



My health. My choices. My future.

BRAIN GYM

12-Session Bridging Manual



This manual was developed by Alice Medalia, PhD and Alice Saperstein PhD
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Introduction to the Manual

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 in the clinic, and 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 order. 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 Handout #12, Graduation, which provides opportunities 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 the 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

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
Memory Serves 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 Goals

Objective: Group members will identify cognitive goals that will support everyday functioning and recovery. They will share how doing homework supports cognitive goals.

Materials: Worksheet #2: Cognitive Goals

Review: To continue our discussion of cognitive (thinking) skills and how they are linked to activities in everyday life, let's briefly review.

- ❓ Can someone give an example of a cognitive skill they practiced in their homework?
- ❓ How is that skill used in everyday life?
- ❓ Did anyone practice this skill today with the computer exercises?
- ❓ What makes it hard/ easy to do the homework?

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

**** Use *Worksheet #2: 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 #2: Cognitive Goals

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 problems 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 problems 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 |



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

3. Motivation

Materials: Worksheet #3: My Expectations and Values

Review: We have been talking about how strengthening our cognitive skills can support us in day-to-day life and how cognitive goals relate to recovery. Since we last met has anyone observed an example of their cognitive skills helping them when talking with someone?

**** Refer to *Worksheet #3: 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 #3: My Expectations and Values

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. Circle the values that 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?

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?

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?

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?

4. MUSIC Model of Motivation

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

Materials: Worksheet #4: The Motivometer

Review: In our last session we talked about how motivation can be a real problem for many people. We talked about expectations and values. How have those factors affected how motivated you are to do your homework on the cognitive exercises?

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 #4: 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.*



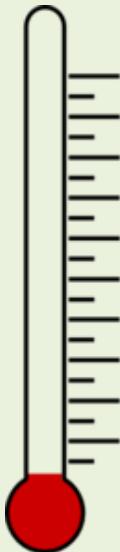
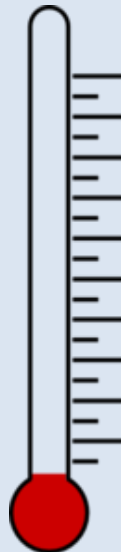
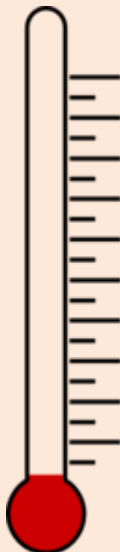
Let's look at each component of MUSIC on the Motivometer and consider how you use these to be motivated to... (e.g., start exercising).

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 #4: Motivometer

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

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

5. Thinking About Your Thinking

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

Materials: Handout #5: Thinking About Your Thinking

Review: How has homework been going for you? Can anyone describe some of the strategies that make it easier to get your homework done?

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 #5: Thinking About Your Thinking*. 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 #5: Thinking About Your Thinking

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.

6. Changing Automatic Thoughts

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 #5: Thinking About Your Thinking
Worksheet #6: Changing Automatic Thoughts

Review: In our last discussion we introduced the concept of automatic thoughts and errors in our thinking. 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. Did anyone catch themselves having Black-or-White Thinking while doing their homework? Do thinking errors sometimes make it hard to do homework?

