

# connections in mind



## Brain development

The brain learns over a period of 25 years and what a child does is crucial in shaping their brain for the rest of their lives. Adults can change their brains but it takes much more effort.

## Executive Function Skills

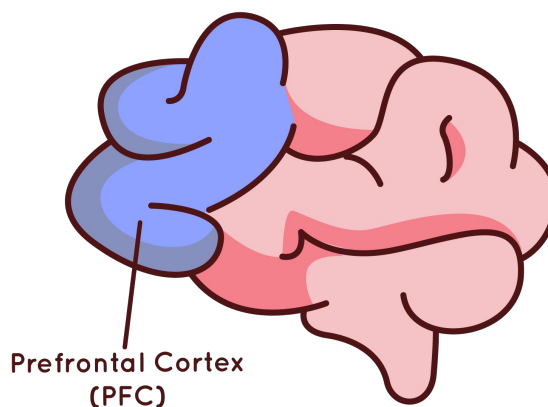
Executive function skills refer to the cognitive skills involved in the top-down control of behaviour when working towards a goal. They are needed whenever an automatic function is either insufficient or detrimental and they are used to regulate behaviour in response to the external environment. They are also needed to help us plan, organise and monitor our responses.

## Connections in Mind

Connections in Mind was founded in 2015 by three like-minded women who, together, wanted to change the way society views people with executive function challenges.

We offer a variety of services

- Executive Function Coaching
- Play-based Adventures
- Parent Support
- Schools Training/Consultancy
- Work with organisations



Executive functions are brain processes found in the prefrontal cortex of the brain. They are called executive functions because they help us to **execute tasks**; they also help us to regulate our emotions.

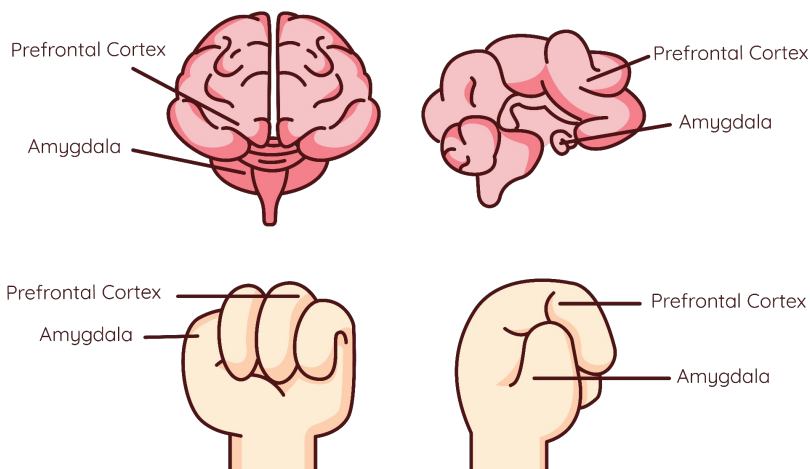
Everyone has a unique executive function profile and can benefit from working to improve their executive functioning.

You can find out yours for **free** here:

For yourself <https://su.vc/executivefunction>

For your children: <https://s.surveyanplace.com/dczybljg>

## Adapted from Dan Siegel's Hand Model





## Individualised approaches to SEND are not working

17% of children in England have SEND, and rising.

Local authorities are underfunded by £2.6bn.

Teachers are burning out and the profession is in crisis.

## Trauma and Brain Development

[Research from the Harvard Centre on the Developing Child](#) has found that psychological trauma can impact the development of the prefrontal cortex.

- Acute Trauma (Big T Trauma) - abuse, neglect, divorce etc.
- Chronic Trauma (Small t trauma)- a breakup, the death of a pet, getting bullied, or being rejected.

