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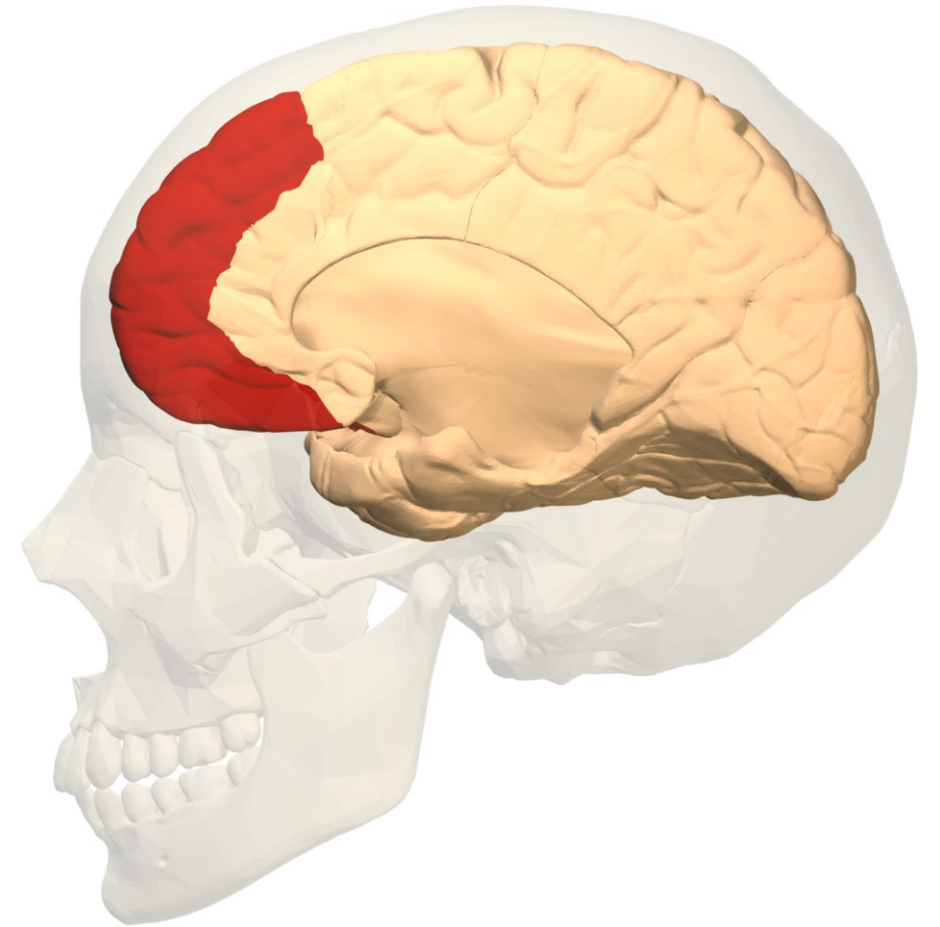


Executive functions sandbox

Prof Sara Baker

Executive functions in everyday life

Skills for active learning, adjusting to expectations, being independent, making 'good' decisions



Check up: Your own executive functions skills

Using the executive functions questionnaire...

What are your executive function superpowers?

Are there any areas that are more difficult for you?



Myth busting

- ✗ Executive functions matter only for children who are struggling on the fringes.
- ✗ Executive functions can be trained with 'brain games'.
- ✗ Once developed, we don't need to focus on executive functions any more.



