

# 10

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## Ready-Made Plans for Teaching Your Child to Complete Daily Routines

The following 20 routines are the ones that children tend to struggle with most. We've grouped them starting with home routines, then those related to school, with the tasks requiring emotional control, flexibility, and response inhibition at the end. Glance through the list and you'll undoubtedly zero right in on the areas where you and your child need help. Refer back to Chapter 9 if you identify several and don't know where to start. We've given the chapter number for each executive skill the routine addresses if you decide you want to do more targeted work on specific skills.

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## Adapting the Interventions for Your Child's Age

In some cases, the ages for which the interventions are appropriate will be dictated by the developmental task involved in the routine or by the school curriculum. We don't expect first graders to study for tests (except spelling tests), to do long-term projects, or to write papers, so these routines were not designed for that age group. Other routines may be applicable for a range of ages. Because many of the routines were written for children in the middle of the age range covered by this book (mid-elementary school), here are some suggestions for how to adjust the strategies for younger and older children where that seems appropriate.

*General guidelines for developing instructional routines for young children:*

- Keep them short.
- Reduce the number of steps involved.
- Use pictures as cues rather than written lists or written instructions.
- Be prepared to provide cues and supervision, and in some cases you'll need to help the child follow the routine, working side by side.

*General guidelines for developing instructional routines for older children:*

- Make them full partners in the design of the routine, the selection of rewards, and the troubleshooting that may be required to improve the routine.
- Be willing to negotiate rather than dictate.
- Whenever possible, use visual cues rather than verbal cues (because these sound a lot like nagging to an older child).

## 1. Getting Ready in the Morning

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), working memory (Chapter 12).

**Ages:** Specifics we've included are for ages 7–10, but this routine is very easy to customize for younger and older children just by changing the sophistication of the tasks.

1. Sit down with your child and together make a list of the things to be done before leaving for school in the morning (or just starting the day for younger kids).
2. Decide together the order in which the tasks should be done.
3. Turn the list into a checklist. (The checklists that follow are just samples; you can use them as is or just as a model, with your own tasks listed in the left column.)
4. Make multiple copies and attach them to a clipboard.
5. Talk through with your child how the process will work from the moment the child wakes up. Explain that in the beginning you will cue your child to do each item on the list and that he or she will check off each item as it is completed.
6. Rehearse or role-play the process so that your child understands how it will work—that is, walk through each step, with the child pretending to do each step and check it off.
7. Determine what time the whole routine should be finished in order to get to school on time (or in order to have some time to play before going to school or to get to whatever the child needs to do).
8. Put the system to work. Initially you should cue your child to begin the first step, watch as he or she does the step, prompt to check off the step on the checklist, praise the child for completing each step, and cue your child to do the next step. Continue the process with supervision until the entire routine is completed.
9. Once the child has internalized the process and is able to complete the routine independently within time constraints, the checklist can be faded.

### Fading the Supervision

1. Cue your child to begin and supervise throughout the routine, providing frequent praise and encouragement as well as constructive feedback.
2. Cue your child to begin, make sure he or she starts each step, and then go away and come back for the next step.
3. Cue your child to begin, check on him or her intermittently (every two steps, then every three steps, etc.).
4. Cue your child to begin and have him or her check in with you at the end.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. If necessary, add a reinforcer for completing the process on time or with minimal reminders. Or give the child a point for each step in the process completed with minimal reminders (agree on how many reminders will be permissible for the child to earn the point).
2. Set a kitchen timer—or have the child set the timer—at the beginning of each step and challenge the child to complete the step before the timer rings.
3. Adjust the time or the schedule as needed—for example, wake the child up earlier or see if there are any items on the list that can be dropped or done the night before.
4. Rather than making a checklist, write each task on a separate index card and have the child hand in the card and get a new one as each step is completed.
5. For younger children, use pictures rather than words, keep the list short, and assume that you'll need to continue to cue the child.
6. The same approach can be adapted for children who need help specifically with making sure they're taking everything to school that they need. A sample checklist for this is also provided.

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**MORNING ROUTINE CHECKLIST**

Task	Number of reminders Tally marks (// //)	Done (✓)
Get up		
Get dressed		
Eat breakfast		
Put dishes in dishwasher		
Brush teeth		
Brush hair		
Get backpack ready for school		

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### GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL CHECKLIST

Task	Done (✓)
ALL homework completed	
ALL homework in appropriate place (notebook, folder, etc.)	

Items to go to school	Placed in backpack (✓)
Homework	
Notebooks/folders	
Textbooks	
Silent reading book	
Permission slips	
Lunch money	
Sports/P.E. clothes/equipment	
Notes for teacher	
Assignment book	
Other:	
Other:	

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## 2. Bedroom Cleaning

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), working memory (Chapter 12), organization (Chapter 17).

**Ages:** Specifics we've included are for ages 7–10, but this routine is very easy to customize for younger and older children just by changing the sophistication of the tasks.

1. Sit down with your child and together make a list of the steps involved in cleaning his or her bedroom. They might look like this:
  - Put dirty clothes in laundry
  - Put clean clothes in dresser/closet
  - Put toys away on toy shelves or in boxes/bins
  - Put books on bookshelves
  - Clean off desk surface
  - Throw away trash
  - Return things to other rooms (dirty dishes to kitchen, towels to bathroom, etc.)
2. Turn the list into a checklist (a sample based on the list above follows; use it as is or as a model with your own tasks in the left column).
3. Decide when the chore will be done.
4. Decide what kinds of cues and reminders the child will get before and during the task.
5. Decide how much help the child will get in the beginning (the long-term goal should be for the child to clean the room alone).
6. Decide how the quality of the task will be judged.
7. Put the routine in place with the agreed-upon cues, reminders, and help.

### Fading the Supervision

1. Cue your child to begin and supervise throughout the routine, providing frequent praise and encouragement as well as constructive feedback.
2. Cue your child to begin, make sure he or she starts each step, and then go away and come back for the next step.
3. Cue your child to begin, then check on him or her intermittently (every two steps, then every three steps, etc.).
4. Cue your child to begin and have him or her check in with you at the end.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. Add a reinforcer if needed. This could either be giving the child something to look forward to doing when the chore is completed, or giving the child points for completing each step, with rewards selected from a reward menu. Rewarding your child for completing each step with no more than one or two reminders or prompts is another way to organize a reward system.
2. If even with your constant presence, cueing, and praise, the child can't follow the routine, begin by working alongside your child, sharing each task.
3. If even that is too much, consider using a backward chaining approach—you clean the entire room except for one small piece and have the child do that piece with supervision and praise. Gradually add in more pieces for the child to do until the child is doing the entire job.
4. Make the room easier to clean—use storage bins that the child can “dump” toys into and label each bin.
5. Take a photograph of what a “clean room” looks like, so when your child completes the task, you can ask him or her to rate his or her performance by comparing his or her work to the photo.
6. For younger children, use pictures of each step rather than words; reduce the number of steps; assume the child will need help rather than expecting him or her to work alone.

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### BEDROOM-CLEANING CHECKLIST

Task	Number of reminders Tally marks (///)	Done (✓)
Put dirty clothes in laundry		
Put clean clothes in dresser/closet		
Put toys away (toy shelves, toy box)		
Put books on bookshelves		
Tidy desk		
Throw away trash		
Return things to other rooms (e.g., dishes, cups, towels, sports stuff)		
Other:		
Other:		

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### 3. Putting Belongings Away

**Executive skills addressed:** Organization (Chapter 17), task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), working memory (Chapter 12).

