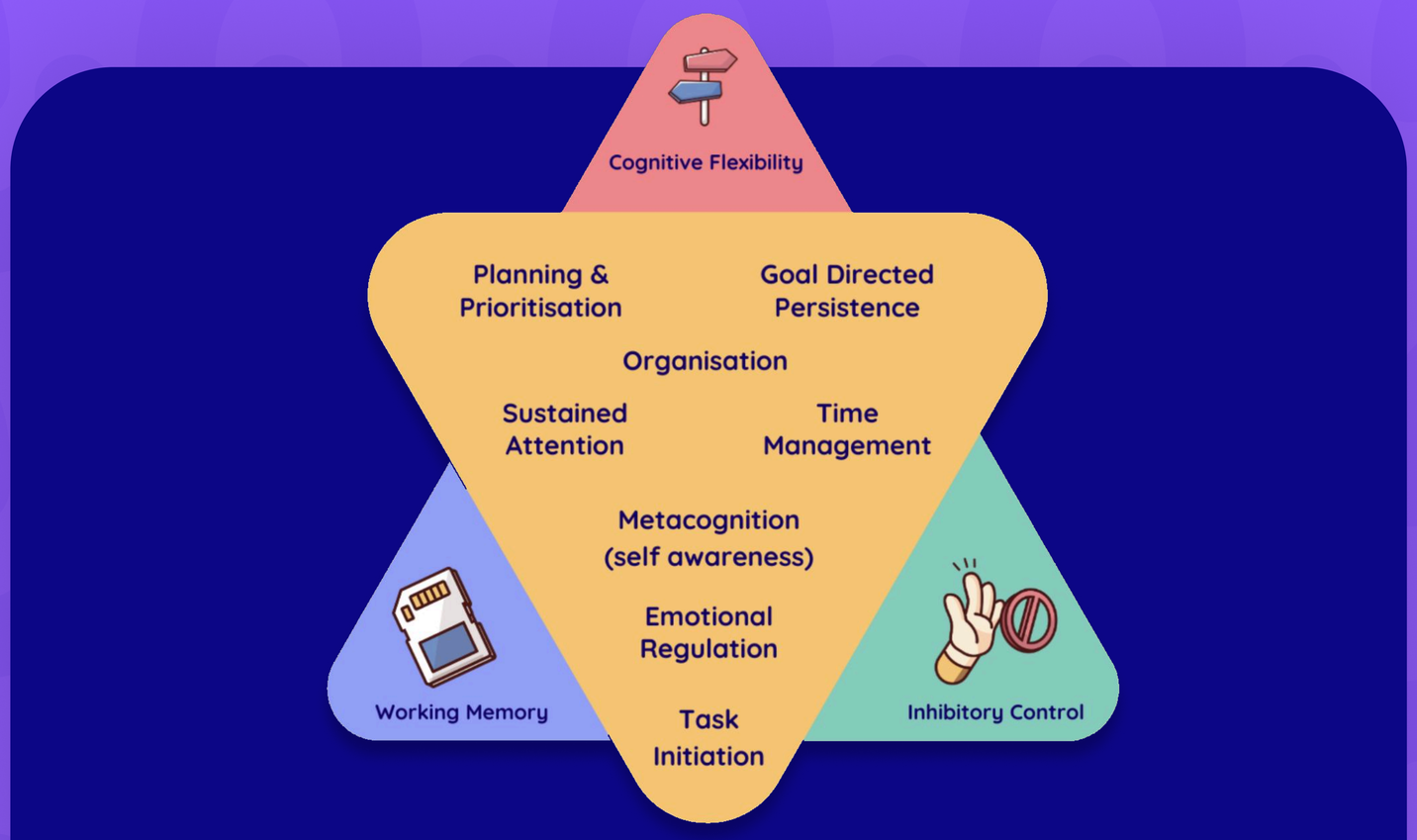
connections in mind

What is Executive Function

Executive functions are the mental processes that help us plan, focus attention, regulate emotions, and achieve goals.

These brain processes are largely managed by the **prefrontal cortex**, which continues developing into the mid-twenties.



3 Brain Processes & 11 Skills

Which skills are included?

Executive functions are required for a network of interconnected skills that support learning and self-management.

