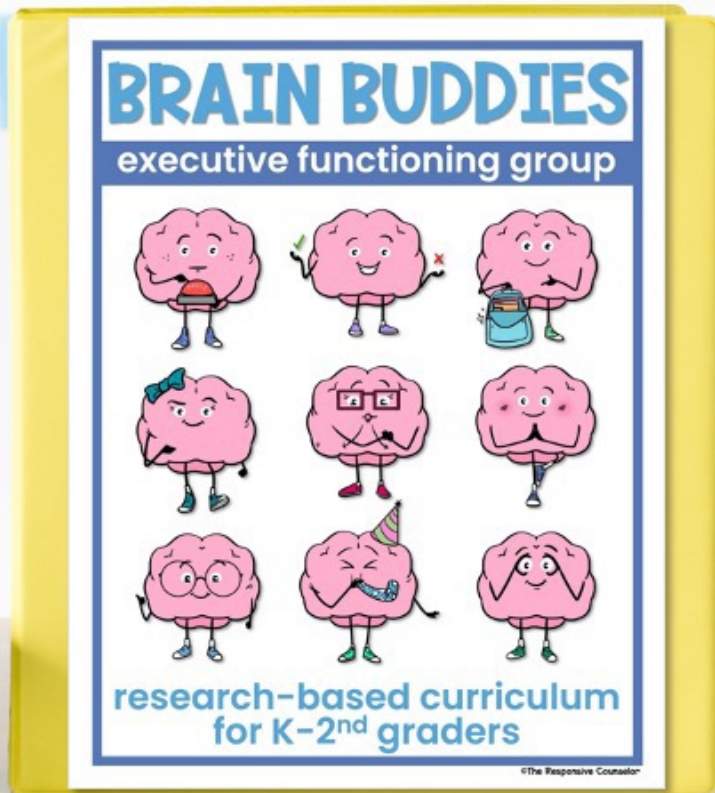


BRAIN BUDDIES

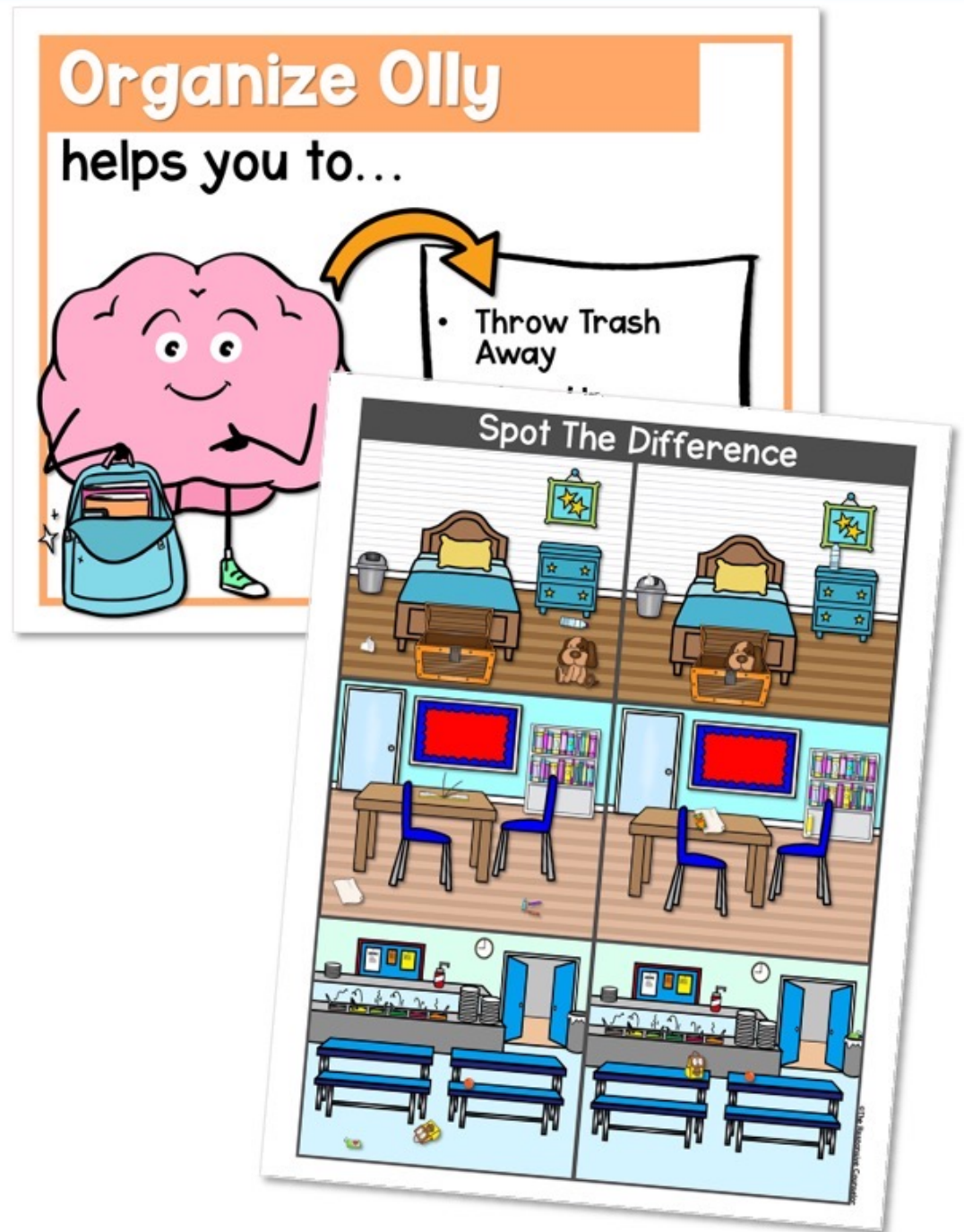
executive functioning group activities for K-2nd

