

Balancing Brilliance

NURTURING EXECUTIVE FUNCTION
& MENTAL HEALTH IN GIFTED KIDS



A Bit About The Presenter



- 1** 13-Year Public School Teacher

- 2** Experience K-12 (Elem, MS, & HS)

- 3** 1/2 Career in Gifted Ed.

- 4** Researcher & Advocate

- 5** Community Member & Parent

Why Executive Functioning & Gifted Students?

Organic Conversations



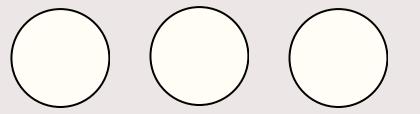
Authentic Experiences



What is Executive Function? ○ ○ ○

- Getting “stuff” done.
- The brain’s ability to take the steps necessary to accomplish a task or goal
- Self-regulating (thoughts, emotions, actions)
- To “execute” complex tasks.

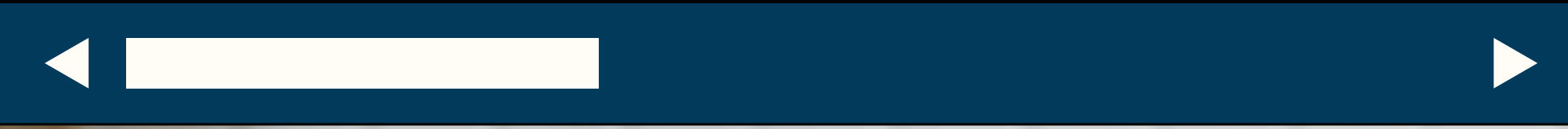
What are Executive Functions?



Inhibitory Control

Working Memory

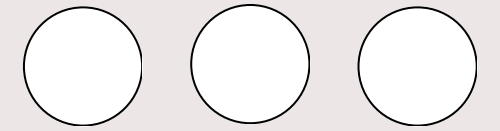
Flexible Thinking



Inhibitory Control

The ability to control our automatic urges (attention, behavior, thoughts, and emotions) by pausing, & then using attention and reasoning to respond appropriately.

Sound Familiar?

