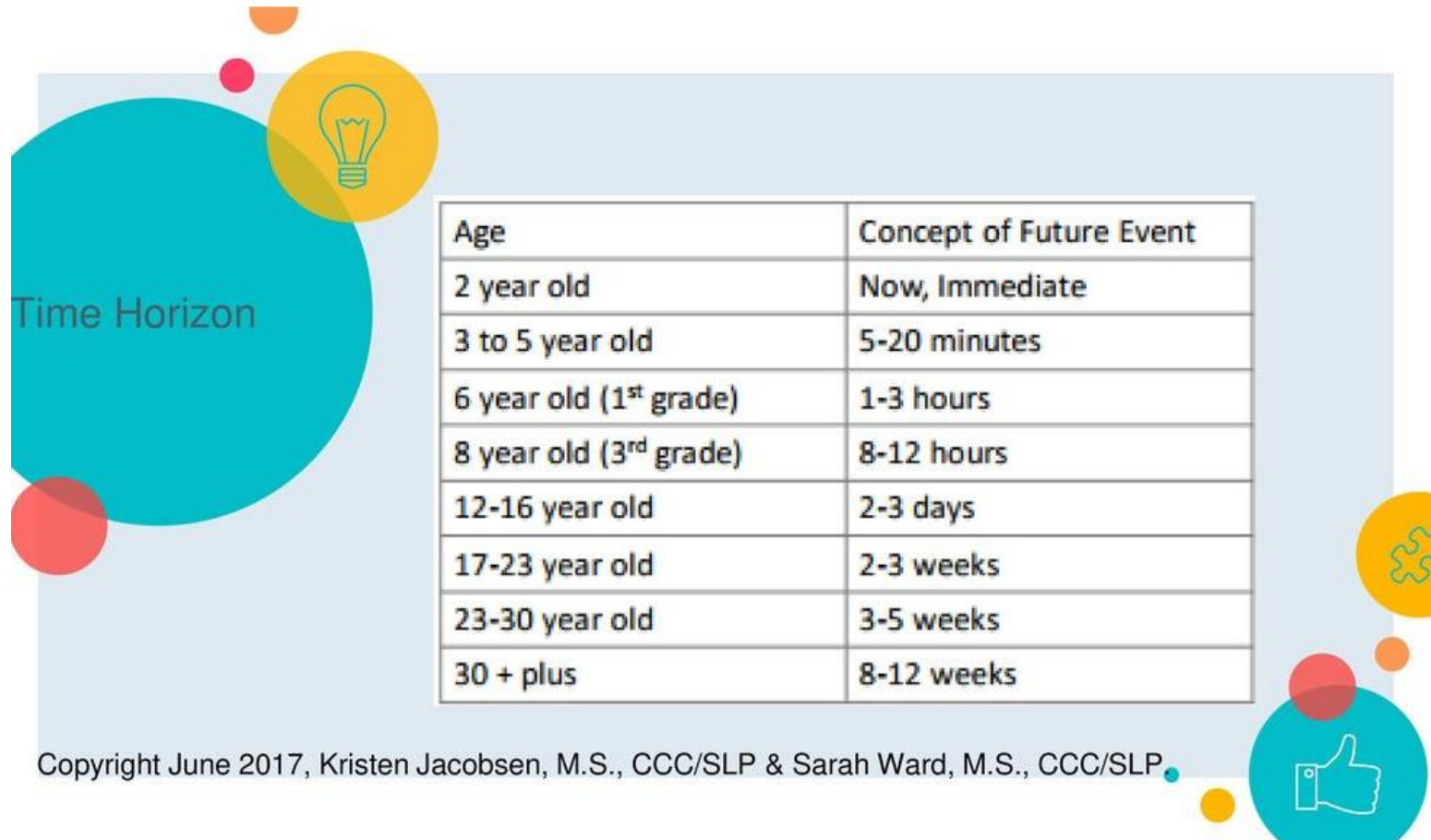


# What do lagging executive function skills look like at school?

- Does homework but doesn't hand it in.
- Unnecessary papers & trash in backpack/binders.
- Reading comprehension/getting the "bigger picture".
- Difficulty with writing assignments.
- Waiting until the last minute for bigger assignments.
- Thinks assignments will take much longer or shorter than they will take.
- Difficulty in unstructured social situations.