- ▶ **Research-based** curriculum
- ▶ Skill-building sessions with **engaging**, hands-on activities
- ▶ Comprehensive, **ready-to-go** group with lots of flexibility



big picture overview

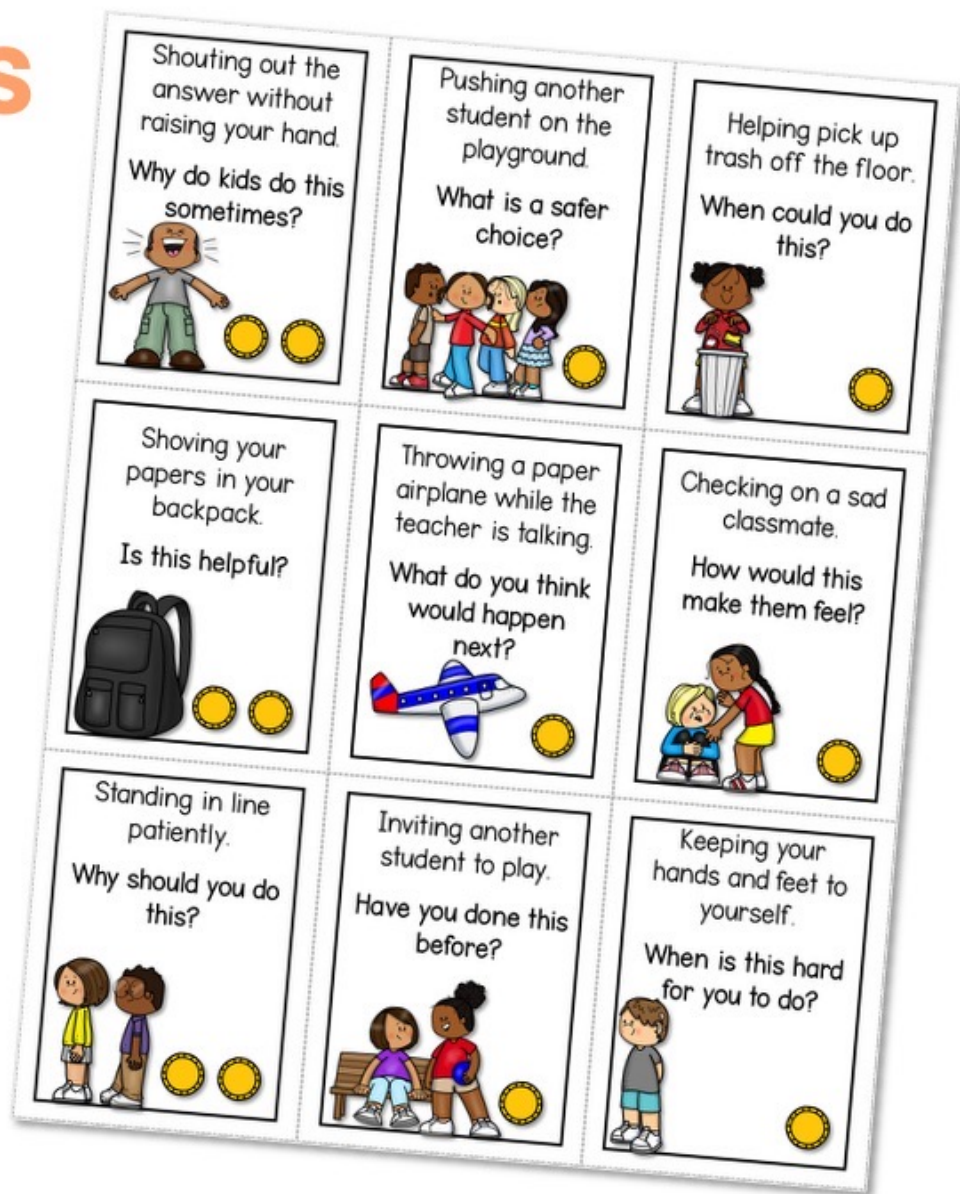
- ▶ Session 1: Introduction
- ▶ Session 2: Self-Control
- ▶ Session 3: Choices + Consequences
- ▶ Session 4: Focus
- ▶ Session 5: Self-Confidence
- ▶ Session 6: Self-Regulation
- ▶ Session 7: Organization
- ▶ Session 8: Getting Started
- ▶ Session 9: Flexible Thinking
- ▶ Session 10: Review + Celebration



You know those students who struggle with...

Executive functioning skills, like getting started on tasks, being organized, and making good choices?

Being the **best student** they can be?



This is the support for them!