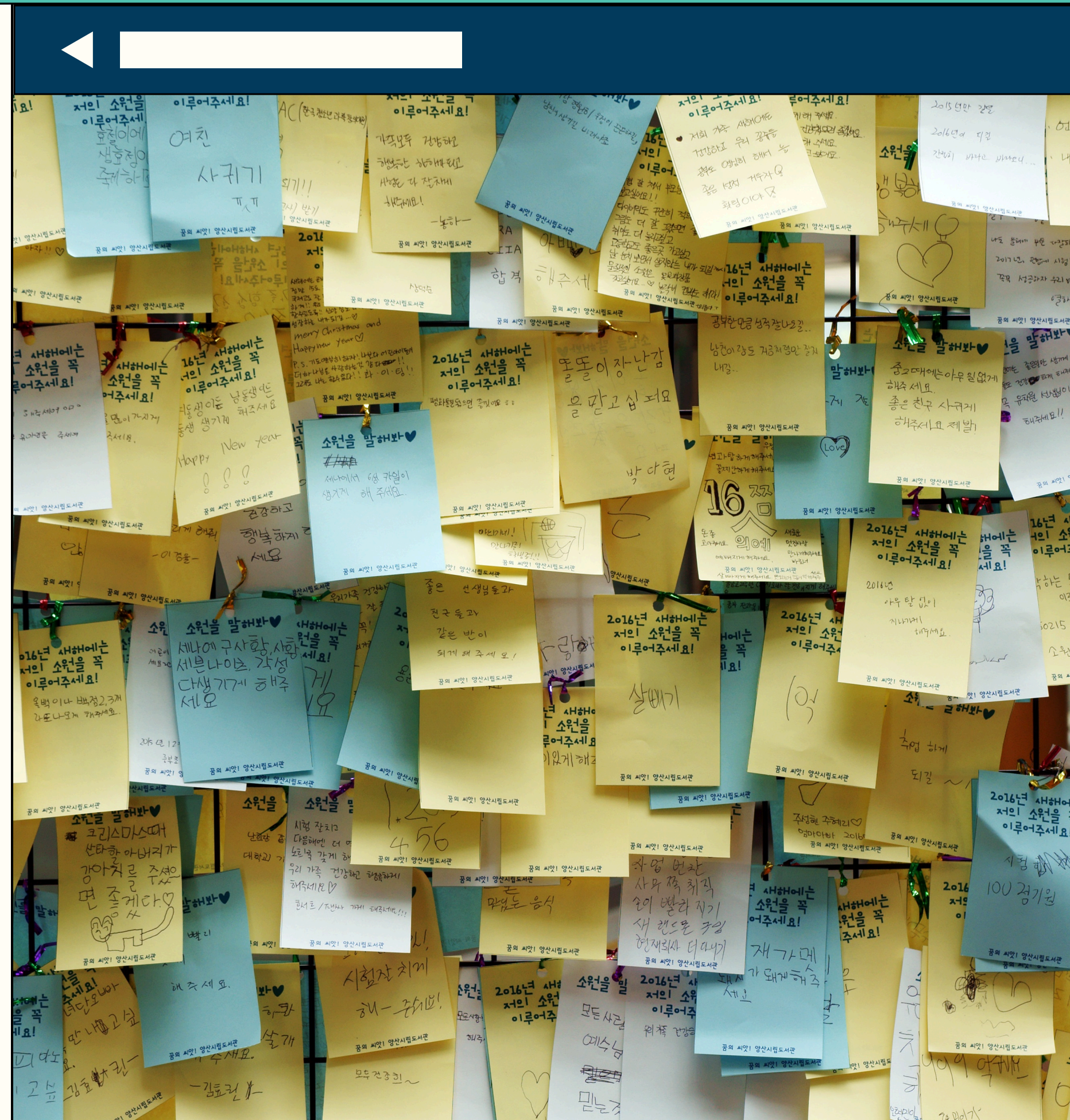


You notice that your child is having trouble completing their classwork in class, resulting in them having to finish the work for homework (which takes forever). You email the teacher, who responds by saying that your child is often found reading a book or browsing YouTube on their school-issued laptop, instead of working on their classwork, and that they benefit from frequent prompts to get back on task.

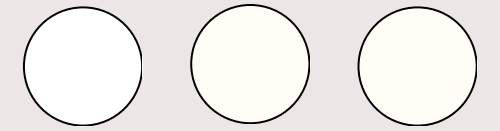
Working Memory

The thinking skill that focuses on memory-in-action:

The ability to remember and use relevant information while in the middle of an activity.