# What do lagging executive function skills look like at home?



- “Prompt Dependence”
- Difficulty sustaining attention to non-preferred subjects/tasks
- Difficulty with “future thinking skills”
- “Feeling” time
- Lack of situational awareness (reading a room)
- Recalling past information and applying it to the present/future (episodic memory)
- Transitioning from preferred tasks to non-preferred tasks (getting off video games)
- Spending more time arguing about a task than the task will take

*Helping* is doing something for someone that he is not capable of doing himself.

*Enabling* is doing for someone things that he could and should be doing himself.

## What inhibits and builds executive function skills?

### **Inhibits**

- Doing tasks for your child they are capable of learning to do independently (enabling overdependence).
- Constant prompting/directing (prompt dependence).
- Solving problems for them (Denying the opportunity to build independent problem-solving skills).
- Micromanaging academic performance at the expense of developing independence and building executive functioning (telling them what they have for homework, ensuring assignments get handed in, etc.)

### **Builds**

- Free play/spending time with friends without adult direction/"hovering"
- Participating in any art/music/martial arts.
- Providing "scaffolding" instead of prompting.
- Teaching visual strategies to help build non-verbal working memory.
- The use of declarative, visual language instead of prompting.



# What can happen when executive function challenges are not addressed?

**Continued prompt-dependence (Kids do not learn to use their own executive functioning because parents have always acted as their executive functioning)**

If you go to college prompt-dependent, it may be a very short trip.

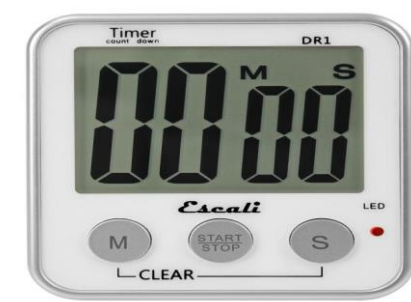
**Inflexibility Tipping Point: When there's a rapid upward trajectory in inflexibility and refusal to accept help, typically begins between 14-15.**

This is when kids become resistant to accepting help yet are still over-dependent on parents to act as their executive functioning.

I have a saying: Flexibility is cultivated, and inflexibility is accommodated.

Have you tried any of these without success?

Trust me, it's not your fault. They don't work for most kids with ADHD.



### Which of the above will help your child with ADHD:

- Learn to feel the passage of time
- Move from being prompt-dependent to independent
- Help to get off video games without fights or nagging
- Develop resiliency to get through non-preferred tasks
- Help to transition from preferred to non-preferred tasks without arguments or blow-ups
- Get through daily routines without constant supervision & reminders
- Keep track of assignments and remember to turn in completed homework
- **Learn how to use his/her executive functioning instead of you constantly acting as his/her executive functioning**

**Answer: None, because they do not teach skills**

# What does work

- Teaching how to “feel time”
- Visual scaffolding to build future thinking skills
- Incentivizing getting through non-preferred tasks with immediate, tangible rewards
- Using visual, declarative language
- Applying “if-then” thinking to teachable moments
- Previewing or “frontloading”
- You committing to stop acting as their executive functioning, with the understanding that they will experience some natural consequences.
- Stop accommodating inflexibility

## Nick Homework Order and Reward

English

One episode of Robot Chicken

Social Studies

Science

5-minute non-screen break

Math

Entrepreneurship

60 minutes of game if before 9:00. If after 9 then one show on DVR

If I finish homework without getting distracted this is the end goal







**This is what visual scaffolding looks like**

# Shifting the way you use language *is* the foundation for improving executive functioning.

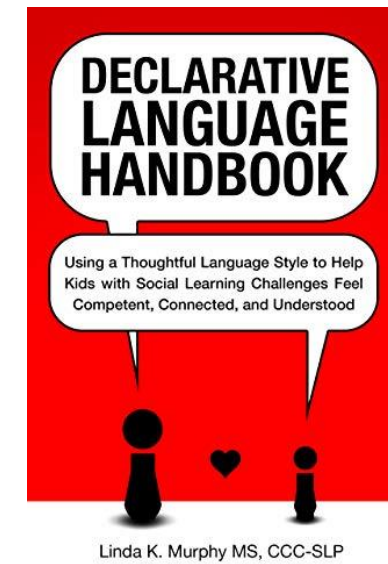
- Kids with ADHD are lagging in the development of their self-directed talk or an internal dialogue (what I refer to as “Brain Voice”). We need to help them develop this “inner voice”.



