



My health. My choices. My future.

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# BRAIN GYM

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24-Session Bridging Manual



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# Introduction to the Manual

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Bridging sessions are intended to link what is exercised on the computer tasks to everyday activities and individual recovery goals. The overall goal is to promote transfer of cognitive skill learning from the computer exercises to everyday life. Bridging sessions are clinician led discussions and activities designed to be about 15 minutes long, and to follow the computer exercises in each session. In this manual there are bridging session descriptions for the clinician and worksheets for the participants. We suggest you first read the session description for the clinician and then take the worksheets to the group. The worksheets have all the information you will need to run the activity.

*Worksheet management:* Each participant should have a session folder that is kept at the program. Completed worksheets should go in that folder. When the participant graduates, they can take their folder with them.

*Session Order:* The sessions are provided in a suggested order. Because there will be rolling admission to the group, not everyone will start at the same place but will eventually cycle around to each topic. For example, participants in Bridging Session 5 may be on their Brain Gym Session 1, or 5 or something else. There is not always a one to one correspondence. Sometimes, the clinician and participants may find it useful to go out of the order suggested in this manual. For example, if it is clear that thinking errors are leading participants to see themselves negatively, it may help to cover the material on Automatic Thoughts earlier. If you do go out of order, you will need to adjust the content of the review of the prior session that starts each Bridging discussion.

*Graduation:* Graduation from Brain Gym means that a participant has either completed all the treatment sessions or that cognitive goals have been attained. Because participants learn at different rates and because participants may start attending the group at different times, participants may graduate from the group at different times. Be sure to always recognize the accomplishments of any graduating participant during their final group session. You can do this by referring to the Bridging Group session on page 65, Cognitive Skills Review, which provides opportunities for all group members to discuss cognition in relation to everyday life and for the graduating individual(s) to reflect on and share with the group what he/she has learned. Certificates of achievement can be printed and provided to formally “graduate” the participant(s).

*Motivation:* More will be gained from the group if participants are motivated and engaged. Before starting the sessions think about these questions:

- How can you best reach every person in your Bridging Group?
- How can you infuse each participant with a sense of excitement and confidence about using the information and tools learned?

Instructional style can make a difference in the amount of learning and behavioral change that takes place. The beginning of each session should be devoted to ENGAGING members and motivating them to improve their cognitive skills. Often the group clinician will play an important role in inspiring, challenging, and stimulating group participants.

### *General Instructional Strategies to Motivate Participants*

1. Create an atmosphere that is open, friendly and positive.
2. Motivate participants by enhancing their reasons for participating in the group.
  - ✓ Be mindful of the goal(s) each individual is working toward.
  - ✓ Help participants find personal meaning and value in the material.
3. Take the time to discover barriers to learning (e.g., anxiety about learning, distractibility) and use that information to problem-solve.
4. Engage each individual as a valued member of the group.
5. Ensure participants' experience of competence by providing opportunities for successful completion of tasks. These tasks should not be too easy or too difficult.
6. Give frequent, early, and positive feedback that supports participants' beliefs that they can do well.
7. Provide opportunities for participants to control the learning process through choosing tasks or stating opinions.

There is no single formula for motivating people to learn. When you find a way to motivate participants, they are more likely to make meaningful changes. Likewise, the successes of participants will keep you motivated and excited about your role as a group leader. That is what the circle of learning is about! Your instructional style, the participants' motivation and cognitive ability all work together to lead to positive change.

# 1. Orientation

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**Objective:** Group members will learn to identify different cognitive skills, how they are used every day, and how the computer-based learning activities will strengthen them. Group members will begin to identify what skills they may want to work on and understand that cognitive skills can change with practice.

**Materials:** Worksheet #1: Cognition in Everyday Life

*Defining Cognition:* Let's step away from the computer to talk about cognition. The computer activities are intended to help you with your cognitive (thinking) skills. In order to fully benefit from these activities, it helps to understand first what cognitive skills are.



How would you define cognition?

What is an example of a cognitive (thinking) skill?

*Putting Cognition in Context:* Let's look at some real-life examples to put these cognitive skills into the context.

**\*\* Use *Worksheet #1: Cognition in Everyday Life* to give examples of key cognitive skills and how they are used in daily life, then continue as indicated below.**

**\*\*Note:** Participants may welcome prompts like – *In the kitchen, what cognitive skills do you use? When you talk with a friend, what cognitive skills do you use? When you walk down the street, what cognitive skills do you use?*

*Normalizing Cognitive Differences:* Everyone has different cognitive strengths and weaknesses.



Some people are better at problem solving than remembering.

What about you?

**\*\*Use *Worksheet #1: Cognition in Everyday Life* to have participants evaluate which skills are personal strengths and which they feel need work. Use the worksheet to continue the discussion, then return to wrap up.**

*Cognitive Skills Can Change:* We are all here to work on our cognitive skills. Just like when we go to the gym to work out our muscles, when we do cognitive training, we are working out our brain. With more practice we can change our cognitive skills and make them stronger.



What does the concept of “Brain Gym” mean to you?

*Cognitive Skills & Computer Exercises:* Let's talk about the computer-based activities we used today so we can understand what they help us with.



What did you work on today?

What cognitive skills does this exercise practice?

*\*\* Examples: Highway Hazards helps with speed of processing  
Familiar Faces helps with memory*

*Wrap Up:* In this group, we will continue working on improving cognitive skills through computer exercises and group activities.

# Worksheet #1: Cognition in Everyday Life

Let's talk about cognition. The computer activities are intended to help you with your cognitive (thinking) skills. But what exactly does that mean? How would you define cognition? What is an example of a cognitive skill?

Listed below are cognitive skills and examples of how each is used in daily life. Can you give another example for each skill? Which skills do you consider personal strengths? Which do you feel need work to improve?

SKILL	Example 1	Example 2	Personal Strength	Needs Work
MEMORY				
Working memory	<i>Calculating a tip</i>			
Visual memory	<i>Finding my cell phone</i>			
Verbal memory	<i>Remembering the name of a song I like</i>			
ATTENTION				
Paying attention	<i>Waiting for the crosswalk signal</i>			
Staying focused over time	<i>Listening to a podcast</i>			
Filtering out distractions	<i>Continuing to read an article/book while text messages come in</i>			
Attending to more than one thing	<i>Making eggs and toast</i>			
PROCESSING SPEED				
Taking in information quickly	<i>Following instructions</i>			
PROBLEM SOLVING				
Thinking of different solutions	<i>Finding a way home after the bus breaks down</i>			
Reasoning/logical thinking/planning	<i>Taking an umbrella because rain is expected</i>			

**Cognitive Skills Can Change:** Just like going to the gym to work out our muscles, cognitive training works out our brain. What does the concept of Brain Gym mean to you?

**Cognitive Skills & Computer Exercises:** What computer-based activities did you work on today? What cognitive skills does the exercise practice?



## 2. Cognitive Activities

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**Objective:** Group members will analyze the skills used during computer-based exercises and link those skills to everyday life.

**Materials:** Worksheet #2: Cognitive Activities

Today we will use the computer exercises you have tried so far to think about how you are practicing your cognitive skills.

*\*\*Refer to **Worksheet #2: Cognitive Activities**. Use the example to illustrate how to analyze a cognitive activity. Use the questions to facilitate further discussion. Then ask group members to do another analysis using a second cognitive activity practiced in session. Then return to wrap up.*

***Wrap up:** Understanding how you are exercising your thinking skills can help you decide which exercises would be most useful to you. Your cognitive practice here can help you use your thinking skills in everyday life.*

# Worksheet #2: Cognitive Activities

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When doing the computer-based activities, it can be helpful to think about what cognitive skills you are exercising and how. This helps you to develop an awareness of what you are practicing and can help you choose which exercises might be right for you.

*Example:* Highway Hazards



What are the cognitive skills you need to do this activity?



**Speed of Processing**  
**Attention**



How do you use those cognitive skills during the activity?



You need **speed** to quickly change lanes when you see an obstacle coming up in the road.

The faster you clear the obstacles, the faster your race car drives.



You need to **stay focused** so you don't miss a sign that tells you an obstacle is coming.

Sometimes there is more than one thing on the road and you need to **pay attention** so you can pick the right lane to drive in.



Is this activity enjoyable?



Is this activity interesting?



Does this activity simulate something you would encounter in everyday life?



Can you think of how the skills you practiced would be useful in your everyday life?

Now choose a second activity you have tried: \_\_\_\_\_



What are the cognitive skills you need to do this activity?



How do you use those cognitive skills during the activity?



Is this activity enjoyable?



Is this activity interesting?



Does this activity simulate something you would encounter in everyday life?



Can you think of how the skills you practiced would be useful in your everyday life?

### 3. Cognitive Goals

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**Objective:** Group members will identify cognitive goals that will support everyday functioning and recovery.

**Materials:** Worksheet #3: Cognitive Goals

*Identifying Cognitive Goals:* Today I'd like for you to think about what working on your cognitive skills means to you.

*\*\* Use **Worksheet #3: Cognitive Goals** to guide further discussion, then return to wrap up.*

*Wrap Up:* We need strong cognitive skills to do things every single day. Cognitive skill building can support how we function in the day-to-day.