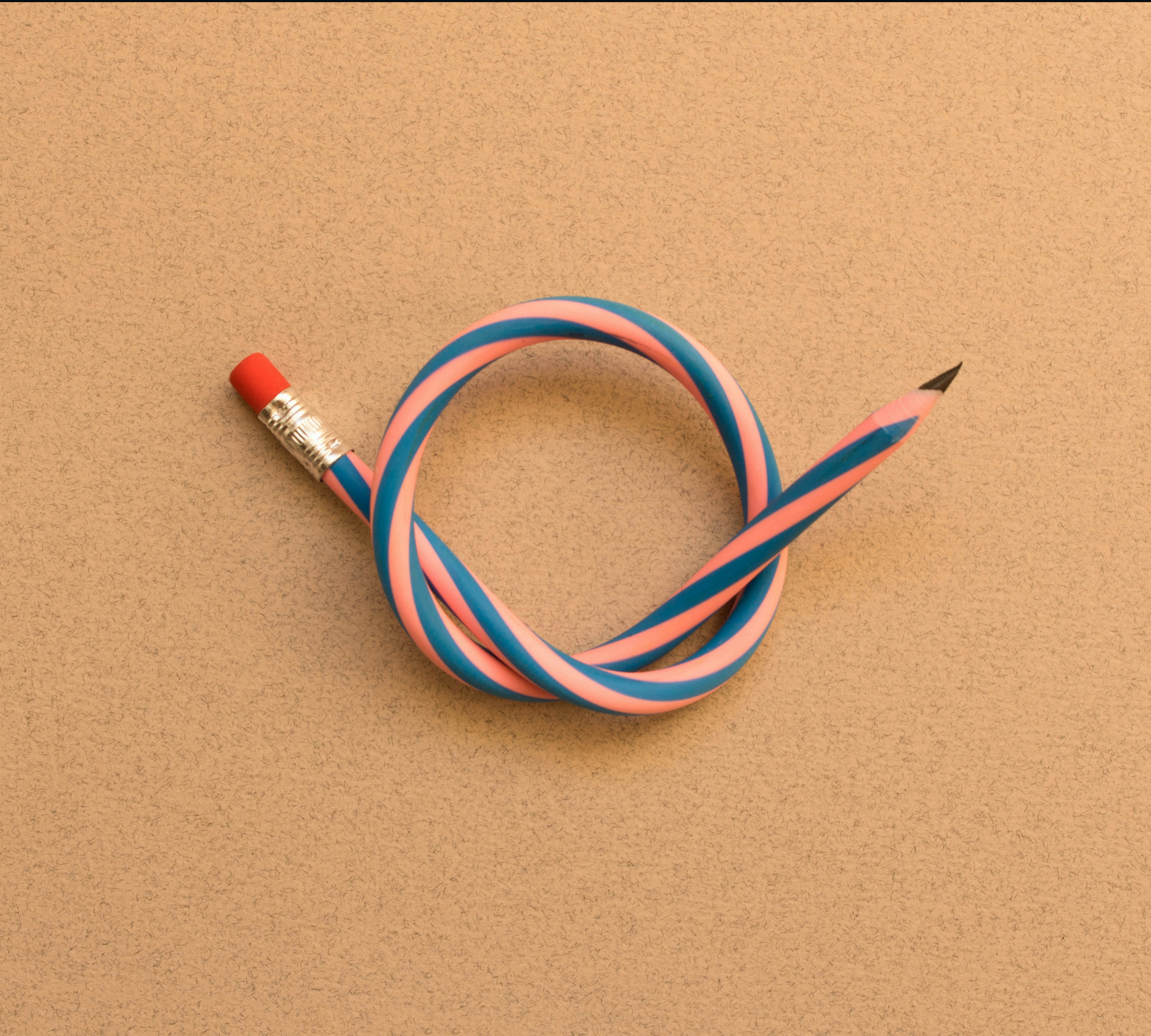


Sound Familiar?



You're sitting across from your child at the kitchen table while they work on their Math homework. You notice they are not showing their work (something their Math teacher mentioned they had room for improvement on during parent-teacher conferences).

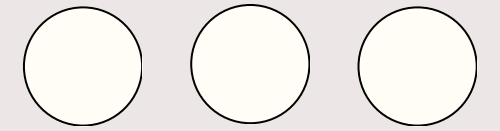
When you ask them about it, they say, "Every time I show my work, I get the wrong answer! Just let me do it my way."



Cognitive Flexibility

The ability to think about something in a new or different way; ability to see the bigger picture.

Sound Familiar?



You're at parent-teacher conferences, and toward the end of the meeting, you ask what your child could improve on. The teacher says that during class discussions, your child has a tough time understanding different perspectives, and seems rigid in their opinions. When other classmates appropriately challenge their views, your child seems to shut down or freeze, and tune out of the discussion altogether.