**Imperative Language:** Get your water bottle and your lunch bag.

**Declarative Language:** Do you look like you're ready for school?

One of these helps build internal dialogue; one does not.



<https://www.declarativelanguage.com/>

**Strategy:**  
Using  
language to  
improve  
self-directed  
talk

Use visual, declarative language instead of prompts:

“Look around the kitchen and figure out what needs to happen.”

“Do you look like you’re ready to leave for school?”

“Picture having YouTube time when you’re done math.”



# Strategy: Frontloading

“Here’s what today is going to look like. We’re going to Target and will leave here around 10:00. After that, we’re running some errands. We will not go into Game Stop while in the shopping center.

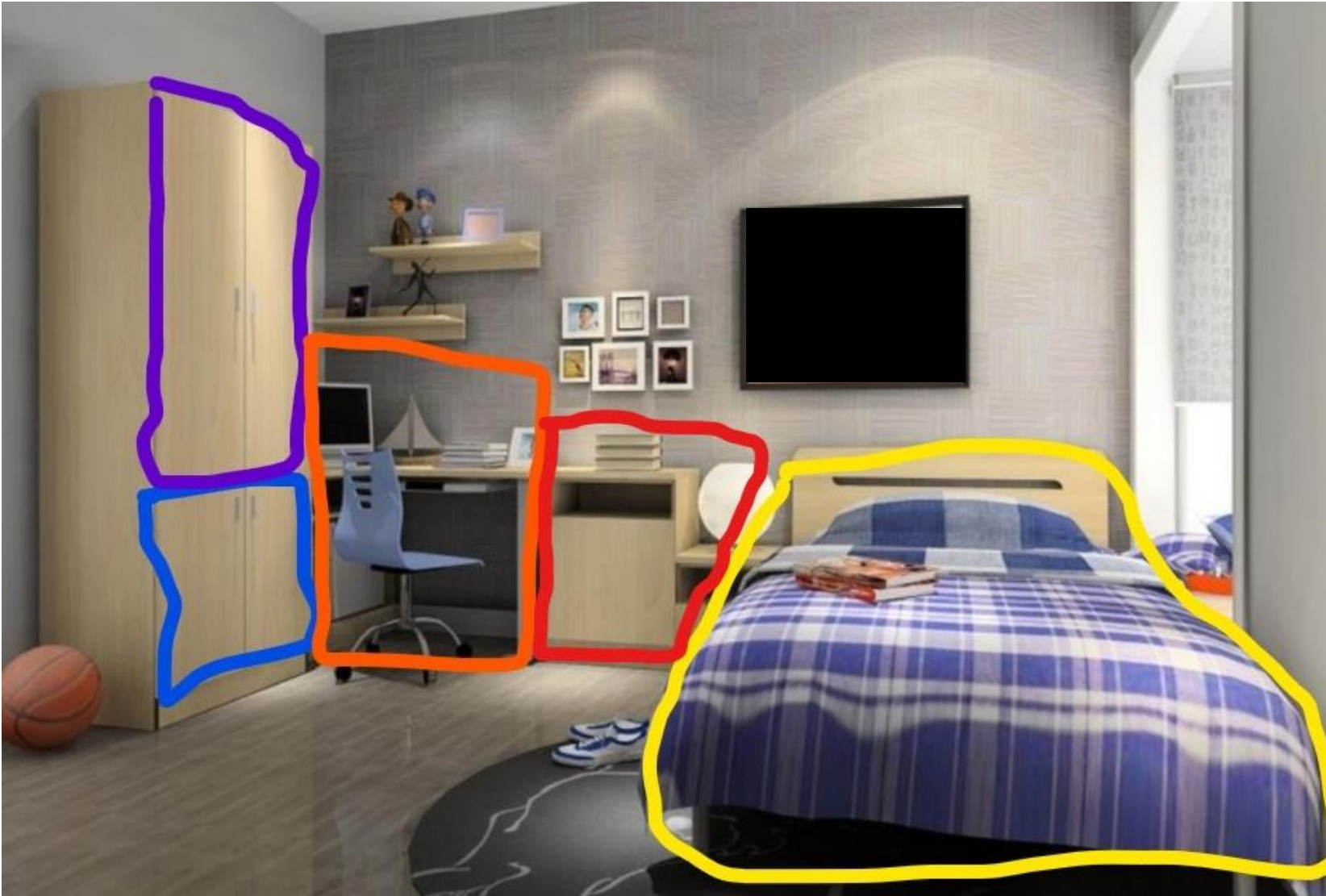


Have you ever said, "*Clean your room*" and expect it to go from this to this yet it never happens?