# Worksheet #3: Cognitive Goals

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Let's think about how strengthening your thinking abilities could be useful to you, in doing day to day activities as well as in supporting your progress towards future goals.

- ? What are one or two difficulties with cognition or thinking that affect you most?  
Make a check beside those you would like to improve.

## *MEMORY*

- ☐ WORKING MEMORY
- ☐ VISUAL MEMORY
- ☐ VERBAL MEMORY

## *ATTENTION*

- ☐ PAYING ATTENTION
- ☐ STAYING FOCUSED OVER TIME
- ☐ FILTERING OUT DISTRACTIONS
- ☐ ATTENDING TO MORE THAN ONE THING

## *ORGANIZATION*

- ☐ TIME MANAGEMENT
- ☐ PLANNING AHEAD

## *PROBLEM-SOLVING*

- ☐ THINKING OF DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS
- ☐ REASONING/LOGICAL THINKING
- ☐ USING FEEDBACK TO GUIDE DECISIONS

- ? What life areas do these difficulties interfere with the most?  
In what way?

- |                                 |  |   |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> WORK   | <input type="checkbox"/> MANAGING PERSONAL AFFAIRS | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATION      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SCHOOL | <input type="checkbox"/> RELATIONSHIPS             | <input type="checkbox"/> INDEPENDENT LIVING |

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- ? What computer exercises have you tried that might help you improve your thinking skills?

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## 4. Cognitive Goals for Personal Wellness

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**Objective:** Group members will link cognitive health to physical health, mental health, and social-emotional well-being to understand the important and central role that cognitive health plays.

**Materials:** Worksheet #4: Cognitive Goals for Personal Wellness

*Cognitive Health:* Today we will talk about cognitive health and well-being. Some people say cognitive health means staying sharp and attentive and being able to remember things.



What words would you use to describe cognitive health?



Researchers have shown that exercise can improve cognitive fitness, making it easier to remember and pay attention. Have you found this to be true in your life?

Now, let's think about it the other way around.

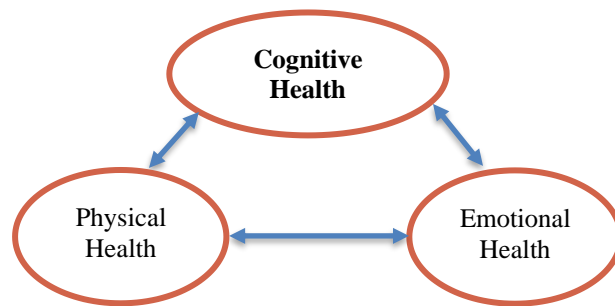
*\*\*Refer to **Worksheet #4: Cognitive Goals for Personal Wellness** to guide the discussion. Review the examples of how cognitive skills can support wellness goals and ask participants to come up with additional examples of how cognitive skills can be used to support participants' goals for personal wellness. Then return to wrap up.*

***Wrap up:** Taking care of your physical and mental health can improve your cognitive health. You can also use strong cognitive skills to do things that impact your physical health and emotional well-being in personally meaningful ways.*

# Worksheet #4: Cognitive Goals for Personal Wellness

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Being cognitively healthy can help you feel better able to make decisions that impact your physical health and mental health. Cognitive health can also support the work you may be doing to build or maintain social connections, and to communicate with your care providers and those in your social support network.



- ? In what ways is cognitive health important to you?  
How are cognitive skills used to support your goals for personal wellness?

**Circle the areas of personal wellness that you would like to work on**

## 1. Diet and Nutrition

*Example: Problem solving skills can help me make healthy decisions about what food to buy at the supermarket that is within my budget*

- ? What is another way cognitive skills relate to diet and nutrition?

## 2. Physical Exercise

*Example: Planning and time management can help me figure out how to squeeze exercise into my weekly schedule.*

- ? What is another way cognitive skills relate to physical exercise?

## 3. Emotional Well-Being

*Example: Being able to pay attention in conversations helps me to feel more connected to my family and friends*

- ? What is another way cognitive skills can support your emotional well-being?

## 5. Motivation

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**Materials:** Worksheet #5: My Expectations and Values

*\*\* Refer to **Worksheet #5: My Expectations and Values**. Summarize the introductory content and ask participants to take turns reading. Encourage discussion to help participants identify what they each value and to share examples.*

*\*\* If time allows, help participants complete the exercise, Assigning Value. Then return to wrap up.*

*\*\* Note: Emphasize how identifying the value of a task can help build motivation to get started or to see the task through.*

*\*\* Note: You may offer participants the opportunity to complete the exercise on their own if time does not allow.*

**Wrap Up:** Getting motivated to start a task, especially one that takes a lot of mental energy, is often the hardest part. Once you begin to experience some success in getting the task done, momentum builds and reinforces your motivation to keep going. Identifying how a task fits with your values can give you the jumpstart you need to begin working on a task, even if your motivation for doing the task is low.

# Worksheet #5: My Expectations and Values

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*The Problem with Motivation:* Many people have times when they feel unmotivated. It can be very troubling to hear others talking about their passions and successes when you do not feel motivated. Poor motivation can mean that even if a person is smart or creative enough to do something, they can't get themselves to do it.

Understanding what determines motivation can help you get more motivated. Two big factors that determine how motivated you are to do something are:

1. Whether or not you expect to be successful
2. How much you value the activity

*Expectation of Success:* If you expect that you will succeed in completing a particular task, the more likely you are to try to get it done. Past success can help you to feel competent. Competence and expectation of success are major motivating forces to build upon. Still, you may have a tough time motivating yourself to do a task that seems too hard, too frustrating, or has given you trouble in the past. This can happen right here when you do the computer exercises.



Have you ever been doing a task and thought, "This is too hard"?  
Did you find yourself unmotivated - wanting to give up?



What is the solution? When doing the cognitive exercises, the key is to be sure the level of difficulty is right for you – so you start to have success!

*Assigning Task Value:* Another strategy that can help you do important tasks, even when you feel unmotivated to do them, is to think about them in terms of your personal values.

1. Values are what you really care about.
2. Your values may be different from what your friends, family and care providers find important.



Thinking about a task in relation to what you value provides a foundation for motivation and energy to get it done. In other words, the more a task is consistent with your personal values, the more motivated you may feel to do it.

*What Do You Value:* There are hundreds of different values, but here is a list of some for you to consider. Even though they are listed under one area of life, these values can be relevant to many other areas as well. Which values resonate with you? Tell about a time you did something because you value it (e.g., finish a difficult homework assignment because you value challenge).





People at work/school often say they **value**:

- ✓ **Challenge:** to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve
- ✓ **Skillfulness:** to continually practice and improve my skills
- ✓ **Industry:** to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated
- ✓ **Power:** to take charge, lead, organize
- ✓ **Responsibility:** to be responsible and accountable for my actions



People in relationships may say they **value**:

- ✓ **Assertiveness:** to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want
- ✓ **Caring:** to be caring towards myself, others, the environment, etc.
- ✓ **Compassion:** to act with kindness towards others
- ✓ **Reciprocity:** to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking
- ✓ **Respect:** to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard



People seeking personal growth often say they **value**:

- ✓ **Courage:** to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat or difficulty
- ✓ **Honesty:** to be honest, truthful and sincere with myself and others
- ✓ **Humor:** to see and appreciate the humorous side of life
- ✓ **Self-development:** to keep growing, advancing or improving in my knowledge, skills, character, or life experience
- ✓ **Mindfulness:** to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my “here and now” experience



People who want more leisure may say they **value**:

- ✓ **Adventure:** to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences
- ✓ **Excitement:** to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating or thrilling
- ✓ **Fitness:** to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing
- ✓ **Fun:** to be fun-loving; to seek, create and engage in fun-filled activities
- ✓ **Pleasure:** to create pleasure for others or myself

Some things to think about now or to do later on your own:

*Assigning Value:* Consider these questions to figure out what values are important to you. Write in your responses below.

**1. Work/School:** your work and career, education and knowledge, and skills development. (This may include volunteering and other forms of unpaid work.)

- ? Is working/getting more education important to you?
- ? Have you ever done a task you did not like because it helped you keep a job or get a degree? (For example, even though you didn't like chemistry, you studied it because it was a requirement.)
- ? Are there tasks on your to-do list that show you value work/education?

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**2. Relationships:** the social bonds in your life, including those with your partner, children, parents, relatives, friends, co-workers, and other contacts.

- ? What sorts of relationships are important to you?
- ? What is something you did because you valued a relationship? (For example, you got coffee with someone even though you felt like staying home.)
- ? What personal qualities do you want to develop?

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**3. Personal Growth/Health:** your ongoing development as a human being. This may include being more independent, expressing your spirituality or creativity, developing life skills, exercising, eating healthy foods, and reducing unhealthy behaviors like smoking.



What is something you did because you valued personal growth/health? (For example, you took a Zumba class.)

Are there things you want to do that show your value of personal growth/health?

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**4. Leisure:** your hobbies or other activities for rest, recreation, fun and creativity; how you play, relax, or enjoy yourself.



Are there things you would like to do that show you value leisure time?

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## 6. MUSIC Model of Motivation

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**Objective:** Group members will learn how to use the ‘Motivometer’ to figure out how to get motivated.