**Neuroception =  
The brain's  
subconscious  
threat detector**

Dr Stephen Porges

## Executive function challenges are normal

- Resisting temptation to say or do things
- Hold a thought in memory while doing other tasks
- Knowing and managing your feelings
- Paying attention even if tired or bored
- Starting straight away
- Planning and deciding what to do when
- Organising information or material
- Managing time
- Persisting towards a goal
- Changing, adapting and being flexible
- Being aware of what is happening and making changes to their EF challenges.

## Online course - self study

Click here for access to our introduction to executive functions course












<https://www.cimlearning.com/courses/intro-efs/>

## Well-being and optimal brain development





## Executive Function Definitions

Skill	Definition
Response inhibition 	The capacity to think before you act; this ability to resist the urge to say or do something and allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behaviour might impact it.
Working memory 	The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the current situation or project into the future.
Emotional control 	The ability to manage emotions to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behaviour.
Sustained attention 	The capacity to keep paying attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.
Task initiation 	The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.
Planning/ prioritisation 	The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what's important to focus on and what's not important.
Organisation 	The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials.
Time management 	The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important.
Goal-directed persistence 	The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of the goal, and not be put off by or distracted by competing interests.
Flexibility 	The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information, or mistakes. It related to an adaptability to changing conditions
Metacognition 	The ability to stand back and take a bird's-eye view of yourself in a situation, to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self mentoring and self evaluative skills (e.g., asking yourself, "How am I doing?" or "How did I do?")

# The Behaviour Iceberg

Quiet and compliant at school, explosive at home

Struggles to get it down on paper

Incomplete homework

Emotional outbursts

Disruptive

Breaks rules

Shouts out in class

Swears

Forgets things easily

Shame

Fear

Guilt

Hopeless

Unloveable

Isolated

Executive Function Challenges

Psychological Trauma  
acute or chronic

Genetic predisposition

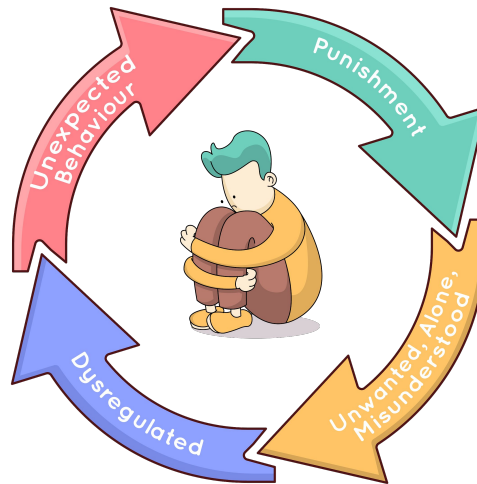
Not always as it seems.



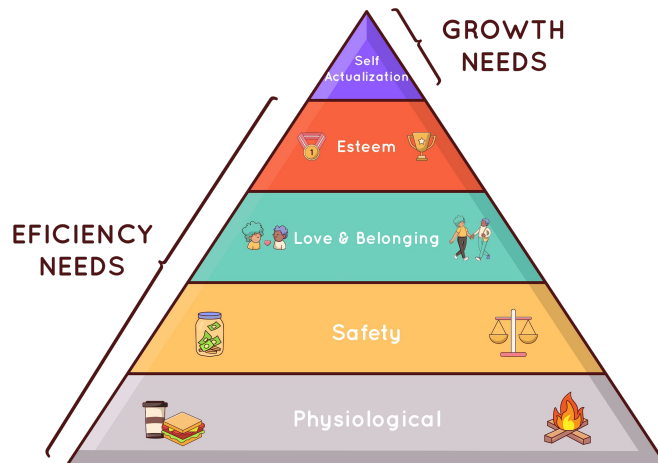
### Neuro-inclusive schools nurture the whole brain of every child

- ❑ Relational Approach to Self Discipline (Desautels, Whitaker - Brighton & Hove)
- ❑ Focus on belonging not fitting in (Riley)
- ❑ Embeds a executive function skills approach (Faith)
- ❑ Teaching staff who model self compassion and care (Brown)

### Traditional behaviour policies escalate unexpected behaviour



### Maslow's hierarchy of needs



Feelings of safety and belonging are fundamental to personal development, traditional behaviour policies make young people with executive function challenges feel like they don't belong.