Executive functions and self-regulation as a foundation for lifelong learning



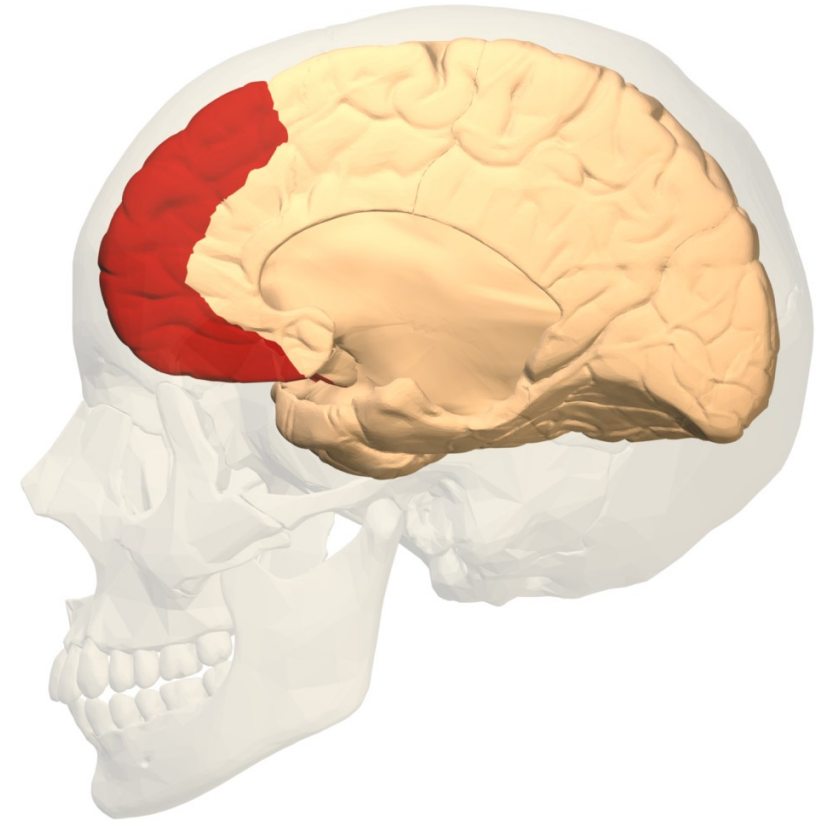
Universal supports can be less stigmatizing and ensure nobody misses out.

Executive functions and self-regulation

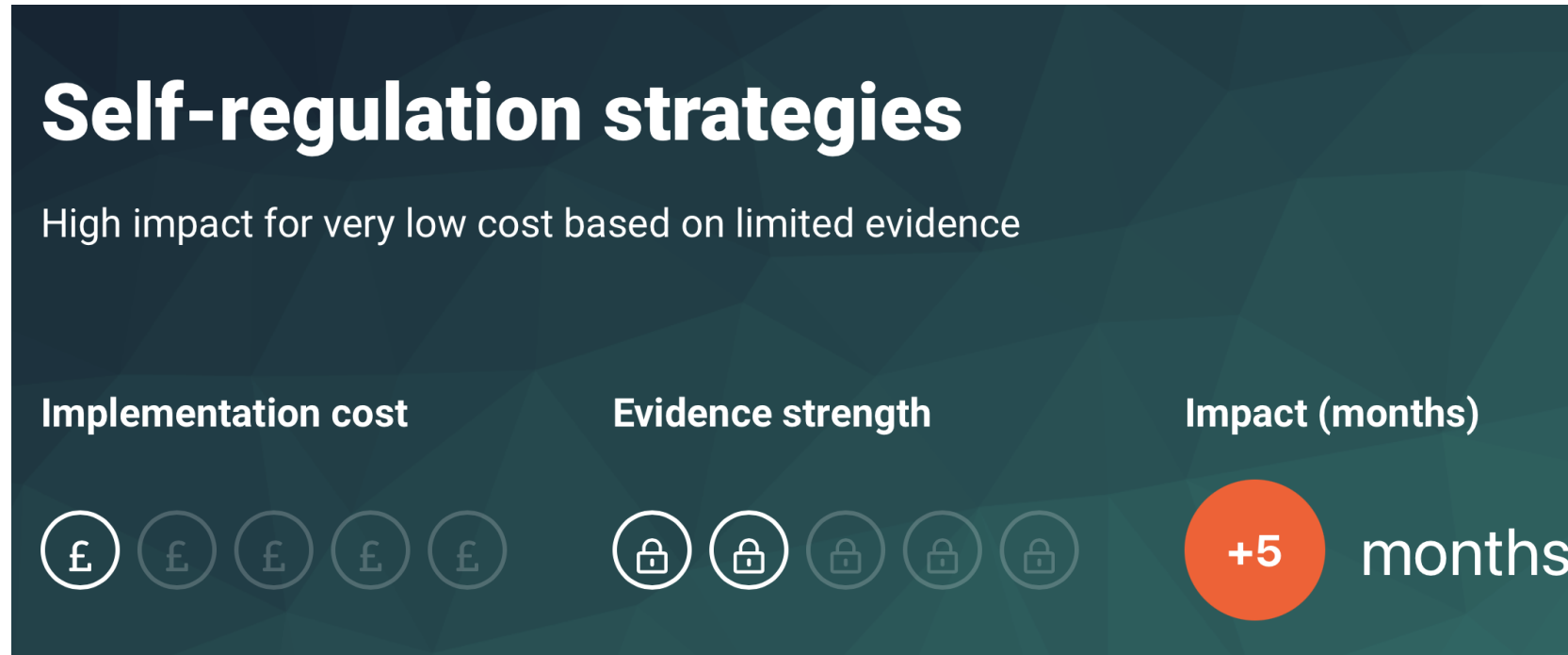
Diverse trajectories of regulation
e.g. emotion regulation and the pandemic cohort