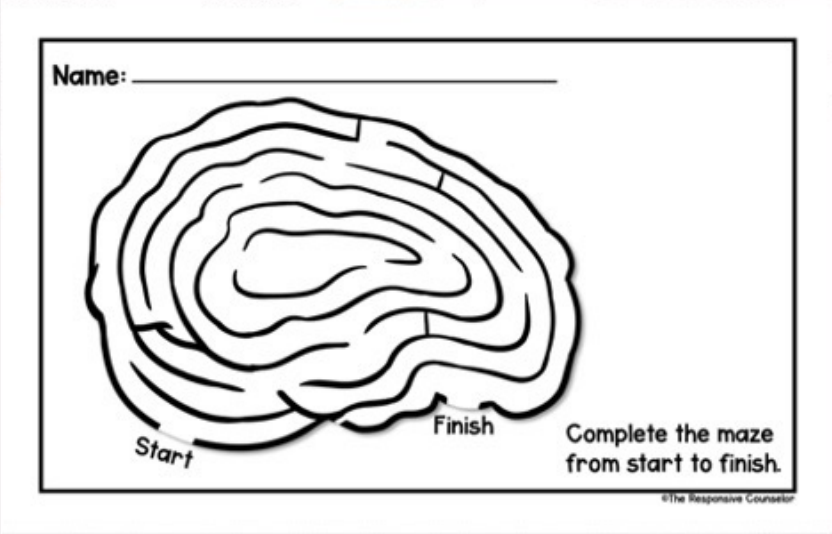
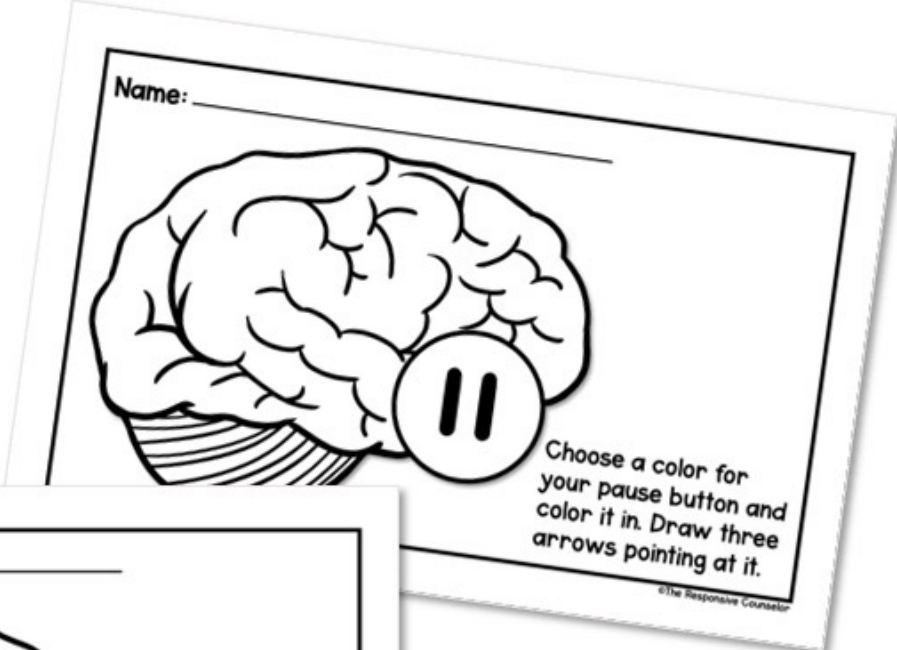
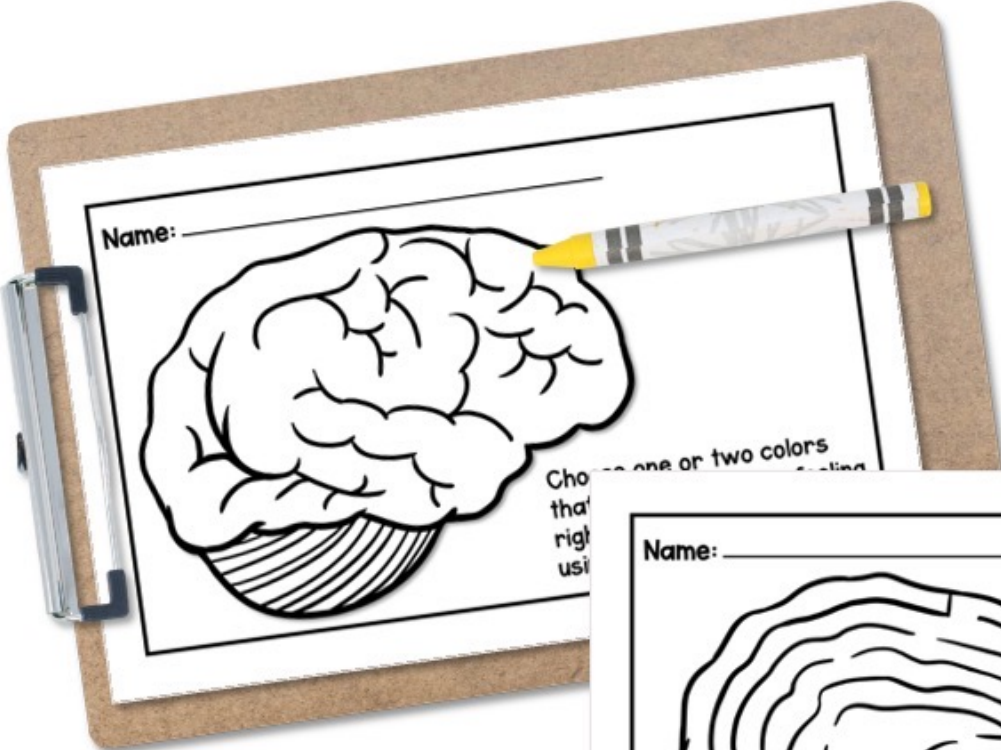
Students thrive on routine! All sessions follow a consistent structure to help students focus on building and practicing important EF skills.

- ▶ Mindful Art Opener
- ▶ Brain Buddy Skill Introduction Letter
- ▶ Hands On Practice Activities
- ▶ Buddies Badge
- ▶ Caregiver/Teacher Notes

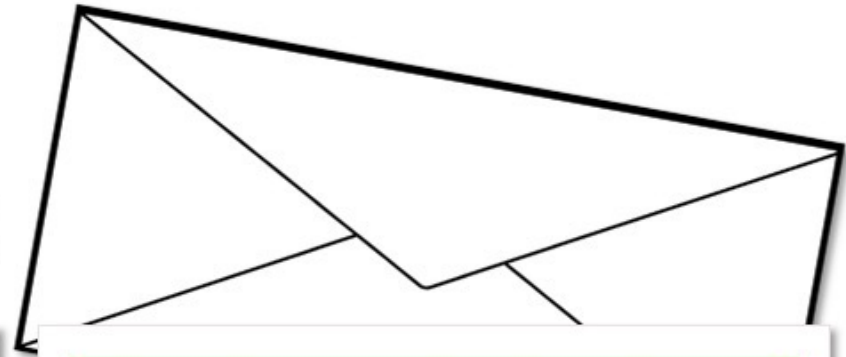


This is what you can expect for each session.

Sessions start with **mindful art** to help make EF skills stick through creative practice!



Each session introduces a new **Brain Buddy** in a letter, teaching students EF skills in a memorable way!



