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Learning Objectives	
Define	Participants will define executive functioning and explain how pertinent skills are represented in daily living.
Analyze	Participants will analyze the connections among executive functioning, cognition, language and social-emotional development to understand how these domains are intertwined with essential components of EF skills.
Explore	Participants will explain the core deficits in ASD, ADHD and LD to demonstrate how to support foundational growth across environments.

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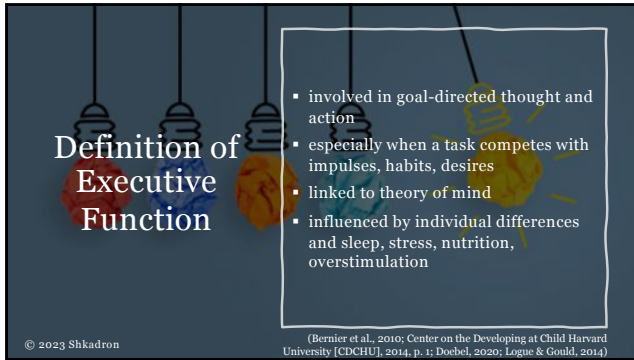
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**Definition of Executive Function**

- involved in goal-directed thought and action
- especially when a task competes with impulses, habits, desires
- linked to theory of mind
- influenced by individual differences and sleep, stress, nutrition, overstimulation

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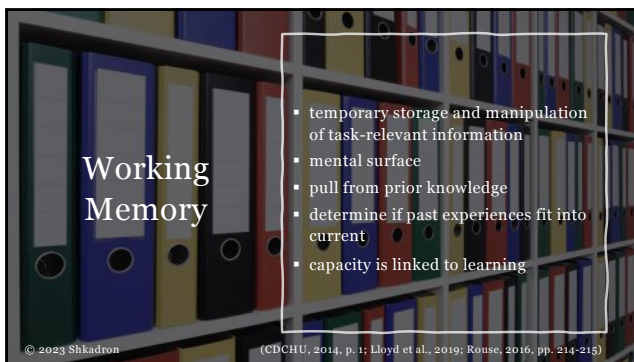
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**Working Memory**

- temporary storage and manipulation of task-relevant information
- mental surface
- pull from prior knowledge
- determine if past experiences fit into current
- capacity is linked to learning

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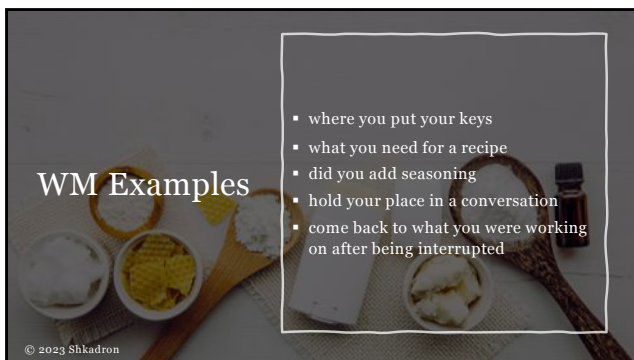
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**WM Examples**

- where you put your keys
- what you need for a recipe
- did you add seasoning
- hold your place in a conversation
- come back to what you were working on after being interrupted

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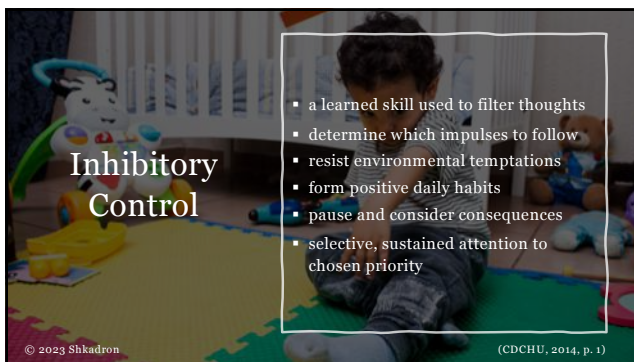
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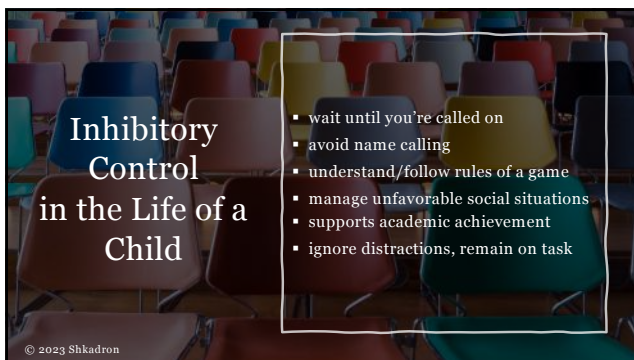
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**EF Example:**  
What does it *really* take?