# Here's why..

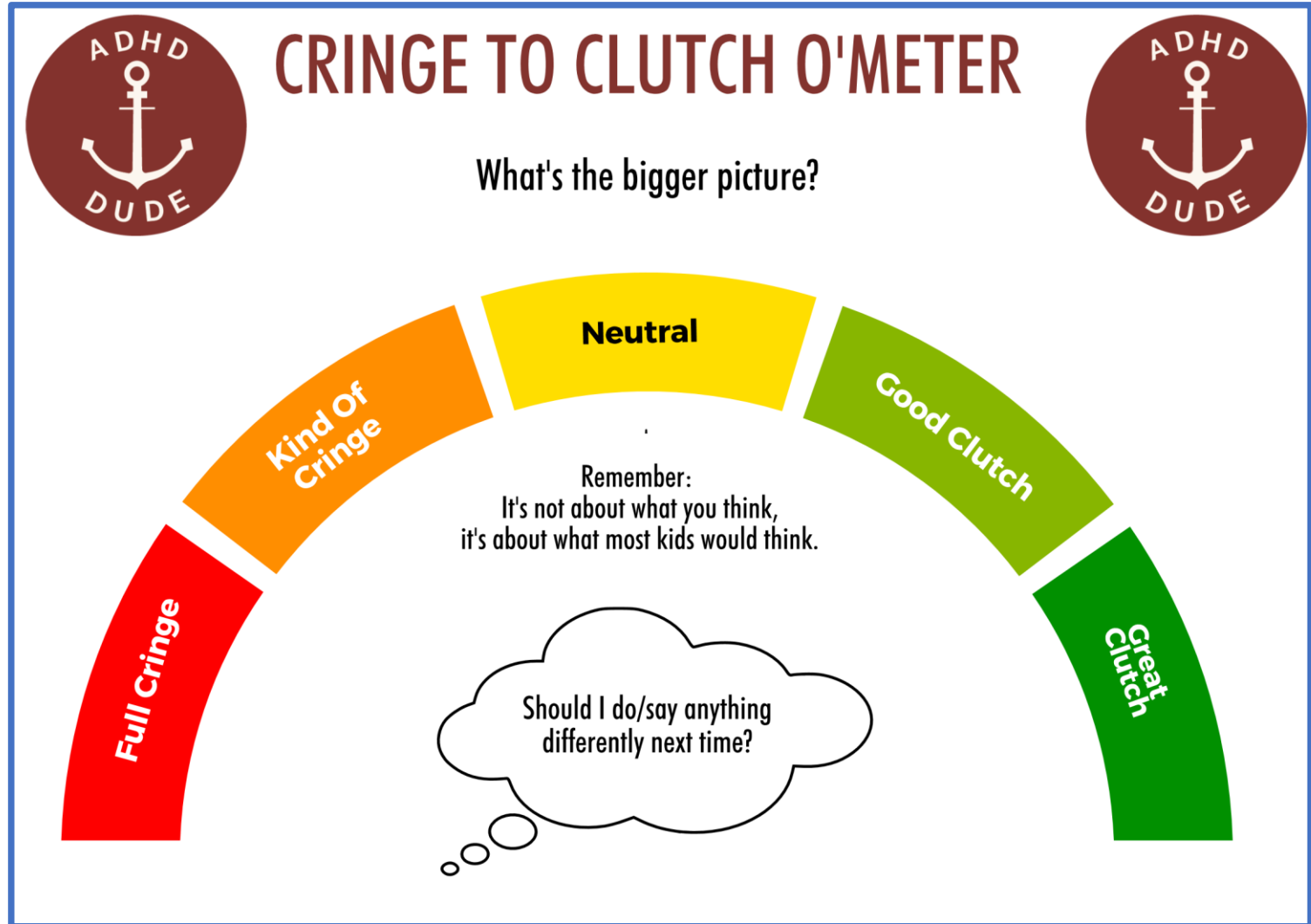
- Because they can't visualize what the space should look like when it's clean, regardless of how many times you may have prompted him to clean it.
- Because they don't know where to start or in what sequence to clean.
- Because they have no concept of how long it will take, so they presume it will take much longer than it will.