Hi, friends!

My name is Self-Control Simon! I help kids learn how to pause, think, and make good choices.

Self-control means you pause your body, take a deep breath, and think before you do something. When you use self-control, your brain is the boss!

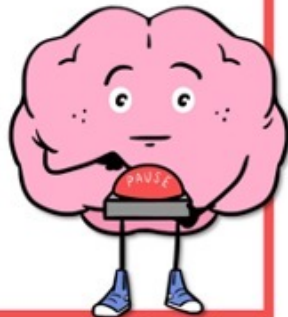
Sometimes it's hard to wait or stay calm, but that's okay. When you practice, your brain gets stronger every day.

You can pause and take a break, wait your turn, use safe hands and kind words, and make good choices.

You are amazing, and I know you can do it!

Your Friend,

**Self-Control
Simon**



©The Responsive Counselor

Hi, friends!

My name is Focus Finn! I help kids learn how to pay attention and use their brain power.

Focusing means thinking about what you are doing. Everyone's brain focuses in different ways!

Some kids focus while sitting still, standing, moving, or using a fidget. All those ways are okay!

Sometimes our brains get distracted and start thinking about other things. When that happens, we can take a deep breath and try again. We can remind our brains, "It's time to focus!"

Each time you practice, your brain gets stronger. You've got this, I am proud of you!

Your Friend,

**Focus
Finn**



©The Responsive Counselor

Hi, friends!

My name is Decision-Maker Danni! I help kids learn how to think through their choices. Every day, we make lots of choices, like how we act and what we say.

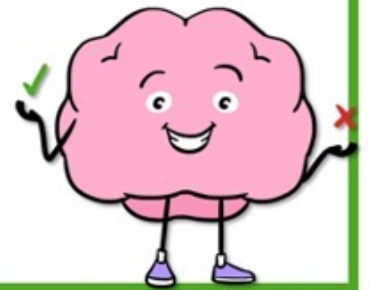
When we make good choices, good things usually happen, like feeling proud, having fun, and helping our friends.

When we make not-so-good choices, there can be not-so-good things that happen, like feeling sad, missing out, or needing to fix a problem. That's why it is important to pause and think before we act!

Before you make a decision, ask yourself, "What will happen if I do this?" OR "Is this a good choice or a not-so-good choice?"

Your Friend,

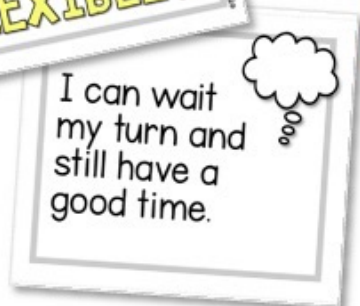
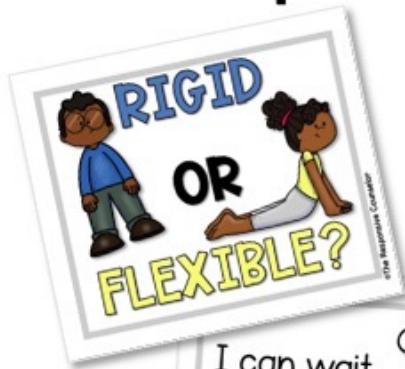
**Decision-
Maker Danni**



©The Responsive Counselor

All session practice activities are...

- ▶ Movement-based
- ▶ Hands on and engaging
- ▶ Do not require independent reading



Brain Buddies/Executive Functioning
session 9: flexible thinking

OUTLINE:

- **Flexible vs Rigid Thinking Poster:** Present the poster to the students and say, "We are going to learn about two kinds of thoughts. We can have rigid thoughts, and we can have flexible thoughts." After reading what a rigid thought is, have the students copy the rigid pose on the poster. After reading what a flexible thought is, have the students copy the flexible pose on the poster.

Flexibility Activity: This activity will help students practice flexibility in three ways: identifying if a thought is flexible vs. inflexible, playing with the playdough, and switching activities even if they are not "done."

- Choose a student to draw a thought card and hand it to you. Read the thought out loud and have the group respond with the rigid or flexible movement from the poster.
- Give each student playdough.
- Instruct them to "Create your favorite animal." (Set a timer for one minute.)
- After the one minute is up, say "Time to be flexible and squish your creation."
- Collect playdough.
- Move on to the next card.

FLEXIBLE

RIGID
A rigid thought is a stuck-brain thought. It makes you feel stiff, frustrated, or like there's only one way to do something.

not this!

ooo

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(sneak peak of session 9!)