- knowledge of what it feels like
- awareness of others' capacity to feel pain
- values related to not harming others
- knowledge of acceptable alternatives
- skills to retrieve a toy without hitting
- retrieve ALL information in the moment
- use higher cognitive processes while exerting self-control
- maintain self-regulation

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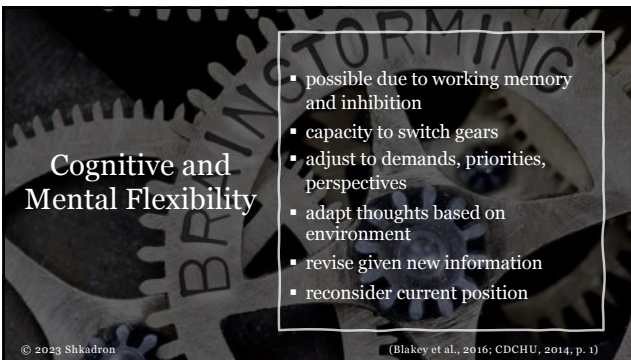
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**Cognitive and Mental Flexibility**

- possible due to working memory and inhibition
- capacity to switch gears
- adjust to demands, priorities, perspectives
- adapt thoughts based on environment
- revise given new information
- reconsider current position

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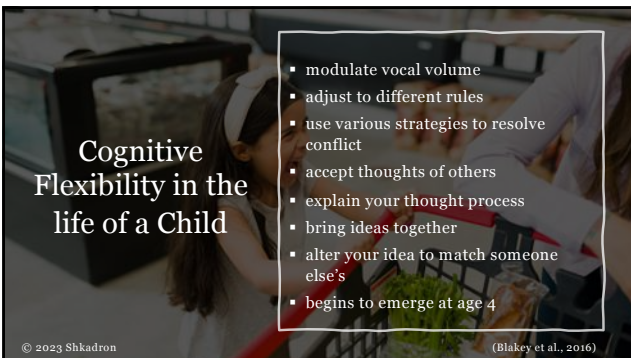
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**Cognitive Flexibility in the life of a Child**

- modulate vocal volume
- adjust to different rules
- use various strategies to resolve conflict
- accept thoughts of others
- explain your thought process
- bring ideas together
- alter your idea to match someone else's
- begins to emerge at age 4

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### EF Skills Affect the “How”

focuses attention	initiates tasks	manages tasks	organizes information	remembers prior experiences
learns from experiences	visualizes what to do in the future	integrates thoughts	self-regulates to manage stressors	adapts to novel situations
self-monitors	develops self-talk	indicates self-awareness	acknowledges conversational cues	picks up on emotional cues of others

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### It's a “Meta” Thing

- metacognition
- reflecting on your thoughts
- seeing the big picture
- part of cognitive flexibility and self-awareness
- translates into social functioning and academics
- understanding our own learning process
- developing strategies
- becoming insightful

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### Questions to Consider

1. What if the child lacks experience or practice?
2. Can these skills be taught, and if so, how?
3. What is your role?

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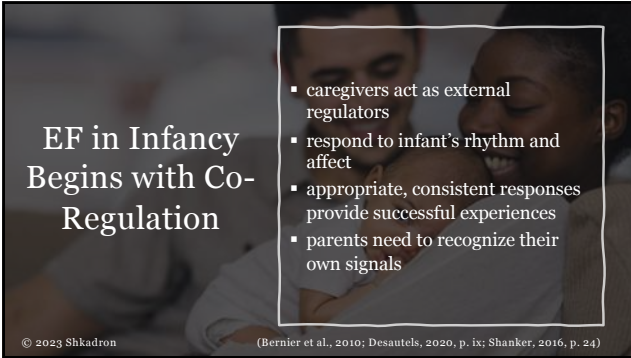
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### EF in Infancy Begins with Co-Regulation

- caregivers act as external regulators
- respond to infant's rhythm and affect
- appropriate, consistent responses provide successful experiences
- parents need to recognize their own signals

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### EF and Co-Regulation

- gradually facilitate child's capacity to self-regulate
- co-regulation is a sacred space
- promotes safety through adult's regulated nervous system

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### Leads to Self-Regulation

- nervous system able to respond to stress
- success in problem-based learning with developmental strategies
- working through a challenge vs. distracting from a challenge
- notice dysregulated state
- part of EF is regaining regulation

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A slide with a background image of a person standing in a field at sunset. The title is "Learning to Not Regulate?". A white box contains a bulleted list of factors. At the bottom left is the copyright notice "© 2023 Shkadron" and at the bottom right is the citation "(Desautels, 2020, p. 8; Shanker, 2016, p. 24)".

Learning to Not Regulate?

- inability to self-regulate is also learned
- lack of opportunity
- type of caregiver models
- parents recognize significance of their own signals
- disrupted EF skills
- cannot exert self-control if consistently dysregulated

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A slide with a background image of a target with a dart hitting the bullseye. The title is "Self-Regulation and EF". A white box contains a bulleted list of points. At the bottom left is the copyright notice "© 2023 Shkadron" and at the bottom right is the citation "(Maguire, 2021, pp. 30-31)".

Self-Regulation and EF

- brain's ability to remain focused on goal
- allows you to follow through
- when stressed, brain can't deliberate, must act quickly
- bring EF skills back online to determine benefits, risks
- use what you know from past to influence present

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A slide with a background image of a parent and a child sitting on a couch. The title is "EF in Parenthood". A white box contains a bulleted list of points. At the bottom left is the copyright notice "© 2023 Shkadron" and at the bottom right is the citation "(Dawson, 2016)".