**Ages:** Specifics we've included are for ages 7–10, but this routine is very easy to customize for younger and older children just by changing the list of belongings.

1. With your child, make a list of the items your child routinely leaves out of place around the house.
2. Identify the proper location for each item.
3. Decide when the item will be put away (for example, as soon as I get home from school, after I finish my homework, just before bed, right after I finish using it, etc.).
4. Decide on a “rule” for reminders—how many reminders are allowed before a penalty is imposed (for example, the belonging is placed off limits, or another privilege is withdrawn). A sample checklist follows.
5. Decide where the checklist will be kept.

#### Fading the Supervision

1. Remind your child that you're working on learning to put things away where they belong.
2. Put the checklist in a prominent place and remind your child to use it each time he or she puts something away.
3. Praise or thank your child each time he or she puts something away.
4. After your child has followed the system for a couple of weeks, with lots of praise and reminders from you, fade the reminders. Keep the checklist in a prominent place, but now you may want to impose a penalty for forgetting. For example, if a toy or a desired object or article of clothing is not put away, your child may lose access to it for a period of time. If it's an object that can't be taken away (as in a school backpack), then impose a fine or withdraw a privilege.

#### Modifications/Adjustments

1. Add an incentive if needed. One way to do this would be to place a set number of tokens in a jar each day and withdraw one token each time the child fails to put away an item on time. Tokens can be traded in for small tangible or activity rewards.
2. If remembering to put items away right after use or at different times during the day is too difficult, arrange for a daily pick-up time when all belongings need to be returned to their appropriate locations.
3. For younger children, use pictures, keep the list short, and assume the child will need cues and/or help for a longer period of time.

**PUTTING BELONGINGS AWAY**

Belonging	Where does it go?	When will I put it away?	Reminders needed (///)	Done! (✓)
Sports equipment				
Outerwear (jackets, gloves, etc.)				
Other clothing				
Shoes				
Homework				
Backpack				
Other:				
Other:				

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## 4. Completing Chores

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), working memory (Chapter 12).

**Ages:** Any age; even preschoolers can be assigned simple, short chores.

1. Sit down with your child and make a list of chores that need to be done.
2. Decide how long it will take to do each chore.
3. Decide when (day and/or time) the chore needs to be done.
4. Create a schedule so you and your child can keep track of the chore. A sample schedule follows.
5. Decide where the checklist will be kept.

### Fading the Supervision

1. Cue your child to begin each chore and supervise throughout, providing frequent praise and encouragement as well as constructive feedback.
2. Cue your child to begin, make sure he or she starts each step, and then go away and come back for the next step.
3. Cue your child to begin, check on him or her intermittently (every two steps, then every three steps, etc.).
4. Cue your child to begin and have him or her check in with you at the end.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. If necessary, add a reinforcer for completing the process on time or with minimal reminders. Or give the child a point for each step in the process completed with minimal reminders (agree on how many reminders will be permissible for the child to earn the point).
2. Set a kitchen timer—or have the child set the timer—at the beginning of each step and challenge the child to complete the step before the timer rings.
3. Adjust the time or the schedule as needed—for example, wake the child up earlier or see if any items on the list can be dropped or done the night before.
4. Rather than making a checklist, write each task on a separate index card and have the child hand in the card and get a new one as each step is completed.
5. For younger children, use pictures rather than words, keep the chores very brief, don't give too many chores, and assume the child will need cues and/or help to complete the chore.

### COMPLETING CHORES

	Chore	How long will it take?	When will you do it?	
			Day	Time
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Chore done (✓)	Chore done (✓)	Chore done (✓)	Chore done (✓)	Chore done (✓)	Chore done (✓)	Chore done (✓)
1							
2							
3							
4							

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## 5. Maintaining a Practice Schedule\*

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), planning (Chapter 16).

**Ages:** Mainly 8–14; for younger children, activities like dance, music, and sports should be designed more for fun than for skill acquisition, although younger kids do build skills during ballet lessons, soccer, tumbling classes, and the like.

1. Ideally, this process should begin when your child first decides on a skill he or she wants to develop that requires daily or consistent practice. Before you and he or she decide to go ahead with this, have a conversation about what will be required to master the skill (or to get good enough for it to be enjoyable!). Talk about how often he or she will need to practice, how long practice sessions will last, what other responsibilities he or she has, and whether there is enough time in the schedule to make consistent practice possible.
2. Create a weekly schedule for when the practice will take place. A sample follows.
3. Talk about what cues or reminders your child might need to remember to start the practice.
4. Talk about how you and your child will decide whether the process is working. In other words, what are the criteria for success to signal that your child should continue?
5. Decide how long you will keep at it before deciding whether to continue. Many parents have strong feelings that when a child decides to take up something like a musical instrument or a sport (especially if money is involved, such as buying an expensive instrument), he or she should “sign on” for enough time to make the expense and commitment worth it. Given that many children tire of these kinds of activities within a relatively short period of time, it makes sense to come to some agreement in advance for the minimum amount of time you expect your child to stick with it before you can discuss giving it up.

### Fading the Supervision

1. Cue your child to begin the practice at the agreed-on time and to check off on the checklist when he or she has finished. Place the checklist in a prominent place so that it alone can eventually act as the cue.
2. Use a written reminder and the checklist. If your child doesn't begin within 5 minutes of the agreed-on time, provide a verbal reminder. If he or she *does* begin on time, provide positive reinforcement for this.

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\*For a musical instrument, sport, or other skill that requires consistent practice.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. You and your child may want to pick a start time that's easy to remember—such as right after dinner or right after a favorite daily TV program. This way, the previous activity actually serves as a cue to begin the next activity.
2. If your child is having trouble remembering to start the practice without reminders, have him or her set a kitchen timer or an alarm clock (or a watch alarm) as a reminder.
3. If your child resists practicing as much as you originally agreed on, consider changing the schedule rather than giving up. Make the practice sessions shorter, schedule them for fewer days, break them in two with a brief break between them, or give them something to look forward to when the practice is finished (for example, schedule the practices *just before* a preferred activity).
4. If you find yourself thinking you need to add a reinforcer to make the practices more attractive to your child, it may be time to rethink the whole process. If your child is reluctant to practice as much as is needed to acquire the skill, this is a signal that he or she may not care so much about learning the skill after all. Many times it is parents who want children to learn something (particularly a musical instrument) and the process is not being driven by the child at all. If this is the case, be up front about it with your child—and then add the reinforcer to persuade your child to work on the skill.

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## LEARNING A NEW SKILL

**BEFORE** you begin, answer the following questions:

1. What do I want to learn?
  
2. Why do I want to learn this?
  
3. What will be involved in learning the skill (lessons, practice, etc.) and how much time will be involved?

What needs to be done	When will this happen?	How much time will it take?
Lessons		
Practice		
Other (e.g., games, exhibitions, recitals)		

4. Will I have to give up anything I'm doing now to fit this into my schedule?

If you decide you want to go ahead, plan your schedule by filling in the boxes that follow. Write what time each activity will take place and how long it will last. You can use this to keep track of your practices as well by crossing off each practice after you've finished it.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Lessons							
Practice							
Games, exhibitions, recitals							

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## 6. Bedtime

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), working memory (Chapter 12).

**Ages:** Specifics we've included are for ages 7–10, but this routine is very easy to customize for younger and older children just by changing the sophistication of the tasks.