**Materials:** Worksheet #6: The Motivometer

In our last session we talked about how motivation can be a real problem for many people. Whether you expect **success** when completing a task, and how much you **value** that task, can have a big impact on how motivated you are to start an activity and to see it through to completion. Today we will talk about a strategy for boosting motivation.

*The Motivometer:* The ‘motivometer’ is a device that you can use to figure out how to motivate yourself. Let’s take a look at the worksheet for today. It asks you to look at how much you value different aspects of a task to find where your motivation lies. **MUSIC** is the easy way to remember these motivating factors.

*\*\*Refer to **Worksheet #6: Motivometer**. Ask the question, “Can someone identify a task they wish they would be more motivated to do?” Ideally a group member will identify a task (e.g., start exercising) and be willing to use their example to discuss the variables denoted by the acronym MUSIC.*

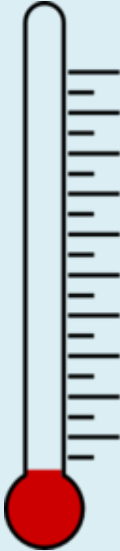

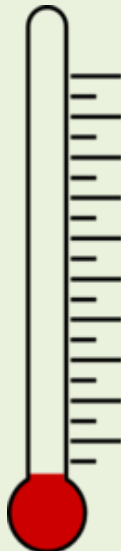
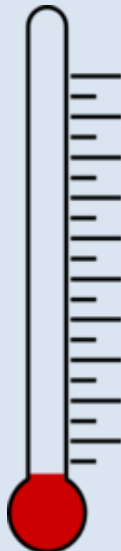

Let’s look at each component of MUSIC on the Motivometer and consider how you use these to be motivated to... (e.g., start exercising).

Now that we have done this as a group, everyone can complete the Motivometer for a task that matters to you.

*Wrap up:* You can draw on your sources of motivation, whether that’s empowerment, usefulness, expectation of success, interest, or caring, to help boost your motivation to do important tasks and work towards your goals.

# Worksheet #6: Motivometer

Evaluate your motivation for a task or goal by assessing the following areas:

eMpowerment	Usefulness	Success	Interest	Caring
Do you have a degree of control over how the task is done? Do you have choices about how to complete it?	Will completing the task bring you some sort of benefit? Will completing this task help you become the person you want to be?	Do you expect you will be able to do this task well? Do you expect to be able to complete it?	Do you enjoy the task? How much interest do you have in it?	Do other people care about what you are doing? Do you have the help you need?
				

## 7. Asking for The Right Kind of Help

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**Objective:** Learn how to take advantage of personal supports to tackle challenges.

**Materials:** Worksheet #7: Asking for Help (the Right Kind!)

Today we are going to talk about more ways to stay motivated.

*\*\* Refer to **Worksheet #7: Asking for Help (the Right Kind!)**. Review the ways to ask for help. Then return to wrap up.*

*\*\* Note: Emphasize that asking for the right kind of help is a choice that each person has the power to make*

**Wrap Up:** In order to increase the chances of getting your needs met, it helps to figure out what kind of support would be most beneficial to you. Thinking of the situations in which each of these could be useful may help you to ask for the right kind of help in the future.

# Worksheet #7: Asking for Help (The Right Kind!)

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Feeling in control – of your decisions, of your treatment, of what you choose to do day-to-day, is essential for motivation. It is very common for other people in our lives to feel like they need to be involved to help us get things done. Often it can be very helpful to have a trusted person on your side when help is needed. But sometimes when people help it can lead to feeling like the task isn't your own, and that can decrease motivation and lead to avoidance. The trick is to find the happy medium – a place between being completely autonomous and being dependent.

Whether the people involved in your recovery and goal setting are therapists, friends, significant others, supervisors, or teachers, it is essential that you know how to talk with them about your needs. This is called “asking for the right kind of help.”

Say you've decided that you do want *some* sort of help, just not the kind that the person is offering right now. What you want probably won't be as simple as asking the person to leave you alone entirely or asking them to do everything with you. Maybe there is some middle ground.

Here are some examples of different kinds of help others have requested:

**Take Over:** In some instances, especially if you are symptomatic or very overwhelmed, you may need someone else to take over a task. For example, you may need someone to take over paying bills if you are feeling unable to think clearly.

? Under what circumstances can you imagine asking others to Take Over?

**Do Together:** You may want another person to sit with you and complete a task together. For example, you may want to go through your bills, do calculations and then submit payments together with a friend.

? What are some examples of how this would be useful to you?

**Check-Ins:** Some people like to do most of the work on their own but want regular check-ins. Check-ins can be useful to review your progress, make sure things are on track and, if not, to problem solve.

? Are there situations where Check-Ins would be helpful to you?  
With whom would you check in?

**Resource Building/Brainstorming:** You may want someone to brainstorm with you or give you advice about where you might find other resources. For example, you may want to ask a friend to brainstorm about possible essay topics for your college application, but you do not want her/him to help you write the actual essay.

- ❓ Is there anything you would want help brainstorming?
- ❓ Have you ever done brainstorming with a partner before?

**Joint Rewards:** Some rewards (like eating a cupcake or watching a favorite T.V. show) are best when the task in front of you is mundane or uncreative, such as cleaning your bathroom. If you want your reward to only happen if you complete the whole task, then you may want to involve someone else. For example, you may tell your friend that you will only see the movie you're both dying to go to after you've cleaned your apartment.

- ❓ What are some examples of how this would be useful to you?

**Parallel Work:** In this situation, you are asking for someone to just be present in the same room while you work on separate tasks. This might mean job hunting online with a friend at the library or asking someone to be home while you clean your room. You don't necessarily want help with the task, but you want to be in the same space and feel the accountability that comes with working in parallel.

- ❓ Have you ever done parallel work before?
- ❓ How did that go?

**Organization:** Many people have difficulty organizing their space and their thoughts. You may want to enlist help to sort through the pile of mail on the table so that you can figure out what you can toss and what you need to act on.

- ❓ How could this be helpful to you?

**Moral support:** Perhaps you don't want someone to help you problem solve or take action, but you do want someone who will provide you with some emotional support. For example, you might ask a friend to help you do some deep breathing before you go to take your GED test.

- ❓ Who could you turn to if you needed some reassurance in a time of need?



***Gatekeeping:*** Many people find that social media and constant connection by phone and email can be very distracting. In order to focus for a set amount of time, you might leave your phone face down or ask someone to hold onto your phone and only let you know if there are urgent calls or texts to address.

- ❓ What are some situations in which this might be helpful?
- ❓ Who could you ask to be your Gatekeeper?

***Deciding what you need from the other person:*** This may sound easier than it actually is. Often, we want others to change their behavior, but we don't give them very clear instructions on how to do that. In order to increase the chances of getting your needs met, you will have to figure out what kind of support you think would be most helpful — and what kind of support would not be helpful, or might even hurt.

- ❓ Think of examples when you need different types of help.

## 8. Thinking About Your Thinking - I

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**Objective:** Learn how to catch, check, and change thinking errors.

**Materials:** Handout #8: Thinking About Your Thinking - I

*Introduction:* Today we are going to discuss how the way we think about things influences how we feel, what we do, **and** our cognitive performance. For example, if you think positively when you do the cognitive exercises – “I bet I will find the solution” - you might feel better and perform better than if you think, “I will never do well at this”.

*Defining Automatic Thoughts:* Automatic thoughts are the thoughts that “pop” up in response to certain situations. These thoughts cause problems if they lower our mood, make us feel anxious, or prevent us from doing the things we want to do so we can reach our goals. Thinking about your thinking allows you to take a critical look at the situation and your response. You may notice that certain automatic thoughts occur more frequently for you, or that certain situations act as triggers for problematic automatic thoughts.

*Catch It, Check It, Change It:* It is important to recognize the automatic thoughts that are problematic for you, when they occur, and what your response is. That way, you can catch them, check them, and change them.

**Catching** the automatic thought means you recognize that the thought occurred. You may first notice an emotional response to a situation, which can be a clue that an automatic thought was triggered. For example, the nervous feeling you have when starting a memory task may be a clue that you had the automatic thought that you are not good at tests.

**Checking** the thought means evaluating the thought and considering whether there is another way of looking at the situation.

**Changing** the thought means revising the thought to be more accurate or more balanced. This process can help you better cope with difficult emotions and situations.

**\*\* Refer to *Handout #8: Thinking About Your Thinking - I*. Encourage participants to identify thinking errors they may have encountered, particularly those that relate to learning. Then return to wrap up.**

*Wrap Up:* Learning how to identify automatic thoughts and whether you are making thinking errors can help you work through challenges during learning and in everyday life.

# Handout #8: Thinking About Your Thinking - I

There are several types of thinking errors people make. They are so common that we've given them names! These thoughts might pop up as automatic thoughts while doing activities. Thinking errors can have a negative impact on how we practice cognitive skills and learn.

It is important to recognize the automatic thoughts that are problematic for you, when they occur, and what your response is – so that you can catch them, check them, and change them.

## THINKING ERROR: ALL-OR-NOTHING / BLACK-OR-WHITE THINKING

### Catch it:

Example During Cognitive Training	Thought Examples
Believing performance is either good or bad without any variation or in-between.	"If I can't do this exercise perfectly, it's not worth doing at all."  "I am a terrible learner."

🔍 How would such a thought make you feel?  
How might you react?