EF in Parenthood

- knowing that first year of life is critical for emotional control
- parent needs to regulate *own* emotions
- self-talk alone manages
- self-talk with self-instruction determines next steps
- combine with self-appraisal
- go "meta" – how am I doing?

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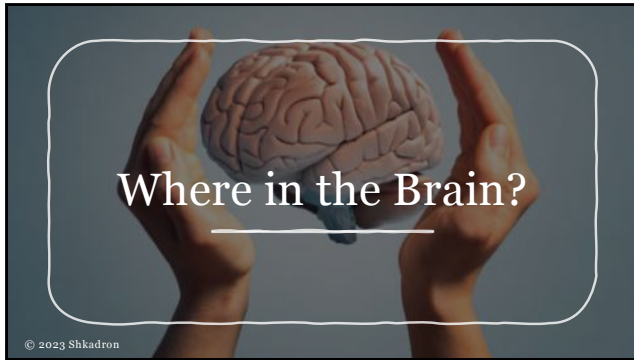
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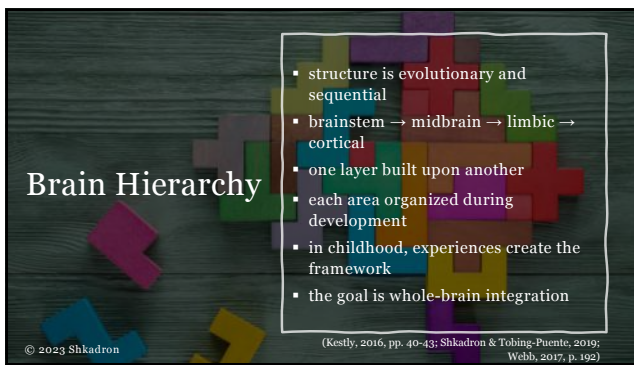
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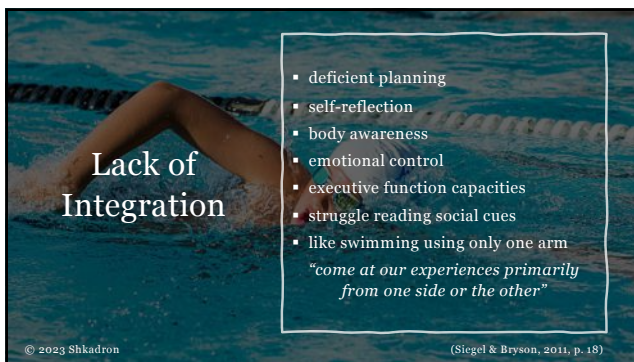
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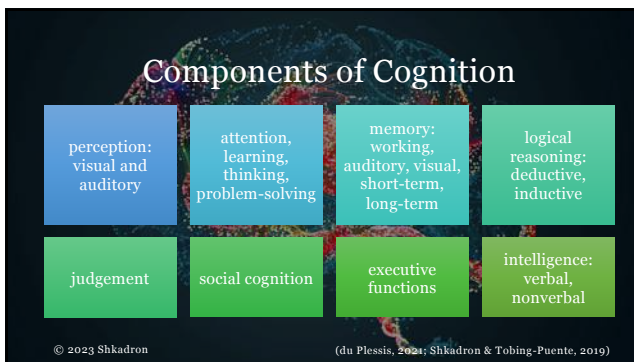
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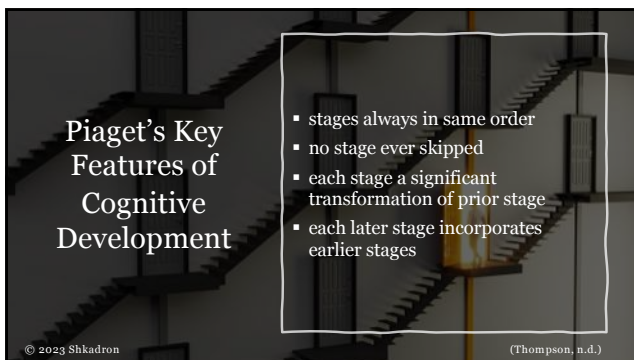
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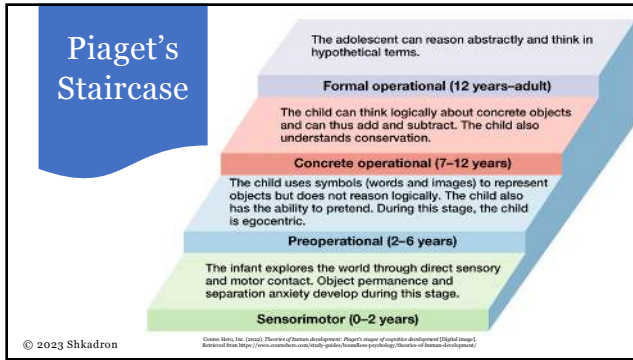
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## Language and Cognition

- language controlled by the brain
- closely linked to general cognition
- mental pictures "anchor" language in the brain
- ability to visualize language – key to comprehension and organization

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## Language Precursors: Bloom & Lahey (1978)