Screening tool
(Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire)

- Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers
- Constantly fidgeting or squirming
- Can stop and think things out before acting
- Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span

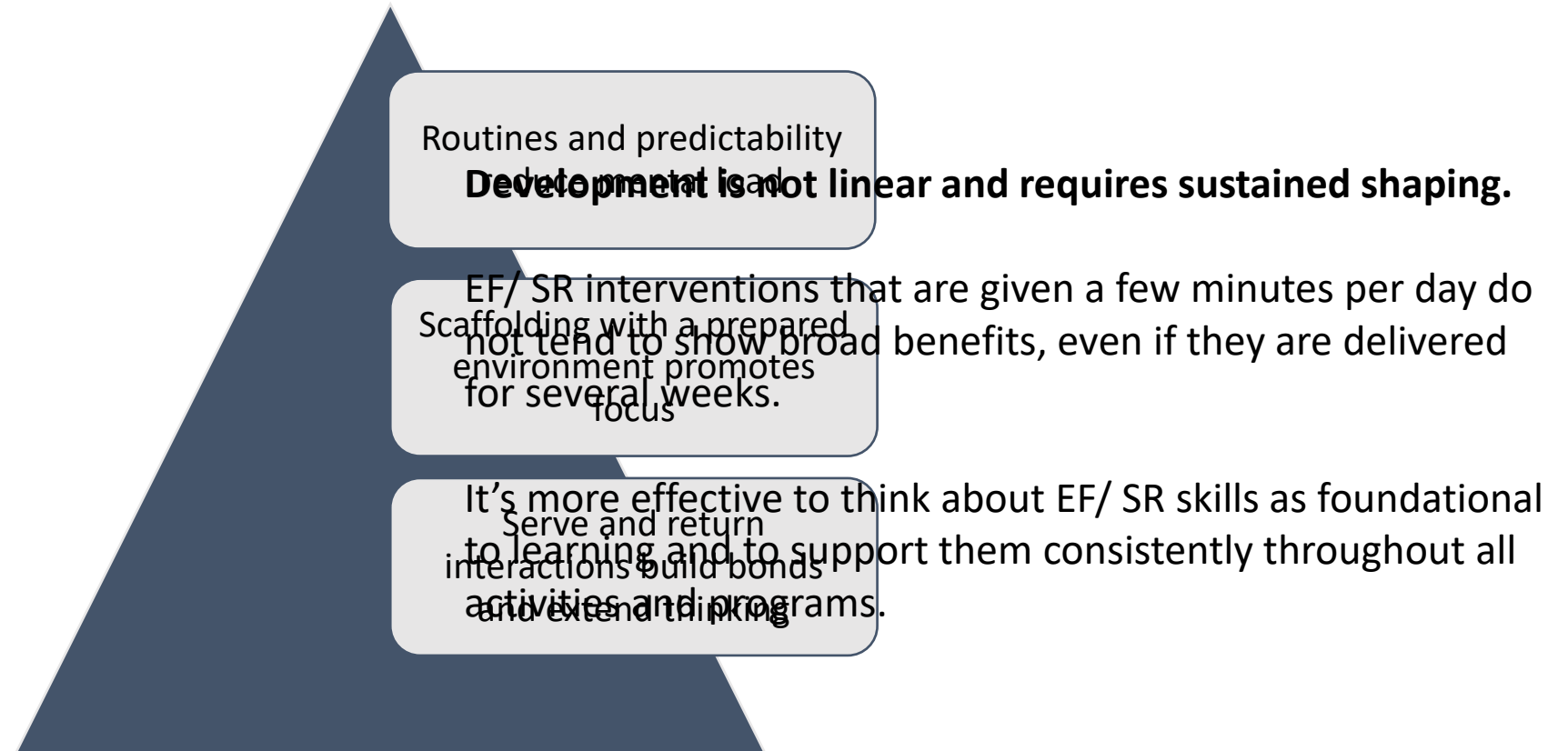


Executive functions and self-regulation



EEF evidence review

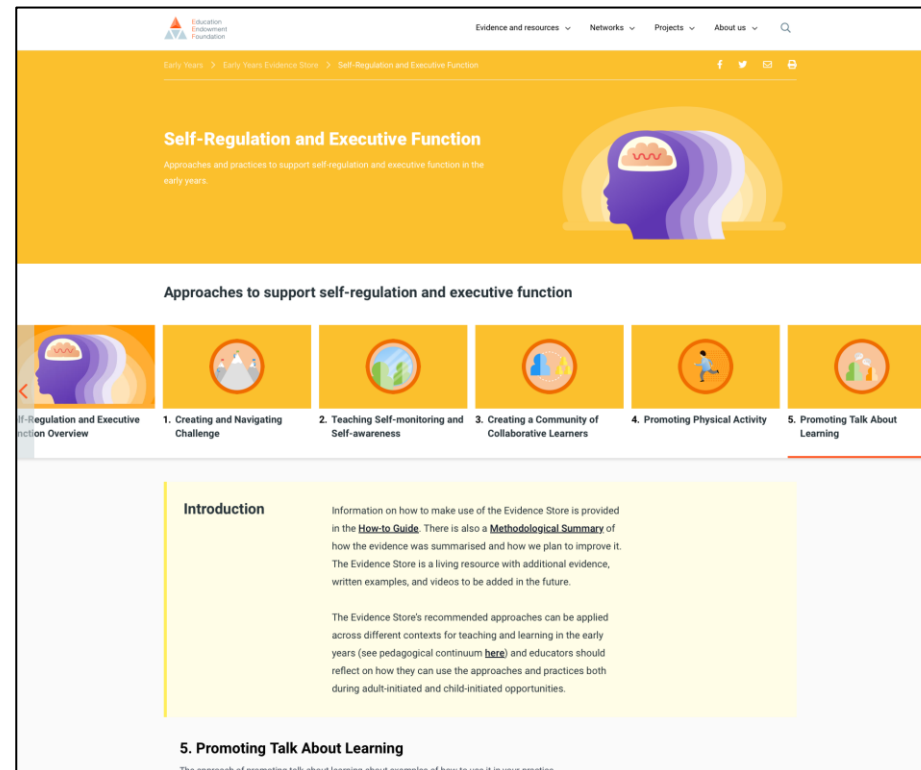
Many ways to support executive functions and self-regulation



Supporting executive functions in a classroom

Video

- Can you identify...
- Goldilocks challenge?
- Meaning for children?
- Thinking about thinking?



Supporting executive functions in the wider school day

- Room routines
 - E.g. Self-register; visual timetable
- Transitions
 - E.g. through cues like a bell or a song
- Aspects of the environment that scaffold learner's thinking and feelings
 - E.g. posters with emotional expressions