1. Talk with your child about what time bedtime is. Make a list of all the things that need to be done before bedtime. This might include picking up toys, getting out clothes for the next day, making sure his or her backpack is ready for school (see Homework), putting on pajamas, brushing teeth, and washing face or bathing.
2. Turn the list into a checklist or picture schedule. A sample follows.
3. Talk about how long each task on the list will take. If you want, time each task with a stopwatch so you know exactly how long each task takes.
4. Add up the total amount of time and subtract that from the bedtime hour so you know when your child should begin the bedtime routine (for example, if bedtime is 8 o'clock and it will take a half hour to complete the routine, your child should start the routine at 7:30).
5. Prompt your child to begin the routine at the agreed-on time.
6. Supervise your child at each step, encouraging him or her to “check your list to see what's next” and providing praise for completion of each task.

### Fading the Supervision

1. Cue your child to begin and supervise throughout the routine, providing frequent praise and encouragement as well as constructive feedback.
2. Cue your child to begin, make sure he or she starts each step, and then go away and come back for the next step.
3. Cue your child to begin, check on him or her intermittently (every two steps, then every three steps, etc.).
4. Cue your child to begin and have him or her check in with you at the end.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. Build in rewards or penalties. For instance, if your child completes the routine at or before the specified bedtime, he or she earns a little extra time before the lights have to go off. If he or she does not complete the routine by bedtime, the next night he or she has to begin the routine 15 minutes earlier.
2. Set the kitchen timer or give your child a stopwatch to use to help him or her keep track of how long each step is taking.
3. Rather than making a checklist, write each task on a separate index card and have the child hand in the card and get a new one as each step is completed.
4. For younger children, use pictures rather than words and assume the child will need cueing and/or supervision.

## BEDTIME ROUTINE

Task	Number of reminders Tally marks (////)	Done (✓)
Pick up toys		
Make sure backpack is ready for school		
Make a list of anything you have to remember to do tomorrow		
Get clothes ready for next day		
Put on pajamas		
Wash face or bathe		
Brush teeth		

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## 7. Desk Cleaning

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), organization (Chapter 17), planning (Chapter 16).

**Ages:** Specifics we've included are for ages 7–10, but of course most 7-year-olds don't spend a lot of time at a desk, so if you need to customize for other ages, it will likely be for older children—just make the tasks more sophisticated.

### First Steps: Cleaning the Desk

1. Take everything out of the desk.
2. Decide what items will go in which drawer. Make labels to put on the drawers.
3. Put appropriate items in the correct drawers.
4. Have a bin near the desk to hold paper that can be recycled.
5. Decide what items should go on top of the desk (a pencil holder, stapler, wire baskets for papers in current use and for things that need to be filed, etc.). Consider putting a bulletin board next to the desk to hold reminders as well as mementos.
6. Place items where your child wants them.
7. Take a picture of what the desk looks like to use as a model. Put the photo on the wall or bulletin board near the desk.

### Steps for Maintaining a Clean Desk

1. Before beginning homework or any other desk project, make sure the desk looks like the photo. If not, put things away so the desk does look like the photo.
2. After finishing homework, put everything away so that the desk again looks like the photograph. This step could also be built into a bedtime routine.
3. Once a week, go through the baskets and decide what needs to stay in the basket, what can be filed, and what should be thrown away/recycled.

### Fading the Supervision

1. Cue your child for each step in the maintenance procedure and supervise throughout the routine, providing frequent praise and encouragement as well as constructive feedback.
2. Cue your child to begin, make sure he or she starts step 1 of the procedure, and come back at the end to make sure he or she finished. Do the same with step 2. At step 3, stay with your child to assist in basket cleaning.
3. Cue your child for all three steps of the maintenance procedure but leave and check in at the end.
4. Remind your child to begin the procedure. At a later point (such as just before

bed), check in to make sure the desk is clean. Provide praise and constructive feedback.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. As your child follows the process, continue to refine it. For instance, there may be better ways of organizing things on top of the desk or in the drawers, and these changes should be incorporated into the process.
2. Visit an office supply store to see what kind of materials might help your child establish and maintain a system for keeping the desk uncluttered and materials readily available for use.
3. As with other procedures, build in a reinforcer for following the routine as necessary.

CLEAN DESK CHECKLIST							
Task	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Desk surface picked up							
Baskets cleared							
Desk matches photograph							

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## 8. Homework

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), planning (Chapter 16), time management (Chapter 18), metacognition (Chapter 21).

**Ages:** 7–14.

1. Explain to your child that making a plan for homework is a good way to learn how to make plans and schedules. Explain that when he or she gets home from school, before doing anything else, he or she will make a homework plan using the form that you will provide (the form follows).
2. The steps the child should follow:
  - a. Write down all assignments (this can be shorthand because more detailed directions should be in your child's agenda book or on worksheets).
  - b. Make sure he or she has all the materials needed for each assignment.
  - c. Determine whether he or she will need any help to complete the assignment and who will provide the help.
  - d. Estimate how long each assignment will take.
  - e. Write down when he or she will start each assignment.
  - f. Show the plan to you so you can help make adjustments if needed (for example, with time estimations).
3. Cue your child to start homework at the time listed in the plan.
4. Monitor your child's performance throughout. Depending on the child, this may mean staying with him or her from start to finish, or it may mean checking up periodically.

### Fading the Supervision

1. Cue your child to make the plan and to begin the routine, providing frequent praise and encouragement as well as constructive feedback. If necessary, sit with your child as he or she does the homework.
2. Cue your child to make the plan and to start homework on schedule. Check in frequently, providing praise and encouragement.
3. Cue your child to make the plan and start homework on schedule. Ask your child to check in with you when the homework is done.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. If your child resists writing the plan, you do the writing, but have your child tell you what to write.
2. If your child tends to forget assignments that may not be written down, modify

the planner to list every possible subject and talk about each subject with your child to jog his or her memory about assignments.

3. Create a separate calendar for long-term projects so that your child can keep track of the work that needs to be done on them (see Long-Term Projects).
4. Build in rewards for starting/ending homework on time or for remembering to do it without reminders.
5. For younger children, simply establishing a set time and place to do homework may be sufficient because they tend to have only one or two assignments per night. Asking them to estimate how long it will take to do each assignment may be useful because this helps train time management skills.

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**DAILY HOMEWORK PLANNER**

Date: _____							
Subject/assignment	Do I have all the materials? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Do I need help? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Who will help me?	How long will it take?	When will I start?	Done (✓)	
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>					
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>					
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>					
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>					
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>					
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>					

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## 9. Managing Open-Ended Tasks

**Executive skills addressed:** Emotional control (Chapter 13), flexibility (Chapter 19), metacognition (Chapter 21).

**Ages:** 7–14.

For many children, the most challenging homework assignment is one that involves an open-ended task. Open-ended tasks are those where (1) multiple correct answers are possible; (2) there are different ways to achieve the correct answer or desired result; (3) the task itself provides no clear feedback about its completion, leaving it to the child to decide when he or she is done; or (4) the task has no obvious starting point, leaving it to the child to decide what to do first.

*Examples of open-ended tasks:*

- Using spelling words in sentences
- Any writing assignment
- Showing several ways to solve a math problem (for example, “How many different ways can you group 24 items into even-numbered groups?”)
- Selecting a strategy to solve a more complex math word problem
- Answering “Why?” questions
- Looking for answers to social studies questions in the text, unless the correct answer is one word or a concrete concept.