Aspects of Executive Function

1 Plan

2 Time Management

3 Organize

4 Prioritize

5 Inhibit

6 Focus

7 Task Initiation

8 Task Persistence

9 Transition

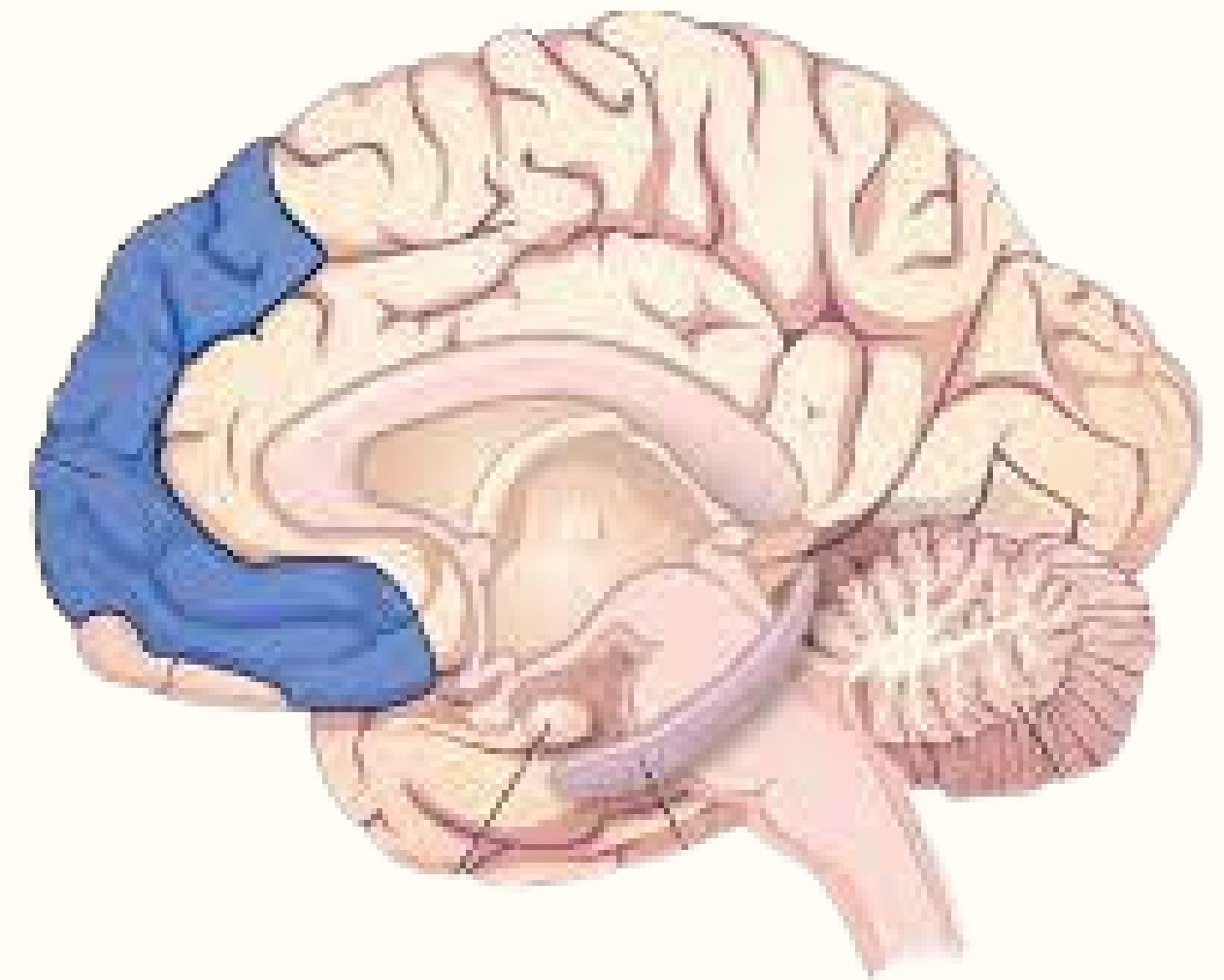
10 Working Memory

11 Reflect

12 Emotional Regulation

Executive Function in the Brain

Pre-Frontal
Cortex

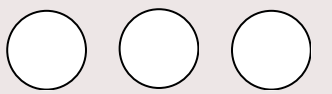


The Most Important Thing:

To be mindful that
the expectations
we maintain for our
kids are
developmentally
appropriate
for their
neurological
development.



Timeline of Development



Working Memory

5-16 YEARS - Develops ability to search varying locations, remember where something was found, then explore other locations (e.g. a game of Concentration or hiding a penny under three cups).

ADULT - Can remember multiple tasks, rules, and strategies that may vary by situation.

Inhibitory Control

10 - 18 YEARS - Continues to develop self-control, such as flexibly switching between a central focus (riding a bike or driving) and peripheral stimuli that may or may not need attention (road signs or pedestrians vs. billboards/houses)

ADULT - Consistent self-control; situationally appropriate responses (e.g. resists saying something socially inappropriate, resists "tit-for-tat" response)

Cognitive Flexibility

10 - 12 YEARS - Successfully adapts to changing rules, even along multiple dimensions (okay to shout on playground, not in classroom, sometimes in theater)

13 - 18 YEARS - Continued improvement in accuracy when switching focus and adapting to changing rules.

ADULT - Able to revise actions and plans in response to changing circumstances.

Mental Health & Well-Being



Sense of Self



Anxiety



Depression



Perfectionism



Content Warning

Please note that the next slide discusses the sensitive topic of suicide and ideation. Please protect your peace and well-being in a way that you see fit.

Suicide

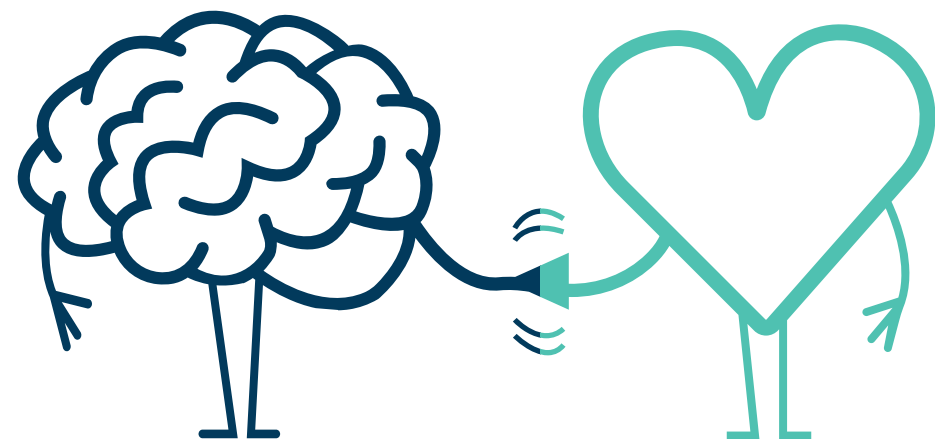
is the **2nd** leading cause of death for individuals **10-24** years of age (**CDC, 2018**).

