



BRANCHING  
MINDS

# The Executive Function Toolkit





Executive functioning in the educational setting is often used synonymously with skills associated with focus and organization. While this can be true in some circumstances, executive functioning skills are defined as “the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully.” (Harvard University) In order to find success with these skills, it is important to have the tools to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and regulate impulses. The complexity of executive functioning and the interconnectedness of the associated soft skills are essential for academic achievement.

As educators, we can integrate practices and strategies that support our students with their cognition around their executive functioning to build their own personal toolkits. The resources provided here are intended to be tailored and utilized as stepping stones to do just that.

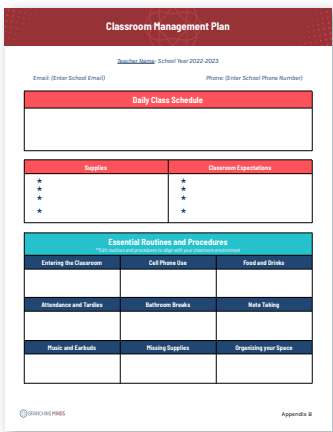


## Resource #1: Daily Self Check-In Template

Need a fun way to check in with your students each day? Incorporating a daily self check-in can take the guesswork out of how your students arrive to class and give an immediate sense of who may need more support (e.g., individual check-in, energy break) with **regulation** prior to academic instruction. These check-ins can also provide more information about trends you are seeing for all students in order to respond more proactively to the whole group.

Utilize the template provided to create your daily self check-ins. Older students also love making these for the group, so feel free to include them in the fun.

- ➔ Check out Appendix A
- ➔ Access the Editable Google Slides Version



## Resource #2: Shareable Classroom Management Plan

Concrete classroom routines and procedures can save students who struggle with executive functioning time and mental energy.

Having an explicit classroom management plan, with clear guidance for routines and procedures shared with students and families and then directly taught and practiced, allows students to understand what is expected of them rather than trying to figure it out for themselves. Post the most used procedures and routines around the room and refer to them often during necessary activities.

- ➔ Check out Appendix B
- ➔ Access the Editable Google Doc Version



Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Subject/Period: \_\_\_\_\_

**Title of Unit/ Lesson**

Unit/ Lesson Objectives:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Unit/ Lesson:	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main Idea</li> <li>• Key Vocabulary</li> <li>• Essential Question</li> </ul>	

© BRANCHING MINDS Appendix C

- ➔ Check out Appendix C
- ➔ Access the Editable Google Doc Version

## Resource #3: Organizational Note Catcher for Strategic Studying

Studying is a strategic process that can be supported and directly taught. By creating note-catchers that act as study guides, you can prioritize essential learning to be used to practice prior to an assessment.

Attached is a template organizational note catcher. Here are some tips on utilizing the template in your classroom:

- Prior to a unit or lesson, provide students with key topics, vocabulary words, or essential questions generated on the left. Color coding the paper also supports organizational efforts and the location of key materials.
- As instruction is provided, students write their answers in the notes column on the right.
- Prior to an assessment, provide class time for students to practice studying with their note-catchers. Students can fold the paper in half individually or with a partner. They should work to provide all the information they can about the topic outlined on the left. From there, they can highlight the information on the right that they still need to learn for further review. Having students practice with a partner and individually using their note catcher can give them options at home, which is a great way to incorporate parent involvement!

**Essential Lesson Takeaways**

From today's lesson, if you can explain or know how to do the following, you have mastered the day!

- ★ (insert key idea, takeaway, or action)
- ★ (insert key idea, takeaway, or action)
- ★ (insert key idea, takeaway, or action)

**Discrete Highlights**

**Visual Highlights**

Ways to Focus Highlights:

- Change from one slide
- Add star or exclamation point
- Change background
- Add or change names with relevance of your students

**Audio Highlights**

Ideas for Audio Highlights:

- Add audio from the slide
- Choose from a popular song
- Record yourself or another class member saying a popular rhyme

Starry Starry

Exclamation

Yellow Arrow

Beats Ball

Firework

Video Game

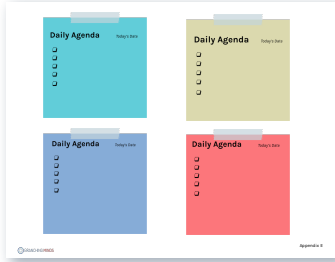
© BRANCHING MINDS Appendix D

- ➔ Check out Appendix D
- ➔ Access the Editable Google Slides Version
- 🔊 Access the Audio Elements

## Resource #4: Discrete Highlights for Key Takeaways

A misconception about executive functioning can be that it is hard for a student to **focus**. The actual concern, however, is the student is focusing on ALL of the information rather than utilizing cues such as tone, body language, and repetition to attune to the key takeaways of the lesson. By incorporating and teaching discrete highlights such as starring information, adding a sound prior to a key idea, or adding a takeaways slide, you can begin cueing students to focus on these concepts.