**Check it:** Consider how accurate the statement is. Is there a different way to think about it?

Thought Example	Why is this an Error?
"If I can't do this exercise perfectly, it's not worth doing at all."	Performance is being put into one of two boxes – perfect or nothing at all. In reality, performance is never going to be perfect 100% of the time.

**Change it:** Revise the thought so it is more balanced.



My performance on this task means there is room to grow.  
If my performance were 100% all the time, this experience would be pretty boring.  
Even if my performance isn't 100%, I am still learning to practice my skills in a new, challenging way.

## THINKING ERROR: MIND READING

### Catch it:

Example During Cognitive Training	Thought Example
Perceiving that others are judging you negatively	"My therapist didn't acknowledge what I said during the group discussion. She must think I'm stupid."



How would such a thought make you feel?  
How might you react?

### Check it: Consider how accurate the statement is. Is there a different way to think about it?

Thought Example	Why is this an Error?
"My therapist didn't acknowledge what I said during the group discussion. She must think I'm stupid."	A negative attribution is being made in assuming what another person is thinking/feeling. In reality, there may be several alternative reasons why my therapist didn't call on me today.



Are there alternative reasons why the therapist didn't acknowledge what you said in group?  
Is there evidence to support the thought that the therapist thinks you're stupid?  
How certain are you that this is true?

### Change it: Revise the thought so it is more balanced.



Maybe my therapist was trying to give other people a chance to talk.  
Maybe she didn't hear me.  
I'm only 50% certain this is true. I'll try talking to her after group about my ideas instead.

## 9. Changing Automatic Thoughts - I

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**Objective:** Participants will gain additional practice with catch it, check it, and change it, with a focus on challenging and changing thinking errors.

**Materials:** Handout #8: Thinking About Your Thinking - I  
Worksheet #9: Changing Automatic Thoughts - I

It is important to recognize when automatic thinking errors occur and what your response is; this way you can catch them, check them, and change them.

*\*\*Provide **Handout #8: Thinking About Your Thinking - I***

*Changing Automatic Thoughts:* The process of 'Catch it, Check it, Change it' is a skill that, just like any other, can be practiced. While you were working on the computer exercises today, did anyone catch an automatic thought?

*\*\*Prompt participants to generate examples of automatic thoughts that illustrate All-or-Nothing / Black-or-White Thinking or Mind Reading.*

*\*\*Refer to **Worksheet #9: Changing Automatic Thoughts - I** to lead participants through the steps using the example provided by a group member. If participants would benefit from a therapist-led example, use "I am a terrible learner." Use as many participant-generated examples as time allows. Then return to wrap up.*

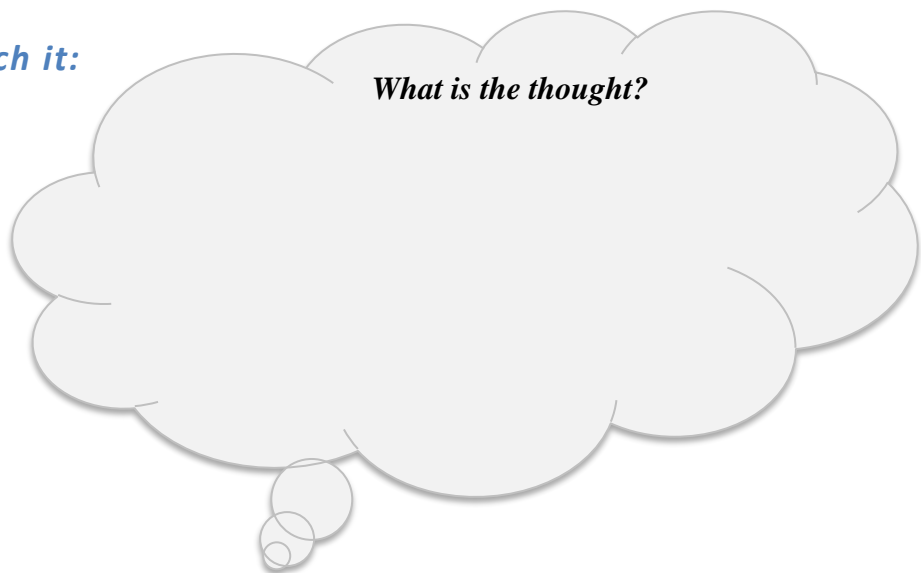
*\*\*Emphasize how reframing one's thoughts about an event or situation, and how thinking in a more balanced way, can decrease the severity and impact of negative emotional experiences.*

*Wrap Up:* Learning how to critically evaluate and change thinking errors can help you tackle emotional challenges during learning and in everyday life. Being able to cope with challenges that come up can help you stay with a task even when it feels hard.

# Worksheet #9: Changing Automatic Thoughts - I

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**Catch it:**



What were you doing at the time? \_\_\_\_\_

How does this thought make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is this feeling? *Rate the feeling from 1 (mild) to 10 (severe):* \_\_\_\_\_

**Check it:**

Is this a thinking error (*All-or-Nothing Thinking, Mind Reading*)? \_\_\_\_\_

**Change it:**

Can you make this thought more accurate or balanced? \_\_\_\_\_

How does this new thought make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is this feeling? *Rate the feeling from 1 (mild) to 10 (severe):* \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. Thinking About Your Thinking - II

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**Objective:** Learn how to catch, check, and change thinking errors.

**Materials:** Handout #10: Thinking About Your Thinking - II

It is important to recognize when automatic thinking errors occur and what your response is so that you can catch them, check them, and change them.

Today we will learn about two more types of common thinking errors. We will practice using the 'Catch it, Check it, Change it' skill.

*\*\* Refer to **Handout #10: Thinking About Your Thinking - II**. Encourage participants to identify thinking errors they may have encountered, particularly those that relate to learning. Then return to wrap up.*

**Wrap Up:** Learning how to identify automatic thoughts and how to identify whether you are making thinking errors can help you work through challenges during learning and in everyday life.

# Handout #10: Thinking About Your Thinking - II

## THINKING ERROR: MAGNIFYING/CATASTROPHIZING

### Catch it:

Example During Cognitive Training	Thought Example
Blowing things out of proportion; making mountains out of molehills.	I forgot to do my cognitive exercise homework on Monday – I will never catch up.

- ❓ How would such a thought make you feel?  
How might you react?

**Check it:** Consider how accurate the statement is. Is there a different way to think about it?

Thought Example	Why is this an Error?
I forgot to do my cognitive exercise homework on Monday – I will never catch up.	A negative event is given more emphasis than it deserves; the consequences of the action are blown out of proportion.

- ❓ How certain are you that this is true?  
Are there other (more likely) consequences?  
What does past experience tell you?

**Change it:** Revise the thought so it is more balanced.

- ❓ What are some alternative ways of thinking about this situation?  
Does thinking about the situation differently change the way you feel?



## THINKING ERROR: DISCOUNTING THE POSITIVE

### Catch it

Example During Cognitive Training	Thought Examples
Picking out a negative detail and dwelling on it while ignoring other (positive) details or counter examples.	I just had a lucky streak. Now I'm back to not being able to do it. I just can't do it right. I never have important contributions during group discussions.



How would such a thought make you feel?  
How might you react?



Pay attention to use of strong language and absolutes (never, always, can't) as clues to catch it.

**Check it:** Consider how accurate the statement is. Is there a different way to think about it?

Thought Examples	Why is this an Error?
I just had a lucky streak. Now I'm back to not being able to do it. I just can't do it right.  I never have important contributions during group discussions.	You may not be giving yourself credit for your accomplishments and instead are focusing on the negative.  You may be rejecting (discounting) a good thing that happened.



How certain are you that this is true?  
Is there evidence to support this thought?

**Change it:** Revise the thought so it is more balanced.



What are some alternative ways of thinking about this situation?  
Does thinking about the situation differently change the way you feel?

# 11. Changing Automatic Thoughts - II

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**Objective:** Participants will gain additional practice with 'Catch it, Check it, Change it', with a focus on challenging and changing thinking errors.

**Materials:** Handout #10: Thinking About Your Thinking - II  
Worksheet #11: Changing Automatic Thoughts - II

*\*\*Provide the **Handout #10: Thinking About Your Thinking - II***

*Changing Automatic Thoughts:* Today we will practice using the 'Catch it, Check it, Change it' skill with examples of Magnifying/Catastrophizing and Discounting the Positive. While you were working on the computer exercises today, did anyone catch an automatic thought?