# Social Executive Function Skills

**Social Executive Function Skills:** The set of skills required to make behavioral adaptations in social situations in order to keep other people feeling comfortable around us.



# Social Executive Function Skills (SEF)

The executive function skills that are required to socially navigate through life successfully.

**SEF skills that kids with ADHD have, but may be lagging and not used consistently:**

- Perspective-Taking
- Situational Awareness (*Reading The Field*)
- Initiation (Reaching out to others)
- Cognitive Flexibility
- Relating to others' emotional experiences
- Appropriate use of humor



# In Elementary School lagging SEF skills look like:

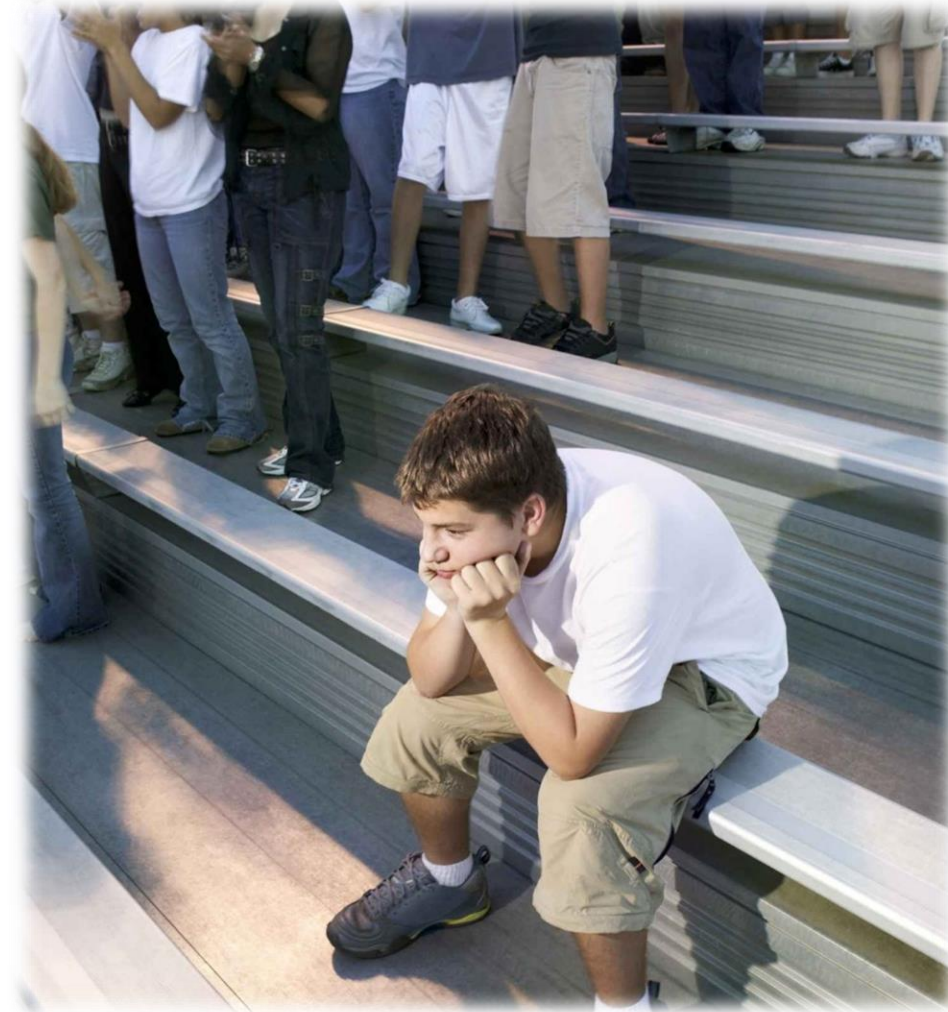
- Propensity to be bossy/controlling in play situations.
- Often relates better to younger kids/adults than similar-age peers.
- Propensity to talk at others about their interests. (perspective-taking).
- Difficulty in unstructured social situations like recess but can present O.K. in structured social situations.
- Can make friends but difficulty keeping them.
- May claim they are being “bullied” when their words/behaviors elicit a negative response in others.
- May be “smothering” of a new friend.
- **Age 8 is when SEF challenges become noticeable**
- **Age 11 is when most parents realize that their child needs help because social expectations increase.**