There are two ways to help children with open-ended tasks: (1) revise the tasks to make them more closed-ended or (2) teach them how to handle these kinds of tasks. Because problems handling open-ended tasks are most evident when children do open-ended homework assignments, it will be important to work with your child’s teacher so that the teacher understands how difficult this is for your child (often the problems are more evident at home than at school) and why modifications need to be made.

*Ways to make open-ended tasks more closed-ended:*

- Talk your child through the task—either help him or her get started or talk about each step in the task and stay with your child while he or she performs each step.
- Don’t ask your child to come up with ideas on his or her own—give him or her choices or narrow the number of choices. You may want to do this in consultation with your child’s teacher so the teacher understands how—and why—the task is being modified. Over time, you can fade this modification—for instance, by gradually increasing the number of choices or by encouraging your child to add to the choices you’re providing.



- Give your child “cheat sheets” or procedure lists (for example, the steps in a math process such as long division).
- Alter the task to remove the problem-solving demand. For instance, practice spelling words by writing each word 10 times rather than composing sentences or give your child sentences with the spelling words missing. Again, you’ll want to make these modifications with the knowledge and approval of your child’s teacher.
- Provide templates for writing assignments. The template itself then can walk the child through the task.
- Provide ample support in the prewriting phases—in particular, brainstorming ideas for writing assignments and organizing those ideas (see *Writing a Paper*).
- Ask your child’s teacher to provide scoring rubrics that spell out exactly what is expected for any assignment.

The easiest way to help your child become more adept with open-ended tasks is to walk him or her through the task, using a think-aloud procedure. In other words, model the kinds of thoughts and strategies needed to attack the task. This generally involves providing close guidance and lots of support initially and then gradually fading the support, handing over the planning more and more to your child. For children with significant problems with flexibility, managing open-ended tasks successfully often takes years and thus may require assignment modifications and support by you and your child’s teacher for a long time.

## 10. Long-Term Projects

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), planning (Chapter 16), time management (Chapter 18), meta-cognition (Chapter 21).

**Ages:** 8–14; kids as young as 7 might be assigned such a project, but it will probably involve a simpler process, meaning this intervention should be simplified too.

1. With your child, look at the description of the assignment to make sure you both understand what is expected. If the assignment allows your child a choice of topic, topic selection is the first step. Many children have trouble thinking up topics, and if this is the case with your child, you should brainstorm topic ideas, providing lots of suggestions, starting with topics that are related to your child's areas of interests.
2. Using the Project Planning Sheet, write down the possible topics. After you have three to five, go back and ask your child what he or she likes and doesn't like about each choice.
3. Help your child make a final selection. In addition to thinking about what topic is of greatest interest, other things to think about in making a final selection are (a) choosing a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow; (b) how difficult it will be to track down references and resources; and (c) whether there is an interesting "twist" to the topic that will either make it fun to work on or appealing for the teacher.
4. Using the Project Planning Sheet, decide what materials or resources will be needed, where the child will get them and when (you may want to fill in the last column after completing the next step). Possible resources include Internet websites, library books, things that may need to be ordered (for example, travel brochures), people that might be interviewed, or places to visit (for example, museums, historical sites, etc.). Also consider any construction or art materials that will be needed if the project involves building something.
5. Using the Project Planning Sheet, list all the steps that will need to be done to carry out the project and then develop a timeline so your child knows when each step will be done. It may be helpful at this point to transfer this information onto a monthly calendar that can be hung on the wall or a bulletin board near your child's desk to make it easier to keep track of what needs to be done when.
6. Cue your child to follow the timeline. Before he or she begins each step, you may want to have a discussion about what exactly is involved in completing the step—this may mean making a list of things to be done for each step. Planning for the next step could be done as each step is completed, so that your child has some idea what's coming next and to make it easier to get the next step started.

### Fading the Supervision

Children who have problems with planning and with the metacognitive skills required to do open-ended tasks often require lots of support for a long time. Using the Project Planning Sheet as a guide, you can gradually hand over the responsibility of having your child complete the sheet more and more on his or her own. As you sense your child's ability to do more of the work independently, sit down with the planning sheet and have him or her indicate which pieces he or she thinks he or she can do alone and which pieces he or she will need help with. It is likely that you will continue to need to remind your child to complete each step in the timeline for a long time before the child can be independent in this part of the process.

### Modifications/Adjustments

Use reinforcers as necessary for meeting timeline goals and for completing the project by the deadline; you can award bonus points for completion without reminders (or with a minimum, agreed-on number of reminders).

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## LONG-TERM PROJECT PLANNING SHEET

Step 1: Select Topic		
What are possible topics?	What I like about this choice:	What I don't like:
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
<i>Final topic choice:</i>		
Step 2: Identify Necessary Materials		
What materials or resources do you need?	Where will you get them?	When will you get them?
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
Step 3: Identify Project Tasks and Due Dates		
What do you need to do? (List each step in order)	When will you do it?	Check off when done
Step 1:		
Step 2:		
Step 3:		
Step 4:		
Step 5:		
Step 6:		
Step 7:		
Step 8:		
Step 9:		
Step 10:		

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## 11. Writing a Paper

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), planning (Chapter 16), organization (Chapter 17), time management (Chapter 18), metacognition (Chapter 21).

**Ages:** 8–14; children don't usually start writing papers till third grade, and they are typically shorter than five paragraphs for the youngest kids in this age range, so if your child is only 8, you may have to shorten the form accordingly.

### Step 1: Brainstorm Topics

If your child has to come up with a topic to write about, you should make sure you understand the exact assignment requirements before beginning. This may necessitate a phone call to the teacher or a friend of your child to clarify directions. The rules of brainstorming are that any idea is accepted and written down in the first stage—the wilder and crazier, the better, because wild and crazy ideas often lead to good, usable ideas. No criticism by either parent or child is allowed at this point. If your child has trouble thinking of ideas on his or her own, throw out some ideas of your own to “grease the wheels.” Once you and your child run out of topic ideas, read over your list and circle the most promising ones. Your child may know right away what he wants to write about. If not, talk about what he or she likes and dislikes about each idea to make it easier to zero in on a good choice.

### Step 2: Brainstorm Content

Once a topic has been selected, the brainstorming process begins again. Ask your child, “Tell me everything you know or would like to know about this topic.” Again, write down any idea or question, the crazier the better at this point.

### Step 3: Organize the Content

Now look at all the ideas or questions you've written down. Together with your child, decide whether the material can be grouped together in any way. If the assignment is to do a report on aardvarks, for instance, you might find the information clusters into categories such as what they look like, where they live, what they eat, who their enemies are, how they protect themselves. Create topic headings and then write the details under each topic heading. Some parents find that it's helpful to use Post-its for this process. During the brainstorming phase, each individual idea or question is written on a separate Post-It. The Post-Its can then be organized on a table under topic headings to form an outline of the paper. The paper can then be written (or dictated) from this outline.

#### Step 4: Write the Opening Paragraph

This is often the hardest part of the paper to write. The opening paragraph, at its most basic level, describes very succinctly what the paper will be about. For instance, an opening paragraph on a report about aardvarks might read:

This paper is about a strange animal called an aardvark. By the time you finish reading it, you will know what they look like, where they live, what they eat, who their enemies are, and how they protect themselves.

The one other thing that the opening paragraph should try to do is “grab the reader”—give the reader an interesting piece of information to tease his or her curiosity. At the end of the paragraph above, for instance, two more sentences might be added:

The reader will also learn the meaning of the word aardvark and what language it comes from. And if that hasn't grabbed your interest, I will also tell you why the aardvark has a sticky tongue—although you may not want to know this!