session 1: introduction

Build rapport, establishing expectations

session 2: self-control

Learn how to press pause and manage impulses

session 3: choices + consequences

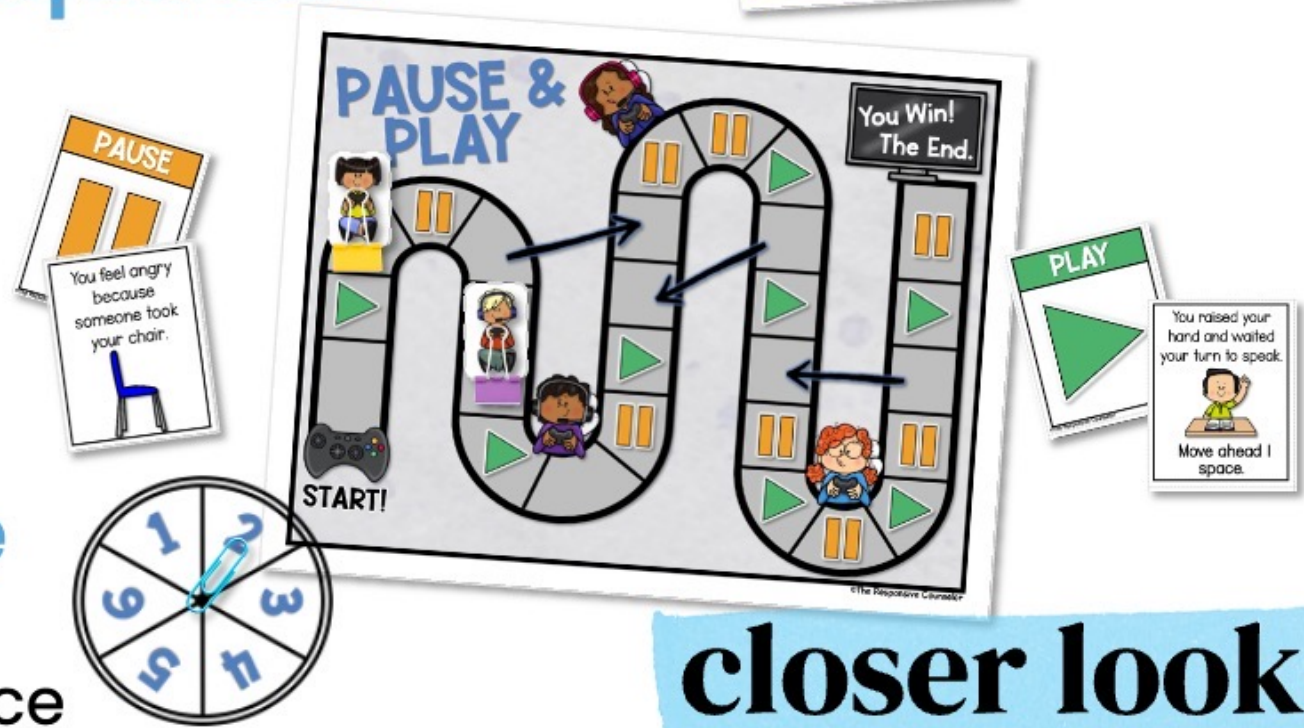
Identify the consequences of good choices and poor choices

session 4: focus

Identify distractions and learn strategies to stay on task

session 5: self-confidence

Positive self-talk cards for practice and a worksheet to boost confidence



closer look

session 6: self-regulation

Identify and manage difficult emotions

session 7: organization

Practice noticing, sorting, and keeping track of details

session 8: getting started

Practice strategies to take the first step even when the work feels hard

session 9: flexible thinking


Practice changing ideas or plans when something doesn't go as planned

session 10: review + celebrate

Reflect on time spent in group and review key skills

ROLL & RESPOND

DIRECTIONS: Roll the die. The first roll determines the feeling. Think of a time you had that feeling. Share about it. Then, roll again. Now, practice the coping skill you rolled.

Feeling	Coping Skill
Sad 	I feel _____ when _____. Can you please _____?
Mad 	Do a chair push-up.
Worried 	Do square breathing.
Excited 	Give yourself a hug.
Lonely 	Stretch your body.
Embarrassed 	Whisper something kind to yourself.

©The Responsive Counselor

MEMORY MATCH

Distraction



©The Responsive Counselor

Review + Celebrate

Share one positive affirmation you can tell yourself today!

Name: _____



RIGID OR FLEXIBLE?

I can only play my favorite game at recess.



I can wait my turn and still have a good time.

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ORGANIZED OR NOT?

Mia puts her trash from her snack in the garbage can before going to recess.

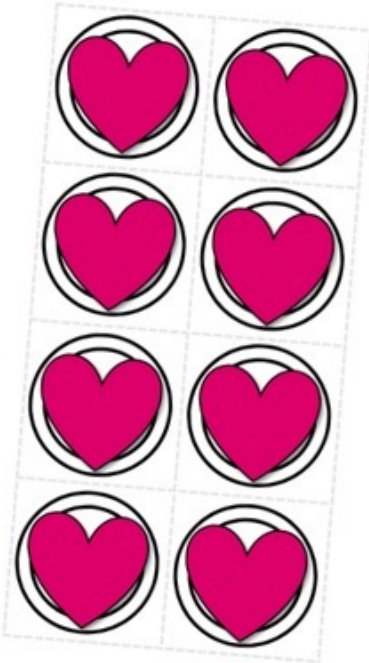
Omar can't find his take-home folder in his backpack.

ORGANIZED **UNORGANIZED**

©The Responsive Counselor

closer look

Every session features a **Buddies Badge** for students to collect that highlights their progress and growth.



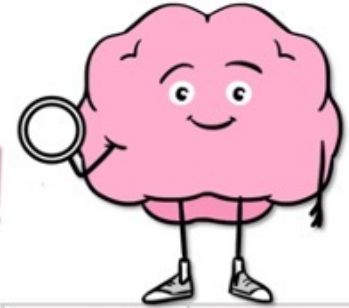
Badge

(cut the dotted line and glue onto Patrol Badges page)

NAME: _____

Buddies Badges

I can do
hard things!



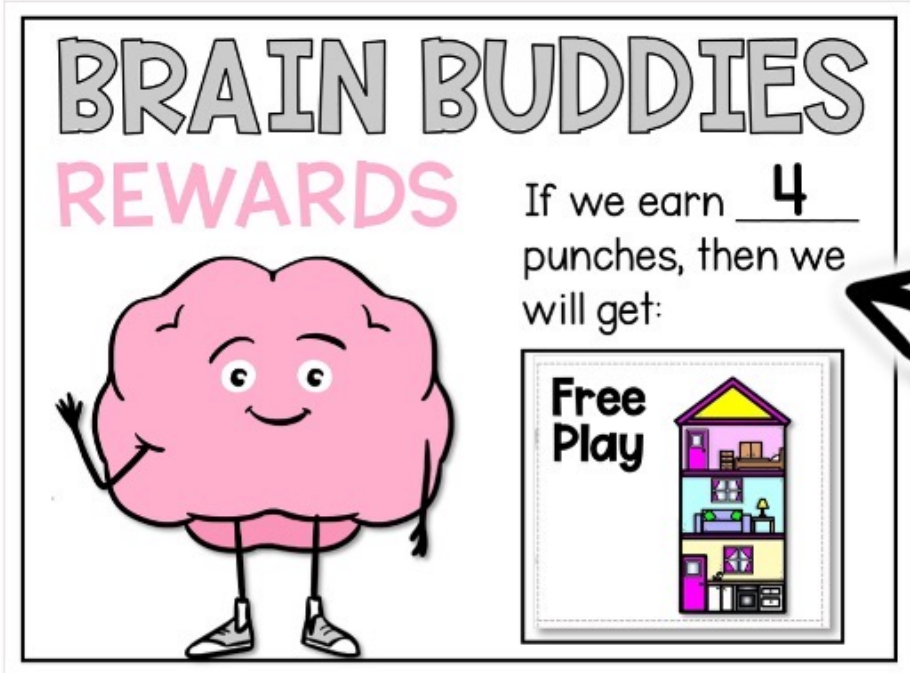
Worried about students struggling to stay on task?