# In Middle & High School lagging SEF skills look like:

- ***(Many of the ones included in the previous slide.)***
- Has begun retreating into an online world of video games/social media.
- Inflexibility may get worse around age 14-15 (Inflexibility tipping point).
- Criticizes other kids (*They're weird, annoying, etc..*)
- Inappropriate use of humor.
- May only want to befriend kids with higher social status who are not accepting of him/her.
- Lacks an understanding that kids his/her age spend time with peers outside of school.
- *"I don't care what people think of me."*



## What does not help build social executive function skills

Being around kids with more developed SEF skills

Role playing scripted, socially appropriate behaviors

Traditional “talk therapy”/counseling

**Social skills groups**

## What does help build social executive function skills

Teaching the work involved in building & sustaining friendships in real life

In the moment teaching

Shifting the way you use language to help build SEF skills

**“Although social skills training (SST) is a common intervention approach, evidence to date suggests that SST has limited efficacy, at least when provided in traditional, clinic-based settings.”**

Mikami, A.Y., Smit, S. & Khalis, A. Social Skills Training and ADHD—What Works?. *Curr Psychiatry Rep* 19, 93 (2017).  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-017-0850-2>

# What Works To Treat ADHD, Based On Evidence

## Effective Therapies for ADHD

Children with ADHD usually need more than one type of treatment to meet their needs. Medication and/or behavior management training for parents and teachers have been shown to be most effective. Additionally, your child's doctor or a psychiatrist can prescribe medicine.

Psychologists, counselors, and social workers can help with the child's behavior. You can also talk to your child's teacher, school counselor, or school psychologist about support for your child at school.

Behavioral approaches and organizational interventions are the most effective non-medical, evidence-based therapies for children and adolescents with ADHD. These include:

- Behavioral parent training (BPT)
- Behavioral classroom management (BCM)
- Behavioral peer interventions (BPI)
- Combined behavior management interventions
- Organization training

The chart below includes more information on the different forms of evidence-based child and adolescent therapies for ADHD. These therapies have been tested by researchers and clinical child and adolescent psychologists, and ranked based on the evidence that shows how effective they have been in the treatment of ADHD.

### Tested Behavioral Therapies for Children and Adolescents

Level One:  
Works Well

- Behavioral interventions (any combination)
  - BPT
  - BCM
  - BPI
- Organization training

Level Two:  
Works

- Combined training interventions

Level Three:  
Might Work

- Neurofeedback training

Level Four:  
Unknown/Untested

- Cognitive training

Level Five:  
Tested and Does Not Work

- Social skills training



# What The Research Data Shows About Play Therapy & Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Kids With ADHD



The American Academy of Pediatrics ADHD treatment recommendations for kids (6 and up):

*Parent Training in conjunction with medication management*

*Therapy might help for other conditions, but there's no consistent evidence these treatments are effective for the symptoms of ADHD.*

-Dr. Stephen Hinshaw (ADDitude webinar)

In my experience, most professionals are unfamiliar with the AAP treatment recommendations thus they recommend ineffective treatments, such as individual therapy & social skills groups.

# Click on "Playlists" to see different topics of videos

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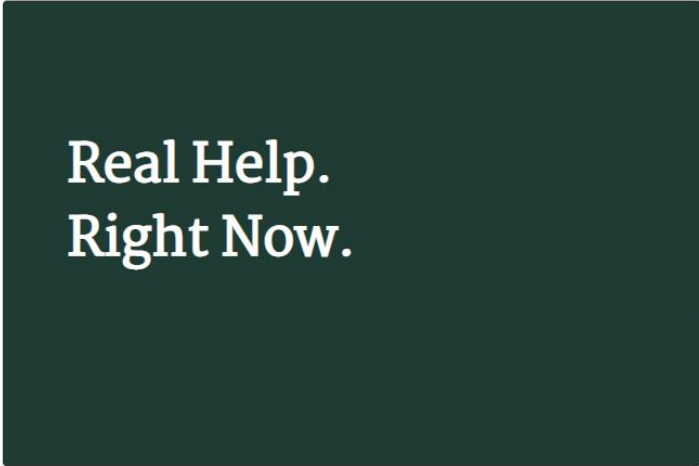
HOME VIDEOS SHORTS LIVE PLAYLISTS COMMUNITY CHANNELS ABOUT