Children with writing problems will have trouble writing the opening paragraph by themselves and may need your help. You may be able to help by asking general questions, such as “What do you want people to know after they read your paper?” or “Why do you think people might be interested in reading this?” If they need more help than that, you may want to give them a model to work from. You could write an opening paragraph on a topic similar to the one your child is working on, or you could use the paragraph here as an example. If your child needs more guided help writing this paragraph, provide it. Then see if he or she can continue without the need for as much support. Remember, the first paragraph is often the hardest part of the paper to write.

#### Step 5: Write the Rest of the Paper

To give your child just a little more guidance, suggest that the rest of the paper be divided into sections with a heading for each section (sort of the way this manual is written). Help him or her make a list of the headings and then see if he or she can continue with the writing task alone. Each paragraph should begin with a main or topic sentence that makes one main point. Following the topic sentence should be three to five sentences that expand or explain the main point. It's helpful to use connecting words to link sentences or paragraphs. Examples of simple linking words are *and*, *because*, *also*, *instead*, *but*, *so*. Examples of more complex linking words are *although*, *moreover*, *on the other hand*, *therefore*, *as a result*, *finally*, *in conclusion*.

In the early stages of learning to write, children with writing problems need a

great deal of help. You may feel like you're writing half the paper in the early stages. It should get better with time, especially if you end each writing session by giving your child some positive feedback about something done well. Note in particular any improvement since the last writing assignment. You might say, "I really like the way you were able to come up with the headings on your own this time, with no help from me."

If you don't see progress over time—or if you feel you lack the time or skills to teach your child to do this kind of writing, talk with your child's teacher to see if additional support can be provided in school. Even if you're willing to help out in this way, you may want to ask for more help in school if you believe your child's writing skills are significantly delayed compared to other children of the same age.

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**WRITING TEMPLATE FOR A FIVE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY**

**Introductory paragraph**

Sentence 1 summarizes what your essay is about:

Sentence 2 focuses in on the main point you want to make:

Sentence 3 adds more detail or explains why the topic is important:

**Body paragraphs**

Paragraph 1, topic sentence:

Supporting detail 1:

Supporting detail 2:

Supporting detail 3:

Paragraph 2, topic sentence:

Supporting detail 1:

Supporting detail 2:

Supporting detail 3:

Paragraph 3, topic sentence:

Supporting detail 1:

Supporting detail 2:

Supporting detail 3:

**Concluding paragraph**

Restate the most important point from the paper you want to make (what the reader should go away understanding):



## 12. Studying for Tests

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14), planning (Chapter 16), time management (Chapter 18), metacognition (Chapter 21).

**Ages:** 10–14; children usually don't have tests till fourth grade, and even then the teacher is likely to tell them what to study, so this routine probably won't be of much use to you until your child is in at least fifth grade.

1. Keep a monthly calendar with your child on which any upcoming tests are written.
2. From 5 days to a week before the test, make a study plan with your child.
3. Using the Menu of Study Strategies, have your child decide which strategies he or she wants to use to study for the test.
4. Have your child make a plan for studying that starts 4 days before the test. Psychological research over many years shows that when new material is learned, *distributed practice is more effective than massed practice*. In other words, if you plan to spend 2 hours studying for a test, it is better to break the time down into smaller segments (such as 30 minutes a night for 4 nights) than to spend the full 2 hours studying the night before the test. Research also shows that learning is consolidated through sleep, so getting a good night's sleep the night before an exam is more beneficial than "cramming" the night before.
5. For children who have problems with sustained attention, using several strategies each for a short amount of time may be easier than using one strategy for the full study period. You can set a kitchen timer for the length of time for each strategy, and when the bell rings, your child can move on to the next strategy (unless the child likes the one being used and wants to continue it).

### Fading the Supervision

Depending on your child's level of independence, he or she may need help making the study plan, may need prompting to follow the plan, and may need supervision while he or she is following the plan. You can gradually fade this support, first by having your child check in with you after he's finished each strategy, but keeping all the other supports in place. Cueing to make the study plan and prompting to start studying will likely be the last supports you can fade.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. After your child takes the test or after the graded test is returned, ask your child to evaluate how the study plan went. Which strategies seemed to work the best? Which ones were less helpful? Are there other strategies he or she might try the

- next time? How about the time devoted to studying? Was it enough? Make some notes on the study plan to help your child when it's time to plan for the next test.
2. If your child felt he or she studied adequately, but still did poorly, check with his or her teacher for feedback about what might have been done differently. Did your child study the wrong material—or study it in the wrong way? Consider asking your child's teacher to prepare a study guide, if that hasn't been done already.
  3. If your child consistently does poorly on tests despite studying long and hard, consider asking his or her teacher for testing modifications (for example, extended time, the chance to retake tests, the chance to do extra credit work to make up for poor test grades, alternatives to tests, or allowing your child to prepare a cheat sheet or take open-book exams). This may require that your child be evaluated to determine whether he or she qualifies for special education services or a 504 Plan (discussed in Chapter 23).
  4. Add an incentive system—rewards for good grades on tests.

### MENU OF STUDY STRATEGIES

Check off the ones you will use.

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Reread text	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Reread/organize notes	<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Read/recite main points
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Outline text	<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Highlight text	<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Highlight notes
<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Use study guide	<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Make concept maps	<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Make lists/organize
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Take practice test	<input type="checkbox"/> 11. Quiz myself	<input type="checkbox"/> 12. Have someone else quiz me
<input type="checkbox"/> 13. Study flash cards	<input type="checkbox"/> 14. Memorize/rehearse	<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Create a "cheat sheet"
<input type="checkbox"/> 16. Study with friend	<input type="checkbox"/> 17. Study with study group	<input type="checkbox"/> 18. Study session with teacher
<input type="checkbox"/> 19. Study with a parent	<input type="checkbox"/> 20. Ask for help	<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Other: _____

**STUDY PLAN**

Date	Day	Which strategies will I use? (write #)	How much time for each strategy?
	4 days before test	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
	3 days before test	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
	2 days before test	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
	1 day before test	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

**Posttest Evaluation**

How did your studying work out? Answer the following questions:

1. What strategies worked best?
  
2. What strategies were not so helpful?
  
3. Did you spend enough time studying?  Yes  No
  
4. If no, what more should you have done?
  
5. What will you do differently the next time?

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## 13. Learning to Manage Tasks That Take Lots of Effort

**Executive skills addressed:** Task initiation (Chapter 15), sustained attention (Chapter 14).

**Ages:** Any age.

There are two primary ways to make tasks that your child sees as taking a lot of effort less aversive to the child: Cut down the amount of effort required, by making it briefer or easier, or offer a large enough incentive that the child is willing to expend the effort required to get the reward. Examples of ways to do this are:

1. Break the task down into very small parts, so that each part requires no more than 5 minutes. Allow your child to earn a small reward at the end of each part.
2. Allow your child to decide how to break down the task. For example, make a list of homework activities or chores and let your child decide how much of each task will be done before he or she earns a break.
3. Give your child something powerful to look forward to doing when the task is done. For instance, your child might earn 45 minutes of video game time for completing his nightly homework (and/or chores), without complaining, within a specified time frame, and with an agreed-on quality (such as making no more than one mistake on the math homework).
4. Reward your child for being willing to tackle tasks that demand effort. You could, for example, draw up a chore list and have your child rate each chore for effort required. Then you could assign a larger reward (such as more video game time) for choosing to do the harder chores. It may be helpful to create a scale for effort—1 for the easiest tasks up to 10 for the hardest tasks your child could ever imagine doing. Once your child masters the use of the scale, you could work on thinking about how to turn a high-effort task (say, one rated 8–10) into a lower effort task (one rated 3–4).