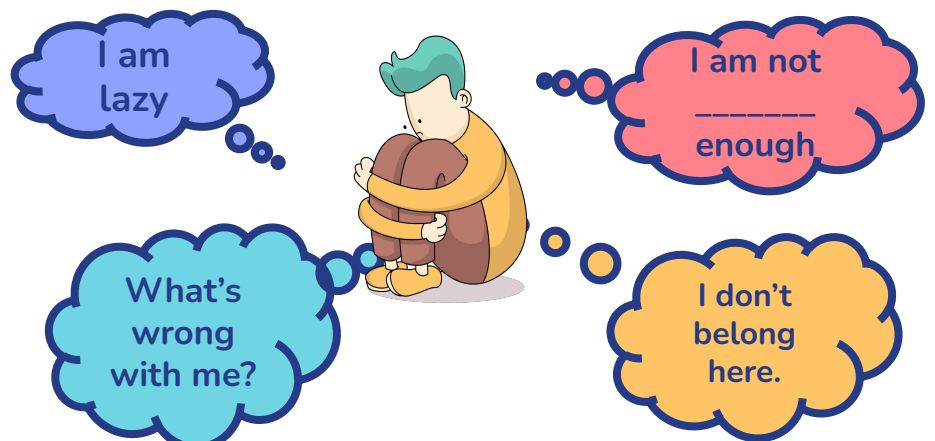
### Psychological harm

These young people internalise the negative comments they hear from teachers, parents and peers and their mental health spirals down.

**“The opposite of belonging is fitting in.”**

Dr. Brené Brown - 2019

**WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACHES ARE NECESSARY FOR SOME, BUT GOOD FOR ALL.**





# Techniques and Strategies

## CONNECT

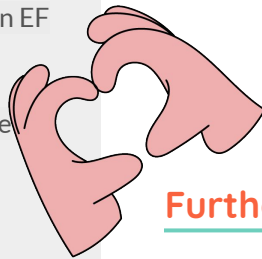
Empathise with the child - feel the emotions with them.

Get EF literate.

Complete our questionnaire

See behaviour through an EF lens.

Talk about your executive function challenges.



## COLLABORATE

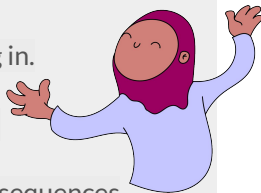
Focus on autonomy.

Get them involved in everything.

Resist jumping in.

Ask questions.

Co-design consequences which feel fair and relevant for all.



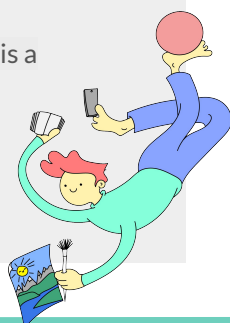
## SUPPORT

Genuine Specific Praise

Remove chronic trauma.

Use checklists and visual prompts to aid working memory.

Ensure well-being is a priority!



## 3 Stages:

# CONNECT

# COLLABORATE

# SUPPORT

## Further Resources

Harvard trauma research

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/deep-dives/adult-capabilities/>

Reading and Resources

<https://connectionsinmind.com/reading-and-resources/>

Empathy Course

<https://cimlearning.com/courses/empathyschools/>

Free Neuroplasticity Video

<https://www.cimlearning.com/courses/neuroplasticity/>

Intro to Executive Functions course

<https://www.cimlearning.com/courses/intro-efs/>

Coach Training for School Professionals

<https://cimlearning.com/coach-training-for-schools/>

School Professionals Resource Subscription

<https://cimlearning.com/school-subscription-lp/>

**Find out more about our schools work**

<https://connectionsinmind.com/schoolseducators/>