Want to keep the group on track?

Try out the positive reinforcement system!



1. Decide how many punches the group needs to earn.
2. Ask students to pick the reward.
3. Use the punch card during the session!



Collect data using the pre/post assessments, progress monitoring, and session tracker tool!



SESSION TRACKER + NOTES FOR BRAIN BUDDIES

ADDITIONAL INFO:

Date	Attendance	Notes
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

BRAIN BUDDIES GROUP Caregiver Pre/Post Assessment

Name: _____

1	My child has trouble with managing impulses and displaying self-control.	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
2	My child has trouble with thinking about consequences before acting.	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
3	My child has trouble with staying on task when distracted.	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
4	My child has trouble with using positive self-talk when facing a challenging task.	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
5	My child has trouble with managing difficult emotions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
6	My child has trouble with keeping their space organized.	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
7	My child has trouble with getting started on a task.	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
8	My child has trouble with changing their ideas/plans when things don't go their way.	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always

Additional Information: _____

TEACHERS GROUP Teacher Pre/Post Assessment

1	My child has trouble with _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
2	My child has trouble with _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
3	My child has trouble with _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
4	My child has trouble with _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
5	My child has trouble with _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
6	My child has trouble with _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
7	My child has trouble with _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always
8	My child has trouble with _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Always

BRAIN BUDDIES GROUP Student Pre/Post Assessment

1	Think before I make a decision.	No	Kinda	Yes
2	Get down when I am frustrated.	No	Kinda	Yes
3	When there are many things to do, I know where they are.	No	Kinda	Yes
4	When I am working, I know when to stop.	No	Kinda	Yes

BRAIN BUDDIES WEEKLY PROGRESS MONITORING

Student/Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Score your student on the three main categories of executive functioning based on the past week. On a scale of 1 to 10, how strong are each of them?

1 10

Self-Regulation: thinking before acting, flexible thinking, taking care of big feelings	
Getting Started + Focus: getting started on a task and staying on task even when bored or distracted	
Organization + Readiness to Learn: comes prepared to learn, puts things in the correct spot	

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Want to see progress made?

Black and white pages included!

FOUR CORNERS

What do you want to be when you grow up?

1. A construction worker
2. An artist
3. A chef
4. A vet

What do you like to do with your family?

1. Go on road trips
2. Have a picnic
3. Watch movies
4. Play Games

What do you want to do for your friends?




1. Invite them to play
2. Help them when they are sad
3. Tell them, "good job!"
4. Throw away their trash from morning breakfast

What is your favorite food?

1. Pizza
2. Chicken nuggets
3. Tacos
4. Spaghetti

ROLL & RESPOND!

DIRECTIONS: Roll the die. The first roll determines the feeling. Think of a time you had that feeling. Then, roll again. Now, practice the coping skill.

Feeling	Coping Skill
Sad 	I feel _____ Can you please _____
Mad 	Do a chair _____
Worried 	Do square _____


Decision-Maker

Danni helps you to think...

What will happen if I do this?

What should I be doing right now?

Is this a good choice?



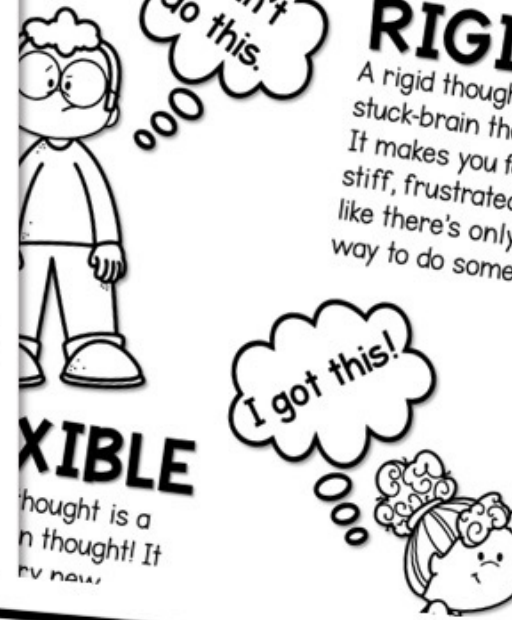
RIGID VS. FLEXIBLE

RIGID
A rigid thought is a stuck-brain thought. It makes you feel stiff, frustrated, or like there's only one way to do something.

FLEXIBLE
A flexible thought is a new thought! It gives you new ideas.


I can't do this.

I got this!



Pause-Control Skills

Press Pause And Think About Your Choices



BRAIN BUDDIES RULES

- Stay in the group 
- Follow directions 
- One voice at a time 
- Be safe 
- Try your best 
- Have fun! 

Want to make the group a semester long?

Here is a guide on how to extend the sessions!

before you begin extending sessions

Below are recommendations for splitting each session into two sessions. This may be useful for groups that are longer than 10 weeks or when additional time is needed for processing and/or skill practice.