- early conception of language
- now embedded into social-emotional interactions
- and cognitive development
- challenges impact social functioning, emotional regulation, academic success

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### Language Precursors: Bloom & Tinker (2001)

- embedded Bloom & Lahey's earlier model
- mental life of the young child
- social and emotional development (engagement)
- and cognitive development (effort)
- tied to child's acquisition of language
- effort vs. engagement

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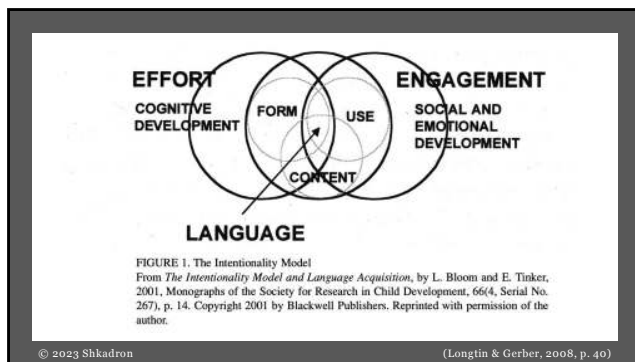
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### Effort vs. Engagement

*What does it mean to lack resources?*

- effort: resources child brings to language learning

*What if there is a lack of engagement?*

- engagement: impacts what child perceives is meaningful
- and what is relevant for language acquisition

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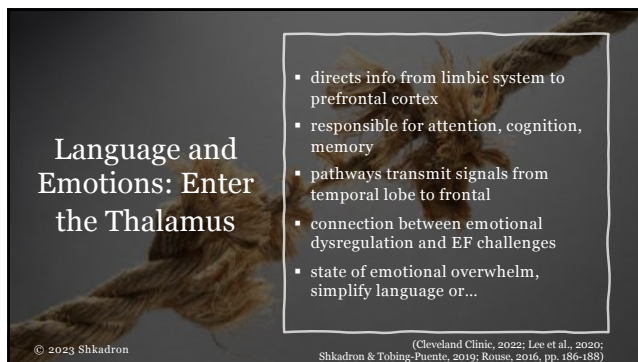
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**Language and Emotions: Enter the Thalamus**

- directs info from limbic system to prefrontal cortex
- responsible for attention, cognition, memory
- pathways transmit signals from temporal lobe to frontal
- connection between emotional dysregulation and EF challenges
- state of emotional overwhelm, simplify language or...

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**Social-Emotional Development DIR® Floortime**

- meeting the child at their developmental level
- relationships optimize development
- emotional capacities for relating and communicating
- sequential process
- 6 foundational capacities – emergence from birth to age 4½
- 16 in total into adulthood

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**Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities (FEDCs)**

- Capacity 1: *Self-Regulation & Interest in the World* (emerges 0 to 3 months)
- Capacity 2: *Engaging & Relating* (emerges 2 to 7 months)
- Capacity 3: *Intentionality & Two-Way Communication* (emerges 3 to 10 months)
- Capacity 4: *Complex Communication & Shared Problem Solving* (emerges 9 to 18 months)
- Capacity 5: *Using Symbols & Creating Emotional Ideas* (emerges 18 to 48 months)
- Capacity 6: *Logical Thinking & Building Bridges between Ideas* (emerges 3 to 4 ½ years)

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**Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities (FEDCs)**

- Capacity 7: *Multiple Perspectives* (emerges 4 to 6 years)
  - multi-causal thinking
- Capacity 8: *Gray Area Thinking* (emerges 6 to 10 years)
  - degrees of influence and perspectives
- Capacity 9: *Reflective Thinking & an Internal Standard of Self* (emerges at 9 years)
  - able to judge experiences
- Capacity 10: *An Expanded Sense of Self* (emerges early to mid adolescence)
  - ability to view self as others do

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**Neurobiology of Play**

- play promotes maturation of higher brain areas (PFC)
- play facilitates development of frontal lobe's behavioral inhibition function
- play helps us to mobilize without losing our ability to stay socially engaged
- early play – child regulates and is regulated by the play interactions

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**Play and the Nervous System**

- play interactions establish optimal ranges of play behaviors
- play secures the relationship between a parent and child
- play develops a nervous system that adapts effectively to challenges in the environment

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**Emotional Expectations**

- higher brain functions operate effectively when integrated
- strong emotions decrease cortical activation
- we expect children to control their impulses, what if...
  - it's outside their developmental ability
  - it's outside their "in the moment" ability

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**What do children gain through play?**

- experiment with conflict
- handle unpleasant situations
- learn to problem solve
- set boundaries
- take on challenging tasks
- attend, organize, plan, revise
- express their ideas
- acknowledge ideas of others
- combine ideas to move the play forward

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*“Solving problems is much easier if a person has the ability to think through solutions.”*

Ross W. Greene, Ph.D.  
*The Explosive Child*

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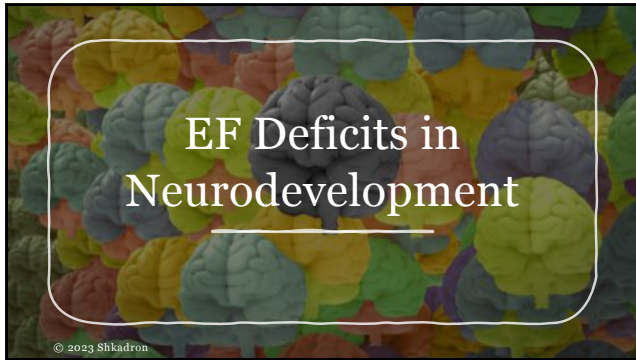
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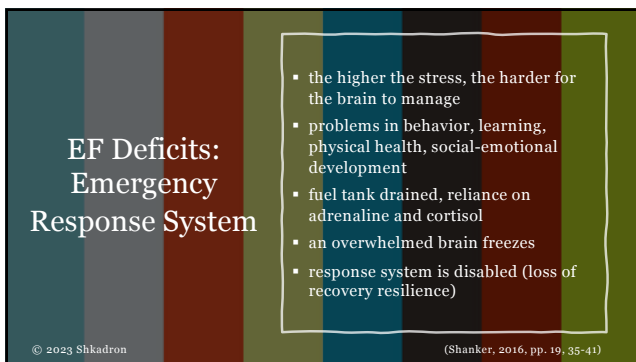
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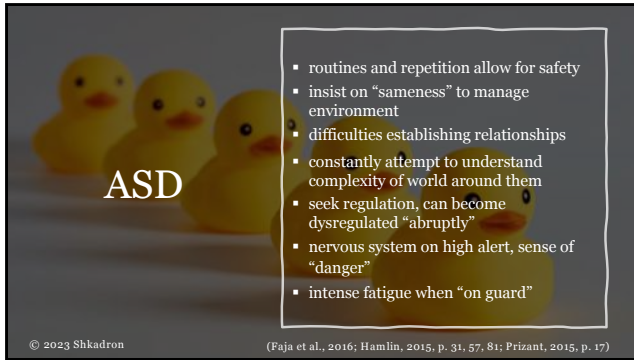
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ASD

- routines and repetition allow for safety
- insist on "sameness" to manage environment
- difficulties establishing relationships
- constantly attempt to understand complexity of world around them
- seek regulation, can become dysregulated "abruptly"
- nervous system on high alert, sense of "danger"
- intense fatigue when "on guard"

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A Different Look

- comforting rituals are grounding
- coping mechanisms
- use of scripts to aid in regulation
- people as regulating factors
- validate child's feelings of dysregulation

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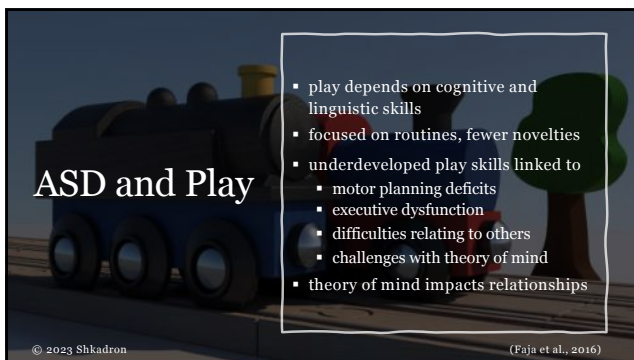
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ASD and Play

- play depends on cognitive and linguistic skills
- focused on routines, fewer novelties
- underdeveloped play skills linked to
  - motor planning deficits
  - executive dysfunction
  - difficulties relating to others
  - challenges with theory of mind
- theory of mind impacts relationships

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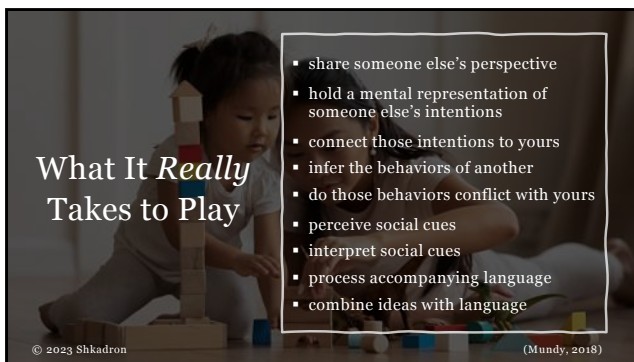
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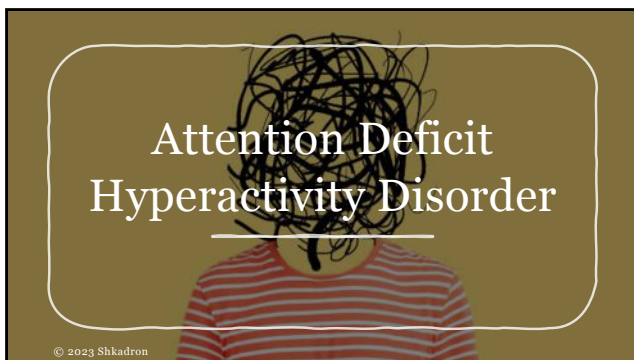
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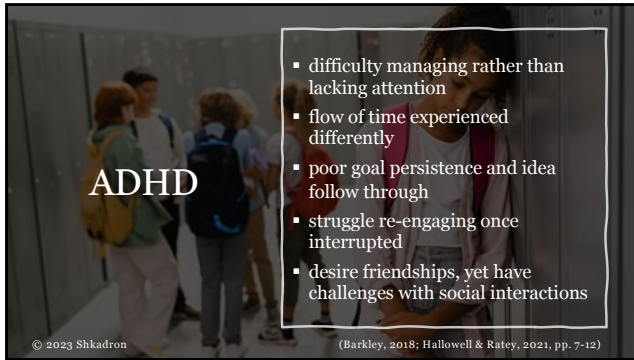
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**ADHD**

- difficulty managing rather than lacking attention
- flow of time experienced differently
- poor goal persistence and idea follow through
- struggle re-engaging once interrupted
- desire friendships, yet have challenges with social interactions

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**ADHD: Clinical Guidance**

- wandering mind, inconsistent performance
  - can't attend in absence of stimulation
  - boredom is kryptonite
- trouble organizing and planning, impacts ADL skills
  - child: getting dressed once in their room
  - adult: throwing out the garbage but then walking right past it

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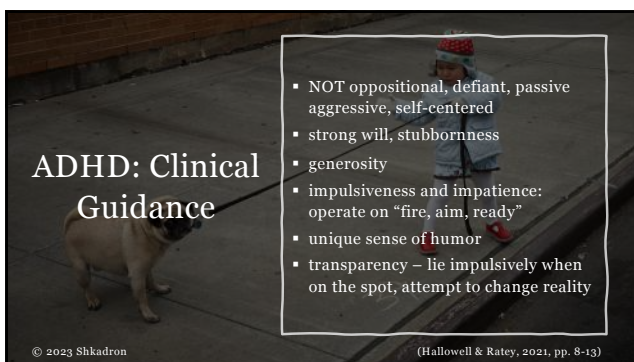
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**ADHD: Clinical Guidance**

- NOT oppositional, defiant, passive aggressive, self-centered
- strong will, stubbornness
- generosity
- impulsiveness and impatience: operate on "fire, aim, ready"
- unique sense of humor
- transparency – lie impulsively when on the spot, attempt to change reality

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**ADHD & Social-Emotional Life**

- difficulty reading the room
- trouble playing with others
- inability to control impulse during conversation
- in adulthood seem rude, self-centered
- highly sensitive to criticism and rejection
- don't see the role they play in a social problem
- negative self-image

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**Learning Disability: Developmental Language Disorder**

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**DLA**

- difficulties understanding and using spoken language
- comorbidities: 30% - 50% dyslexia; 22% ADHD
- challenges with phonological processing and letter identification
- atypical lexical-semantic development, like the quantity and quality of words

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**Building EF Components**

- main skills: WM, inhibition, cognitive flexibility
- complex skills: sustained attention, goal-directed persistence, metacognition, organization, emotional regulation
- complex skills build on foundations: sustained attention draws on WM, inhibition, shifting
- weak, splintered foundation in language and cognition

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**EF Weaknesses & DLD**

- coordinating mathematical operations
- what it means to add, multiply
- remember the order
- pull from procedural knowledge
- practice each operation
- word problems increase linguistic demands

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**EF, Language & Emotions**

- when increased resources used for emotional regulation
- impacts language expression
- language planning system takes on increased processing demands
- results in longer "awkward" pauses
- use of fillers and interjections

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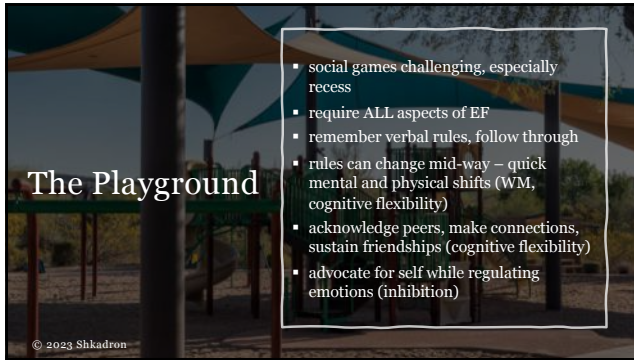
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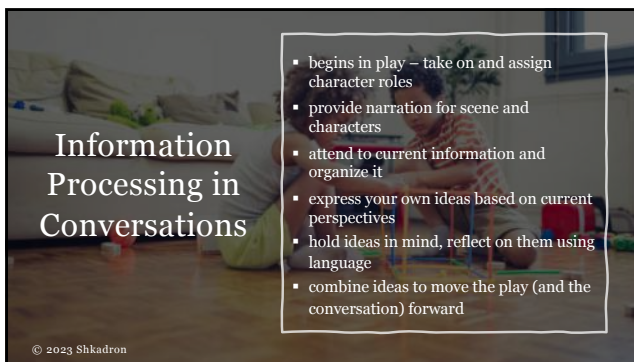
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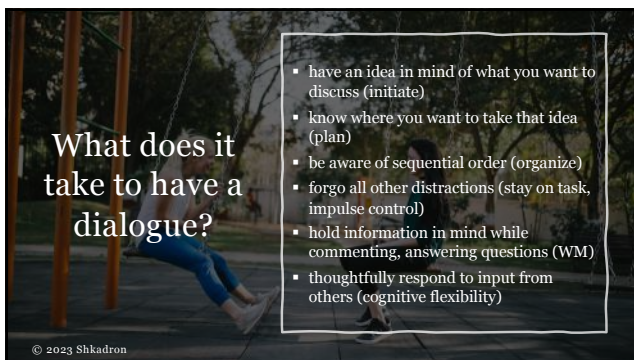
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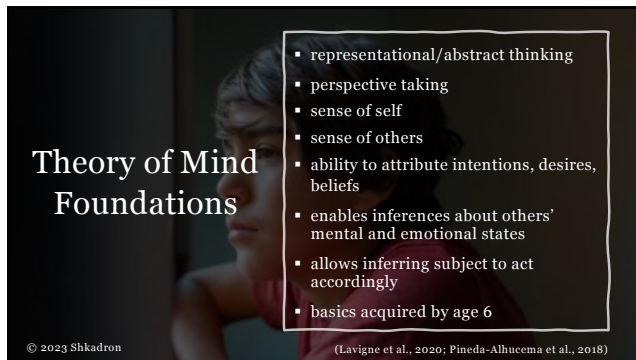
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The slide features a dark background with a faint image of a child's face. The title 'Theory of Mind Foundations' is on the left. A white-bordered box on the right contains a bulleted list of skills. At the bottom, there are two small copyright notices.

### Theory of Mind Foundations

- representational/abstract thinking
- perspective taking
- sense of self
- sense of others
- ability to attribute intentions, desires, beliefs
- enables inferences about others' mental and emotional states
- allows inferring subject to act accordingly
- basics acquired by age 6

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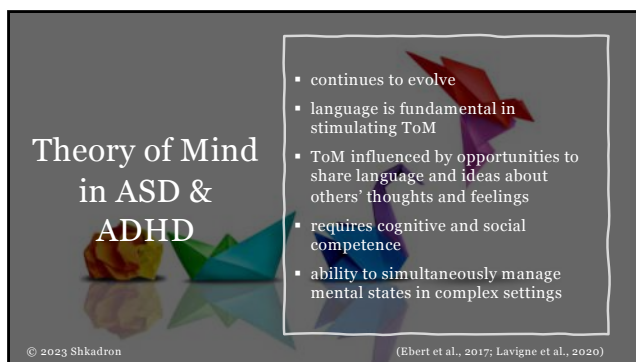
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The slide features a dark background with colorful paper airplanes. The title 'Theory of Mind in ASD & ADHD' is on the left. A white-bordered box on the right contains a bulleted list of points. At the bottom, there are two small copyright notices.

### Theory of Mind in ASD & ADHD

- continues to evolve
- language is fundamental in stimulating ToM
- ToM influenced by opportunities to share language and ideas about others' thoughts and feelings
- requires cognitive and social competence
- ability to simultaneously manage mental states in complex settings

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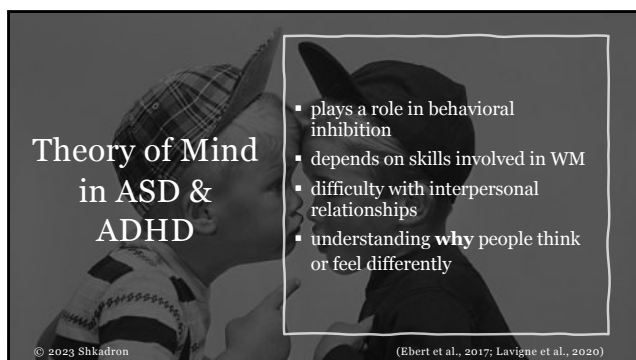
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The slide features a dark background with a silhouette of a person wearing a hat. The title 'Theory of Mind in ASD & ADHD' is on the left. A white-bordered box on the right contains a bulleted list of points. At the bottom, there are two small copyright notices.

### Theory of Mind in ASD & ADHD

- plays a role in behavioral inhibition
- depends on skills involved in WM
- difficulty with interpersonal relationships
- understanding **why** people think or feel differently