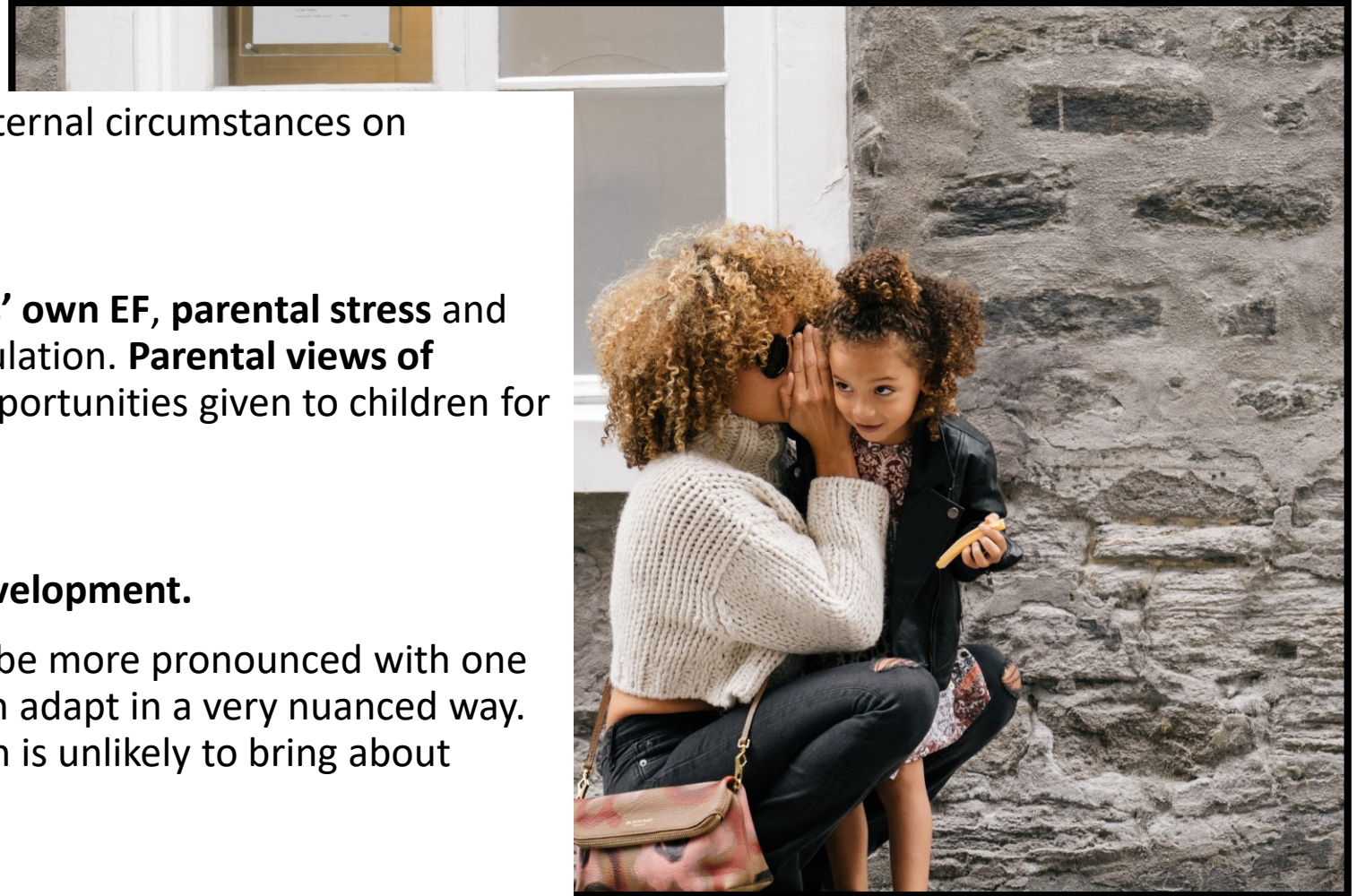
Home environment, executive functions and self-regulation

Parenting can mediate the effect of external circumstances on children's EF/ SR.

Bidirectional relation between **parents' own EF, parental stress and parenting style** and children's self-regulation. **Parental views of children's safety** can also affect the opportunities given to children for exercising self-regulation.

Multiple factors influence a child's development.

For example emotional reactivity may be more pronounced with one adult than another, suggesting children adapt in a very nuanced way. Therefore a single point of intervention is unlikely to bring about holistic changes.



