

Session 4:

Attention and Shifting

Parent Summary: Attention and Shifting

Session Overview

- ◆ Homework review
- ◆ Attention
- ◆ Shifting
- ◆ Homework assignment

Key Information

◆ Types of Attention:

- ◆ Selective – focusing on something specific, to the exclusion of other things.
- ◆ Sustained – maintaining selective attention over time.
- ◆ Alternating – shifting attention among multiple stimuli (also known as “shifting”).
- ◆ Divided – using rapid shifting to attend to multiple stimuli almost simultaneously (e.g., listening and taking notes).
- ◆ Attention is the gateway to learning – if you cannot attend to information adequately, you cannot think about it, understand it, store it into long-term memory, etc.
- ◆ Children who struggle with attention may:
 - ◆ Be easily distracted by things in their environment, irrelevant details, or their own thoughts, sensations, or emotions.
 - ◆ Have difficulty maintaining focus, especially on unengaging or challenging tasks.
 - ◆ Have difficulty completing tasks because they are distracted by other things.
 - ◆ Miss important details, possibly interfering with understanding, following instructions, etc.
 - ◆ Make frequent oversight errors because they do not *notice* important details or errors.
 - ◆ May miss non-verbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, irritated tones, etc.) that would let them know what others are feeling.
 - ◆ May not notice contextual cues (e.g., that certain environments require more formality).
 - ◆ May frequently lose or misplace things, because they don't notice that they are putting something down, let alone where they are putting it.
 - ◆ May be incorrectly seen as not caring about their work or as being careless, lazy, disorganized, etc.
- ◆ Types of strategies to support attention include:
 - ◆ Minimize distractions
 - ◆ Provide aids
 - ◆ Provide direct support
 - ◆ Increase stamina
 - ◆ Adapt or reduce demands
 - ◆ Provide tools
 - ◆ Provide extra practice

- ◆ Shifting is the ability to change focus or your course of action. It allows us to be flexible, and to rapidly switch our attention among different tasks, which is what we experience as “multi-tasking.”
- ◆ Children who struggle with shifting may:
 - ✦ Tend to hyper-focus, particularly on engaging tasks or activities they feel invested in. For some children, this tendency can be strong enough to can lead to obsessiveness.
 - ✦ Have difficulty stopping activities, particularly when they haven’t finished what they are doing.
 - ✦ Difficulty with transitions (e.g., from one task to another, one place to another, from asleep to awake, etc.).
 - ✦ Have difficulty shifting among competing demands (e.g., listening and taking notes, attending to details *and* the big picture or main idea, etc.).
 - ✦ Be resistant to change or trying new things.
 - ✦ Get stuck on details, ideas, emotions, etc.
 - ✦ Be rigid or inflexible, possibly becoming distressed when their expectations aren’t met.
 - ✦ Be argumentative, because they *can’t* let go or shift away.
 - ✦ Have extreme and/or black and white thinking.
 - ✦ Have difficulty considering themselves and others, simultaneously.
 - ✦ May be perceived as self-centred, argumentative, stubborn, controlling, manipulative, spoiled, etc.
- ◆ Types of strategies to support shifting include:
 - ◆ Predicting and preventing problems.
 - ◆ Building your child’s awareness and motivation to work on shifting skills.
 - ◆ Using and teaching specific strategies to improve shifting.
 - ◆ Practicing through experimentation and play.
 - ◆ Providing your child direct support “in the moments” they are struggle with shifting.