### Modifications/Adjustments

If approaches such as these don't help your child complete tough tasks without complaining, whining, crying, or otherwise resisting, you may want to take a slower and more labor-intensive approach to training your child to tolerate high-effort tasks. This approach, mentioned earlier under Bedroom Cleaning, is called *backward chaining*. Essentially your child starts at the end of a high-effort task, at first completing only the very last step to earn a reward. For bedroom cleaning, this last step might be having the child put the dirty clothes in the laundry after you've tidied the rest of the child's room or having him put what he needs for the schoolday into his backpack after you've assisted him through the earlier steps of his morning routine.

You keep repeating this process until your child can do that one step easily and effortlessly. Then you back up one step and require the child to do only the last *two* steps in the task before earning the reward. Over time, your child is backed through the task until you get to the point where you expect him to complete the entire task independently. Many parents resist this approach, especially if they know that the child will eventually clean his room if they nag and harass him long enough. But who wants to have to nag for the rest of their parental life? Backward chaining actually trains the child to tolerate tedious or high-effort work and eventually eliminates the need for nagging.

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## 14. Organizing Notebooks/Homework

**Executive skills addressed:** Organization (Chapter 17), task initiation (Chapter 15).

**Ages:** 6–14.

1. With your child, decide on what needs to be included in the organizational system: A place to keep unfinished homework? A separate place to keep completed homework? A place to keep papers that need to be filed? Notebooks or binders to keep notes, completed assignments, handouts, worksheets, etc.? A sample list is in the checklist that follows.
2. Once you've listed all these elements, decide how best to handle them, one at a time. For example, you and your child might decide on a colored folder system, with a different color for completed assignments, unfinished work, and other papers. Or you might decide to have a separate small three-ring binder for each subject or one large binder to handle all subjects. You may want to visit an office supply store to gather ideas.
3. Gather the materials you need—from the house if you have them on hand or from the office supply store if you don't. Materials should include a three-hole punch, lined and unlined paper, subject dividers, and small Post-it packages your child might want to use to flag important papers.
4. Set up the notebooks and folders, labeling everything clearly.
5. At the beginning of each homework session, have your child take out the folders for completed assignments, unfinished work, and material to be filed. Have your child make a decision about each piece of material and where it should go. Complete this process before beginning homework.
6. When homework is completed, have your child place homework in the appropriate folder and file anything else that needs to be saved.

### Fading the Supervision

1. Cue your child to begin homework by following the “organizing” process. Supervise each step of the process to make sure all steps are followed and checked off on a checklist.
2. Cue your child to begin homework with the organizing process and remind him or her to check off each step when done. Check back periodically and check in at the end of homework to make sure the checklist is done and that materials have been stored appropriately.
3. Cue at the beginning, check in at the end, and do occasional spot checks of notebooks, folders, and other files.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. As much as possible, involve your child in the design of the organizing system. We've discovered that what works well for one person is a disaster for another because it's not a good fit.
2. Redesign the elements that aren't working right. Again, involve your child in the troubleshooting. "How could this work better for you?" is the way to approach this.
3. For people who are not naturally organized, it can take a long time for this process to become a habit. Keep in mind that supervision over the long haul may be necessary.

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**SETTING UP A NOTEBOOK/HOMEWORK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

System element	What will you use?	Got it (✓)
Place for unfinished homework		
Place for completed assignments		
Place to keep materials for later filing		
Notebooks or binder(s) for each subject		
Other things you might need: 1. 2. 3. 4.		

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**MAINTAINING A NOTEBOOK/HOMEWORK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Task	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Weekend
Clean out "to be filed" folder					
Go through notebooks and books for other loose papers and file them					
Do homework					
Place all assignments (both finished and unfinished) in appropriate places					

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## 15. Learning to Control His or Her Temper

**Executive skills addressed:** Emotional control (Chapter 13), response inhibition (Chapter 11), flexibility (Chapter 19).

**Ages:** Any age.

1. Together with your child, make a list of the things that happen that cause your child to lose his or her temper (these are called *triggers*). You may want to make a long list of all the different things that make your child angry and then see if they can be grouped into larger categories (when told “no,” when he or she loses a game, when something promised doesn’t happen, etc.).
2. Talk with your child about what “losing your temper looks or sounds like” (for example, yells, swears, throws things, kicks things or people, etc.). Decide which ones of these should go on a “can’t do” list. Keep this list short and work on only one or two behaviors at a time.
3. Now make a list of things your child can do instead (called *replacement behaviors*). These should be three or four different things your child can do instead of the “can’t do” behaviors you’ve selected.
4. Put these on a “Hard Times Board” (see the example that follows).
5. Practice. Say to your child, “Let’s pretend you’re upset because Billy said he would come over to play and then he had to do something else instead. Which strategy do you want to use?” (See the more detailed practice guidelines that follow.)
6. After practicing for a couple of weeks, start using the process “for real,” but initially use it for only minor irritants.
7. After using it successfully with minor irritants, move on to the more challenging triggers.
8. Connect the process to a reward. For best results, use two levels of rewards: a “big reward” for never getting to the point where the Hard Times Board needs to be used, and a “small reward” for successfully using a strategy on the Hard Times Board to deal with the trigger situation.

### Practicing the Procedure

1. Use real-life examples. These should include a variety representing the different categories of triggers.
2. Make the practice sessions “quick and dirty.” For example, if a coping strategy is to read a book, have your child open a book and start reading, but don’t spend more than 20–30 seconds on this.
3. Have your child practice each of the strategies listed on the Hard Times Board.
4. Have brief practice sessions daily or several times a week for a couple of weeks before putting it into effect.

**Modifications/Adjustments**

1. At first you may need to model the use of the strategy. This means talking aloud to show what your child might be saying or thinking as he or she implements the strategy.
2. There may be times when, despite having a procedure in place, your child still loses control and can't calm down or use any of the strategies on the Hard Times Board. In this case, remove the child from the situation (physically if necessary). Tell the child in advance that you will do this, so that your child knows what to expect. Say, "If you hit or kick or scream, we're always going to leave."
3. If your child is fairly consistently unable to use the strategies effectively, it may be time to consider seeking professional help; see Chapter 22.

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**SAMPLE HARD TIMES BOARD**



**Triggers: What Makes Me Mad**

1. When I have to stop doing something fun
2. When it's time to do a chore
3. When my plans don't work out



**Can't Dos**

1. Hit somebody
2. Break anything



**When I'm Having a Hard Time, I Can:**

1. Draw a picture
2. Read a book
3. Listen to music
4. Play with the dog

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**MY HARD TIMES BOARD**



**Triggers: What Makes Me Mad**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



**Can't Dos**

- 1.
- 2.