*\*\*Prompt participants to generate examples of automatic thoughts that illustrate Magnifying/Catastrophizing and Discounting the Positive.*

*\*\*Refer to **Worksheet #11: Changing Automatic Thoughts - II** to lead participants through the steps using the example provided by a group member. If participants would benefit from a therapist-led example, use "I never have important contributions during group discussions." Use as many participant-generated examples as time allows.*

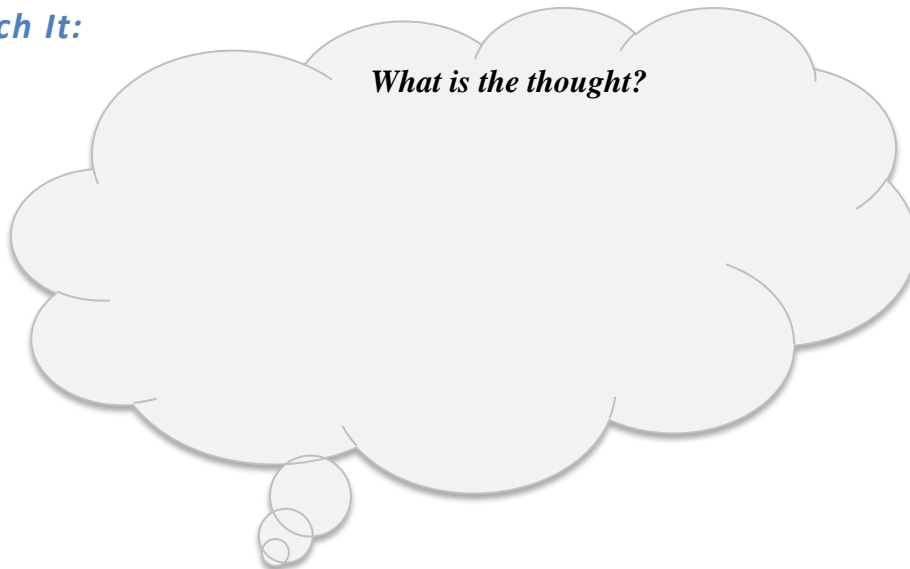
*\*\*Emphasize how reframing one's thoughts about an event or situation, and thinking in a more balanced way, can decrease the severity and impact of negative emotional experiences.*

*Wrap Up:* Learning how to critically evaluate and change thinking errors can help you tackle emotional challenges during learning and in everyday life. Being able to cope with challenges that come up can help you stay with a task even when it feels hard.

# Worksheet #11: Changing Automatic Thoughts - II

---

## **Catch It:**



What were you doing at the time? \_\_\_\_\_

How does this thought make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is this feeling? *Rate the feeling from 1 (mild) to 10 (severe):* \_\_\_\_\_

## **Check It:**

Is this a thinking error (*All-or-Nothing Thinking, Mind Reading, Magnifying / Catastrophizing, Discounting the Positive*)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Change It:**

Can you make this thought more accurate or balanced? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How does this new thought make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

How strong is this feeling? *Rate the feeling from 1 (mild) to 10 (severe):* \_\_\_\_\_

## 12. Active Mindfulness

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**Objective:** Identify how mindfulness can be used during cognitive practice and in everyday life to improve focus and concentration.

**Materials:** Handout #12: Mindfulness

*Common Problems with Attention:* Today we will switch our topic to discuss the cognitive skill: attention. Does anyone here ever find it difficult to focus? Or that it is easy to get distracted? It is common for people to struggle with attention and staying on task.

The good news is that there are things you can do to improve your focus and attention. Today we will practice and talk about Mindfulness.

*\*\* Refer to **Handout #12: Mindfulness** to guide the discussion, then return to wrap up.*

*\*\* Note: Do only as much of the example mindfulness activities as needed for everyone to participate and to adequately illustrate the skill*

*Wrap Up:* Mindfulness is an important skill that can help you be more aware of what you are doing, thinking and feeling.

# Handout #12: Mindfulness

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*What is Mindfulness:* Mindfulness involves training yourself to observe your mind and notice when you have become distracted. This ability is crucial when you are striving to improve your attention.

Mindfulness refers to “active thinking,” “monitoring,” or “taking notice” when something has been done. An example of being mindful is being aware of when you turn the stove off so you can be sure flames are not left on.

Here are mindfulness exercises so you can practice keeping your mind focused on the present, to what is right in front of you:

*1. Mindful Movement:* Everyone follow the person who has volunteered to be the Guide. The Guide makes small and not so small movements (e.g. moving a finger or a leg) that others copy. Take turns with who is the Guide. Try doing this for a few minutes.

*2. Staying on Track:* Mindfulness is a skill that can help you stay in the moment, so you can keep on track. Let’s try a mindfulness exercise by saying the alphabet backwards. Each person will say the letter that comes next.

❓ What did you notice as you were doing these activities?

*Mindfulness During Cognitive Practice:* Mindfulness is a skill that can be used while practicing your cognitive skills.

## MINDFULNESS IS:

### *Noticing when your mind drifts away from an activity*


❓ Did that happen during the alphabet task?  
What did you do to bring yourself back to the task?


★ When you notice your mind drift, you can (non-judgmentally) bring your attention back or problem-solve to reduce distractions.

### *Being aware of the cognitive skills and strategies you are practicing*


❓ What cognitive skill did we practice when reciting the alphabet backwards?  
What strategy did you use?

### *Monitoring how cognitive practice is going*

 Can you think of a time when you consciously decided to do the cognitive exercises on the computer differently?


 You can make conscious decisions about how to approach a task or a cognitive challenge.


### *Catching automatic thoughts that interfere with cognitive practice*

 Catching a thinking error allows you to check it and change it.

Practicing mindfulness during cognitive training can help you stay actively engaged during your cognitive practice. This can help you process information more deeply and make the most out of the learning experience.

*Mindfulness Every Day:* People say that being focused and mindful helps them do things faster and better.

 How do you think mindfulness would help you in your everyday life?

 How can you be mindful when walking down the street? In the kitchen? When talking to someone?

## 13. Managing Distractibility

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**Objective:** Identify challenges to paying attention and solutions to manage them.

**Materials:** Handout #13: 4 Steps to Improve Your Attention

*Managing Distractibility:* Today we will talk more about mindfulness and introduce other strategies that can help you manage distractibility in everyday life. There are lots of potential distractions that can throw us off track when we are trying to get things done.

❓ What are some things you get distracted by?

*\*\* Refer to **Handout #13: 4 Steps to Improve Your Attention**. Take turns reading the options and ask participants whether they already use any of the strategies listed or which options they are likely to try.*

*Wrap up:* Once you've identified the types of distractions you are likely to encounter, you can choose the strategies you think will be most effective to help you remain on-task.

# Handout #13: 4 Steps to Improve Your Attention

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There are lots of potential distractions that can throw us off track when we are trying to get things done. There are several **steps** you can take to improve your attention:



**Circle the steps you would like to try.**

**Mindfulness:** Mindfulness involves training yourself to observe your mind and notice when you have become distracted. This ability is crucial when you are striving to improve your attention. Example: Be mindful when you turn the stove off so you can be sure flames are not left on.

**Self-Talk:** Self-talk involves coaching yourself through a task by paraphrasing instructions, reminding yourself of what task you intend to complete, and reinforcing your intention to attend to the task.

**Breaks:** If you are too exhausted your effort towards a task is going to be misspent. It is often better to take a small break and then go back to the task.

**Sleep:** Without rest you will also be spending more effort trying to focus than if you got some rest and tried again. Would it be better if you set an early morning alarm to finish a paper or presentation rather than burning the midnight oil?



## 14. Solutions to Distraction

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**Objective:** Participants will identify situations in which distractions are present in the environment and learn ways to resolve them.

**Materials:** Handout #14: Solutions to Distraction

*Resolve Distractions in your Environment:* In addition to improving attention, you can also problem-solve situations in which distractions are present in your environment. Let's review the different types of distractions and how to resolve them.

*\*\* Refer to **Handout #14: Solutions to Distraction**. Take turns reading the options and ask participants if they already use any of these strategies or which options they are likely to try. Then return to wrap up.*

*Wrap up:* Being prepared with a toolkit of solutions to distraction can help you problem solve when you are trying to stay focused and remain on-task.

# Handout #14: Solutions to Distraction

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One of the ways to improve focus is to get rid of unnecessary distractions. Let's look at some of the most common sources of distraction and ways you can deal with them.

**Circle the distractions you experience and the solutions you might try.**

***Auditory Distractions:*** Is the TV or radio on? Are people talking? Some people find it easier to focus when there is some noise but others need complete silence. Which kind of person are you?



Use noise cancelling headphones or earbuds to signal to others you're not available.  
Use a white noise machine

***Visual Distractions:*** Phones and TVs can be visually distracting.



Turn your phone face down.  
Turn the TV off.

***Social Distractions:*** Are people distracting you by interrupting when you are trying to get something done?



Tell people when you will be available.  
Explain that now is not a good time.

***Emotional Distractions:*** Experiencing stress and feeling upset can be very distracting.



Consider using 'Catch it, Check it, Change it'.  
Write down what is distracting you and set a time that you will deal with it.

***Physical Distractions:*** Uncomfortable clothing, uncomfortable chairs, being hungry and tired can make it difficult to focus.



Think ahead when you set out to do a task that requires focus.  
Are you dressed comfortably? Did you eat and get enough sleep?

## 15. Strategies for Better Memory

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**Objective:** Introduce strategies for remembering details.

**Materials:** Handout #15: Memory Strategies

*Introduction:* Being able to remember tasks and information is a skill that is required in almost all settings; work, school, when talking with friends, and managing daily chores. Sometimes, even when you are paying attention, it may be hard to recall information later. Today we are going to talk about two strategies to help you remember.

*\*\*Refer to **Handout #15: Memory Strategies**. Practice repetition by each person saying a fact they want someone else to remember, and the other person repeats it and gives it context.*

*Wrap Up:* Taking notes and repetition are helpful strategies to remember important information.

# Handout #15: Memory Strategies

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Being able to remember tasks and information is a skill that is required in almost all settings; work, school, when talking with friends, and managing daily chores.