****Provide *Handout #5: Thinking About Your Thinking***

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.**

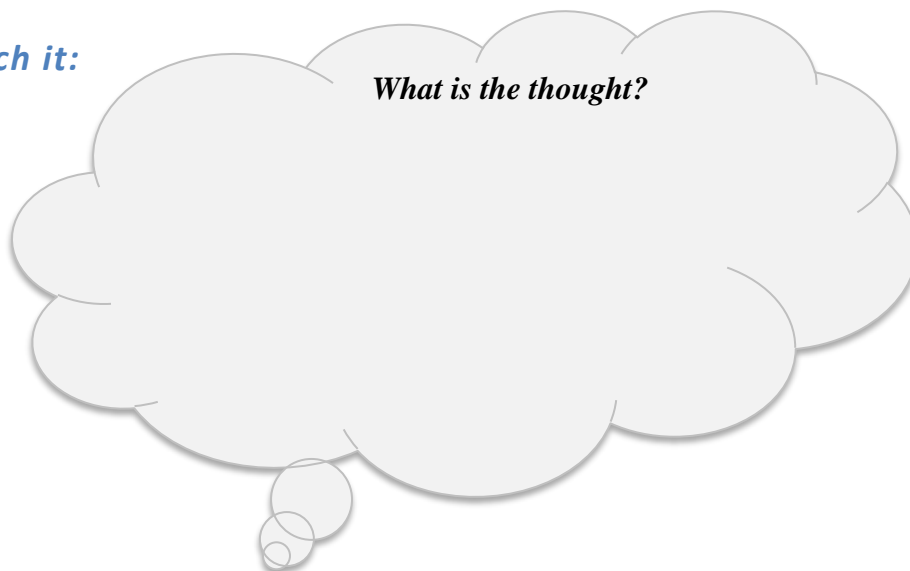
****Refer to *Worksheet #6: Changing Automatic Thoughts* to lead participants through the steps using the example provided by a group member. If participants would benefit from a therapist-led example, use “I am a terrible learner.” Use as many participant-generated examples as time allows. Then return 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 #6: Changing Automatic Thoughts

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):* _____

7. Active Mindfulness

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

Materials: Handout #7: Mindfulness

Review: How has the homework been going? Some people are OK doing homework and others are not. What about you?

Common Problems with Attention: Today we will 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 #7: 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 #7: Mindfulness

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?

8. Solutions to Distraction

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

Materials: Handout #8: Solutions to Distraction

Review: Has anyone found it difficult to pay attention while doing homework? We talked about mindfulness to help with focus and concentration. Did anyone use mindfulness since our last group? Would this strategy help with doing homework?

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 #8: 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 #8: Solutions to Distraction

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?

9. Problem-Solving

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

Materials: Handout #9: Sam's Appointment

Review: We have been talking about how strengthening our cognitive skills can support us in day-to-day life. Have you been able to do your homework as one way to improve cognitive skills? If not, what are the barriers? What would help you do your homework?

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 #9: 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 45th 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 everyday 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 #9: Sam's Appointment

Sam has an appointment with his doctor, Dr. Susan Lyons, today at 10am at the Medical Arts Building on 120 East 45th 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?

10. How to Get Things Done: Chunking

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 #10: Chunking

Review: We have been talking about how strengthening our cognitive skills can support us in day-to-day life. Have you been able to do your homework as one way to improve cognitive skills? If not, what would help you do your homework?

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 #10: 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?

