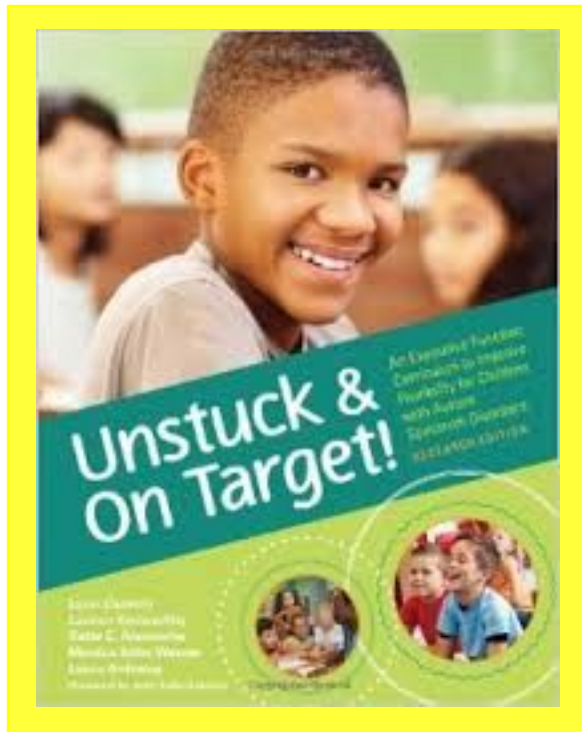


# unstuck & On-Target

Improving flexibility and executive functioning in students with Autism and/or ADHD



# What is unstuck & On-Target?

• A program that teaches consistent strategies to address executive functioning, flexibility, and planning, through the use of:

- Concrete, hands-on experiences
- Specific vocabulary (stuck, flexible, compromise)
- Specific routines and scripts
- Planning and goal setting for flexibility



# unstuck and On Target was developed by:

- Iyymount School - Model Asperger Program
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# What is Cognitive Flexibility?



- The mindset that allows us to adapt to changes in routines, adjust to the unexpected, and generate new ways to solve problems.

# Why Teach Flexibility?

- Students with ASD and ADHD have biologically based rigidity and inflexibility often impacting:
  - Making transitions
  - Tolerating unexpected changes
  - Accepting others' viewpoints
  - Responding to needs/interests of others
  - Managing emotions, stopping a meltdown
  - Accepting flexible interpretations of rules or events
  - Generating new ways to solve problems
  - Correcting other people

# Long Term Outcomes



46% of children with ASD have an IQ in the average range

Despite average intelligence, adult outcomes remain poor, even when compared to other developmental disabilities (Henninger & Taylor, 2012; Howlin et al., 2004; Howlin & Moss, 2012; Shattuck et al., 2012; Roux et al., 2013).

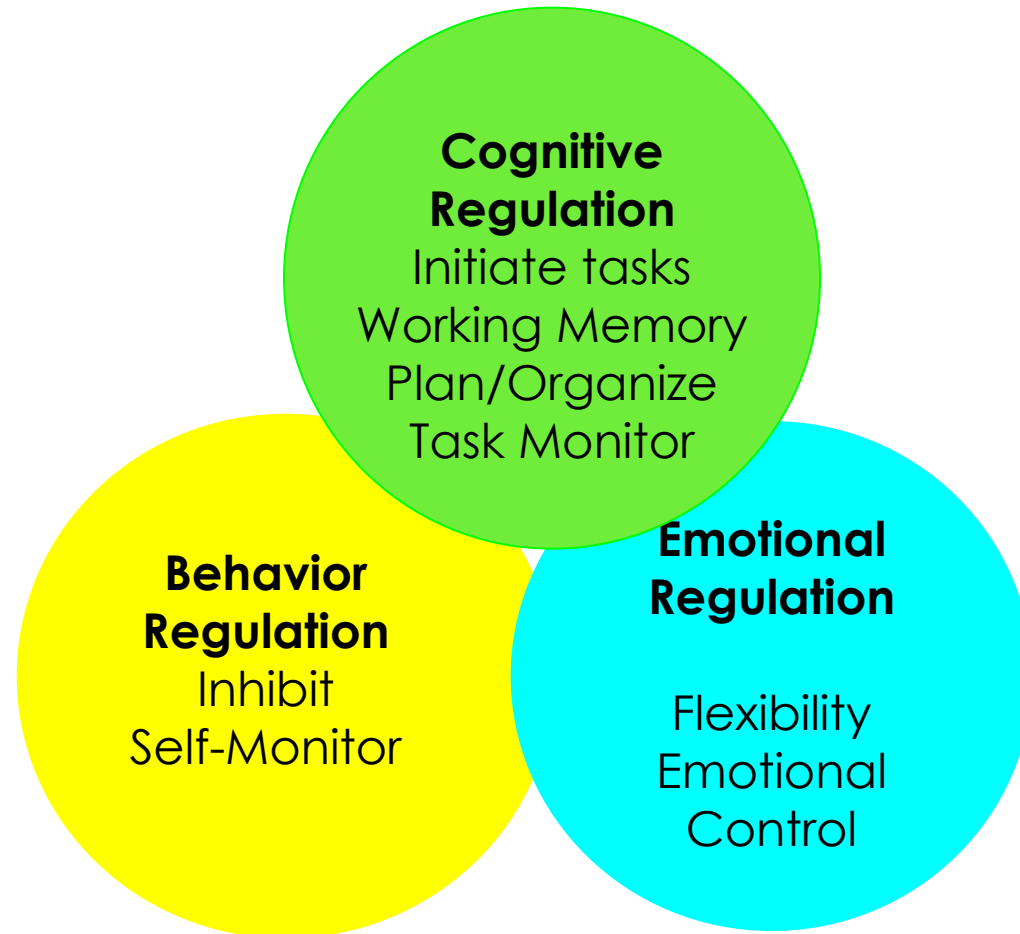
Many are underemployed, underpaid, socially excluded

More than 25% of young adults with Autism without Intellectual Disability have no daytime activities of any kind (Taylor & Mailick Seltzer, 2010)

# Is it willfulness or a different brain?

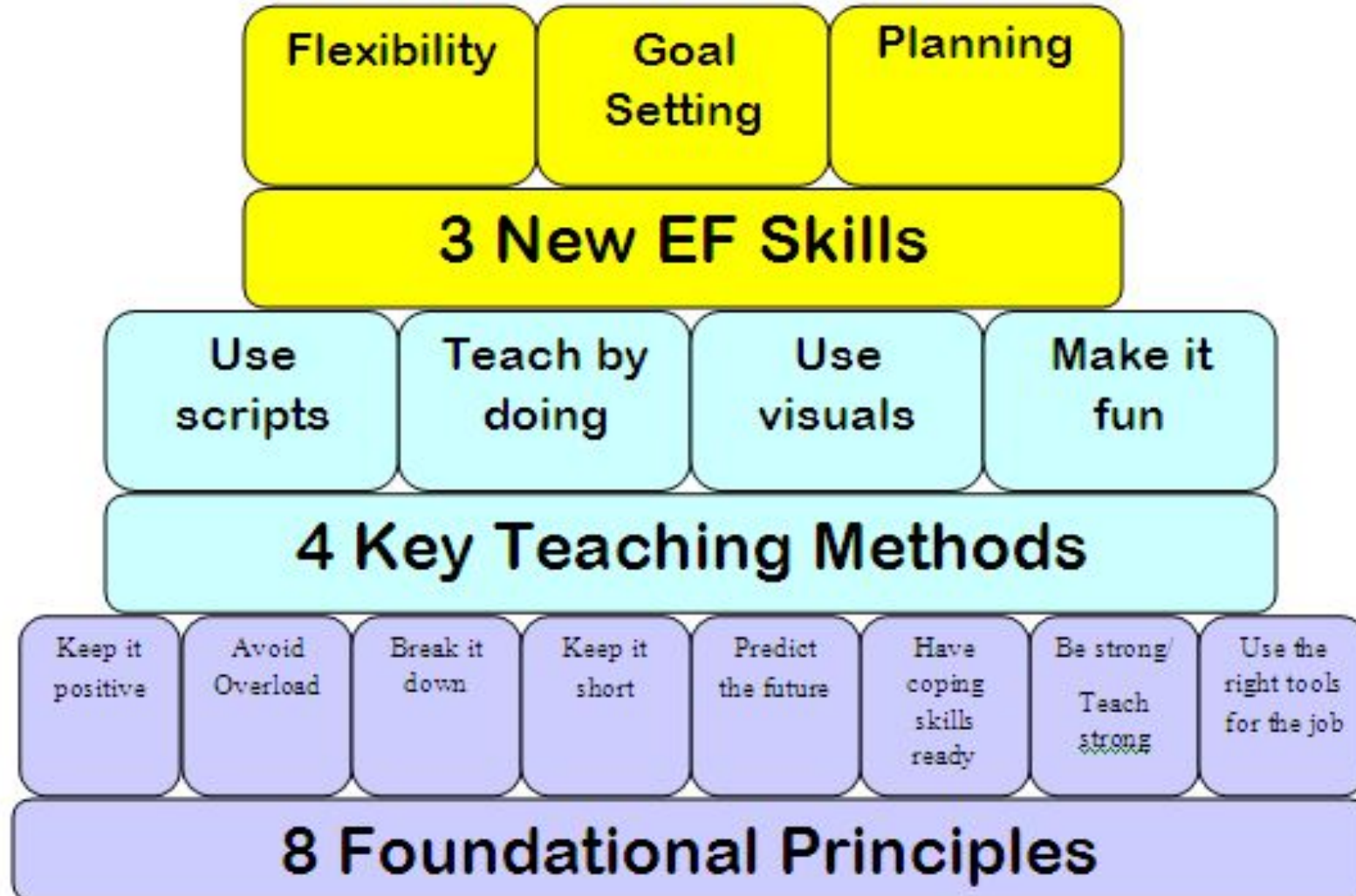
Looks like <i>won't</i>	Could be <i>can't</i>
Oppositional, stubborn	Cognitive inflexibility, protective effort to avoid being overwhelmed
Can do it if he wants to	Difficulty shifting
Self-centered	Impaired social cognition/theory of mind
Won't put ideas on paper	Poor fine motor, organization
Sloppy, erratic	Overload, Poor self-monitoring
Won't control outbursts	Overload, disinhibition
Doesn't care what others think	Impaired non-verbal cues/theory of mind

# Three factor model of executive functioning





# What is unstuck?



# How do we impact flexibility in students with cognitive flexibility needs?



1. Adapt the environment to meet the students needs
2. Teach the student to adapt to his/her environment
3. Allow the student to avoid environments that are highly problematic

We can't expect children to change, if we are not willing to change ourselves!



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# Flexible and Supportive Environments

- Smooth, calm transitions
- Absence of power struggles
- High ratio of praise to correction
- Use of advanced warnings
- Clear and specific expectations
- Materials are organized



# What do we do with this information?

- Know key concepts and vocabulary
- Promote additional practice of topics when appropriate
- Reinforce flexible behaviors when observed
- Model flexible behavior when appropriate
- Use language and vocabulary in problem solving with students



# Unstuck & On Target!

## Flexible

- When flexible, more good things happen.
- "We can be flexible and make a Plan B."
  - "I love how you were flexible."

## Unstuck

- Being stuck feels bad. Getting unstuck feels better.
- "I'm getting stuck on \_\_\_\_\_. How can I get unstuck?"
  - "Since you got unstuck, now you have more choices."

## Plan A/Plan B

- The problem is the plan, not the child. Bad plans just need a Plan B.
- "What is our Plan B?"
  - "You always think of great plans."

## Compromise

- Both people have to be flexible to compromise.
- "Let's compromise so we both get some of what we want."
  - "Something is better than nothing."

## Big Deal/Little Deal

- Do not tell a child his or her big deal is a little deal.
- "How can we **turn** this big deal into a little deal? Let's make a plan."

## Choice/No Choice

- Remember poor choices are still choices; reserve "No Choice" for taxes, fire drills, etc.
- "You have a choice. Let's look at all of your choices."

**Goal** What and why? → **Plan** How do we do it? → **Do** Try it! → **Check** How did it go?

Adapted from Fig. 3.1 in Solving Executive Function Challenges: Simple Ways to Get Kids with Autism Unstuck and on Target Kernworthy et al © 2014 Brookes Publishing Co.

# 1. Flexibility



Flexible, Changing



Inflexible, Rigid

Flexible: This means we can

- Change our ideas
- Do something different than what we thought we would do
- Think something different
- Consider new information
- Keep an open mind
- Identify other flexible mind accomplishments

# Flexibility Social Stories

Read the following situations and determine whether the student was flexible (F) or rigid (R)

## Scenario 1

Today in math, we had a worksheet that had mixed problems. Some problems were word problems and some were standard algorithm. I hate word problems and did not want to do them. I crossed out all the word problems and pretended like they weren't there. When I got my paper back, I got a C.

1. Was the student being flexible or rigid?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What were the consequences of their actions?

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

3. What could they have done differently?

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

How big was the problem?

0      1      2      3      4      5

Example of class work completed to practice and discuss flexibility.

- Students read the scenario then they acted it out.
- We decided if the student was being flexible or rigid.
- Discussed the consequences and what they could have done differently.
- We discussed how big the problem was and if the reaction matched the level of the problem.

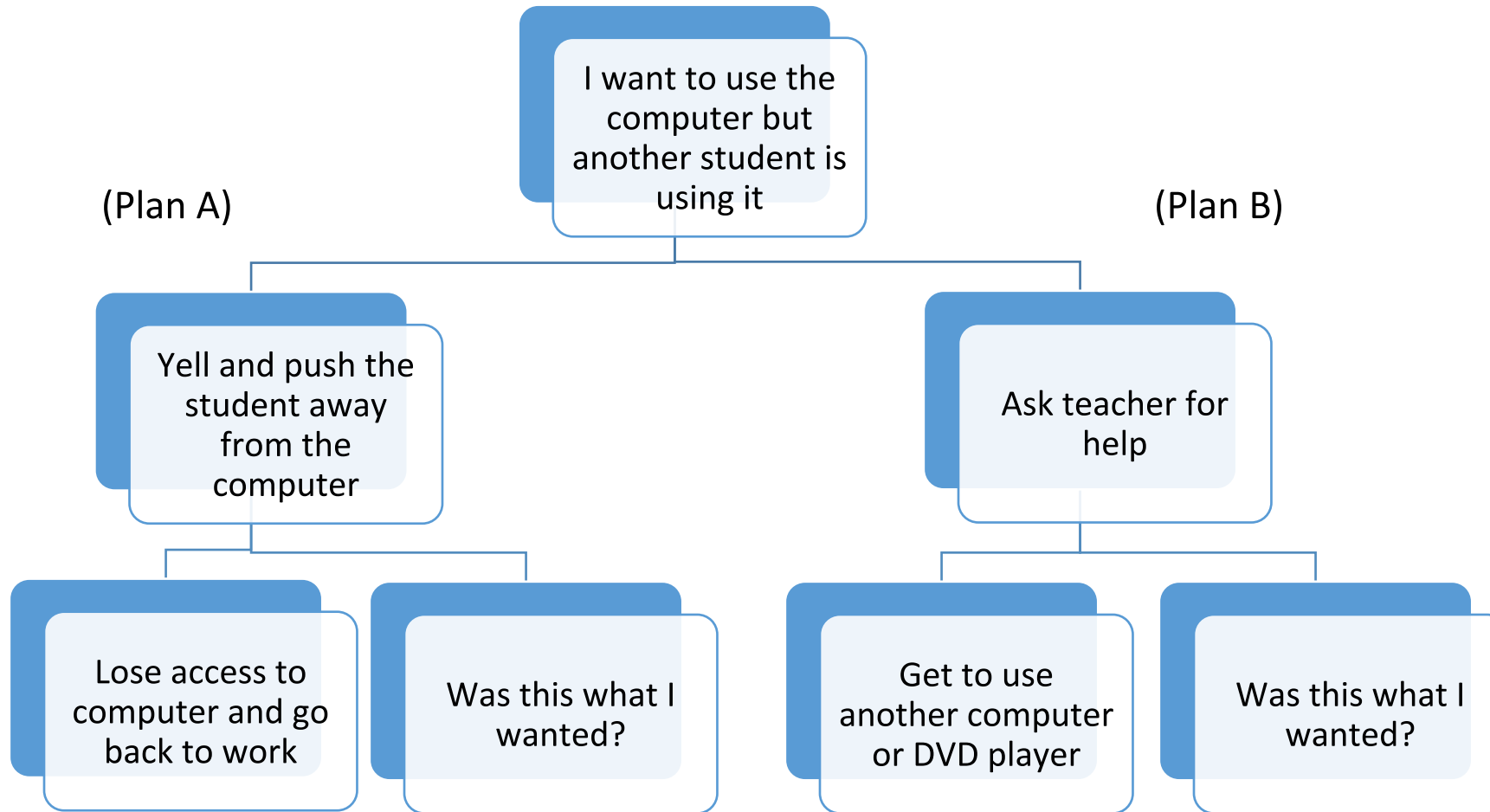


## 2. Unstuck

### When we are rigid/stuck we:

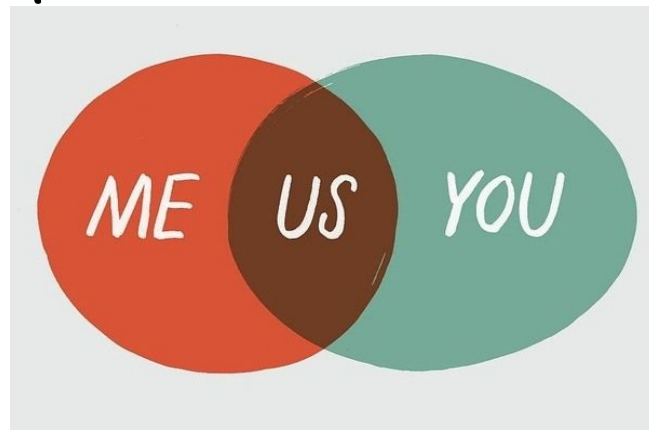
- Do not change our ideas or think differently
- Do not do something different than what we thought we would do
- Do not consider new information

### 3. Plan A / Plan B



## 4. Compromise

- *Compromise* is a way for everyone to get a little of what they want.
- *Compromise* occurs when two or more people get a little of what they want
- *Compromise* is different from giving in because compromise means that everyone gets some of what they want; giving in means that you don't get any of what you want.



# 5. Big Deal / Little Deal

## Level 5 EMERGENCY

fire, earth quake, someone is in danger

I can call for help, be scared, worry.

## Level 4 GIGANTIC

friend or family member is very ill, hurt or bleeding

I can tell a teacher, go to the nurse, be scared, worry.

## Level 3 LARGE

minor accident, disagreement, being disrespected, feeling sick

I can tell a teacher, go to the nurse, feel sad, take a break

## Level 2 MEDIUM

forgot homework, argued with a friend, lost recess or choice time, didn't agree with teacher directions

I can take a break, tell a teacher, talk to friend

## Level 1 SMALL

someone cut in line, losing choice time, stuck on a problem, having a partner who isn't your friend

I can take a break, take a breath, talk to the teacher

## Level 0 GLITCH

don't have a pencil, teacher didn't call on me, not first in line

I can borrow a pencil, wait to be called on, take a breath

# Examples of Big Deal/ Little Deal

## LEVEL 0 GLITCH

What are examples?

How should you react?

## LEVEL 5 EMERGENCY

What are examples?

How should you react?

# How Big Is My Problem?

## Scenario

Someone accidentally bumps you or is staring at you

Your teacher tells you, "No" or asks you to do something

Another student is trying to talk to you when you should be quiet or working

You forgot your homework and you know there is a consequence

Someone hurts you or threatens to hurt you

There is an announcement for a lockdown

## Size of Problem

## What should you do?

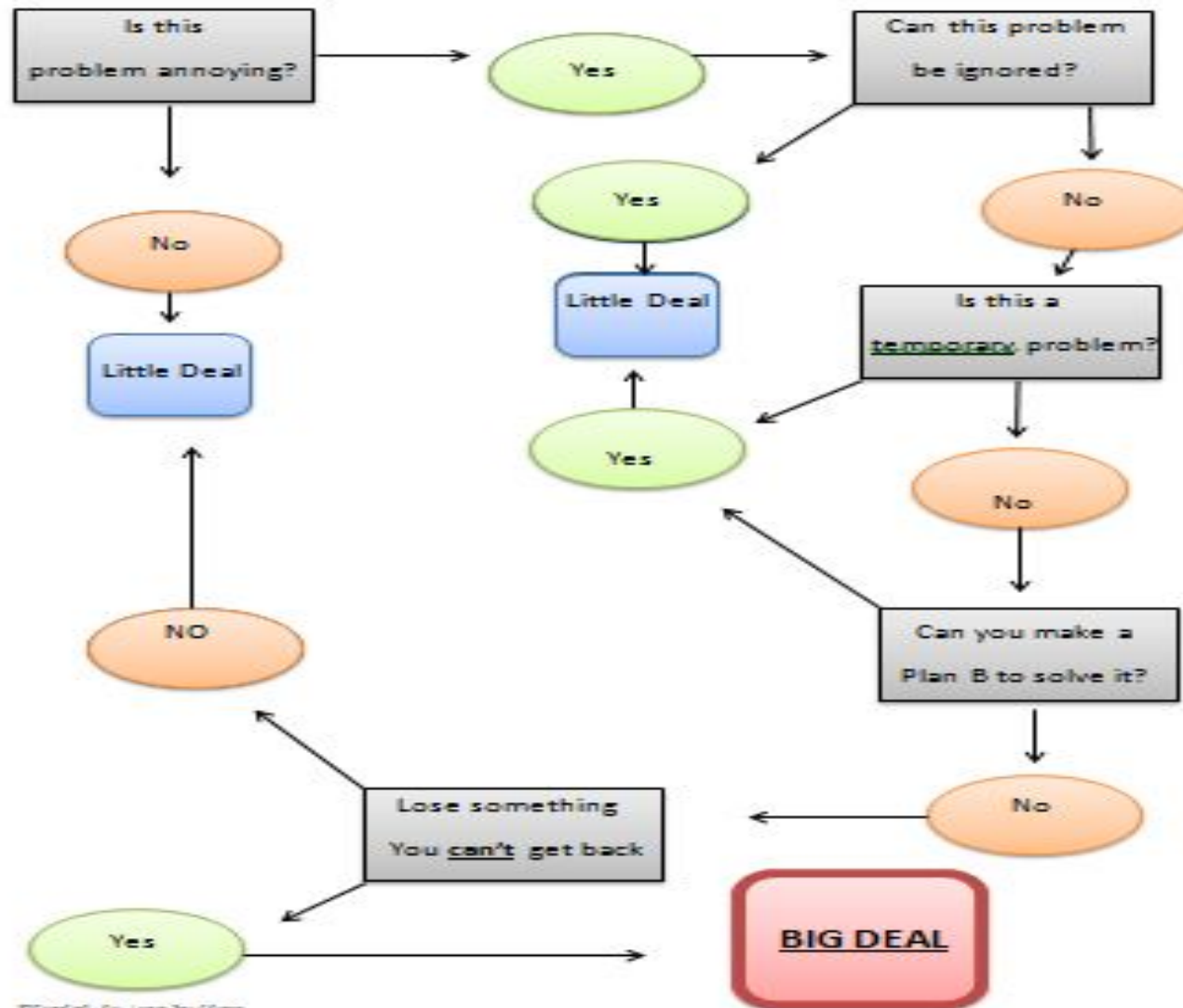
Students read through a variety of scenarios and decided what level the problem was. They then selected an expected solution to the problem.