A helpful hint is pointing out the non-discrete cue you use when you get to these discrete highlights. Such as, “my voice slows down when I get to this slide because this information is important.” Over time you may scaffold these highlights with practice lessons for students to begin identifying the non-discrete cues for themselves. Utilize the discrete highlights provided for your next lesson.

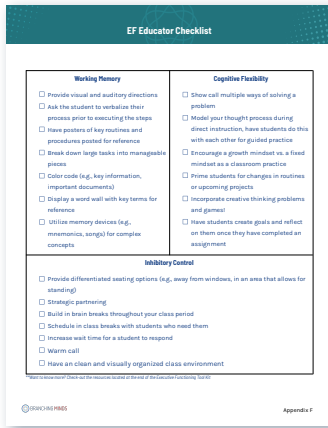


## Resource #5: Post-It Note Agenda

For some students, it can be difficult to transition from one task to another without getting **distracted**. When this happens, students may get lost in where they are supposed to be and what they need to do. Utilizing ‘post-it notes’ with your daily agenda can support students in getting back on track with the lesson.

- ➔ Check out Appendix E
- ➔ Access the Editable Google Doc Version

Highlight key activities throughout your lesson and create checklist agendas (resource template below). Creating them online allows you to copy and paste your lesson plan directly, saving time and energy. Just place a piece of tape on the back after printing and provide them for students who need extra support.



## Resource #6: Executive Function Educator Checklist

Supporting executive functioning in the classroom does not have to be a huge lift for educators. Often small teacher choices can support many students who exhibit need. The EF checklist provides quick adjustments educators can make proactively or in the moment.

It is also helpful to involve the student when using these moves. Checking in with them can help them identify what works and does not work for them as they age, and this ultimately helps them build their confidence and ability to advocate for themselves.

- ➔ Check out Appendix F
- ➔ Access the Editable Google Doc Version

# Appendices

Today I  
feel...

1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



Today I  
feel...

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

# Creating and utilizing your own template

- 1) **Make a copy of the template daily student check-in**
- 2) **Use images that target various feelings students may come in to class with.**  
**Try to select images that are fun and target the interests of the group.**
  - a) Specifically select a few images that you know you will need to respond to and have a solution in mind. *For example: If you have a morning period and students come in hungry. Having a few school breakfasts on hand to give those students can be a proactive solution before learning begins.*
  - b) FREE Stock images can be found be found online for any area of interest you are looking for. *Try searching: Free stock images of [insert topic]. Then copy and paste into the template*
- 3) **Incorporate your daily student check-in at various times of the day or the beginning of the class period**
  - a) Trends for the group may be prevalent after a few days. *For example after lunch students may come in very excited and social. If this is a trend you begin to see, being able to plan for a few quiet moments before beginning a lesson may support retention of information over time.*



# Classroom Management Plan

Teacher Name- School Year 2022-2023

Email: (Enter School Email)

Phone: (Enter School Phone Number)

## Daily Class Schedule

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### Supplies

- ★
- ★
- ★
- ★

### Classroom Expectations

- ★
- ★
- ★
- ★

## Essential Routines and Procedures

*\*\*Edit routines and procedures to align with your classroom environment*

### Entering the Classroom

### Cell Phone Use

### Food and Drinks

### Attendance and Tardies

### Bathroom Breaks

### Note Taking

### Music and Earbuds

### Missing Supplies

### Organizing your Space



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Subject/ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

### Title of Unit/ Lesson

Unit/ Lesson Objectives:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Unit/ Lesson:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Main Idea</li><li>• Key Vocabulary</li><li>• Essential Question</li></ul>	<b>Notes</b>

# Essential Lesson Takeaways



From today's lesson, if you can explain or know how to do the following, you have mastered the day!

