

Supporting the development of executive functioning skills in secondary aged pupils

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Executive functioning

Executive function and self-regulation skills act like an air traffic control system in the brain, helping us manage information, make decisions, and plan ahead. We need these skills at every stage of life, and while no one is born with them, we are all born with the ability to develop these and other key skills.



Essential for lifelong journey



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Challenges -
no
judgements
intended!

The pandemic

Social media.

Use of phones and iPad – adults and CYP

Gaming

Cost of living crisis

Changes to family structure

Worldwide challenges and uncertainty

Executive functioning skills help children to regulate their behaviour to achieve a goal. There are three main skills that underly executive function and these begin to develop during the early years:

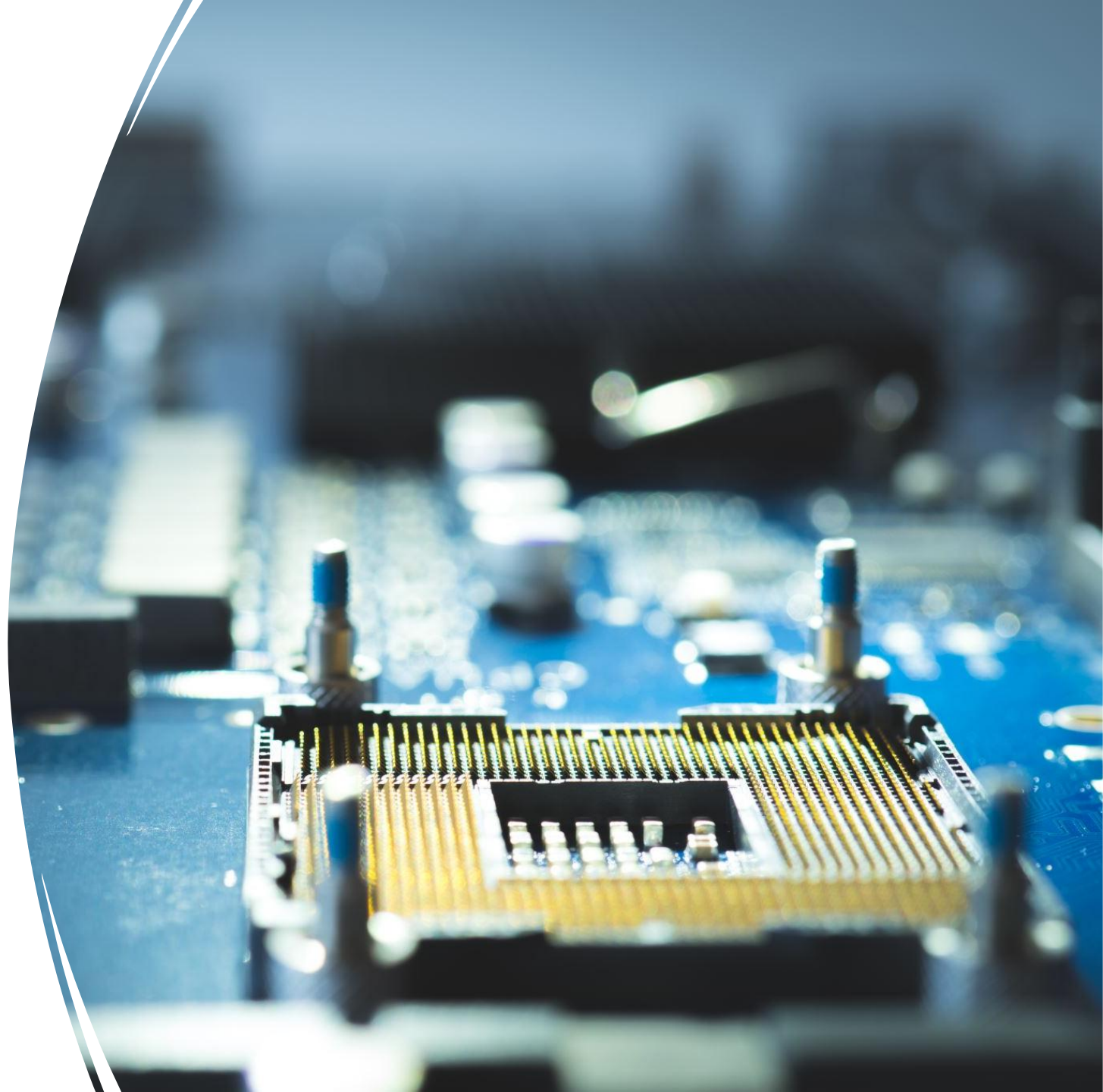
Working memory (holding information, such as rules or goals, in mind);

Cognitive flexibility (sustaining or shifting attention in response to different cues); and

Impulse control (resisting initial reactions and responses).