**When I'm Having a Hard Time, I Can:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

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## 16. Learning to Control Impulsive Behavior

**Executive skills addressed:** Response inhibition (Chapter 11), emotional control (Chapter 13).

**Ages:** Any age.

1. Together with your child, identify the triggers for the impulsive behavior (watching TV with siblings, open-ended play with friends, or whatever).
2. Agree on a rule for the trigger situation. The rule should focus on what your child can do to control impulses. Build in choice if you can—in other words, you and your child should come up with a couple of different things he or she can do in place of the unwanted impulsive response.
3. Talk about what you might do to signal to your child that you think he or she is on the verge of “losing control” so that he or she can back off or use one of the coping strategies agreed on. This works best when the signal is a relatively discrete visual signal (for example, a hand motion) that can alert your child to the problem situation.
4. Practice the procedure. Make this a “Let’s pretend” role-play. “Let’s pretend you’re outside playing with your friends and one of them says something that makes you mad. I’ll be your friend and you be you.” If this is hard for your child, you may want to play your child in this role-play to model how he or she will handle the situation.
5. As with the other skills involving behavior regulation, practice the procedure daily or several times a week for a couple of weeks.
6. When you and your child are ready to put the procedure in effect in “real life,” remind him or her about it just before the trigger situation is likely to occur (for example, “Remember the plan,” “Remember what we talked about”).
7. Review how the process worked afterward. You may want to create a scale that you and your child can use to assess how well it went (5—Went without a hitch! to 1—*That* didn’t go real well!).

### Modifications/Adjustments

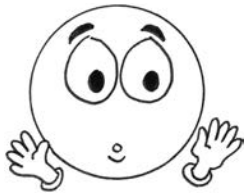
1. If you think it will make the process work more effectively or more quickly, tie the successful use of a replacement behavior to a reinforcer. This may best be done using a “response cost” approach. For example, give your child 70 points to begin the day. Each time your child acts impulsively, subtract 10 points. You can also give bonus points if your child gets through a specified period of time without losing any points.
2. If impulsivity is a significant problem for your child, begin by choosing one time of day or one impulsive behavior to target to make success more likely.
3. Be sure to praise your child for showing self-control. Even if you’re using tangible rewards, social praise should always accompany any other kind of reinforcer.

**MAINTAINING SELF-CONTROL**

The things I do without thinking include:



Common situations where I act without thinking are:



What I will do to stay controlled:



## 17. Learning to Manage Anxiety

**Executive skills addressed:** Emotional control (Chapter 13), flexibility (Chapter 19).

**Ages:** All ages.

1. Together with your child, make a list of the things that happen that cause your child to feel anxious. See if there's a pattern and whether different situations can be grouped into one larger category (for example, a child who gets nervous on the soccer field, when giving an oral report in school, and playing in a piano recital may have *performance anxiety*—that is, he or she gets nervous when he or she has to perform in front of others).
2. Talk with your child about what anxiety feels like so he or she can recognize it in the early stages. This is often a physical feeling—"butterflies" in the stomach, sweaty hands, faster heartbeat.
3. Now make a list of things your child can do instead of thinking about the worry (called *replacement behaviors*). These should be three or four different things your child can do that either are calming or divert attention from the worries.
4. Put these on a "Worry Board" (an example follows).
5. Practice. Say to your child, "Let's pretend you're getting nervous because you have a baseball tryout and you're worried you won't make the team. Which strategy do you want to use?" (See the more detailed practice guidelines that follow.)
6. After practicing for a couple of weeks, start using the process "for real" but initially use it for only minor worries.
7. After using it successfully with minor worries, move on to bigger anxieties.
8. Connect the process to a reward. For best results, use two levels of rewards: a "big reward" for never getting to the point where the Worry Board needs to be used and a "small reward" for successfully using a strategy on the Worry Board to deal with the trigger situation.

### Practicing the Procedure

1. Use real-life examples. These should include a variety representing the different categories of triggers.
2. Make the practice sessions "quick and dirty." For example, if a coping strategy is to practice "thought stopping," have the child practice the following self-talk strategy: Tell her to say, loudly and forcefully (but to herself), "STOP!" This momentarily interrupts any thought. As soon the child has done this, have her think of a pleasant image or scene. Practice this a few times daily. When the problem or anxiety-provoking thought occurs, use this strategy and continue repeating it until the thought stops.

3. Have your child practice each of the strategies listed on the Worry Board.
4. Have brief practice sessions daily or several times a week for a couple of weeks before putting it into effect.

### Modifications/Adjustments

1. Possible coping strategies for managing anxiety might include deep or slow breathing, counting to 20, using other relaxation strategies, thought stopping or talking back to your worries, drawing a picture of the worry, folding it up, and putting it in a box with a lid, listening to music (and maybe dancing to it), challenging the logic of the worry. For further explanation for these, type “relaxation for kids” into a search engine and check out the websites that come up. Another helpful resource is a book written for children and parents to read together: *What to Do When You Worry Too Much* by Dawn Huebner, PhD.
2. Helping children manage anxiety generally involves a procedure sometimes called *desensitization* in which the degree of anxiety to which the child is exposed is low enough so that with some support he or she can get through it successfully. For example, if a child is afraid of dogs, you might begin by asking him to look at a picture of a dog and model what he might say to himself (“I’m looking at this picture, and it’s a little scary when I think of there being a real dog, but I’m managing okay, I’m not getting too scared. I can look at the picture okay.”). The next step might be to have the child be inside a house with a dog outside and talk about what that’s like. Very gradually, bring the dog closer to the child. A similar approach can be used with other fears and phobias. The exposure has to be very gradual; you don’t move to the next step until the child feels comfortable with the current step. The critical elements in guided mastery are physical distance and time—in the beginning, the child is far removed from the anxiety-provoking object and the exposure is for a very short time. The distance is then reduced and the time increased gradually. It’s also helpful to have a script (something the child is to say in the situation) and a tactic he can use (such as thought stopping or something he can do to divert his attention).
3. The kinds of worries or anxieties that this approach will work with are (1) separation anxiety (being unhappy or worried when separated from a loved one, usually a parent); (2) handling novel or unfamiliar situations; and (3) obsessive or catastrophic thinking (worrying about something bad happening). This approach should work with all three, although the coping strategies for each may vary.

**SAMPLE WORRY BOARD**



**I Get Worried When . . .**

1. I have a test at school
2. I have to kick a soccer ball in a game
3. I have to talk in front of a group



**When I Get Nervous . . .**

1. My heart beats too fast
2. My stomach feels queasy
3. I have trouble thinking clearly



**When I'm Feeling Worried or Nervous, I Can . . .**

1. Draw a picture of my worry and then tear it up
2. Use a relaxation technique
3. Talk back to my worries
4. Listen to music

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**MY WORRY BOARD**

**I Get Worried When . . .**

**When I Get Nervous . . .**

**When I'm Feeling Worried or Nervous, I Can . . .**

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## 18. Learning to Handle Changes in Plans

**Executive skills addressed:** Emotional control (Chapter 13), flexibility (Chapter 19).

**Ages:** Any age.

Helping your child accept changes in plans without anger or distress involves some advance work and lots of practice. Whenever possible, you need to present your agenda for your child ahead of time, before the child has formulated his or her own plan for that time period. Meanwhile, you start introducing the child to small changes on a regular basis, gradually increasing the child's tolerance for surprises over time.