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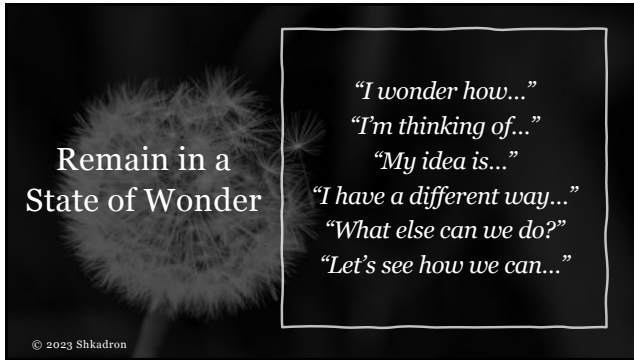
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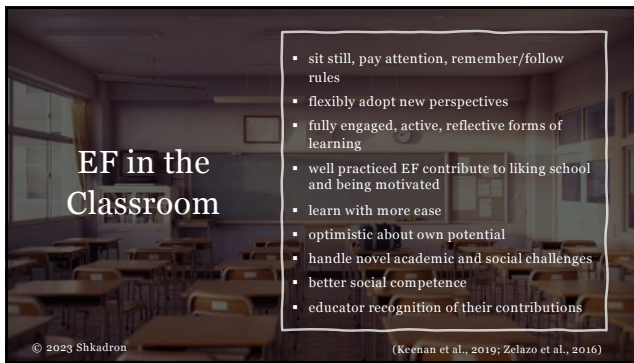
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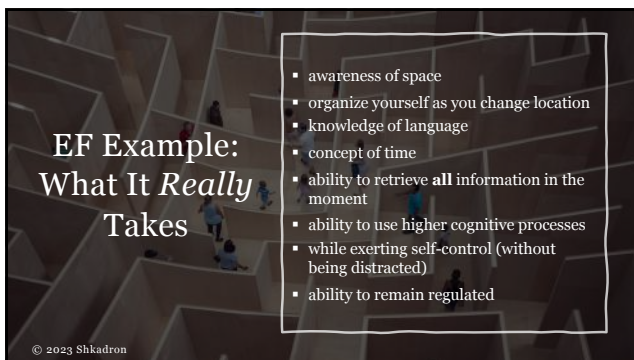
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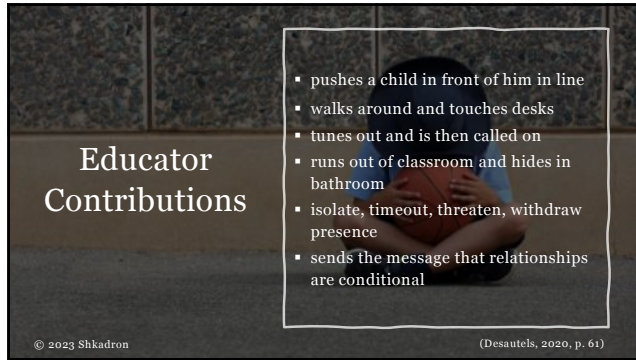
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**Educator Contributions**

- pushes a child in front of him in line
- walks around and touches desks
- tunes out and is then called on
- runs out of classroom and hides in bathroom
- isolate, timeout, threaten, withdraw presence
- sends the message that relationships are conditional

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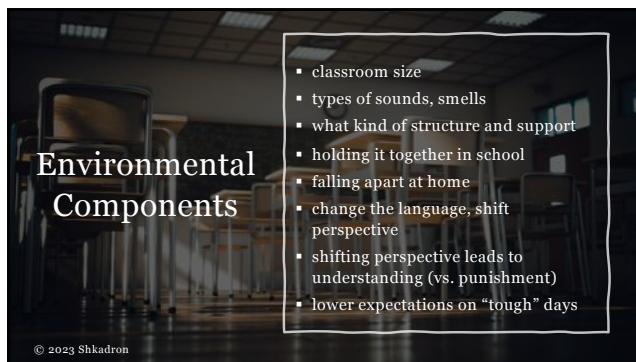
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**Environmental Components**

- classroom size
- types of sounds, smells
- what kind of structure and support
- holding it together in school
- falling apart at home
- change the language, shift perspective
- shifting perspective leads to understanding (vs. punishment)
- lower expectations on "tough" days

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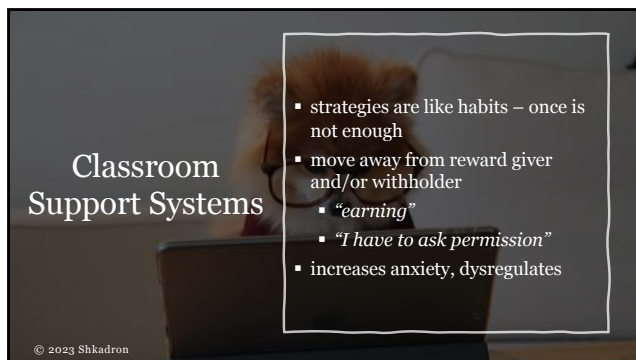
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**Classroom Support Systems**

- strategies are like habits – once is not enough
- move away from reward giver and/or withholder
  - "earning"
  - "I have to ask permission"
- increases anxiety, dysregulates

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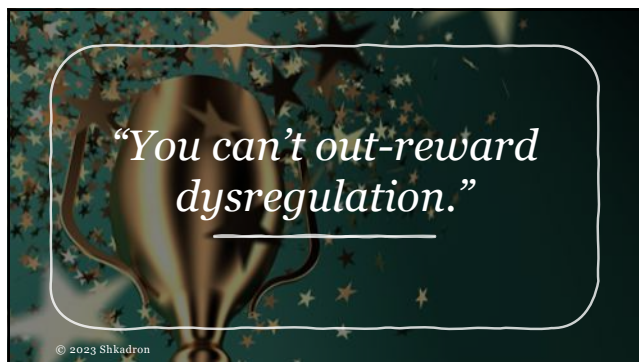
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### Connect with Me

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IG: @playtolearnconsulting

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### Recommended Texts

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