**The ADHD Diagnosis: What Every Parent Needs to Know**  
1,776 views · 4 days ago  
Real Help. Right Now.  
ADHD Dude is Ryan Wexelblatt, LCSW, ADHD-CCSP.  
Ryan is the father to a son with ADHD, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, a Certified School Social Worker, an ADHD-Certified Clinical Services Provider, and creator of ADHD Dude and Trip ...  
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## ADHD Dude Membership Site

THE MOST EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS FOR PARENTS OF KIDS WITH ADHD.

[JOIN NOW](#)

[DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOUR CHILD?](#)



### PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS THAT YOU CAN START IMPLEMENTING IMMEDIATELY.

The ADHD Dude membership site consists of ADHD Dude webinars designed specifically for parents of kids with ADHD.

Thousands of families worldwide have successfully used these strategies to help their child with ADHD improve executive function skills, behavior, social skills, independence, and self-confidence.

# Risks of unmedicated ADHD

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- The results of the present study show that the long-term outcomes for participants with ADHD when left untreated were poor compared with non-ADHD controls, and that treatment of ADHD improved long-term outcomes, but usually not to the point of normalization.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3520745/...>

- “If you look at the four biggest health risks in the U.S.—poor diet, insufficient exercise, obesity, and smoking—ADHD presents a greater risk than all four of these concerns combined,” explains Dr. Barkley.

[https://chadd.org/.../new-research-suggests-untreated.../...](https://chadd.org/.../new-research-suggests-untreated.../)

- Pharmacotherapy for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) decreases the risk for substance abuse: findings from a longitudinal follow-up of youths with and without ADHD.