*The #1 way to remember something is to write it down.*

Writing helps encode information in multiple ways:



- Hear it
- Write it
- Read it as you write
- Say it out loud after you write



What kinds of things do you regularly write down?



- Shopping lists
- To-do lists



- Reminders/notes to self
- Directions/instructions



- Log-ins/passwords



Where do you keep important written information?



- Consider you want to be able to see it, access it easily, and remember where that information is located.



- Use a section of your calendar. File the information appropriately in the space for each day.



- Carry a small notebook with you to keep track of information you might routinely need.



- Keep a to-do list or a list of important information in your phone/other electronic device

*The #2 way to remember something is to repeat it in the context of a story.*

Repetition helps us encode information.



- If I tell you my name you might forget it. However, if you repeat my name, and say something using it, you are more likely to remember it.

*Practice:* As an example, if I say, “You should really read ‘Cat’s Cradle’ by Kurt Vonnegut” What would you say to repeat and remember that?

## 16. Problem Solving

**Objective:** Participants will identify cognitive skills and strategies needed to successfully navigate and troubleshoot at a doctor's appointment.

**Materials:** Handout #16: Sam's Appointment

*Putting Cognition in Context:* Today we will use the example of going to a doctor's appointment to talk through how cognitive skills and strategies are used.

**\*\* Refer to *Handout #16: Sam's Appointment*. Ask each participant to read a sentence of the scenario, taking turns until it is completed.**

**\*\* Ask the questions to analyze the scenario.**

Sam has an appointment with his doctor, Dr. Susan Lyons, today at 10am at the Medical Arts Building on 120 East 45<sup>th</sup> Street, office suite 301. At this appointment he will get an annual physical, including blood work that requires him to not eat anything in the 12 hours before. He was asked to bring a list of his medications, ID and insurance card, and to arrive 15 minutes early to fill out paperwork. On the bus Sam realizes he forgot to bring his insurance card. If he goes back home to get it, he will be late.

? What cognitive skills did Sam need to get to his doctor's appointment?

★ **Memory:** remembering the appointment time and location, the instructions to follow and what to bring

★ **Time Management/Planning:** scheduling a time to wake up, deciding when to leave to be on time and figuring out how to get to the office

? Are there cognitive support strategies you use to help you remember the types of important information Sam needed?

★ **Calendar:** write down (discuss where) appointment day/time and location

★ **To-Do List:** make a list of items to bring (discuss where to write and keep this list, e.g. phone, appointment card)

★ **Alarms:** set an alarm (discuss where) to remind you when to leave

? What cognitive skill did Sam need when he realized he forgot to bring his insurance card?

★ **Problem Solving:** think of different approaches to solve the problem, weigh the options, select a solution

- ❓ If you were in this situation what would you do?
- ❓ What are some possible solutions to this problem?
- ❓ Which solution would you try first?

*Linking Cognitive Skills to Computer Exercises:* Help participants make links between the cognitive skills discussed in the scenario and the computer-based exercises.

- ❓ Did anyone exercise memory, planning or problem solving on the computer today?
- ❓ How did you use those cognitive skills in the exercises?
- ❓ Were there any strategies you used to help you meet the challenge of the cognitive exercises you worked on?

*Wrap Up:* Today we discussed a scenario where we saw how cognitive skills including memory, problem solving, and planning can be used in every-day life. In the next week, make a mental note of when it is helpful to use some of the cognitive skills and strategies we discussed today.

# Handout #16: Sam's Appointment

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Sam has an appointment with his doctor, Dr. Susan Lyons, today at 10am at the Medical Arts Building on 120 East 45<sup>th</sup> Street, office suite 301. At this appointment he will get an annual physical, including blood work that requires him to not eat anything in the 12 hours before. He was asked to bring a list of his medications, ID and insurance card, and to arrive 15 minutes early to fill out paperwork. On the bus Sam realizes he forgot to bring his insurance card. If he goes back home to get it, he will be late.

## *Discussion Questions:*

- What cognitive skills did Sam need to get to his doctor's appointment?
- ? Are there cognitive support strategies you use to help you remember the types of important information Sam needed?
- What cognitive skills did Sam need when he realized he forgot to bring his insurance card?
- ? If you were in this situation, what would you do?
- Did you exercise memory, planning or problem solving on the computer today?
- ? How did you use those cognitive skills in the exercises?
- Were there any strategies you used to help you meet the challenge of the cognitive exercises you worked on?

## 17. Planning

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**Objective:** Identify cognitive skills and strategies needed to plan a party.

**Materials:** Handout #17: Planning a Party

*Planning Skills:* Today we will use the example of planning a party to talk about how cognitive skills are used in an everyday life situation.

*\*\*Refer to **Handout #17: Planning a Party** to guide the discussion. Then return to wrap up.*

*Wrap up:* Organization and prioritizing are important skills needed for planning. Writing things down to make lists and using a calendar to put tasks in order can help you plan your time so that things get done efficiently and effectively.




# Handout #17: Planning a Party

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It's April 21<sup>st</sup> and you have your annual 'Cinco De Mayo' party coming up. You need to plan ahead to make sure things go smoothly. One tradition you definitely want to keep up is the 'Guac Off' – a guacamole competition amongst partygoers. You also need to pick out 2 other Mexican themed recipes for party appetizers and get beverages.

Work together to answer the following questions about throwing a party on May 5<sup>th</sup>:

 What kinds of tasks do you need to do?

Tasks:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

 In what order should you do these tasks to ensure the party meets your high standards?

 How can you use a calendar to plan so that 'Cinco De Mayo' is a success?

A calendar allows you to visualize when you have time that is available or not available. Use the calendar on the next page to plug in which tasks can be done on which days.

# APR - MAY 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9



What cognitive skills did you need to do this exercise?  
What strategies do you use to organize and plan ahead?

# 18. How to Get Things Done: Chunking

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**Objective:** Help group members learn how to break down large goals into smaller, more manageable and more specific tasks to increase successful goal completion.

**Materials:** Worksheet #18: Chunking

*Goal Setting Strategies:* One of the biggest problems people face in achieving their goals is that they do not give themselves good instructions on how to take action. Today, we will learn how to give ourselves a clear direction when we need to work on larger tasks. The skill we will learn is called chunking.

*Chunking:* Chunking is a way to break down an overwhelming task, either by limiting the amount of time you will spend on the task, or by creating a very specific smaller task that you will complete.

**\*\* Refer to *Worksheet #18: Chunking*. Review example (getting a job), chunking by task and chunking by time. Use the questions below to guide each person in completing the worksheet, then return to wrap up.**



What is something you want to accomplish?  
Can you chunk this goal into smaller ones?



How would you chunk that goal? By task? By time?

*Wrap Up:* Many times, the items on our to-do list are simply too broad and unmanageable to easily get started. Chunking helps guide us towards setting goals and expectations that allow us to be more successful.

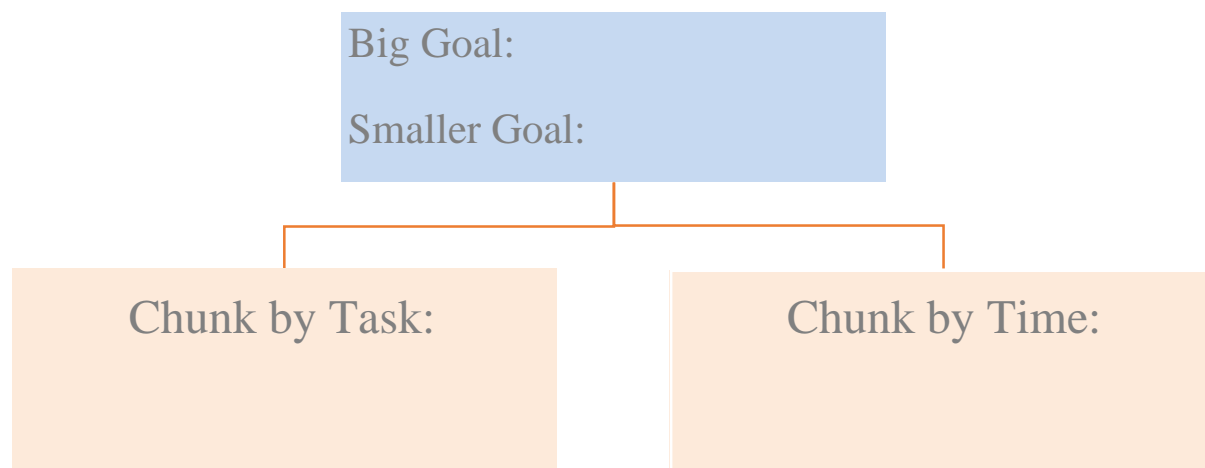
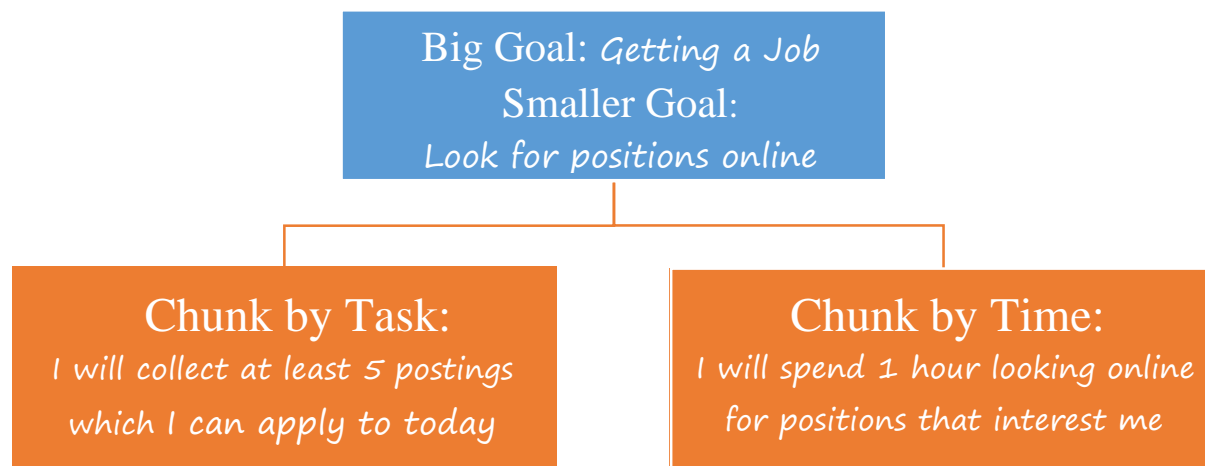
# Worksheet #18: Chunking

