

The Plan

Self-Talk may be considered the backbone of executive functions. It is a skill that students can learn to use explicitly, and it is the foundation for the development of additional skills that comprise executive functions.

Self-Talk is the act of talking to oneself, either aloud or silently, for help to focus on the task at hand.

Metacognition, the awareness of one's own learning or thinking processes, is a critical factor in the development of executive functions. Your students must learn to develop a plan of action, to maintain and monitor the plan, and to evaluate how well their plan worked. The best evidence that they are doing these things is for them to use Self-Talk to state their goals, strategies, and self-evaluations aloud. You will guide the students toward silent Self-Talk using the sequence of activities in this unit.

■ Levels of Independence

The activities in this unit are designed to guide the student to learn to use Self-Talk. They are presented in three levels, with the student achieving more independence at each consecutive level.

- Level 1** The clinician monitors the student as he states the skill he is learning and his strategy aloud and plans an exercise using audible Self-Talk.
- Level 2** The clinician monitors the student as he states the skill he is learning aloud, states his strategy silently (in his head), and plans an exercise using silent Self-Talk.
- Level 3** The student states his strategy and plan using silent Self-Talk before he completes an exercise.

Each level of independence contains four types of activities: Calculations, Sequence Detection, Alphabetizing, and Word Recall. Each type of activity contains three exercises, giving the student multiple opportunities to practice Self-Talk using a variety of activities at each level of independence. The student should complete the Level 1 Exercises first, and then move on to the Level 2 and Level 3 Exercises respectively.

The number of exercises students must complete to achieve mastery of Self-Talk will be different for each student. One student may only need to do several exercises at each level to grasp the concept. Another student may need more practice to understand the skill and, therefore, may need to do all of the exercises at each level. Repetition of exercises is particularly important for the student who is not learning executive functions incidentally. This student may need to redo exercises multiple times to solidify his use of Self-Talk. Use your clinical judgment to determine how many exercises the student needs to complete at each level and how much repetition he requires for each exercise.

Note: All exercises and the answer key are on the enclosed CD.

■ Completing an Exercise

Engage the student in ongoing discussions to introduce the skills and to discuss the progress he is making toward Setting Goals and Self-Evaluating his performance. Talking about how the student works and learns and actively engaging him in discussions will lead him toward the level of metacognitive ability he needs to use executive functions independently. The guided reflections that precede each level of exercises will serve as informal scripts for these discussions and will help you use consistent terminology with the student.

The student should state the two skills he is learning at the onset of each Level 1 and Level 2 Exercise. This will help him develop explicit awareness of the skills he is acquiring. His response to the "What am I learning?" prompt should be, "I am learning to set goals and self-evaluate."

The student's next step is to establish a baseline (i.e., a basic standard for time and errors) for each of the four types of activities in this unit. To establish a baseline, the student must complete the initial exercise for each activity in Level 1 (i.e., Rapid Calculations 1, Rapid Sequence Detection 1, Categories 1, and Personal Goal 1) without setting a goal. You will keep track of the time it takes him to complete the exercise and you will tally the errors he makes. These results become the baseline for comparison and the student's guideline for setting the goal for his next attempt at the exercise.

For example

The first time the student completes Rapid Calculations 1, he does not set a goal. He finishes the exercise in 4 minutes, 20 seconds and makes five errors. His goal for the next Rapid Calculations exercise might be to complete the exercise in 4 minutes or less and to make fewer than five errors.

The student's objective will always be to improve his speed and/or accuracy from his previous performance. Depending on his performance and your knowledge of his working behaviors, encourage the student to set goals that are appropriate for him. One student may need to set goals that reflect small, incremental steps to help him succeed in using the skill. Another student may set and reach goals that significantly reduce his time and/or errors. Goals may address only reduced time, only reduced errors, or both reduced time and errors. You should intervene whenever you feel a student is setting unreasonable or unattainable goals.

The final exercise for each level of independence requires the student to set a personal goal and self-evaluate his attempts at attaining it. This exercise is not timed and it does not require error reporting. It is possible that the student has not had any experience in setting personal goals, or he may not have done so with the level of scrutiny that you will provide, so he may require your assistance.

Steps to Learning Setting Goals & Self-Evaluating

- 1 Introduce the guided reflection . . .
Getting Ready
 - 2 Present Level 1 Exercises
 - 3 Introduce the guided reflection . . .
Making It Mine
 - 4 Present Level 2 Exercises
 - 5 Introduce the guided reflection . . .
On My Own
 - 6 Present Level 3 Exercises
 - 7 Introduce the guided reflection . . .
I Own It
-

■ **Exercises, continued**

Read the following passage to the student at a more typical rate while maintaining exaggerated inflection and stress on the bold print words. After you read the passage, have the student complete A Few Clues 2 (CD page 308).

The Musical Dilemma

Meredith always wanted to be a musician. She started taking **flute** lessons when she was in **fourth grade**, and her parents bought her a flute for her **11th birthday**. In **middle school**, she was in band class. She enjoyed it so much that she decided to join the band in high school.

On the first day of band class in high school, Meredith counted **20 students** playing the flute! That was too many. The band director suggested that Meredith should consider playing a different instrument. There was only **one bassoon** player and the band needed another one. He asked her to think about it and let him know by **Monday**.

Meredith was **excited** about learning a new instrument, but she was worried she would not be able to play it well enough. She also worried that her parents wouldn't be able to buy a new bassoon because they are very **expensive** — much more expensive than a flute. She was worried about one more thing too — there are **no bassoon** players in a **marching band**. She could play the bassoon in the **spring** during the **concert season**, but what would she do during the marching band season in the **fall**?

Meredith was relieved when the band director answered all of her questions. He was confident she could learn to play the bassoon quickly because she was a good musician. He told her she could **borrow** the school's bassoon so she didn't have to buy one. Finally, he told her that she could play the **cymbals** during the marching band season in the fall and play the bassoon in the spring. Yes, Meredith decided, she would learn to play the bassoon.

Listening Awareness | A Few Clues 2 Level 2

What am I learning?

The Musical Dilemma

■ Did I listen? Yes No

■ The main idea: _____

■ Did I understand? Yes No

■ The details: _____

■ Did I remember? Yes No

Used the skill? Yes No

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Concluding Remarks

- Consider the exercises in this program as a means to an end. The worksheets serve only to introduce your student to the varied skills that comprise executive functions and to provide practice using those skills in controlled conditions. It is important that you provide ongoing generalization activities.
- Observe the way the demands of your student's academic, social, and home life change over time. Continue to provide suggestions for ways your student can use his new skills in these changing conditions.
- Explicit awareness of the skill the student is using is the most important aspect of this program. Your student stated the skill he was learning for each exercise he completed. Continue to use this methodology as he generalizes.
- Communicate with your student's family and teachers about the skills he is acquiring. Enlist their help in carryover.
- Students have always learned to use executive functions, but the skill set has not always been as clearly defined as it is now. It may be necessary to educate family members and teachers about the significance of executive functions.