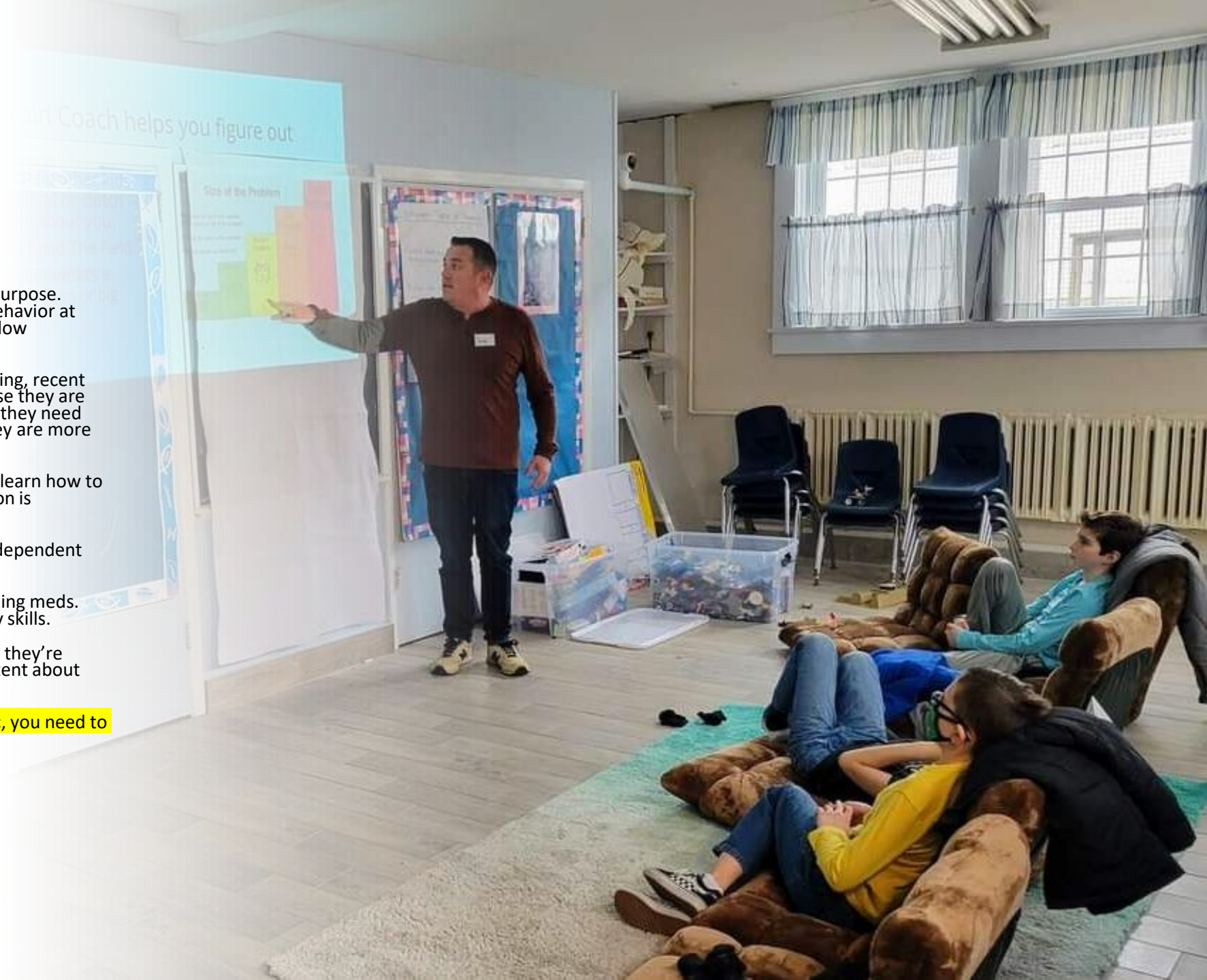
<https://scholar.google.com/scholar...>

- If left untreated, adolescents will self-medicate. There is a 100% increased risk of substance abuse among this group of teens.
- The epidemic of traffic fatalities has also been linked to untreated ADHD.
- Those with untreated ADHD are twice as likely to divorce as their treated or typical peers.

<https://www.smartkidswithld.org/.../untreated-adhd.../>

# Suggestions

- Kids with ADHD need to feel useful and have a sense of purpose. Without this, they tend to exhibit extremely immature behavior at home, but nowhere else. This is a result of “high giving/low expectations.”
- Authoritative parenting style works best. “Gentle parenting, recent parenting trends create anxiety in kids with ADHD because they are unclear. Kids with ADHD need to know who is in charge, they need structure and for things to be concrete. Without this, they are more likely to struggle.”
- If you’re dealing with behavior issues at home, you must learn how to stop accommodating your child. Parental accommodation is widespread in families of kids with ADHD.
- Have them participate in extracurricular activities and independent experiences away from home.
- Allow them to speak to their prescribing physician regarding meds. This helps with buy-in, and with developing self-advocacy skills.
- (For parents of girls in particular): Be aware of who/what they’re watching on social media. There’s a lot of very toxic content about mental health, ADHD, autism, etc.
- **Expecting “talk therapy” to change behavior is unrealistic, you need to change your behavior, if you want behavior to improve.**





# Suggestions

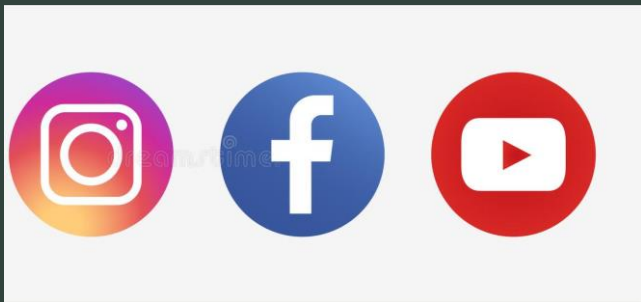
- Follow the AAP treatment recommendations, they exist for a reason. I find they produce the best results, in the most time & cost-effective way for families.
- Provide scaffolding to build executive function skills & independence which will in turn build self-confidence.
- Skill development doesn't happen on a time frame that's convenient to your schedule. This is a consistent work on progress.
- Expect inconsistency, because ADHD is a condition of inconsistent performance.





**Thank You!**  
**Ryan Wexelblatt, LCSW**  
**ADHD Dude**

**“ADHD Dude” on  
YouTube & social media**



I am a mother of 2 children with ADHD and also a therapist. I've never had anything as useful as your training. I'm using it a lot with my kids and I'm referring you to my clients too. I explain to them that I cannot treat their children with ADHD, but they can help them a lot by taking your courses.