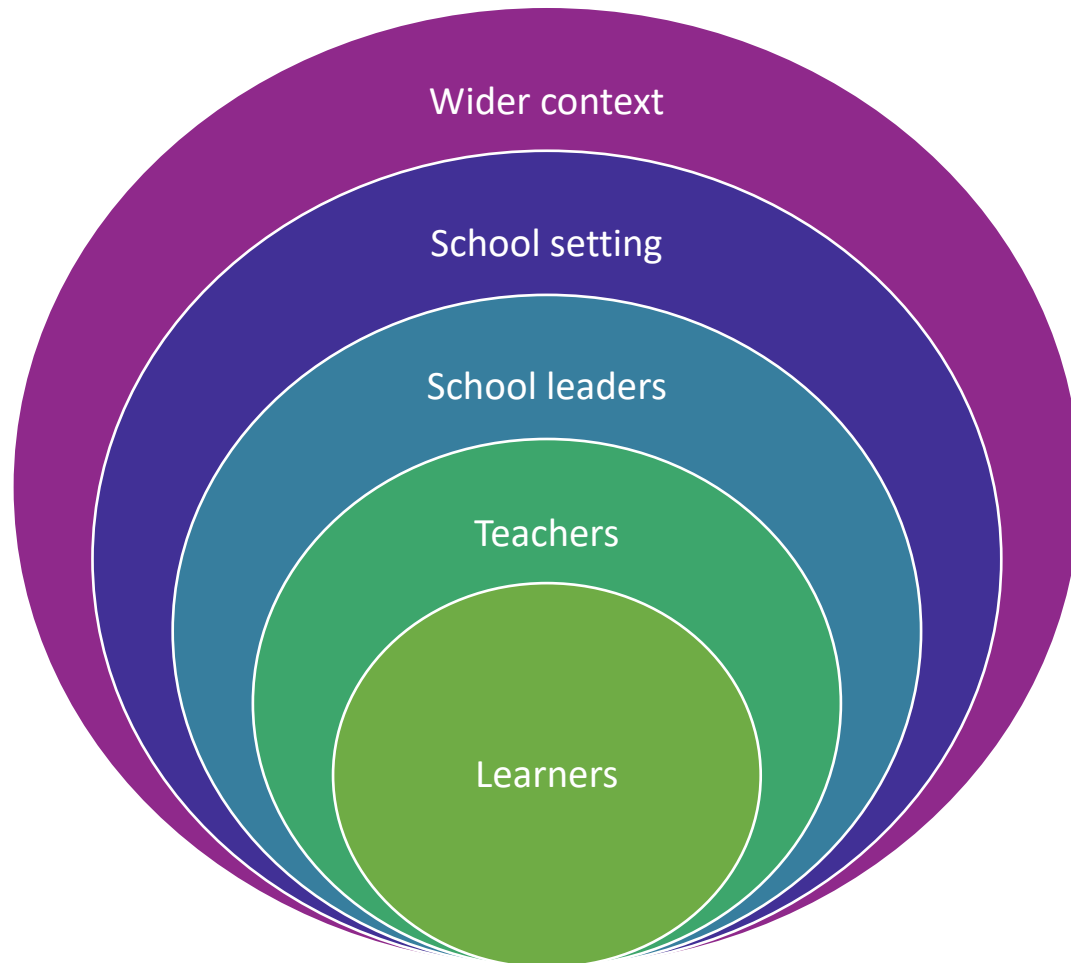
Expectations about executive functions in different contexts

- What differences in expectations are you aware of in the groups you work with, which may value self-regulation differently at different ages?
- For example are children expected to sleep on their own at a certain age?
- Are children expected to put on their own coat at a certain age?



Bringing it all together

Can you identify barriers and enablers of executive functions in your context?
How might you address those?



Teachers and school leaders:

Time pressures
Mindset
Own EFs

School setting:

Infrastructure
School culture

Wider context:

Parenting attitudes and values
Policies & law
Economic & social conditions

Key take-aways

- **EF skills may be at the root of other behaviours.** Consider the mechanisms before deciding on the target.
- **Gradients in the data suggest everyone can benefit from improving EF and SR. Including adults!**
- **Multiple factors influence a child's development.** Work with parents and community partners, develop a shared language.
- **Development is not linear and requires sustained shaping.** It's most effective to think about EF skills as foundational to learning and to support them consistently throughout all activities and programs.

Further resources on executive functions and self-regulation

Report with overview of the concepts

Executive function mapping project: Untangling the Terms and Skills Related to Executive Function and Self-Regulation in Early Childhood, Stephanie Jones 2019

Podcast with Deborah Leong, developer of Tools of the Mind, explaining self-regulation and executive functions in the early years

<https://childinst.org/tools-of-the-mind-with-deborah-leong/>

Age-appropriate activity guides from 6 months – 12 years

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2014). *Enhancing and Practicing Executive Function Skills with Children from Infancy to Adolescence*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

Webinar on self-regulation in the early years with the East London Research School (includes connections to EYFS)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmcJdaLEr48>

Guide from Early Years Library on self-regulation (what is it and how to support it in early years)

<https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/early-years-library> > see 'Laying the foundations: Supporting children's self-regulation'



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Thank you!

You can find me on LinkedIn or
during the breaks.

stb32@cam.ac.uk

@SaraBCam