• Introduction

- Session 1: Mindful Art, Character Letter, Group Rules Role & Respond
- Session 2: Character Poster, Four Corners, Buddies Badge

• Self-Control

- Session 3: Mindful Art, Character Letter, Pause & Play Game
- Session 4: Character Poster, Read 'Clark the Shark' OR Play Simon Says, Buddies Badge

• Choices + Consequences

- Session 5: Mindful Art, Character Letter, Choice Check Cards
- Session 6: Character Poster, Read 'Chicken Clicking' OR Play Chutes and Ladders, Buddies Badge

• Focus

- Session 7: Mindful Art, Character Letter, Puzzle
- Session 8: Character Poster, Memory Match, Buddies Badge

before you begin extending sessions

• Self-Confidence

- Session 9: Mindful Art, Character Letter, Pat Pat Positive Cards
- Session 10: Character Poster, Mirror Mirror Worksheet, Buddies Badge

• Self-Regulation

- Session 11: Mindful Art, Character Letter, Role & Respond
- Session 12: Character Poster, Read 'Alphabreaths' OR Practice Yoga Poses, Buddies Badge

• Organization

- Session 13: Mindful Art, Character Letter, Spot the Difference Activity
- Session 14: Character Poster, Organized or Not Sorting Cards, Buddies Badge

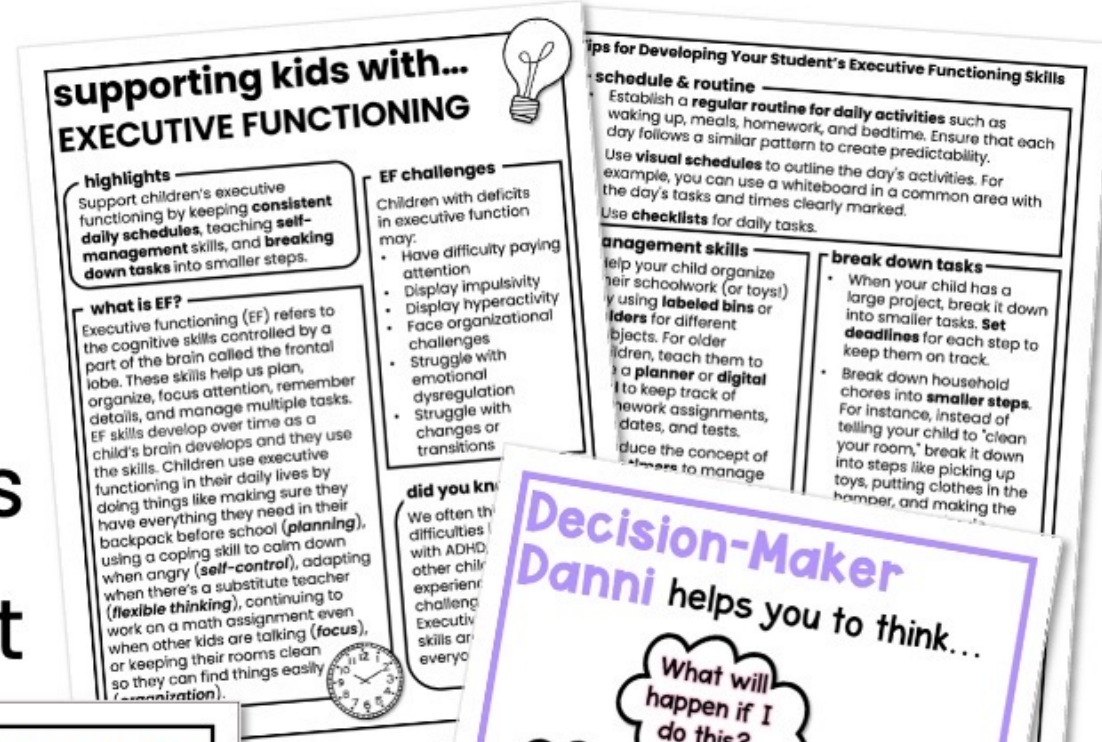
• Getting Started

- Session 15: Mindful Art, Character Letter, Getting Started Flip Activity, Task/Get Started Puzzle
- Session 16: Character Poster, Read 'I Don't Want to Read This Book' OR Play Musical Chairs, Buddies Badge



Additional tools included:

- ▶ Skill reinforcement posters
- ▶ Completion certificate
- ▶ Suggested book companions
- ▶ Teacher & caregiver tip sheet



Supporting kids with... EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Highlights
Support children's executive functioning by keeping **consistent daily schedules**, teaching **self-management skills**, and **breaking down tasks** into smaller steps.

What is EF?
Executive functioning (EF) refers to the cognitive skills controlled by a part of the brain called the frontal lobe. These skills help us plan, organize, focus attention, remember details, and manage multiple tasks. EF skills develop over time as a child's brain develops and they use the skills. Children use executive functioning in their daily lives by doing things like making sure they have everything they need in their backpack before school (**planning**), using a coping skill to calm down when angry (**self-control**), adapting when there's a substitute teacher (**flexible thinking**), continuing to work on a math assignment even when other kids are talking (**focus**), or keeping their rooms clean so they can find things easily (**organization**).

EF challenges
Children with deficits in executive function may:

- Have difficulty paying attention
- Display impulsivity
- Display hyperactivity
- Face organizational challenges
- Struggle with emotional dysregulation
- Struggle with changes or transitions

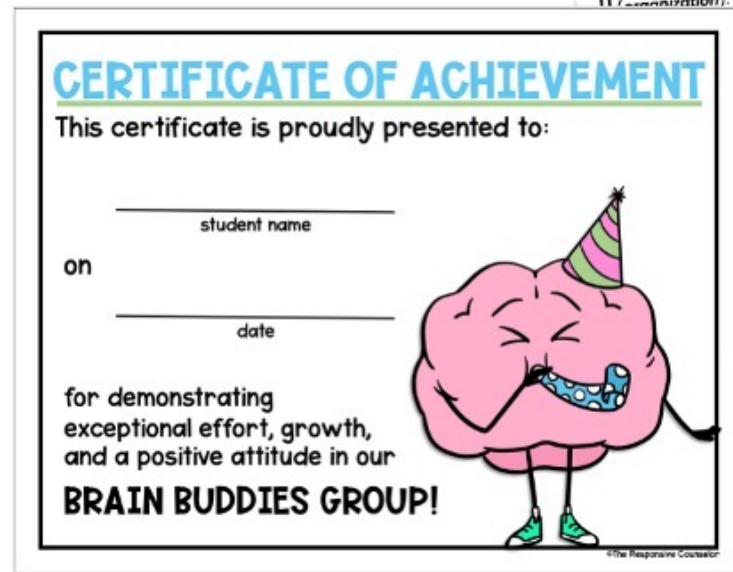
Did you know?
We often think of executive function difficulties as only affecting children with ADHD, but other children experience challenging executive function skills as well.