Homework Checklist

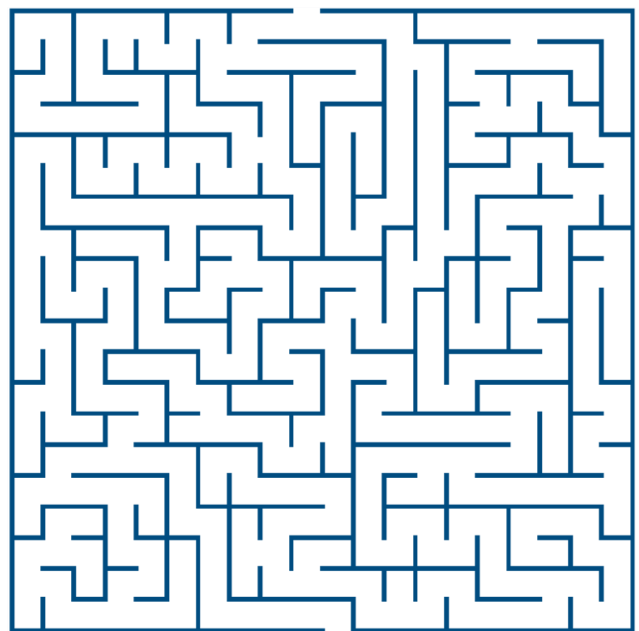
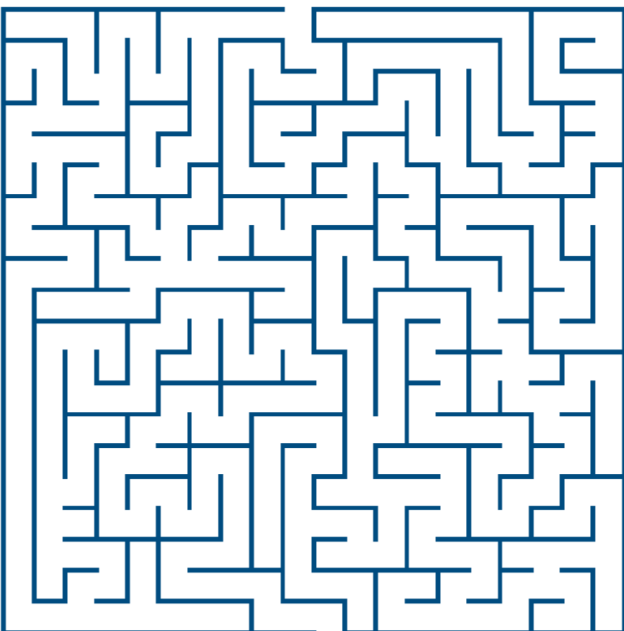
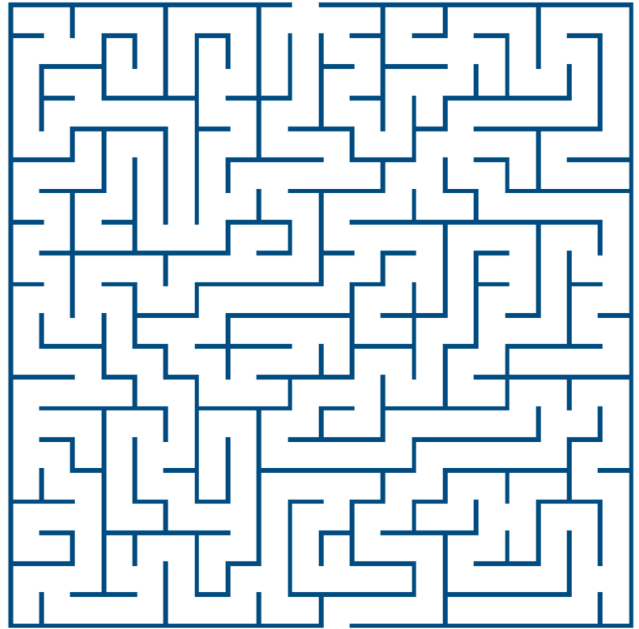
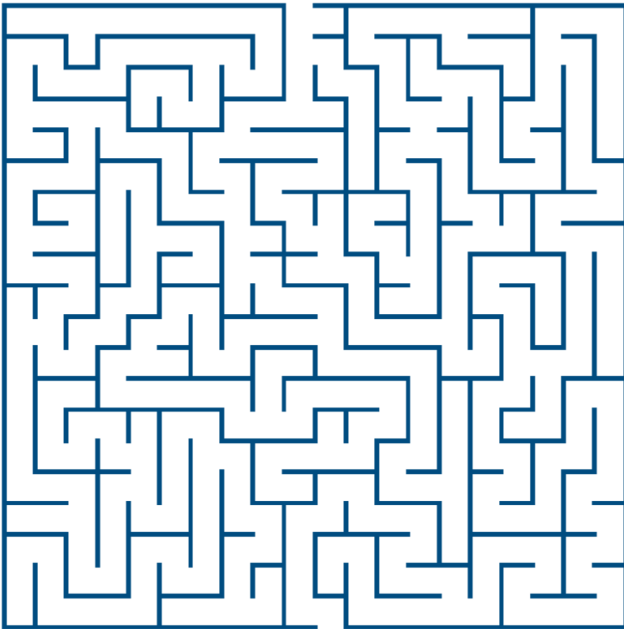
- Complete the Attention worksheet and try 1-2 strategies with your child this week.
- Complete the shifting worksheet and try 1-2 strategies with your child this week.