- ★ *(insert key idea, takeaway, or action)*
- ★ *(insert key idea, takeaway, or action)*
- ★ *(insert key idea, takeaway, or action)*

# Discrete Highlights

## Visual Highlights

### Ideas for Visual Highlights

- Images from this slide
- School mascot
- Image of yourself
- Add a funny meme with interests of your students



## Audio Highlights

### Ideas for Audio Highlights

- Audios from this slide
- Chorus from a popular song
- Record yourself or another staff member saying a popular tagline



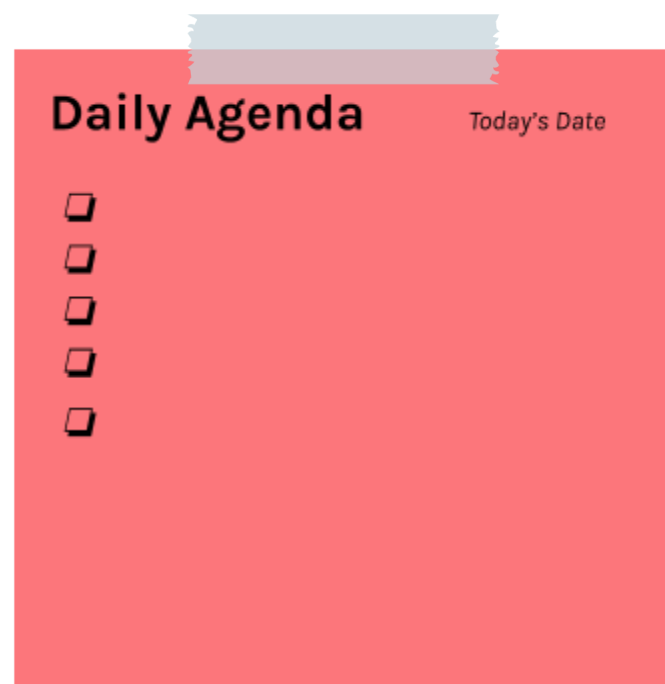
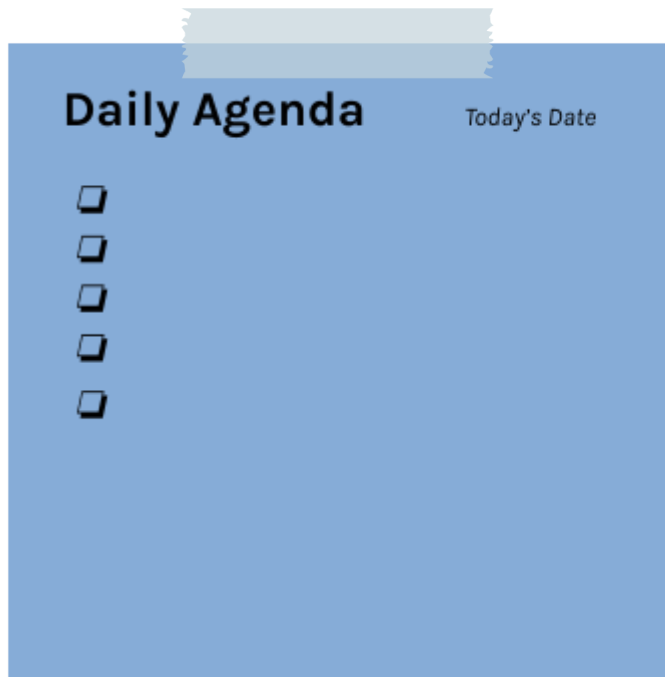
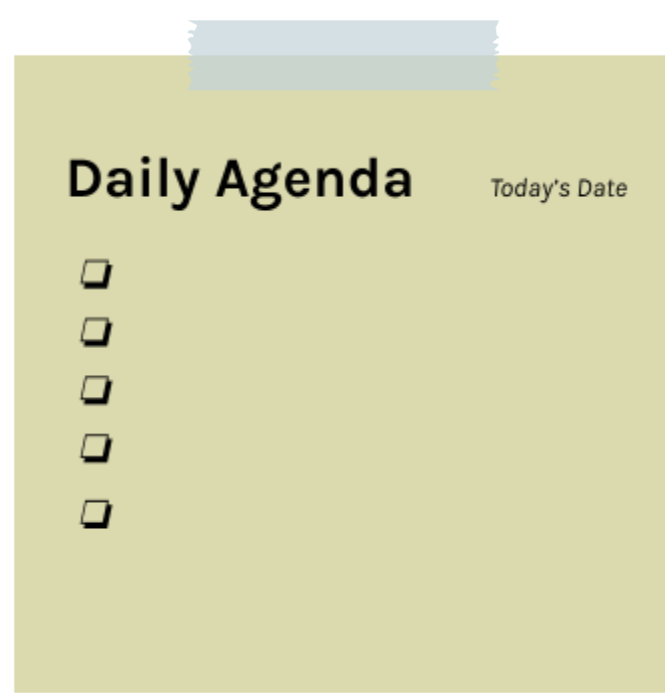
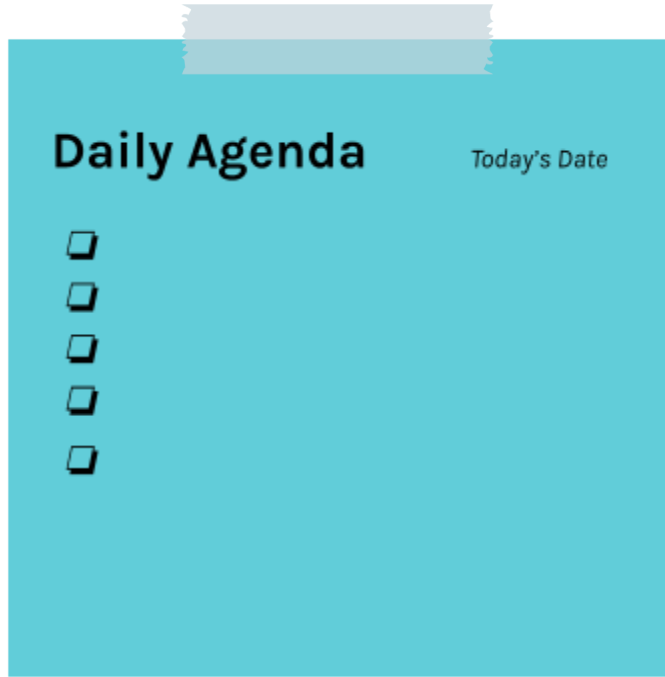
**Bicycle Bell**