1. Sit down with your child and establish a schedule of activities and tasks. This might mean creating some organization and routine for the day, or it might mean simply making a list of events that are already part of a routine. Include any activity that is a "have to" as far as you're concerned (mealtimes, bedtime, etc.) and any regular activity (such as lessons and sports).
2. Try not to attach precise times to the activities unless necessary (as with sports events and lessons), using time ranges instead. For example, dinner might be around 5:00 P.M., which could be between 4:30 and 5:30.
3. Talk with your child about the fact that changes or "surprises" can always come up despite plans and schedules established in advance. Give examples: instead of fish, we have pizza for dinner; you get to play outside for an extra 20 minutes; we have to go to the dentist today.
4. Create a visual for the schedule, such as activities written on a card or a series of pictures, and post it in at least two places, such as the kitchen and your child's room. Make a "Surprise!" card for the schedule and explain that when a change is coming, you will show him the card, say what the change is, and put it on the schedule. (Even when a change comes up that's a surprise to everyone, you can pull out the card and follow the same process.)
5. Review the schedule with your child either the night before and/or the morning of the day.
6. Start to introduce changes and show the Surprise card. Initially, these should be pleasant, such as extra playtime, going out for ice cream, playing a game with a parent. Gradually introduce more "neutral" changes (apple juice for orange juice, one cereal for another, etc.) Eventually, include less pleasant changes (can't do a planned activity because of weather).

### Modifications/Adjustments

If the Surprise card and the gradual introduction of changes are not sufficient, there are a few other approaches to consider. When possible, introduce the change well

before the event. This gives your child time to adjust gradually rather than quickly. Depending on his or her reaction to less pleasant change (crying, resisting, complaining), talk about other behaviors the child could use that would allow for protest in an acceptable way (such as filling out a Complaint Form). You also can provide a reward for successfully managing the change. Keep in mind that reactivity to change decreases with the amount of exposure that the child has and the success he has in negotiating it. As long as the exposure is gradual and does not initially involve situations that are frustrating or threatening, your child can become more flexible.

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**MANAGING CHANGES IN PLANS OR SCHEDULES**

**Daily Schedule**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time	Activity
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Surprise:</b></p>	

**Complaint Form**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Nature of complaint:

Why you think the situation was unfair:

What you wish had happened:

## 19. Learning Not to Cry over Little Things

**Executive skills addressed:** Emotional control (Chapter 13), flexibility (Chapter 19).

**Ages:** Any age.

When children cry over little things, they're generally trying to communicate that they want sympathy, and they're using this method of getting it because they've found it effective in the past. So the goal of this intervention is not to teach kids to be tough little soldiers or anything of the sort, but to help them find ways other than crying to get what they want. The goal is to get them to use words instead of tears in those situations where crying does not appear to be an appropriate response.

1. Let your child know that crying too much makes people disinclined to spend time with him or her and that you want to help the child find other ways of handling feelings when upset so that this doesn't happen.
2. Explain that your child needs to use words instead of tears when upset. This can be done by having your child label his or her feelings ("I'm upset," "I'm sad," "I'm angry," etc.).
3. Let your child know that it may be helpful for him or her to explain what caused these feelings (for example, "I'm upset because I was hoping to go to Joey's house, but when I called, no one was home," or "I'm mad because I lost the game").
4. When your child is able to use words, respond by validating his or her feelings (for example, "I can see you're upset. Not being able to play with a friend must be a big disappointment to you"). Statements like this will communicate to the child that you understand and sympathize.
5. Let your child know in advance what will happen when an upsetting situation arrives. This should include giving him or her a script for handling the situation. You might say, "When you feel like crying, you can use words like 'I'm angry,' 'I'm sad,' 'I need help,' or 'I need a break.' When you use words, I'll listen and try to understand your feelings. If you start to cry, though, you're on your own. I'll either leave the room or ask you to go to your bedroom to finish crying." At first you may periodically need to remind your child of the procedure to prepare him or her to follow the script when an upsetting situation occurs.
6. As soon as your child starts to cry, make sure he or she gets no attention from anyone for crying. This means no attention from *anyone* (siblings, parents, grandparents, etc.), so you should make sure everybody likely to be involved understands the procedure. Without the attention for crying, it will gradually diminish (although it may get worse initially before it gets better).
7. The goal here is not to extinguish *all crying* (because there are legitimate reasons for children to cry). A rule of thumb for judging when it may be appropriate to cry is to think about the average child of your child's age. Would crying be a nat-

ural response in the situation at hand? Crying is appropriate, for instance, when dealing with physical pain or when a serious misfortune befalls your child or someone your child is close to.

### **Modifications/Adjustments**

If crying is firmly entrenched, you may want to build in a reinforcer to help your child learn to use words instead of tears. Depending on the age of your child, you could give him or her stickers or points for using words instead of tears or for going a certain amount of time without crying. To determine how long that time should be, it would be helpful to take a baseline so you know how frequently your child cries now. A log to help you track how often the crying occurs, how long it lasts, and what the precipitating event is included to help you do this. Following it is a “contract” you can make with your child to handle crying. Depending on the age of the child, the contract can be completed with words, pictures, or both.

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UPSET LOG			
Date	Time	Duration of upset	Precipitating event

Here's what I can do instead of crying:

Here's what will happen if I can keep from crying when I'm upset:

Here's what will happen when I cry over little things:

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## 20. Learning to Solve Problems

**Executive skills addressed:** metacognition (Chapter 21), flexibility (Chapter 19).

**Ages:** 7–14; even though metacognition in its most advanced form is one of the latest skills to develop, you can do problem solving with younger kids too (see, for example, the widely respected program called *I Can Problem Solve*, by Myrna B. Shure, PhD, for preschoolers).

1. Talk with your child about what the problem is. This generally involves three steps: (a) empathizing with the child or letting the child know you understand how he or she feels (“I can see that makes you really mad” or “That must be really upsetting for you”); (b) getting a *general* sense of what the problem is (“Let me get this straight—you’re upset because the friend you were hoping to play with can’t come over”); and (c) defining the problem more narrowly so that you can begin to brainstorm solutions (“You have a whole afternoon free, and you can’t figure out what to do”).
2. Brainstorm solutions. Together with your child, think of as many different things as you can that might solve the problem. You may want to set a time limit (like 2 minutes) because this sometimes speeds up the process or makes it feel less like an open-ended task. Write down all the possible solutions. Don’t criticize the solutions at this point because this tends to squelch the creative thinking process.
3. Ask your child to look at all the solutions and pick the one he or she likes best. You may want to start by having him or her circle the top three to five choices and then narrow them down by talking about the pluses and minuses associated with each choice.
4. Ask your child if he or she needs help carrying out the choice.
5. Talk about what will happen if the first solution doesn’t work. This may involve choosing a different solution or analyzing where the first solution went wrong and fixing it.
6. Praise him or her for coming up with a good solution (and then praise again after the solution is implemented).

### Modifications/Adjustments

This is a standard problem-solving approach that can be used for all kinds of problems, including interpersonal problems as well as obstacles that prevent a child from getting what he or she wants or needs. Sometimes the best solution will involve figuring out ways to overcome the obstacles, while at other times it may involve helping your child come to terms with the fact that he or she cannot have what he or she wants.

Sometimes the problem-solving process may lead to a “negotiation,” where you

and your child agree on what will be done to reach a solution that's satisfactory. In this case, you should explain to your child that whatever solution you come up with, you both have to be able to live with it. You may want to talk about how labor contracts are negotiated so that both workers and bosses get something they want out of the bargain.

After you've used the process (and the worksheet) with your child for a number of different kinds of problems, your child may be able to use the worksheet independently. Because your goal should be to foster independent problem solving, you may want to ask your child to fill out the Solving Problems Worksheet alone before coming to you for your help (if needed). Eventually, your child will internalize the whole process and be able to solve problems "on the fly."

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SOLVING PROBLEMS WORKSHEET

What is my problem?

What are some possible things I could do to solve my problem?

What will I try first?

If this doesn't work, what can I do?

How did it go? Did my solution work?

What might I do differently the next time?

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