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One of the most valuable skills you can learn is to **'CHUNK'** larger goals down into **smaller ones**. Many times, the items on our to-do list are simply too broad and unmanageable to easily get started. For example, if I write, "get a job" on my to-do list, what do you think my response will be to that? I haven't given myself any "foothold" in getting started on the task. Instead, I have a huge, multi-faceted (and potentially unappealing) task that I will most likely want to avoid.

In this situation, the first question you might ask yourself is, "*do I want to chunk this by TASK or by TIME?*"

Chunking by **TIME** usually works for long term projects without specific deadlines (e.g. finding a job, cleaning your house, developing a skill), whereas chunking by **TASK** is best for when you must complete a task by a certain date.



# 19. ESMART Goals

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**Objective:** Learn how to create ESMART goals when chunking by task or time.

**Materials:** Worksheet #19: ESMART Goals

**ESMART:** Once you start using chunking, another strategy that can help you take action is to create an “ESMART” chunk. ESMART is an acronym that gives you criteria for how to create a chunk that is easier to act on. Some of you may have already heard of “SMART” goals. In ESMART, “E” stands for “**emotionally charged**”. Finding a way to “light a spark” under you can help when tasks are not particularly exciting but must be done. For example, people rarely enjoy completing paperwork, but it is required in a lot of situations.

*\*\*Refer to **Worksheet #19: ESMART Goals** to guide the remaining discussion. Then return to wrap up.*

*\*\* Note: Not all ESMART criteria must be filled. If a task isn't getting done or the goal is too overwhelming, consider if the chunks are too large. Using ESMART can help you break things down even further than chunking.*

**Wrap Up:** Using the acronym ESMART can help us find the motivation we need to get important things done and ensure that we set ourselves up on a path towards success.

# Worksheet #19: ESMART Goals

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**E** stands for “**emotionally charged**”. Make sure there is some desire in you to complete the goal. If it is an undesirable goal, think about creating a sense of competence or self-image as someone who does not quit.

**S** stands for “**specific**”. Make sure the goal is clear and simple.

**M** stands for “**measurable**”. You can ask yourself how would you know whether or not you’ve achieved the goal? A goal may be measurable in terms of how well it was done or how much was completed.

**A** stands for “**achievable**”. Ask yourself if your goal is realistic. Can you really accomplish it given your time and resources?

**R** stands for “**relevant**”. This helps you stay on track towards your larger goal, as opposed to starting new projects, getting distracted, or starting something you don’t have the resources to finish.

**T** stands for “**timely**”. Ask yourself how much time it will take and when you will work on a chunk. It may help to define a window of time to complete the task in.

Now consider the goal you created in the chunking exercise. How does it fit into the ESMART criteria?

*Emotionally Charged:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Specific:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Measurable:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Achievable:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Relevant:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Timely:* \_\_\_\_\_

## 20. Time Management

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**Objective:** Group members will learn several techniques to improve time awareness and planning.

**Materials:** Handout #20A: Time Management  
Handout #20B: Lydia's Planner  
Handout #20C: Lydia's Improved Planner (Optional)

*\*\* Use **Handouts #20A and #20B(C)** to review this material. Summarize the information and encourage discussion around the questions. At the conclusion, return to wrap up. Showing Lydia's improved planner is optional but often helpful.*

*At the conclusion, return to wrap up.*

**Wrap Up:** Using a planner or calendar is a great first step to help you feel more in control of your time and to be more productive.

# Handout #20A: Time Management

---

Time management involves a set of strategies that, when used together, help you take control of your time. This way, you can get everything done without being stressed.

- ?
- Did you ever feel that time “got away” from you?
- Did you ever plan to do something, but it never happened?
- What was that like for you?

*Time Management Strategies:* Does anyone here use a calendar or planner to keep track of appointments? How about alarms as reminders of when to do things?

Strategies like alarms, calendars and planners can be very useful tools. They help free up “brain space” or “mental energy” because you don’t have to keep information permanently logged in your head. In fact, trying to keep track of things mentally can slow you down and make decision-making harder than when you use tools to help you.

Using a planner can help you to stay organized and to visualize how you spend your time and when you are free. Time spent planning with a calendar can prevent problems in the present and save you time and energy in the future.

Let’s take the example of Lydia’s planner (see next page).

Keep this information in mind:

1. Lydia lives 25 minutes from her school.
2. Her doctor is a 15-minute walk from school.
3. She made plans to have lunch with her friend Kim back near school after her appointment.

- ?
- What are some positive things you notice about Lydia’s planner?
- What do you think is wrong with Lydia’s planner?

Is there enough wake up and travel time?

- ?
- Is there enough transition time between activities?
- Can you relate to the feeling of rushing from one place to another? The feeling of barely catching up with your schedule?



# Handout #20B: Lydia's Planner

8am	:00	
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	
9am	:00	
	:15	
	:30	Wake up
	:45	
10am	:00	Arrive @ School – History Class
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	
11am	:00	
	:15	Dr. Grant
	:30	
	:45	
12pm	:00	
	:15	Lunch with Kim at Da Capo
	:30	
	:45	

Keep this information in mind:

1. Lydia lives 25 minutes from her school.
2. Her doctor is a 15-minute walk from school.
3. Da Capo is the café by the school.



What are some positive things you notice about Lydia's planner?  
What do you think is wrong with Lydia's planner?



Is there enough time to wake up and travel to school?  
Is there enough transition time between activities?



Can you relate to the feeling of rushing from one place to another?  
Can you relate to the feeling of barely catching up with your schedule?

## Handout #20C: Lydia's Improved Planner

<b>8:00 AM</b>	<b>:00</b>	
	:15	
	:30	Wake Up – Snooze 3x
	:45	
<b>9:00 AM</b>	:00	Morning Routine ↓
	:15	
	:30	Leave House – R TRAIN
	:45	
<b>10:00 AM</b>	:00	Arrive @ School – History Class ↓
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	
<b>11:00 AM</b>	:00	Socialize
	:15	Leave for Dr. Grant
	:30	
	:45	Dr. Grant Appt.
<b>12:00 PM</b>	:00	
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	Leave to meet Kim
<b>1:00PM</b>	:00	
	:15	Lunch with Kim at Da Capo ↓
	:30	
	:45	

Keep this information in mind:

1. Lydia lives 25 minutes from her school.
2. Her doctor is a 15-minute walk from school.
3. Da Capo is the café by the school.



What are some positive things you notice about Lydia's planner?  
What changed from the previous version?



Is there enough time to wake up and travel to school?  
Is there enough transition time between activities?

## 21. Effective Calendar Use

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**Objective:** Group members will learn how to make the best use of their calendars and planners.

**Materials:** Handout #21: Effective Calendar Use  
Worksheet #21: Planner Practice

*Guidelines for Effective Calendar use:* Last time we discussed the example of Lydia who used a planner to map out her day. Planners and calendars help us to be more productive and to feel good about what we can accomplish each day. There are a few guidelines to take into consideration so that calendars are effective time management tools.

**\*\* Refer to *Handout #21: Effective Calendar Use* and *Worksheet #21: Planner Practice*. Then return to wrap up.**

*Wrap up:* Using a calendar or planner on a routine basis and using techniques like time padding, can help you to manage your schedule, be more efficient, and keep stress levels low.

# Handout #21: Effective Calendar Use

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Calendars help us to be more productive and to feel good about what we can accomplish each day. There are a few guidelines to consider when using calendars, so they can be effective time management tools.

★ ***Calendars and planners need to be available and visible.***  
You need to be able to consult them regularly.

❓ **Where would you keep your calendar/planner so that you can access it regularly?**

★ ***Every appointment should be written in the calendar:*** If it is not entered, it does not exist - and might not get done!

★ ***Have realistic expectations:*** It's good to be optimistic, but you should consider the time and resources you have available that day when adding tasks to the calendar.

★ ***Account for transition time.*** Give yourself time to get ready to leave your house, say goodbye to friends after lunch, and get your things together at the end of the workday. This allows you to have time to breathe as you go from one thing to the next.