***Note:** try two strategies altogether – one in each area or two in your child’s area of greatest need.

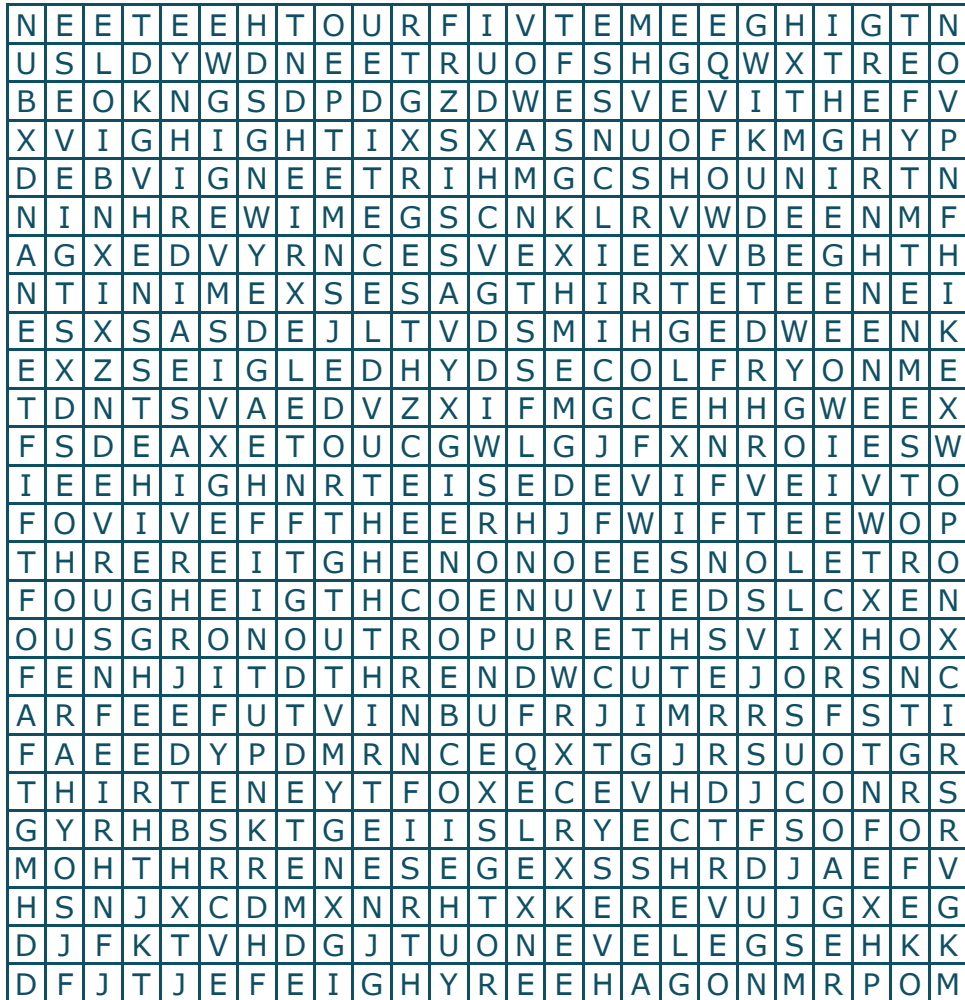
Handout: Activities

Activity 1 Materials

MAZES ACTIVITY



WORD SEARCH ACTIVITY



Find the following numbers:

ONE	SIX	ELEVEN
TWO	SEVEN	TWELVE
THREE	EIGHT	THIRTEEN
FOUR	NINE	FOURTEEN
FIVE	TEN	FIFTEEN

WORD SEARCH SOLUTION

N	E	E	T	E	H	T	O	U	R	F	I	V	T	E	M	E	E	G	H	I	G	T	N			
U	S	L	D	Y	W	D	N	E	E	T	R	U	O	F	S	H	G	Q	W	X	T	R	E	O		
B	E	O	K	N	G	S	D	P	D	G	Z	D	W	E	S	V	E	V	I	T	H	E	F	V		
X	V	I	G	H	I	G	H	T	I	X	S	X	A	S	N	U	O	F	K	M	G	H	Y	P		
D	E	B	V	I	G	N	E	E	T	R	I	H	M	G	C	S	H	O	U	N	I	R	T	N		
N	I	N	H	R	E	W	I	M	E	G	S	C	N	K	L	R	V	W	D	E	E	N	M	F		
A	G	X	E	D	V	Y	R	N	C	E	S	V	E	X	I	E	X	V	B	E	G	H	T	H		
N	T	I	N	I	M	E	X	S	E	S	A	G	T	H	I	R	T	E	T	E	E	N	E	I		
E	S	X	S	A	S	D	E	J	L	T	V	D	S	M	I	H	G	E	D	W	E	E	N	K		
E	X	Z	S	E	I	G	L	E	D	H	Y	D	S	E	C	O	L	F	R	Y	O	N	M	E		
T	D	N	T	S	V	A	E	D	V	Z	X	I	F	M	G	C	E	H	H	G	W	E	E	X		
F	S	D	E	A	X	E	T	O	U	C	G	W	L	G	J	F	X	N	R	O	I	E	S	W		
I	E	E	H	I	G	H	N	R	T	E	I	S	E	D	E	V	I	F	V	E	I	V	T	O		
F	O	V	I	V	E	F	F	T	H	E	E	R	H	J	F	W	I	F	T	E	E	W	O	P		
T	H	R	E	R	E	R	E	I	T	G	H	E	N	O	N	O	E	E	S	N	O	L	E	T	R	O
F	O	U	G	H	E	I	G	T	H	C	O	E	N	U	V	I	E	D	S	L	C	X	E	N		
O	U	S	G	R	O	N	O	U	T	R	O	P	U	R	E	T	H	S	V	I	X	H	O	X		
F	E	N	H	J	I	T	D	T	H	R	E	N	D	W	C	U	T	E	J	O	R	S	N	C		
A	R	F	E	E	F	U	T	V	I	N	B	U	F	R	J	I	M	R	R	S	F	S	T	I		
F	A	E	E	D	Y	P	D	M	R	N	C	E	Q	X	T	G	J	R	S	U	O	T	G	R		
T	H	I	R	T	E	N	E	Y	T	F	O	X	E	C	E	V	H	D	J	O	N	R	S			
G	Y	R	H	B	S	K	T	G	E	I	S	L	R	Y	E	C	T	F	S	O	F	O	R			
M	O	H	T	H	R	R	E	N	E	S	E	G	E	X	S	S	H	R	D	J	A	E	F	V		
H	S	N	J	X	C	D	M	X	N	R	H	T	X	K	E	R	E	V	U	J	G	X	E	G		
D	J	F	K	T	V	H	D	G	J	T	U	O	N	E	V	E	L	E	G	S	E	H	K	K		
D	F	J	T	J	E	F	E	I	G	H	Y	R	E	E	H	A	G	O	N	M	R	P	O	M		

Activity 4 – Partner A Instructions

PART 1 – You are the instructor!

Task 1:

Provide your partner with the following instructions:

“Read the characters under part 1 out loud.”

As they respond, mark an “x” through any errors:

1 4 3 7 A 4 8 3 C 2 8 3 F 7 Z E P 9 X V 6 N F H 1 3 M W 6 T

When they finish, tell them how many mistakes they made.