****Note: You might use the example of chunking homework for this group.**

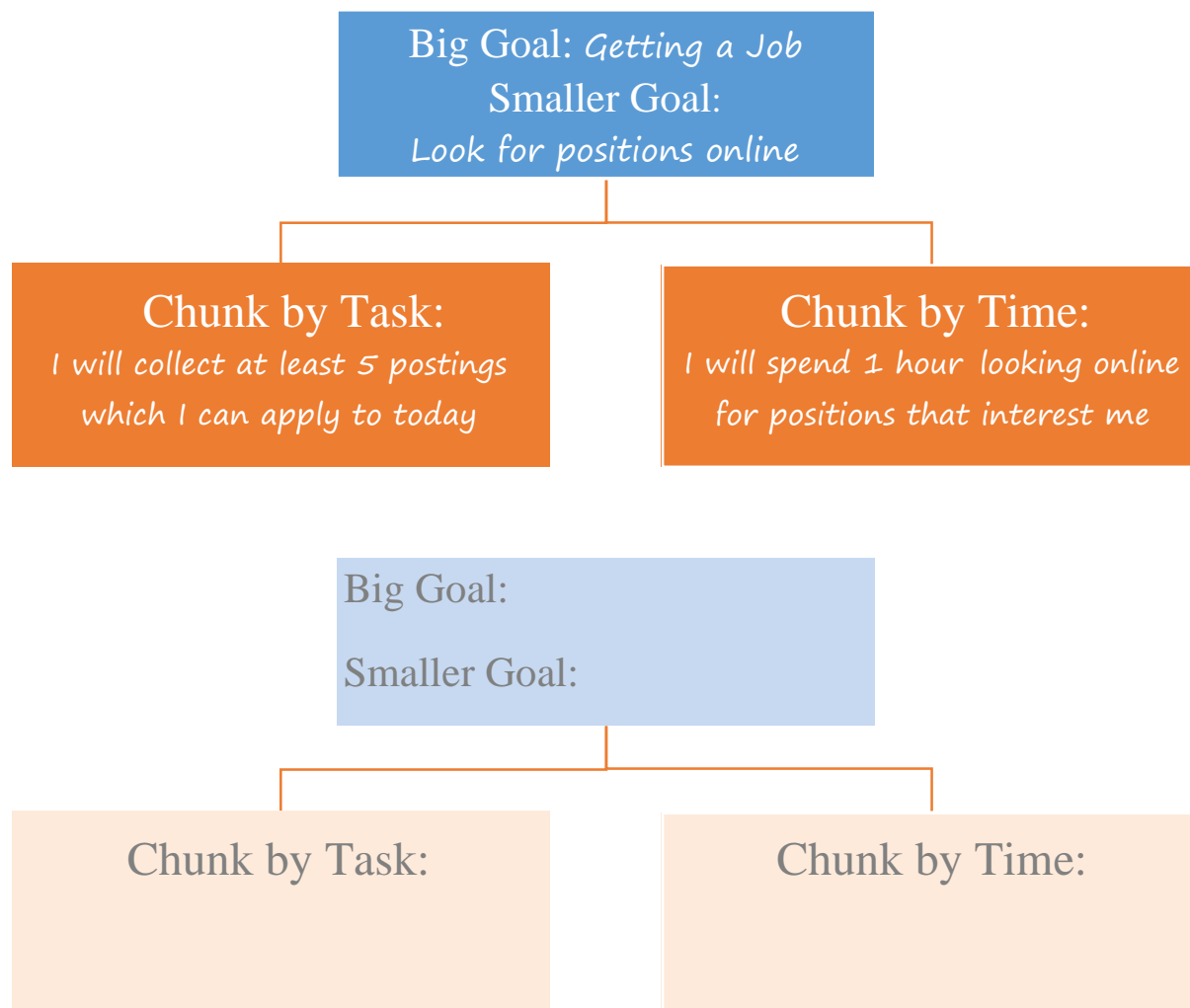
Wrap Up: Many times, the items on our to-do list are simply too broad and unmanageable to easily get started. Chunking helps guide us towards setting goals and expectations that allow us to be more successful.

Worksheet #10: Chunking

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.



11. Time Management

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

Materials: Handout #11A: Time Management
Handout #11B: Lydia's Planner

Review: Have you been able to do your homework to improve cognitive skills? If not, what are the barriers? What would help you do your homework?

**** Use *Handouts #11A and #11B* to review this material. Summarize the information and encourage discussion around the questions. At the conclusion, return to wrap up.**

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

Handout #11A: 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 calendar?
- What do you think is wrong with Lydia’s calendar?

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 #11B: Lydia's Planner

8am	:00	
	:15	
	:30	
	:45	
9am	:00	
	:15	
	:30	Wake up
	:45	
10am	:00	Arrive at School
	:15	- History Class
	: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 calendar?
What do you think is wrong with Lydia's calendar?
- ? 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?

12. Skills for Effective Communication / Graduation

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 #12A: PAWS, Handout #12B, Graduation, Graduation Certificates

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 12A: 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

Memory Grid - 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

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

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 #12A: PAWS

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?

Handout #12B: Graduation

Summary: Over the last few months we have covered a lot of ground. We have discussed how cognitive skills are used in your everyday life, and you have learned an array of skills and strategies. These can help you process information better, organize and manage your time, and make progress – in the short- and long-term – towards achieving your personal goals.

Graduation:

- ❓ 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

HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE REQUIREMENTS TO GRADUATE FROM

 BRAIN GYM 

2020

x