**Firework**



**Video Game**



# EF Educator Checklist

## Working Memory

- Provide visual and auditory directions
- Ask the student to verbalize their process prior to executing the steps
- Have posters of key routines and procedures posted for reference
- Break down large tasks into manageable pieces
- Color code (e.g., key information, important documents)
- Display a word wall with key terms for reference
- Utilize memory devices (e.g., mnemonics, songs) for complex concepts

## Cognitive Flexibility

- Show call multiple ways of solving a problem
- Model your thought process during direct instruction, have students do this with each other for guided practice
- Encourage a growth mindset vs. a fixed mindset as a classroom practice
- Prime students for changes in routines or upcoming projects
- Incorporate creative thinking problems and games!
- Have students create goals and reflect on them once they have completed an assignment

## Inhibitory Control

- Provide differentiated seating options (e.g., away from windows, in an area that allows for standing)
- Strategic partnering
- Build in brain breaks throughout your class period
- Schedule in class breaks with students who need them
- Increase wait time for a student to respond
- Warm call
- Have an clean and visually organized class environment

*\*\*Want to know more? Check-out the resources located at the end of the Executive Functioning Tool Kit*



## Resources

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

Understood

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/types-of-executive-function-skills>

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## About the author



### **Meagan Gillcrist**

*Educational Consultant, Branching Minds*

Meagan Gillcrist is a Branching Minds Educational Consultant based in Denver, CO. Meagan has been a devoted advocate and secondary public school educator for 12+ years. Her work as an instructional coach and special education program director have allotted her the opportunity to understand the holistic needs of both students and teachers at a deeper systematic level. This knowledge has given Meagan extensive experience in seeking a more collaborative, equitable, and inclusive process at the school and district level through the implementation of MTSS. Her passion for this work is rooted in keeping great educators in education to support student growth and achievement far beyond the classroom walls. Meagan holds a Masters degree in Special Education from the College of William and Mary.



## About the Branching Minds Solution

Branching Minds is an MTSS/RTI system-level education platform that brings together innovative, easy-to-use technology with the latest insights from the learning sciences to help drive student and school success, while making teachers and administrators work easier and more effective. Branching Minds connects data, systems, interventions, and stakeholders so that educators, administrators, and families can work better together to support students' holistic needs.



## Branching Minds Helps Educators

Understand school health and wellness across the district

Target approach to strengthen Behavior/SEL intervention practice

Avoid overidentification or underreferral of student subgroups