***Gifted students are typically successful their first attempt (Cross & Anderson, 2016).**



**Feelings of
“Differentness”**

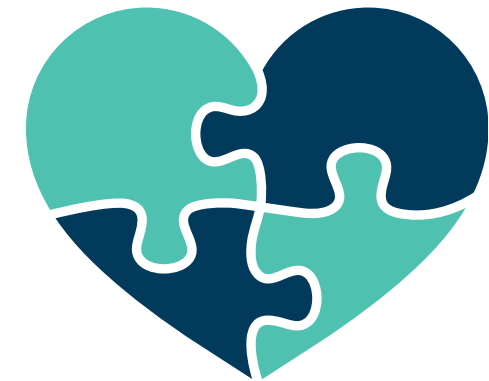
Other Contributing Factors Specific to Gifted Children



Asynchrony



**Over-
Excitabilities**



**Twice-
Exceptionality**

Strategies to Improve Executive Function



1

Mindfulness

2

Metacognition

3

Brain Training

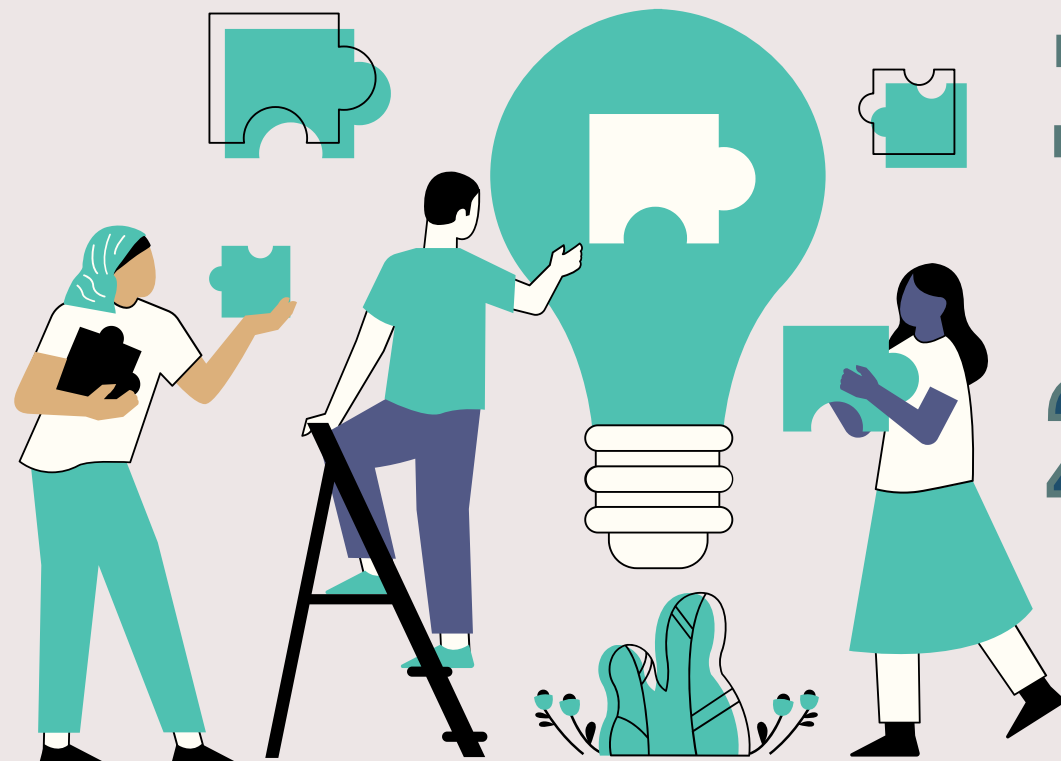


My Research

bit.ly/DrErikaLucasDissertation

Questions?

Interested in learning more?



1 Follow [@TXGifted](#) to stay in the know.

2 Follow/visit [@Dr.ErikaLucas](#) for resources.

**Interested
in learning
more?**

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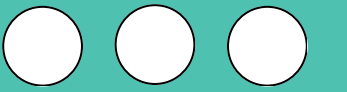
UNLOCKING

THE SIGNS OF

**EXECUTIVE
DYSFUNCTION**

STUDY SKILLS





Thank you!



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