Task 2:

Provide instructions:

“Now read the characters under part 2, but this time, when you see a letter, replace it with the number immediately before it. For example: if you see 1-3-B-4, you would say, ‘1-3-3-4.’ Ready? Go.”

Mark errors:

1 4 7 7 4 8 3 3 2 8 3 3 7 7 8 2 4 9 9 7 7 2 6 6 4 1 3 3 6 2 2

(blue digits = numbers that replaced letters)

When they finish, tell them how many errors they made.

Task 3:

Provide instructions:

“Now, read the characters under part 3, but this time when you see an *even number*, replace it with the letter immediately before it, and when you see an *odd number*, replace it with the letter immediately following it. For example: if you see 1-B-C-4, you would say, ‘B-B-C-C.’ Ready? Go.”

Mark errors:

B B B A A C V V C C C G J J F F Z Z Z X P P E E X X X K L L N

(blue = digits replaced odd number; purple = digits that replaced even number)

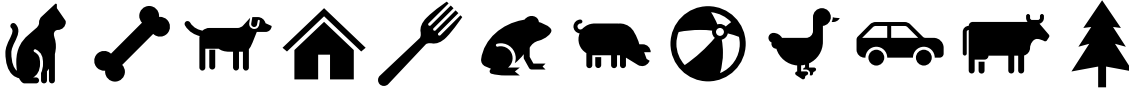
When they finish, tell your partner how many errors they made. Then, go to next page for second set of activities!

PART 2 – You are the participant!

Follow your partner's instructions for each of the following tasks. An abbreviated set of instructions is provided, in case you need a reminder, as you complete the task.

Task 1:

Name the pictures.



Task 2:

Replace animal name with name of first letter (e.g., say "f" instead of frog).



Task 3:

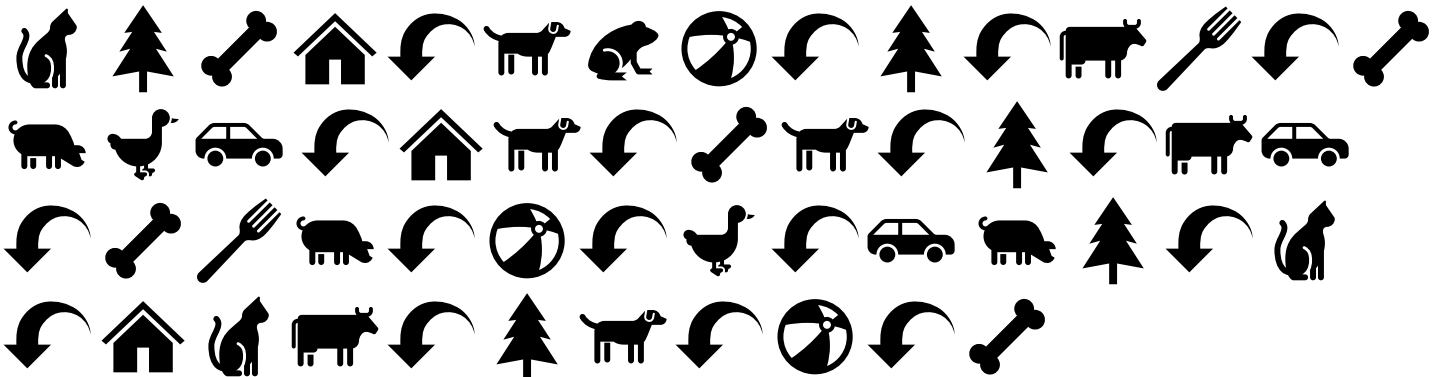
Start naming objects and the first letter of animals; switch to doing the opposite when you see arrow; continue to switch with each arrow.

Example Items:



Bone D fork ball C T cow cat H D

Task items:



Activity 4 – Partner B Instructions

PART 1 – You are the participant!

Follow your partner's instructions for each of the following tasks. An abbreviated set of instructions is provided, in case you need a reminder, as you complete the task.

Task 1:

Read the characters.

1 4 3 7 A 4 8 3 C 2 8 3 F 7 Z E P 9 X V 6 N F H 1 3 M W 6 T

Task 2:

Replace each letter with number immediately before it (e.g., 1 3 B 4 becomes 1 3 3 4).