This diagram illustrates three core brain processes and eleven executive function skills that work together to support **learning, behaviour, and independence.**

Executive function differences often appear as difficulty:

- Starting work
- Organising materials
- Focussing
- Following multi-step instructions
- Managing frustration
- Completing tasks

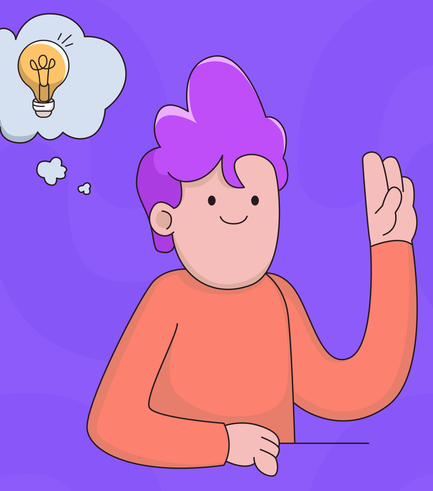
Importantly, students may understand the work but struggle with the process of doing it.

Executive function differences are commonly associated with:

- ADHD
- Autism
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Developmental Language Disorder

However, executive function challenges are transdiagnostic and may also occur in pupils without a formal diagnosis, particularly during periods of stress or developmental transition.

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Executive Function Differences Are Universal

All people experience strengths and challenges across executive function skills. These skills develop gradually and are influenced by **development, stress, relationships, and environment.**

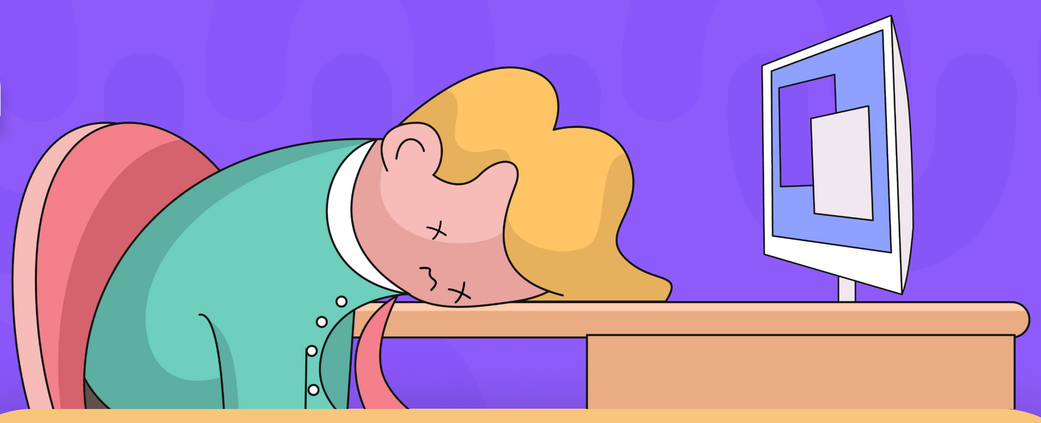
This is why classroom environments that scaffold executive function skills benefit every learner, not just those with identified SEND.

Can executive function skills be developed?

Yes.

Executive function skills develop gradually through:

- **Modelling**
- **Co-regulation**
- **Structured opportunities to practise skills**

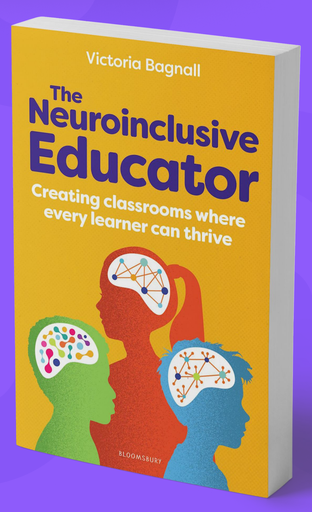


Stress/trauma and executive function

When pupils become overwhelmed or dysregulated, the brain shifts resources away from the prefrontal cortex and towards threat-response systems; reducing access to executive function skills.

Over time, and without support, stress can turn into trauma and impact the development of executive function.

The Neuroinclusive Educator introduces a practical framework to help teachers support executive function development through everyday classroom practice.



Key Research Highlights

Executive function skills measured in early childhood **predict later academic outcomes** more strongly than IQ.

The **prefrontal cortex** continues developing into the mid-twenties.

Around 1 in 5 pupils experience significant executive function challenges.

Stress reduces access to executive function skills.

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