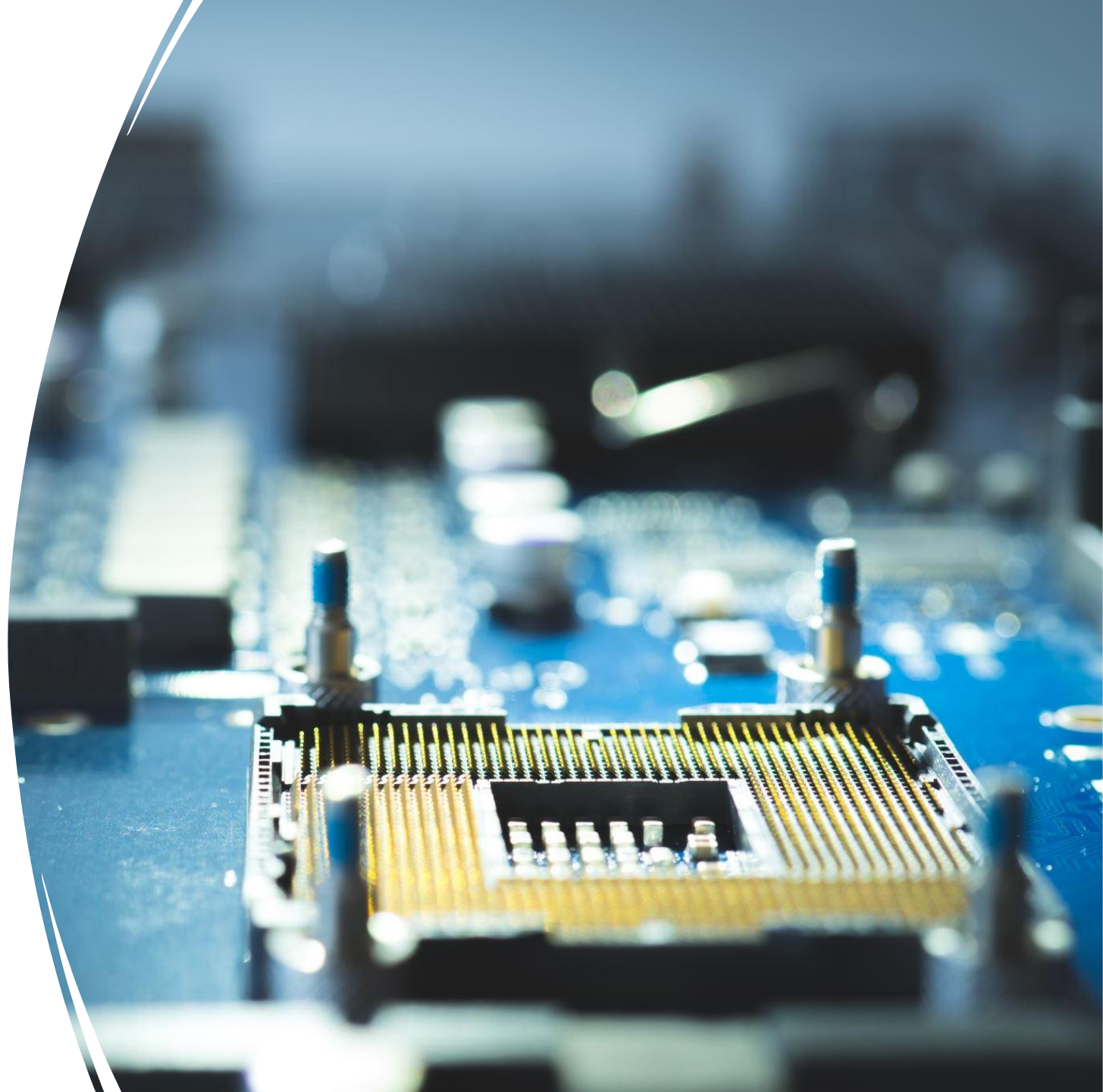
1. Working memory

- **Working memory** is a **cognitive system** with **limited capacity** that temporarily holds information for immediate use.
- It is essential for **reasoning, decision-making, and behavioural guidance**.
- Often compared to a **temporary sticky note** in the brain, it allows manipulation of information rather than just storing it.



Working memory

- It supports tasks like **problem-solving, learning, and understanding sentences** by holding and processing multiple pieces of information simultaneously.
- Working memory is distinct from **short-term memory**, as it involves **active manipulation** of information rather than mere storage.



Metacognition

Metacognition refers to "thinking about thinking," encompassing awareness and regulation of one's cognitive processes, which is crucial for effective learning and problem-solving.




Strategies to support secondary aged pupils



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Working memory – strategies

- Provide the “Big picture”.
 - Visuals and key words to support understanding of task.
 - Other multi sensory prompts
 - Checking understanding of task – simplifying it and removing unnecessary detail.
 - Encouraging pupils to remember how they have completed a task like this before.
 - Chunking task – quick wins.
 - Reassurance and meaningful praise
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2. Cognitive flexibility

- Flexible thinking – building resilience to change.
- Initiating task
- Planning and prioritising.
- Organisation



Strategies to support secondary aged pupils



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Cognitive Flexibility – Strategies

- Plan and practice changes.
- Providing structures for changes
- Gathering ideas from peers.
- High quality questioning.
- Promote a culture of curiosity.
- Sentence starters and writing frames
- Different worked through examples
- Support risk taking: **First Attempt In Learning.**



3. Impulse control

- Emotional regulation
- Self monitoring - assessing their capability.
- C&YP perceptions of themselves but not understanding how they are perceived by others.
- Managing risks
- Building stamina around waiting:
Must feel and accept the frustration

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Impulse control – strategies.

- Practice waiting – using the time for self talk.
- Visual clues to remind pupils of expectations
- Mindfulness breaks
- Movement breaks
- Think about seating and grouping
- Decluttering the learning environment
- “Stop, think, act” - may work if established early.
- Provide positive reinforcement and remaining calm.

**For the most
disengaged
learners**



PINCH

- Play
- Interest
- Novelty
- Competition
- Hurry up
(adrenaline)



Questions

