

The Executive Function Language Framework

Strengthening Planning, Sequencing, Flexible Thinking, Problem Solving & Metacognition Skills Through Verbal Rehearsal

Why This Works: The Science

When children verbalise their plans, they engage multiple brain regions simultaneously:

- Prefrontal Cortex: Executive control and decision-making
- Broca's Area: Language production and sequencing
- Working Memory Networks: Holding and manipulating information

This process, called verbal mediation, creates a cognitive bridge between thought and action. The act of speaking their plan literally strengthens the neural pathways needed for independent planning and problem-solving.

Research shows: Children who regularly verbalize their plans demonstrate 40% better performance on executive function tasks and show improved self-regulation in daily activities.

CATEGORY 1: Planning & Sequencing

For Young Children (Ages 4-7):

- "What do we do first? What's next?"
- "Tell me your plan for [activity]."
- "What three things do you need to get ready?"

For Older Children (Ages 8-12):

- "Walk me through how you'll approach this."
- "What order makes the most sense?"
- "How much time do you think each step will take?"

For Teens (Ages 13+):

- "What's your timeline for getting this done?"
- "What are the critical steps? What can wait?"
- "How will you know you're on track?"

CATEGORY 2: Flexible Thinking & Problem-Solving

Anticipating Obstacles:

- "What might be tricky? What will you do if that happens?"
- "If we don't have [item], what's Plan B?"
- "What could go wrong? How would you handle it?"

When Plans Change:

- "That didn't work. What else could you try?"
- "What part of your plan needs adjusting?"
- "If you can't do [original plan], what's another option?"

Decision-Making:

- "What are two ways you could solve this?"
- "What are the pros and cons of each choice?"
- "Which option feels like the best starting point?"

CATEGORY 3: Metacognition & Reflection

Before Starting:

- "What do you already know about this?"
- "What strategy worked last time?"
- "What will help you stay focused?"

During the Task:

- "How's your plan working so far?"
- "Do you need to adjust anything?"
- "What's helping? What's making it harder?"

After Completion:

- "What went well? What was challenging?"
- "What would you do differently next time?"
- "What did you learn from this experience?"

The Power of Wait Time

After asking a planning question:

- Wait 5-10 seconds (This feels long—resist the urge to jump in!)
- Prompt if needed: "What could you start with?" or "What do you think?"
- Acknowledge effort: "I like how you're thinking through this."
- Let them verbalise completely before offering suggestions

Remember: The struggle to articulate IS the learning. That pause is where neural connections strengthen.

Quick Start Guide

Week 1: Choose Your Moment & Pick ONE daily routine (morning, homework, or bedtime)

Week 2: Ask, Don't Tell. Replace instructions with: "What's your plan?"

Week 3: Add Reflection. End each day with: "What went well today?"

Week 4: Expand & Reinforce. Add a second routine and continue building consistency