tips for Developing Your Student's Executive Functioning Skills

Schedule & routine
Establish a **regular routine for daily activities** such as waking up, meals, homework, and bedtime. Ensure that each day follows a similar pattern to create predictability. Use **visual schedules** to outline the day's activities. For example, you can use a whiteboard in a common area with the day's tasks and times clearly marked. Use **checklists** for daily tasks.

Organization skills
Help your child organize their schoolwork (or toys!) by using **labeled bins or folders** for different subjects. For older children, teach them to use a **planner or digital calendar** to keep track of homework assignments, dates, and tests. Introduce the concept of **prioritization** to manage tasks.

Break down tasks
When your child has a large project, break it down into smaller tasks. **Set deadlines** for each step to keep them on track. Break down household chores into **smaller steps**. For instance, instead of telling your child to "clean your room," break it down into steps like picking up toys, putting clothes in the hamper, and making the bed.



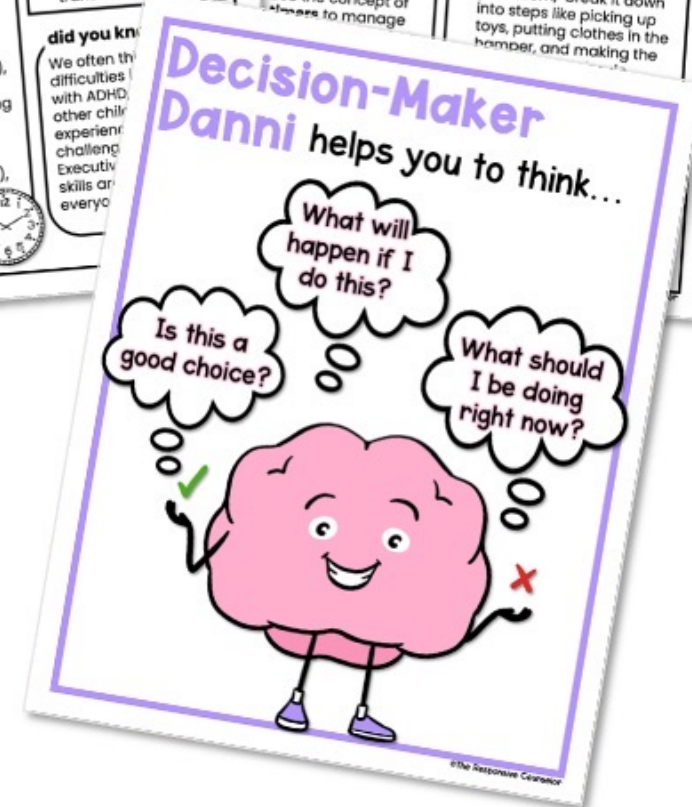
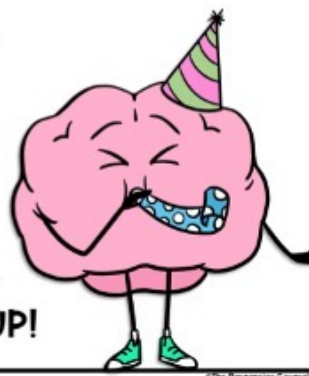
CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

This certificate is proudly presented to:

_____ student name

on _____ date

for demonstrating exceptional effort, growth, and a positive attitude in our **BRAIN BUDDIES GROUP!**

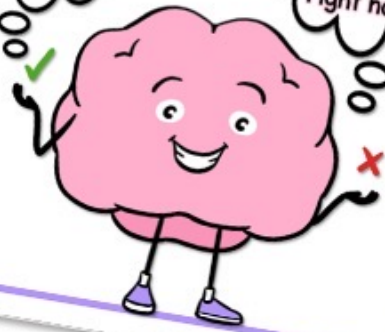


Decision-Maker
Danni helps you to think...

What will happen if I do this?

Is this a good choice?

What should I be doing right now?



questions & answers

Is this ASCA or CASEL aligned?

ASCA Standards

- ▶ Belief in using abilities to their fullest to achieve high-quality results and outcomes
- ▶ Self-confidence in ability to succeed

CASEL Competencies

- ▶ Self-Awareness
- ▶ Self-Management
- ▶ Responsible Decision-Making

What does research-based mean?

It means it was created using what peer-reviewed published research tells us matters and works in growing children's executive functioning skills!

Is this in the group counseling curriculums bundle?

It is not in that bundle and will not be added to it. That bundle is complete.

Hi, I'm Sara! At The Responsive Counselor, we create resources for school counselors, child therapists, and teachers that improve social emotional learning and help students be their best selves. Our focus is creating resources that are effective (using research-based best practices) and engaging (through collaborative learning and relevant scenarios) for students.

B.A. from Michigan State University

Psychology and Anthropology

M.S. from Vanderbilt University

Community, Research, and Action

M.Ed. From Vanderbilt University

Human Development Counseling:
School Counseling & Mental Health

experience

I'm a former school counselor from a large southeastern school district with a wonderfully diverse group of students. I created and implemented a data-based comprehensive school counseling program while helping classroom teachers and administrators implement schoolwide SEL and restorative practices. Now, I share my ideas and resources to reach students and help educators across the world!



let's connect:

