

# CHAPTER 1

## The Foundational Skills

### *Understanding and Strengthening Nonverbal and Verbal Working Memory*

Welcome to the first chapter of *The Executive Function Playbook in Action*. This chapter is devoted to the two most essential—but often invisible—building blocks of executive functioning: nonverbal working memory and verbal working memory. These are the internal skills that form the foundation for every other executive function your child will need to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Many of the challenging behaviors we see in children with ADHD—impulsivity, forgetfulness, reactivity, difficulty following multistep directions—are not signs of defiance or laziness. They are signs that these internal systems are underdeveloped. Simply put, the child is missing the tools that allow them to stop, think, and reflect before they act.

In this chapter, we focus on giving those tools back.

Nonverbal working memory is the ability to visualize and mentally “replay” past experiences. It allows a child to picture what happened yesterday, imagine how someone felt, or anticipate what might happen next. When this skill is weak, the child struggles to learn from experience, repeats the same mistakes, and often seems stuck in the moment without the ability to pause or adjust.

Verbal working memory is the ability to use internal language to guide behavior. This is the inner voice that helps a child talk themselves through a task, remember the steps to a routine, or calm themselves during a moment of frustration. Without it, children often rely entirely on external prompts and reminders—and struggle to function independently.

The pages ahead are designed to strengthen these two foundational skills through structured reflection, visualization, and language-building exercises. They include prompts like:

- ◆ “What did I do yesterday, and how did it turn out?”
- ◆ “What will future me need from me right now?”
- ◆ “What can I say to myself when I’m starting to feel upset?”

These aren’t just worksheets—they’re tools to build internal systems.

You’ll also find pages that encourage the use of imagery, drawing, and storytelling to help children hold onto key emotional experiences, recall them when needed, and apply them in new situations. Over time, as these skills strengthen, you’ll see a child who is better able to pause, reflect, regulate, and self-direct.

Before children can manage time, plan assignments, or handle social challenges, they must be able to remember and talk themselves through what has already happened—and what needs to happen next. This chapter is where that journey begins.

Take your time with these pages. Revisit them as needed. And most importantly, complete them alongside your child. Your presence, modeling, and emotional regulation are just as foundational as the skills we’re building here.

Let’s begin laying the groundwork—one internal skill at a time.

## Activity 1.1: Practicing the GrowNOW Predictions Review Model

**Executive function skills strengthened:** Nonverbal working memory, verbal working memory

### OVERVIEW

One of the most significant cognitive challenges faced by children with ADHD is difficulty holding onto mental representations of time, outcomes, and internal experiences. This difficulty—known as *working memory impairment*—is a hallmark executive function deficit. In *The Executive Function Playbook*, we emphasize that without strong nonverbal working memory (mental imagery) and verbal working memory (self-talk), students struggle to plan ahead, regulate their emotions in the moment, and learn from experience.

The **GrowNOW Predictions Review Model** was developed to directly strengthen these internal cognitive systems through an evidence-based process. It is rooted in neurodevelopmental research showing that individuals with ADHD benefit most from *guided mental rehearsal*, *explicit language strategies*, and *structured reflection* before

and after tasks. In short, they learn best through experience—but only when that experience is processed, previewed, and reviewed with support.

This page walks families through a step-by-step approach to improving future thinking (visualizing and talking to themselves through what’s ahead) and hindsight reflection (learning from what just happened). These are the very skills needed to break cycles of impulsivity, task avoidance, and time blindness—and to move toward independent goal-directed behavior.

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARENT, TEACHER, CLINICIAN, AND CHILD (COMPLETE TOGETHER)**

Use this worksheet before and after a task, activity, or part of the day (such as going to school, starting homework, playing a sport, or going to a new place). This can be done daily or used situationally to build a habit over time.

#### ***Step 1: Predictive Visualization (Mental Movie)***

Before beginning the task, guide your child to close their eyes, put their head down, and make a mental movie of what the task or day ahead will look like.

Coach them to visualize:

- ◆ Where they’ll be
- ◆ What they’ll be doing
- ◆ How they think they will feel
- ◆ What challenges might come up
- ◆ What success will look like

This strengthens nonverbal working memory—the brain’s internal “camera” that helps children picture themselves in the future. It’s the same skill used by successful athletes, public speakers, and leaders who mentally rehearse before performance.

#### ***Step 2: Record the Predictions***

Now have your child write (or dictate) the specific predictions they made during their visualization. These should be short, clear, and tied to internal experience, not just external outcomes.

##### **Examples:**

- ◆ “I’ll feel tired at the beginning but get more focused after 10 minutes.”
- ◆ “I’ll probably want to quit when it gets boring, but I’ll keep going.”
- ◆ “I think it will take 20 minutes to finish.”
- ◆ “I’ll feel proud when I turn it in.”

**Step 3: Create a Self-Talk Script**

Help your child create a verbal self-coaching statement—a short script they can say in their head during the task to stay focused and regulated. This builds verbal working memory, the internal voice used for planning, problem-solving, and motivation.

**Examples:**

- ◆ “Stay calm. You know how to do this. Just take it one step at a time.”
- ◆ “If I get distracted, I’ll just come back to the goal.”
- ◆ “I’ve done this before—I can do it again.”
- ◆ “Keep going until it’s done. Then I can relax.”

Encourage repetition of the same script in future tasks to build familiarity and internalization.

**Step 4: Do the Task or Activity**

Now your child does the task. You don’t need to guide them through this step—just allow them to apply what they’ve visualized and rehearsed. If they become dysregulated or frustrated, gently prompt them to return to their mental movie or self-talk script.

**Step 5: Predictions vs. Reality—Review and Reflect**

After completing the task, come back together and compare what was predicted vs. what actually happened. This builds insight, self-monitoring, and adaptive learning. Help your child identify:

- ◆ Where their predictions were accurate
- ◆ Where things went differently
- ◆ How they felt about the outcome
- ◆ What they’d do the same or differently next time

This final step strengthens *hindsight*—a crucial executive function skill that allows individuals to build adaptive strategies over time, rather than repeat the same mistakes or emotional reactions.

**KEY MESSAGE**

Working memory is not just about remembering facts—it’s about holding onto internal experiences long enough to plan, act, and reflect. The Predictions—Review Model gives children a structure to visualize the future, talk themselves through the moment, and learn from the past. Over time, this builds the internal architecture for independence, regulation, and resilience.

### CLOSING THOUGHT

Kids with ADHD often live in the “now.” They act without thinking, and they forget what they’ve learned. This isn’t due to laziness or defiance—it’s neurological. But the brain can grow. With repetition and coaching, your child can develop the internal skills to become their own guide. This worksheet is not just a strategy—it’s a mirror that helps them see who they can become.

### RESEARCH REFERENCE

Klingberg, T. (2010). Training and plasticity of working memory. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 14(7), 317–324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2010.05.002>

## Activity 1.2: The Brain Coach, Part 1

**Executive function skills strengthened:** Verbal working memory

### OVERVIEW

One of the most powerful tools a child can develop for executive function growth is the ability to talk to themselves—*on purpose*. In the Barkley-Vygotskian model of ADHD, as discussed by Dr. Russell Barkley, verbal working memory is the internal voice we use to guide ourselves, regulate behavior, and stay on task. This inner voice is often underdeveloped in children with ADHD, which can lead to difficulties with impulse control, self-direction, and task completion—especially for tasks that feel boring or offer no immediate reward.

In *The Executive Function Playbook*, I emphasize that the development of self-talk is a teachable skill, not a fixed trait. Children need consistent modeling and opportunities to practice talking themselves *through* challenges, rather than reacting emotionally *to* them.

This worksheet introduces the concept of the “Brain Coach”—a friendly, internal guide that children can access anytime, anywhere. Originally introduced by Ryan Wexelblatt (known as the ADHD Dude and co-host of the *ADHD Parenting Podcast*), this concept provides kids with a concrete, empowering way to begin building an internal support system.

By externalizing the idea of a brain coach—something “real” they can rely on—adults can help students begin to develop the skill of self-directed speech, which is crucial for emotional regulation, motivation, problem-solving, and time management.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ADULT (PARENT, TEACHER, OR CLINICIAN)

This section is designed to be a *conversation and practice tool*. Begin by explaining the concept and then work through the worksheet prompts together.

**Step 1: Introduce the Brain Coach Concept**

Explain that inside everyone's brain is a quiet, helpful voice that can remind them of what matters, guide them through challenges, and keep them focused on the future.

Say something like:

“Everyone has a Brain Coach inside their head. This coach helps us stay on track, even when things feel boring, frustrating, or hard. Your Brain Coach is your best helper—it never yells, and it always wants you to succeed. We're going to learn how to hear it and use it.”

Make it playful, concrete, and positive. Younger kids may enjoy drawing their brain coach. Older kids may want to choose a name or personality for theirs.

**Step 2: Identify Situations Where the Brain Coach Is Needed**

Guide your child to name some common situations where their Brain Coach could be helpful:

- ◆ Starting a nonpreferred task
- ◆ Getting distracted in class
- ◆ Feeling frustrated during homework
- ◆ Wanting to give up quickly
- ◆ Facing something new or uncertain
- ◆ Trying to stay calm during an argument

**Step 3: Practice Sample Brain Coach Scripts**

Now, together they come up with three to five phrases their Brain Coach could say in those situations. These are simple, actionable self-talk lines that can be mentally repeated during moments of challenge.

**Examples:**

- ◆ “You've done hard things before. Just get started.”
- ◆ “Keep going—don't stop now.”
- ◆ “You can do this for five more minutes.”
- ◆ “Stay calm, take a breath, think it through.”
- ◆ “One step at a time.”

Encourage consistency. These same phrases can be used across situations to help the child internalize them as default scripts.

**Step 4: Reinforce Brain Coach Awareness During the Day**

Encourage the child to check in with their Brain Coach throughout the day—especially during transitions or moments of stress. Adults can prompt with questions like:

- ◆ “What would your Brain Coach say right now?”
- ◆ “Did your Brain Coach help you during math today?”
- ◆ “Next time you feel stuck, try asking your Brain Coach for help.”

Over time, this builds the habit of **intentional self-talk**, a foundational skill of verbal working memory and long-term executive function growth.

**Why This Matters**

Children with ADHD often lack a strong “mental narrator” to help guide behavior. Instead, they react quickly and emotionally in the moment. Teaching them to access and strengthen their inner Brain Coach helps build the essential pause between thought and action.

Verbal working memory enables:

- ◆ Future thinking
- ◆ Goal persistence
- ◆ Emotional self-regulation
- ◆ Planning and follow-through

This page gives kids a starting point for that lifelong skill—and gives adults a structured way to coach it consistently.

**KEY MESSAGE**

Self-talk isn’t just helpful—it’s essential. Children with ADHD must be explicitly taught to develop their inner voice so they can guide themselves through discomfort, distraction, and challenge. The Brain Coach gives them a tool they can access anytime—and the words to use when they do.

**CLOSING THOUGHT**

No child is born with a fully developed inner voice—but every child can build one. With practice and support, your student can learn to become their own guide, their own motivator, and their own calming presence. The Brain Coach isn’t imaginary—it’s the first step toward independence.

**RESEARCH REFERENCE**

Barkley, R. A. (2012). *Executive Functions: What They Are, How They Work, and Why They Evolved*. Guilford Press.

**Activity 1.3: The Brain Coach, Part 2**

**Executive function skills strengthened:** Verbal working memory

**OVERVIEW**

Building on the previous activity, this page deepens a child’s understanding of their internal voice—specifically when they are under stress, dysregulated, or not acting like their “best self.” Children with ADHD often default to negative or rigid internal scripts in moments of failure, boredom, or frustration. These internal reactions may sound like: “I can’t do this,” “This is stupid,” “I’m bad at this,” or “Nothing ever goes right.” Left unaddressed, these thought patterns reinforce low motivation, poor emotional regulation, and learned helplessness.

Verbal working memory—the ability to guide oneself with internal speech—is one of the most crucial executive function skills for maintaining goal-directed behavior under pressure. In *The Executive Function Playbook*, we emphasize the critical role of intentional self-talk in breaking impulsive cycles, managing emotions, and maintaining momentum.

This page helps the adult guide the child to intentionally create the voice they want to hear when they’re at their lowest. It’s a shift from reactive, unconscious thinking to deliberate, positive internal guidance. In effect, the child is not just imagining a brain coach—they are building the *blueprint for their own self-regulation system*.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ADULT (PARENT, TEACHER, OR CLINICIAN)**

Begin by reviewing what the Brain Coach is: an internal guide who always supports the child’s success. Then explain that this page is about preparing for moments when things go wrong—when the child is feeling upset, impulsive, ashamed, angry, or off-track.

Emphasize that the Brain Coach is:

- ◆ Positive, even when things feel hard
- ◆ Kind, never mean or judgmental
- ◆ Flexible, reminding them there’s always another way
- ◆ Regulating, helping them calm down
- ◆ Motivating, helping them take the next step forward

You can say:

“Everyone has moments when they’re not at their best. What matters is what we do next—and what we say to ourselves in that moment. Today we’re going to decide what we want our Brain Coach to tell us when we feel that way.”

### STEP-BY-STEP GUIDANCE

#### 1. Set the context.

Ask your child:

- “What does it mean to *not* be your best self?”
- “What are some times you feel really frustrated, angry, or like you’re about to give up?”

Use real examples from home or school to ground the discussion.

#### 2. Brainstorm responses from the brain coach.

Work with your child to come up with three phrases or short scripts they want their Brain Coach to say in those moments. Keep them:

- Short and easy to remember
- Encouraging and noncritical
- Flexible and realistic

#### 3. Review some examples.

- “It’s okay to mess up. You can try again.”
- “You’re not stuck. Take a breath, and then figure out what’s next.”
- “This is hard, but you’ve done hard things before.”
- “Even if today wasn’t great, you still get to try again tomorrow.”

#### 4. Practice tone and voice.

Once the child chooses their three Brain Coach lines, have them say each one out loud using a calm, kind, and encouraging tone. This helps them hear the difference between helpful and unhelpful self-talk.

#### 5. Make it routine.

Adults can reinforce this by asking:

- “What did your Brain Coach say when you felt upset today?”
- “Which Brain Coach line helped you the most today?”
- “Do we need to change or add a new Brain Coach phrase for tomorrow?”

### Why This Matters

Kids with ADHD often internalize the message that something is “wrong” with them—especially when they struggle to control their behavior or emotions. Giving them a compassionate, empowering internal voice interrupts this cycle and replaces shame with growth.

Verbal working memory isn't just for planning or remembering—it's the tool children use to *talk themselves through* discomfort, distraction, and disappointment. This activity helps that tool become stronger, more available, and more effective—especially during the hardest moments of the day.

### KEY MESSAGE

In moments of dysregulation or difficulty, children need a voice that keeps them grounded and focused—not one that adds pressure or shame. When they choose what their Brain Coach says ahead of time, they build the inner tools to navigate emotional challenges with greater control and confidence.

### CLOSING THOUGHT

What we say to ourselves when no one else is watching shapes who we become. Helping a child script that voice with kindness, flexibility, and motivation is one of the most powerful interventions we can offer.

### RESEARCH REFERENCE

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and Language* (E. Hanfmann & G. Vakar, Trans.). MIT Press.

## Activity 1.4: Nonverbal Working Memory

**Executive function skills strengthened:** Nonverbal working memory

### OVERVIEW

Nonverbal working memory is the ability to mentally visualize experiences—past, present, and future—without relying on language. In *The Executive Function Playbook*, this skill is described as the “mental movie screen” that allows children to reflect on the past, anticipate consequences, and picture themselves moving through time and tasks. Dr. Russell Barkley refers to nonverbal working memory as a foundational executive function because it allows individuals to pause, reflect, and apply lessons from previous experiences—what we commonly refer to as hindsight.

For children with ADHD, this internal movie screen is often underdeveloped or underutilized. They may struggle to hold on to recent memories, reflect on yesterday's choices, or mentally rehearse the steps needed for a task. Instead, they operate in the present moment, heavily influenced by impulse and emotion. Without consistent access to hindsight, it becomes nearly impossible to learn from past experiences or make thoughtful decisions.

This page guides adults in helping children activate and strengthen their nonverbal working memory through a daily reflection routine. The goal is to slow down the mind, develop awareness of patterns, and give the brain space to simulate and reflect—skills that are often undermined by excessive screen time and overstimulation.

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ADULT (PARENT, TEACHER, OR CLINICIAN)**

This page is intended to be used at the beginning of the day or before a meaningful task (e.g., school, homework, practice). You will guide the child in a quiet mental rehearsal exercise to strengthen their ability to recall, reflect, and imagine.

This daily mental rehearsal—just two minutes a day—can become a powerful anchor in the development of executive functioning skills such as goal-setting, emotional regulation, time awareness, and future planning.

### **STEP-BY-STEP GUIDANCE**

#### **1. Set the scene.**

Have the child sit comfortably, close their eyes, and put their head down if that helps them focus. Explain that they are going to create a mental movie of yesterday. No talking, no moving—just imagining.

Say:

“I want you to watch a movie in your mind of what happened yesterday. Just sit quietly and let the day play out in your imagination. You can start from the morning and go all the way to bedtime.”

#### **2. Wait silently for two minutes.**

Use a timer if needed. No prompts during this period—let the child sit in silence and work their mental movie screen.

#### **3. Ask guided reflection questions.**

After the two minutes, use the following questions to facilitate thoughtful discussion and help the child connect visual memory with insight:

- “Can you walk me through what happened yesterday—from start to finish?”
- “What went well?”
- “What didn’t go so well?”
- “How did you feel during different parts of the day?”
- “Did anything or anyone help you stay on track?”
- “Where did things start to go off course?”
- “What could you have done differently?”
- “What did you do well that you’re proud of?”
- “What are your goals or plans for today, based on what you remember?”

#### 4. Connect past to present.

Help the child use what they remembered and reflected on to set intentions for the current day. This builds a sense of cause and effect and helps children apply learning from their past to shape future behavior.

#### *Why This Matters*

Nonverbal working memory is not just a memory skill—it is the internal mechanism that gives children access to *hindsight*. Without it, patterns are not recognized, lessons are not internalized, and behavior remains reactive.

In today's fast-paced, screen-saturated world, children are rarely bored. But boredom plays a crucial developmental role: it creates the mental space for imagination, memory, and reflection to flourish. Screens, on the other hand, hijack attention and offer endless stimulation, preventing the brain from developing the cognitive patience and imagery needed for deep reflection.

This activity helps re-establish that space. It gives children the mental stillness they need to “see” their life with clarity and to use the past as a compass for growth.

#### KEY MESSAGE

True executive functioning begins with memory—not just of facts, but of experience. When children can mentally replay the past and visualize themselves in it, they gain insight, foresight, and control. This is the heart of self-regulation and personal growth.

#### CLOSING THOUGHT

Children don't grow from chaos. They grow from reflection. Every quiet moment spent imagining yesterday is a step toward building a better tomorrow. This daily practice is a simple, powerful way to help them pause, process, and plan—one mental movie at a time.

#### RESEARCH REFERENCE

Alloway, T. P., & Alloway, R. G. (2010). Investigating the predictive roles of working memory and IQ in academic attainment. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 106(1), 20–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2009.11.003>

### Activity 1.5: GrowNOW Video Journals

**Executive function skills strengthened:** Self-evaluation

#### OVERVIEW

Students with ADHD often struggle with *self-monitoring*—the ability to track their own performance, reflect on their behavior, and make adjustments without being told.

In *The Executive Function Playbook*, we explore how this challenge is closely tied to deficits in working memory, emotional regulation, and delayed internal development of self-talk and self-reflection.

Traditionally, journaling has been used as a powerful tool to support emotional insight, identity formation, and goal-setting in youth. However, students with ADHD frequently find written journaling to be tedious, slow, and frustrating. Writing requires sustained attention, emotional regulation, task initiation, memory retrieval, and motor output—skills already underdeveloped in this population.

Instead of forcing a model that doesn't fit, this page introduces an innovative adaptation: video journals. By using the child's natural comfort with screens and their interest in seeing themselves on camera, we can preserve the *benefits* of journaling while removing the *barriers*. Video journals allow students to speak freely, reflect in real time, and access a record of their own words, thoughts, and goals—without relying on writing.

This practice supports the development of self-evaluation, the executive function skill that allows individuals to step outside of themselves, observe their own behavior, and make deliberate changes. Over time, regular use of video journals can increase independence, strengthen internal motivation, and reduce overreliance on adult prompting.

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ADULT (PARENT, TEACHER, OR CLINICIAN)**

Set this up as a regular, low-pressure habit—daily or a few times per week. Use a phone, tablet, or laptop camera. The video doesn't need to be long (two to five minutes is enough), and it does not need to be watched by anyone else unless the child wants to share it.

What matters most is that the child is practicing thinking about their day, setting intentions, and evaluating outcomes.

Make it part of the routine: morning video + evening video.

### **STEP-BY-STEP GUIDANCE**

#### **Morning Video Journal (Before the Day or Task Begins):**

Record a short video with your child answering the following four prompts. Adults can ask the questions off-camera or let the child speak freely in sequence.

- 1. What are my goals for today?**

Encourage one to three short goals. These can be behavioral, emotional, academic, or social.

- 2. What does my perfect day look like?**

This prompt builds future thinking and intentionality. It invites the child to visualize their own ideal and align their behavior with it.

**3. What do I want to avoid today?**

Help them build awareness of common distractions, pitfalls, or emotional triggers. This develops internal monitoring and anticipation.

**4. How do I want to feel at the end of the day?**

This connects the day's goals to an internal emotional outcome (pride, relief, confidence, calm), strengthening emotional regulation and forward planning.

**Evening Video Journal (After the Day or Task Ends):**

At the end of the day, record a second video to reflect on how things went. Guide the child through the following three prompts:

**5. What went well today?**

Help the child celebrate small wins. This builds confidence and reinforces progress.

**6. What didn't go well?**

Encourage honesty without shame. The goal is to normalize setbacks as learning opportunities.

**7. What are my goals for tomorrow?**

Support the child in carrying forward momentum or addressing what needs improvement. This reflection-to-action loop builds long-term self-reliance.

**Why This Matters**

Self-evaluation is a critical component of executive function growth—and one of the most overlooked in ADHD treatment. Children who don't regularly reflect on their choices and outcomes tend to repeat mistakes, misread their own progress, and remain dependent on adult prompts for change.

By using technology *as a tool* instead of a distraction, this activity makes self-reflection accessible and engaging. Children begin to build a digital library of their own insights, thoughts, and growth over time. This process nurtures internal motivation, metacognition, and a stronger sense of ownership over their decisions and behavior.

**KEY MESSAGE**

Video journals are a developmentally appropriate and ADHD-friendly alternative to written reflection. When students consistently set goals, reflect on outcomes, and visualize their success using their own voice and face, they grow in self-awareness, emotional control, and independence.

### CLOSING THOUGHT

When children see themselves, they begin to know themselves. Video journaling turns passive experience into active reflection. It transforms everyday moments into lessons—and turns students into the authors of their own growth story.

### RESEARCH REFERENCE

Pennebaker, J. W., & Smyth, J. M. (2016). *Opening up by writing it down*. Guilford Press.

## Activity 1.6: My Core Memory

**Executive function skills strengthened:** Nonverbal working memory, verbal working memory

### OVERVIEW

Children with ADHD often struggle to access their past experiences in a way that guides their present behavior. When they become emotionally dysregulated, they may act impulsively or feel overwhelmed, as if the moment will never end. This is because both nonverbal working memory (the ability to mentally visualize a past experience) and verbal working memory (the ability to use internal self-talk) are often underdeveloped. As a result, they lack the internal tools to recall positive emotional states or use calming language with themselves during distress.

This page guides the child to intentionally retrieve a meaningful, positive “core memory”—one filled with joy, calm, love, or fun—and teaches them how to store that memory as a tool they can revisit when their emotions spiral. By building this skill, the child learns to tap into positive self-regulation strategies from within, rather than relying solely on external reminders or interventions.

This memory becomes a mental anchor—a personal moment of joy they can return to again and again.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ADULT

Begin this activity during a calm, quiet moment. Ask the child to close their eyes (if comfortable) and reflect on one of their happiest, most peaceful memories. Reassure them that it doesn't need to be big or dramatic—sometimes the smallest memories hold the most emotional power.

Use gentle prompting to help them recall the details:

- ◆ Where were you?
- ◆ What were you doing?
- ◆ Who was with you?
- ◆ What made you feel so good?
- ◆ What were the sounds, smells, or colors?

Then encourage the child to draw any part of the memory—it can be literal or abstract. The image doesn't need to be perfect; what matters is that it represents a feeling they want to hold onto.

### STEP-BY-STEP GUIDANCE

**1. Create a safe reflective space.**

Say: “Let’s think back to one of the best memories you’ve ever had. A time you felt calm, happy, loved, or excited. Let’s see if we can bring it back into our minds.”

**2. Complete the reflection prompts.**

Help the child write or dictate responses to:

- “Where were you?”
- “What were you doing?”
- “Who were you with?”
- “How did you feel?”

**3. Reinforce emotional vocabulary and sensory detail.**

**4. Draw the memory.**

Invite the child to sketch something from that moment. It might be a beach, a dog, a favorite meal, or just colors and shapes that represent how they felt.

**5. Build the connection to regulation.**

Guide the child through this key idea:

“You felt that way before. That calm, happy feeling is *still inside you*. You can bring it back anytime—even when things feel hard.”

**6. Practice visualization as a regulation strategy.**

Teach the child how to pause and silently picture this memory during moments of stress or overwhelm. Reinforce:

“Your memory is a superpower. Use it to remind your body that you’ve felt peace before—and you can feel it again.”

### KEY MESSAGE

You’ve already felt joy, calm, and safety before—and that memory is always with you. It’s yours to carry and yours to return to when life gets hard.

**CLOSING THOUGHT**

Self-regulation begins with internal access to peace. When children learn to visualize a calm, joyful memory and connect it to their emotional state, they build the inner tools of resilience, reflection, and hope. Memory is not just a record—it's a resource.

**RESEARCH REFERENCE**

Siegel, D. J. (2012). *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. New York: Random House.

**Activity 1.1: Practicing the GrowNOW Predictions Review Model**

1. Stop, close your eyes, put your head down, and make a mental movie of what the day, task, or activity will look and feel like.
2. Record your predictions here.

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3. Create a self-talk script to coach yourself through to the end goal.

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4. Complete the plan, task, or activity.
5. Once completed, record the event below. How does it compare to the prediction?

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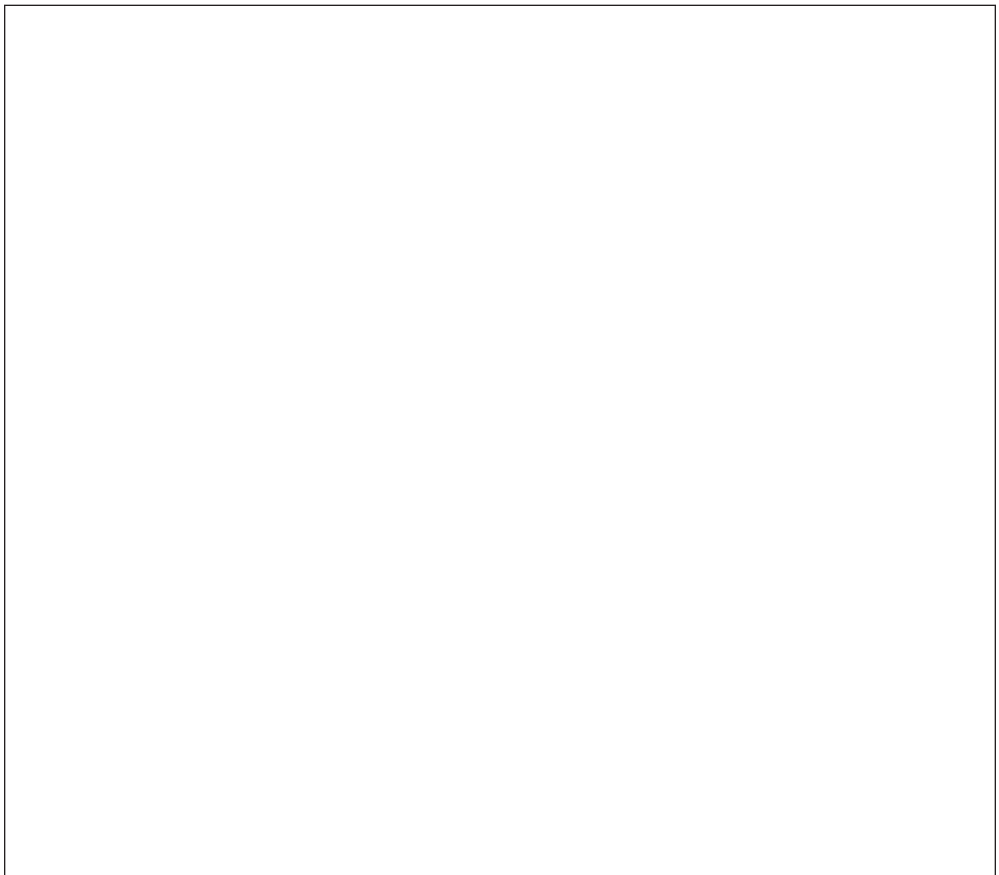
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## Activity 1.2: Brain Coach, Part 1

1. Name of your Brain Coach:

2. Draw a picture of your Brain Coach in the space provided:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing a picture of the student's Brain Coach.

### Activity 1.3: Brain Coach, Part 2

The Brain Coach is always:

- ◆ Positive
- ◆ Kind
- ◆ Flexible
- ◆ Regulating
- ◆ Motivating

What are three things you want your Brain Coach to tell you when you are *not* your best self?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Activity 1.4: Nonverbal Working Memory

At the beginning of the day, follow these steps:

1. Take one to two minutes to visualize what happened yesterday.
2. Describe what happened.

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3. What went well? What didn't go well? How did you feel about it?

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4. Based on what happened yesterday, what are your goals or plans moving forward?

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5. What did you do well yesterday?

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6. What could you do differently today?

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## Activity 1.5: GrowNOW Video Journals

Morning Video Journal: Record a short video with your child at the start of the day and have them answer the following four prompts.

1. What are my goals for today?

i. \_\_\_\_\_

ii. \_\_\_\_\_

iii. \_\_\_\_\_

2. What does my perfect day look like?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What do I want to avoid today?

\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

4. How do I want to feel at the end of the day?

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\_\_\_\_\_

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Evening Video Journal: At the end of the day, record a second video to reflect on how things went. Guide the child through the following three prompts:

**1.** What went well today?

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**2.** What didn't go well?

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**3.** What are my goals for tomorrow?

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**Activity 1.6: My Core Memory**

Think of one of your most favorite memories you have ever had in your entire life.

Where were you?

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What were you doing?

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Who were you with?

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How did you feel?

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Draw that feeling here.



How do we make ourselves feel this way?

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