1 4 7 A 4 8 3 C 2 8 3 F 7 Z 8 2 4 9 E 7 X 2 6 N 4 1 3 M 6 2 K

Task 3:

Replace **even** numbers with letter immediately **before** it; replace odd numbers with letter immediately after it (e.g., 1 B C 4 becomes B B C C).

1 B 4 7 A C V 8 3 C 2 G J 8 3 F 7 Z 2 X P 4 9 E 5 X 6 K L 2 N

PART 2 – You are the instructor!

Follow your partner's instructions for each of the following tasks. An abbreviated set of instructions is provided for each task.

Task 1:

Provide your partner with the following instructions:

"Name the pictures, from left to right."

Check answer (correct as required, as they name them):

Cat, bone, dog, house, fork, frog, pig, ball, duck, car, cow, tree

Task 2:

Provide instructions:

"Again, name the pictures you see, but this time, when you see an animal, say the name of the letter it begins with, instead of its name."

Mark errors as they name items:

Bone, fork, ball, d, car, tree, c, house, c, d, tree, bone, ball

After they finish, tell them how many errors they made.

Task 3:

Provide instructions:

"This time, you're going to switch between naming specific pictures and stating the first letter of other pictures. At first, follow the rules from part 2 – name the objects, and state the first letters of the animals. BUT as soon as you see a reverse arrow, switch to naming the animals and stating the first letters of the objects. Each time you see a reverse arrow, switch which task you are doing. In the example, you would say: bone, d, fork, ball, c, t, cow, cat, h, d. Do you understand?" (If not, have them practice again, or switch roles.)

Once they understand, say: "okay, when I say go, start naming the objects and stating the first letters of the animals; remember to switch tasks each time you see an arrow. Ready? Go!"

Mark errors:

c, tree, bone, house ⇔ dog, frog, b ⇔ tree ⇔ cow, f ⇔ bone, p, d, car ⇔ h, dog ⇔ bone, d ⇔ t ⇔ c, car ⇔ b, f, pig ⇔ ball ⇔ duck ⇔ car, p, tree ⇔ cat ⇔ house, c, c ⇔ t, dog ⇔ ball ⇔ b

*Note: ⇔ denotes where they are being cued to switch tasks

When they are finished, tell them how many errors they made.

Worksheet: Attention

Helping your young person improve their attention skills takes time and patience. Which strategies will help depends on how their attention differences are impacting them.

SELECTIVE ATTENTION STRATEGIES

✓ Minimize environmental and sensory distractors

- Noise-cancelling earphones and/or music, white noise, etc.
- Minimize visual clutter (walls, surfaces, shelving, etc.)
- Provide space away from distracting people and activities
- Provide study carrels
- Eliminate any other sensory distractors that your child can identify (e.g., itchy clothes).

✓ Minimize mental distractions

- Teach your child to jot down distracting thoughts
- Teach your child to highlight the main topic on assignments
- Provide your child with task completion checklists

✓ Direct support to attend to social cues

- Teach your child social cues to look for in different contexts
- Prompts to monitor social cues *before* entering specific social situations
- Provide verbal prompts to watch for social cues *in the moment*

✓ Transition Cues

- Checklists for materials required on the way to/from school and other activities
- Checklists in transition spaces (e.g., visual reminders of what to bring and where)
- Visual reminders in "hot spots" (e.g., to bring dishes back to kitchen from TV area)

✓ Support Attention to Detail

- Checklists for common oversight errors (with direct support, as needed)
- Teach child to highlight important information (e.g., key words, task requirements)

✓ Other Supports

- Monitor child's attention when you're speaking (e.g., blank stare; ability to rephrase)
- Provide accommodations (e.g., allow them to fidget or doodle when listening)

- _____
- _____
- _____

SUSTAINED ATTENTION STRATEGIES

✓ Build attention span

- Increase attention span incrementally (start with baseline; add 1-3 minutes at each stage until young person can stay focussed for that period 8/10 times before progressing)
- Alter environment to maximize alertness (e.g., bright/natural light, cool temperature)
- Monitor alertness and progress (direct support, timers, tracking)
- Practice with games (e.g., Simon memory game, Spot It!, Where's Waldo, Quick Cups, Distraction)