## Solutions

Stay calm, follow the teacher directions, stay quiet.	Admit you forgot it Write down your homework so you don't forget next time	Walk away. Tell your teacher or an adult
	Ignore it. Accept their apology	
Accept your teacher's response—use kind words and a soft voice. Continue your work		Quietly and kindly ask them to leave you alone



# Turning a big deal into a little deal



## 6. Choice / No Choice



### A Choice occurs when:

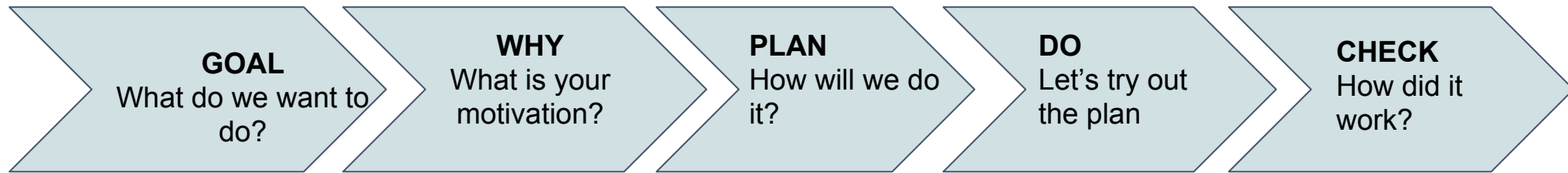
- There are multiple ways to solve a problem
- There is more than one option for what to do next
- There are different, equally correct ways to do something
- You are asked for your opinion

### A no-choice situation occurs when:

- There is only one correct way to do something
- There is only one acceptable option
- There is a specific requirement that a specific thing be done
- Something is required by law or the rules of the school or house
- Something specific has to occur at a specific time



# 7. Goal, Why, Plan, Do, Check

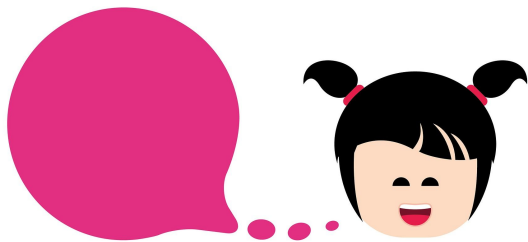




# Goal, Plan, Do, Check

<b>GOAL</b>	To join a club
<b>WHY</b>	To have fun with my friends
<b>PLAN</b>	Plan A: Think about other kids I know who have similar interests, ask them if they are in any clubs and go with them to the next meeting. Plan B: Let my parents pick a club that they think I would like and try that club Plan C: Ask a teacher to help me look at the choices and pick one that might be a good choice Plan D: If none of the clubs interest me, talk to a teacher about starting a new club
<b>DO</b>	Follow my plans
<b>CHECK</b>	Did I meet my goal? Which plan worked? Would I do it the same, or different next time?

# Language Examples



Flexible

Great job being flexible!

Unstuck

I'm getting stuck on \_\_\_\_\_. How can I get unstuck?

Compromise

Let's compromise so we can both get some of what we want.

Plan A/Plan B

What is our plan? What is our plan B?

Keeping an open  
mind

If I keep an open mind, I'll have more choices.

Big deal/Little  
deal

Is this a big deal or a little deal?

# What would happen if?

A boy needs to get across the playground. In the middle of the playground, some kids are playing kickball.



1. The boy walks around the kickball game.

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2. The boy walks through the middle of the kickball game

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3. The boy yells at the kids not to kick the ball so he can walk across the playground

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4. Why is it important for the boy to 'stop, use his eyes and think' before he makes his choice?

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5. Why is it the wrong decision to walk right through the middle of the game?

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6. Was it OK for the boy to yell at the other kids to stop their game so he could safely walk across the playground? Why/why not?

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Here the students read the scenario and discussed the what ifs of the scenario. We were able to incorporate our skills when we played a whole class kickball game!

# unstuck and on Target in MCPs



- Elementary and Middle School Asperger's Programs
- Bridge
- Social Emotional Support Services
- Autism Resource Services, Darnestown Learning Center
- Some HSM teams
- Comprehensive Autism Preschool Program (CAPP)
- Classic Autism Program - modified concepts for select students

Thank You!

Please feel free to contact the  
Autism unit with any further  
questions or for resources.

301-593-3720