★ ***Account for travel time.*** Plan ahead and account for adequate travel time so you don't feel rushed and stress levels remain low.

★ ***Time Padding.*** Accounting for transition time and adequate travel time is a concept called "Time Padding." Build in or plan for all the everyday things that take extra time and even the little interruptions life throws in your life every day.

Use the practice planner to build a schedule that takes these factors into consideration.

# Worksheet #21: Planner Practice

---

8am	:00	
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	
9am	:00	
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	
10am	:00	
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	
11am	:00	
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	
12pm	:00	
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	

Use this planner to schedule a morning.

List things you need to account for in your schedule (e.g. travel time) here:

## 22. Prioritizing

---

**Objective:** Participants will learn what factors to consider when prioritizing, identify pitfalls of time management, and discuss problem resolutions.

**Materials:** Handout #23: Prioritization

*Prioritization:* Prioritizing is the process of deciding the importance or urgency of a thing or things, like the items on your to-do list.

❓ What are some of the factors that help you decide what takes priority (i.e. why you would choose one task or activity to tackle over another)?



**Deadlines** – when does this task have to be completed?

**Urgency** – things that have the earliest deadline should have greater priority.



**Values** - what activities are most meaningful to you?

**Goal-Related** - what is important for your own short- or long-term goals?

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we fall into some traps when it comes to planning and prioritizing. Let's discuss these and see if we can find ways to resolve them.

**\*\*Refer to *Handout #23: Prioritization***

**\*\*Note:** Encourage participants to generate examples of when they have or have not been successful at prioritizing. What approaches were helpful? Prompt group members to brainstorm solutions to time management pitfalls and problems. Then return to wrap up.

*Wrap Up:* Being good at prioritizing involves critical thinking to identify what needs to get done as well as how to approach a list of tasks. Prioritizing also involves problem solving to make sure you make the most efficient use of your time.

# Handout #22: Prioritization

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Breaking down goals into manageable tasks, using planners, calendars, and to-do lists help with time management. But if you're not able to prioritize the tasks that need to get done, it will still be very difficult to reach your goals.

**Prioritizing is the process of deciding the importance or urgency of a thing or things, like the items on your to-do list.**

There are some guidelines for how to prioritize tasks on a to-do list:



**Deadlines** – when does this task have to be completed?

**Urgency** – things that have the earliest deadline should have greater priority.



**Values** – what activities are most meaningful to you?

**Goal-Related** – what is important for your own short- or long-term goals?

Prioritizing and following through on an action plan all the way to goal completion can be challenging. Below is a list of common pitfalls. Read and ask yourself:



Have you ever encountered any of these pitfalls to prioritization?

How could you resolve them?

**Putting Out Fires:** Attending to what is right in front of you rather than tending to long term projects.

*Example: Answering incoming emails instead of responding to job posts online.*

**Pseudo-efficiency:** Doing tasks that, while potentially important, aren't necessarily urgent. We sometimes call this "procrastination with a top hat" since it *looks* like you are being productive.

*Example: Organizing your desk drawer when sitting down to study for an exam.*

**Lack of Completion:** Starting numerous projects but having difficulty bringing any to completion, leaving lots of loose ends.

*Example: Enrolling in 2 different online computer classes to increase your skill-set while also looking for full time employment.*

**Feeling Overwhelmed:** Feeling there is too much on the to-do list to ever get done.

*Example: Your to-do list includes all the tasks with deadlines in the next week and all the things you need to get done in the next month.*

**Feeling Behind:** You feel you have fallen behind and want to make up for lost time.

*Example: You were sick for a week with the flu and reschedule all your missed meetings and appointments in the next 2 days.*

**You Love To-Do Lists:** You include items on your to-do list because it feels good.

*Example: Writing down the things you do daily (e.g. eat breakfast) overshadows the things you really need to remember to do (e.g. pay your rent)*



## 23. Skills for Effective Communication

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**Objective:** Group members will learn to recognize aspects of a conversation that allow for the conversation to be more effective. They will use working memory and memory to improve conversation skills.

**Materials:** Handout #23: PAWS

*Effective Communication: Today we are going to focus on using cognitive skills to be effective when we communicate. Working memory and memory can really help one communicate well. Let's discuss why that is.*

❓ What do we mean by effective communication?

- ★ All parties involved are able to get their point across
- ★ Effective communication involves both giving and receiving information
- ★ Social cues are used to gauge how the communication is going and to guide the flow of conversation

*When you are starting a conversation, it is a good idea to pause and consider these tips. To help you remember these tips, they spell out PAWS.*

**\*\* Refer to *Handout 23: PAWS* to guide the discussion. If time allows, have pairs (or you and a client) practice using the mental file cabinet to start and keep a conversation going. Each participant says something he/she likes to do, and some place he/she has been. Allow clients to practice with each other for 2-3 minutes, using information they have learned about one another to start and maintain a brief conversation.**

Example: Ben likes to look at new cars – and thought Times Square was awesome  
Dave likes to shop and eat in Chinatown

Dave: “Hey Ben, how’s it going? I was just thinking of you because I saw an ad for the auto show.”

Ben: “Oh yes I saw that – looks like it will be a great car, show. Hey what’s up with you? Have you been to Chinatown lately?”

*Linking Cognitive Skills to Computer Exercises: Help participants make links between the cognitive skills discussed in relation to PAWS and the computer-based exercises.*



What exercises are you working on at the computer that help you keep a mental file cabinet? How do they help?

*Syllable Stacks* – Remembering detailed information you’ve heard



*Auditory Ace* - Paying attention to what you hear and keeping it in memory

*In the Know* – Keeping track of what’s been said in a conversation and remembering details



What exercises are you working on at the computer that help you be an effective listener in conversations? How do they help?



*Mixed Signals* - Paying attention to what you hear

*To Do List* – Paying attention to verbal information and keeping it in memory

**Wrap up:** Communicating in an effective manner is the best way to get your point across. When you pause before starting a conversation, you can be sure to use all of the (PAWS) skills we learned to communicate effectively.

# Handout #23: PAWS

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*When you are starting a conversation, it is a good idea to pause and consider these tips. To help you remember these tips, they spell out PAWS.*

## **P – Prepare Ahead**



“File away” facts you learn about people you know.



Use these facts to choose an appropriate topic.

## **A – Ask**



Think about what you want to say and how you are going to say it before you start talking.



Choosing an appropriate topic will show that you are interested in that person.



Thinking about how to open the conversation will make sure the greeting is appropriate for the person you are addressing (greeting a friend versus a boss, teacher, or doctor).

## **W – When**



Is it a good time to begin a conversation?



How do you know if it's a good time?



When might *not* be a good time to start a conversation? (if the person is having a private conversation with someone else, if they are in a rush or busy)

## **S – Signals**



Give good verbal and non-verbal signals whether you are giving or receiving information



Give an appropriate greeting



Read the “temperature” of the situation and display appropriate affect



Use eye contact to stay engaged in the conversation



Use non-verbal cues such as nodding your head to show you are listening

*Let's practice using the mental file cabinet to start a conversation. To do this, let's each say two things about ourselves:*

- 1. What is something you like to do?*
- 2. Where is a place you've been that you like?*



*Try starting and maintaining a brief conversation with a partner, using information you have learned.*

*Discussion Questions:*



*What exercises are you working on at the computer that help you keep a mental file cabinet? How do they help?*



*What exercises are you working on at the computer that help you be an effective listener in conversations? How do they help?*

## 24. Cognitive Skills Review/Graduation

**Objective:** Participants review how cognitive skills were practiced in-session and are used in real-world settings. Graduating participants receive certificates and reflect on how participation in Brain Gym has helped them improve cognitive skills and negotiate the demands of everyday life.

*\*\* Note: Adjust the time spent talking about cognitive skills according to how many graduates there are.*

**Materials:** Certificates of Achievement, whiteboard or flipchart

**Introduction:** There are many ways in which we work to improve our thinking in this group. Today let's talk about how you practiced your cognitive skills using the computer exercises, and how this practice might be helpful to you in your everyday life.

*Following the example below, write the categories **Cognitive Skill**, **Cognitive Exercise**, **Everyday Use** on the whiteboard. Either the group leader or a participant can fill in with the examples given during the discussion.*

<b>Cognitive Skill</b>	<b>Cognitive Exercise</b>	<b>Everyday Use</b>
<i>Verbal memory</i>	<i>To-Do List Training</i>	<i>Remembering song lyrics</i>

**Discussion:** Can someone offer an example of a cognitive exercise practiced on the computer today?

- ? What are the cognitive skills you need to do this activity?
- ? What is an example of how the skills you practiced are used in your everyday life?
- ? Were there strategies that helped you succeed during your cognitive practice?  
How did they help you?

**Graduation:** Let's take the last few minutes to recognize our group members who are graduating today.

*Ask graduating participants to reflect on their experience in Brain Gym using the questions below. Provide Certificates of Achievement.*

- ? If you had to summarize in just 2-3 sentences what Brain Gym is about – from your experience - what would you say?
- ? In what ways was this group most helpful to you?

# CERTIFICATE *of* ACHIEVEMENT

THIS ACKNOWLEDGES THAT

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HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE REQUIREMENTS TO GRADUATE FROM

 BRAIN GYM 

2020

x

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