✓ Boost engagement

- Adapt tasks/responsibilities to fit child's strengths
- Make information, problems, etc. as personally relevant and meaningful as possible
- Make rote or boring tasks more interesting/exciting (e.g., songs, game format, role play)

✓ Keep challenging tasks manageable

- Break tasks into manageable pieces; allow opportunities to re-regulate in between
- Provide direct support for stressful components (e.g., scribing)
- Have child track anxiety/stress before, during, and after tasks

✓ Other supports

- _____
- _____
- _____

DIVIDED ATTENTION STRATEGIES

✓ Reduce demands for divided attention and multi-tasking

- Encourage child not to move onto new step before completing current step
- Ask teachers to provide notes to allow young person to focus on listening
- Provide to-do lists on cards, one item per card; have child check in by handing in card

✓ Use visual aids and technology to accommodate divided attention needs

- Use SmartPen and similar technology for note-taking
- Provide supported practice (e.g., writing key words while you give oral directions)

✓ Other supports

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Worksheet: Shifting

Consider the types of difficulties your child is experiencing with shifting. Mark any strategies you know are helpful or would like to investigate. Then choose 1-2 strategies to try this week.

Predict and prevent problems

- Help your child engage in good, routine self-care (sleep, nutrition, exercise, sensory needs).
- Schedule highly engaging, involved activities wisely.
- Use PCPS to address predictable, ongoing problems that arise due to problems shifting.
- Help child develop a plan to use for specific challenging situations (e.g., strategies, activities).
- Practice plans routinely, outside of the moment they are needed, until they are automatic.
- Provide accommodations (e.g., adapt due dates to take advantage of hyper-focus; extra time to re-regulate after transitions; provide cues, use visual timers, etc.).

Build child's awareness and motivation to work on shifting

- Tell them what shifting is, and what it means to "get stuck."
- Help them recognize when it happens to them (in the moment or later, always with empathy).
- Help them talk about how it feels when they are having difficulty shifting.
- Help them become more aware of the negative impacts to them and others (again, gently).
- Follow up after they have experienced particularly difficult moments or negative outcomes.
 - ✓ Empathize and validate.
 - ✓ Help them reflect on contributing factors/stressors, the "tipping point," etc.
 - ✓ Let them know you will help them with this skill, and instill hope.

Use and teach your child specific strategies to improve shifting

- Use advanced warning and visual schedules to mentally prepare kids for transitions.
- "Sandwich" schedules (e.g., fun/challenging/fun; unengaging/preferred/pleasant).
- Pressing pause during hyper-focus.
 - ✓ Start small (e.g., 5 seconds or 1 minute); build up slowly until long enough to unstick.
- Use physiological "resets" (e.g., cold water, intense exercise, dance party, tickling, massage).
- Use visualization (e.g., a mental vacation, the next activity, what success looks/feels like).
- Do-the-opposite (e.g., start with the intent of not finishing; share 3 positive experiences).
- Brainstorm alternatives without commitment to try them.
- Teach your child to "ride the wave on wanting" (slowly build up tolerance).
 - ✓ Where do they feel it in their body? How intense is it (check at various intervals)? What thoughts come with the wave? What makes it more or less intense?

Practice through experimentation and play

- Engage your child in "experiments" or "games" that tackle a specific area of difficulty (e.g., follow the leader – child leads you to school each day, changing route in some way).
- Play family games that require frequent shifting (e.g., Blink!, Uno, Ghost Blitz, Snake Oil, Quirkle, Anomia, and Monopoly Cheater's Edition).

Support your child in the moment they are struggling with shifting

- Use emotion regulation strategies from session 2.
- Try "natural" regulators or pleasant activities to ease transitions or break hyper-focus (e.g., 1 video, listening to 1-2 songs, a popsicle or snack).
- If all else fails, be prepared to "ride the wave" until it recedes (i.e., accept the moment as it is).
- Plan for your own self-care during those moments (e.g., earphones, a walk, talk to a friend).