



Working memory is part of our attention or executive functioning skills. It is like the yellow stickie note where we put important information. It helps us remember phone numbers, do math problems, write an essay and follow multi step instructions. It also helps us cope with feelings, thoughts and ideas. Working memory doesn't remember things for very long, much less than a minute. It's only a temporary place where we keep important things in mind while we are trying to figure out the best thing to do. Stress can also erase ideas we really need to remember. It gets overwhelmed by too much information or strong feelings.

Just like Post it notes, working memory definitely has a limited size. It's also smaller when we feel sick or are tired. When working memory is small, it's harder to remember important things and also harder to ignore big worries. Our working memory grows during childhood and it can be affected by attention problems or cognitive late effects due to cancer treatment.

Ways to Help Working Memory:

1. Speed matters. Frustration triples when things are said or shown too quickly. Present new information slowly in small chunks. If they don't seem to understand, ask your child to repeat back what they heard. This way you can learn how much was stored in working memory

2. We all miss things. Working memory has very small storage. Repeat new or complicated information in several different ways.

3. Shorter conversations will help improve comprehension. Giving instructions in less than one minute is good and 30 seconds optimal.

4. Reduce stress. Less stress means more attention can be spent on learning. Help your child reduce stress where ever possible. One or two deep breaths go a long way towards helping clear up space.



Looking for more ideas and inspiration from other families? Dr. Adrienne Witol will be talking about how working memory affects coping skills, increases irritability and learning speed. These are informal meetings with lots of time for families to talk and share ideas with each other.

Weekly BrainWorks

Zoom Drop In

Wednesdays at 10AM
Meeting ID: 418 195 127
Password: 589020

Come join us in the community Zoom drop in if you would like to connect with other parents, talk more about these ideas, and learn other ways to help your child with homechooling!

<https://zoom.us/j/418195127?pwd=N1Z6YlVzSm1MRUFEVDg0dmpOTW8vUT09>

Activities for Families

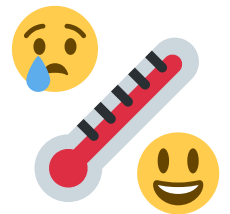
Attention takes hard work and a lot of energy. Concentration requires that many parts of the brain work together. Strong emotions also take up working memory space; frustration competes with one's attention and processing skills. When practiced regularly, activities like these can help decrease stress and build mental stamina.

Personal Thermometer (Great for everyone)

Often we don't notice feelings until they get "loud". Strong, intense feelings are harder to cope with. It's always easier to manage a feeling when it's small. Julian Ford, an expert in the field of trauma and recovery, developed this technique to help develop awareness about how stressed or calm we are feeling "in the moment" and how much in control or "dysregulated" we are feeling by ranking our feelings on a thermometer from 1-10. Used regularly, this visual cue, builds emotional awareness and help us plan an earlier approach before feelings get too intense.

Here's how:

- 1. Slow down** (sit back, relax, take a deep breath, pay attention to your breathing and one thought at a time)
- 2. Orient** (pay attention to where you are, what you are doing, who you are with)
- 3. Self check** using the thermometer (rank how you are feeling and rate yourself on a scale of 1-10. Higher numbers mean more stress and feeling less control.
- 4. Take action.** If your number is more than 3, take a short break and do something that feels good, that helps you relax or talk with someone who cares about you.



5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise (Great for everyone)

Grounding exercises help us use our working memory to focus on the here-and-now. It's a great way to use our senses to help stop paying attention to strong feelings and get through difficult moments. 5,4,3,2,1 is especially handy if you feel overwhelmed, very anxious or disconnected from things. It's also a good thing to try if you're feeling nervous and having trouble remembering partway through a test.

Steps:

1. Describe 5 things you see in the room.
2. Name 4 things you can feel ("my feet on the floor" or "the air in my nose")
3. Name 3 things you hear right now ("traffic outside")
4. Name 2 things you can smell right now (or 2 smells you like)
5. Name 1 good thing about yourself

Rip, Squish, Spaghetti! (Great for kids)

Feelings start in our body and there are a lot of going strategies that help them moving through and out of our bodies... Encourage children to do try these steps when stress is starting to rise and to use as much movement as they need.

Its more effective to do this one together.

- Take all the play-doh out of the container.
- Say "Rip!" as you rip the piece into two. Say it loud if you like.
- Put the pieces back together on the table in front of you and say "Squish!" as you flatten it on the table with your hand
- Make a ball with the squished play-doh and put it in your palm with your fingers spread apart. Then squeeze the play-doh in your fist and say "Spaghetti!"
- Repeat 3 to 5 times or more.

Think, talk or draw how you felt before "RIP, SQUISH, SPAGHETTI" and how you feel after. You might want to try using the thermometer too.

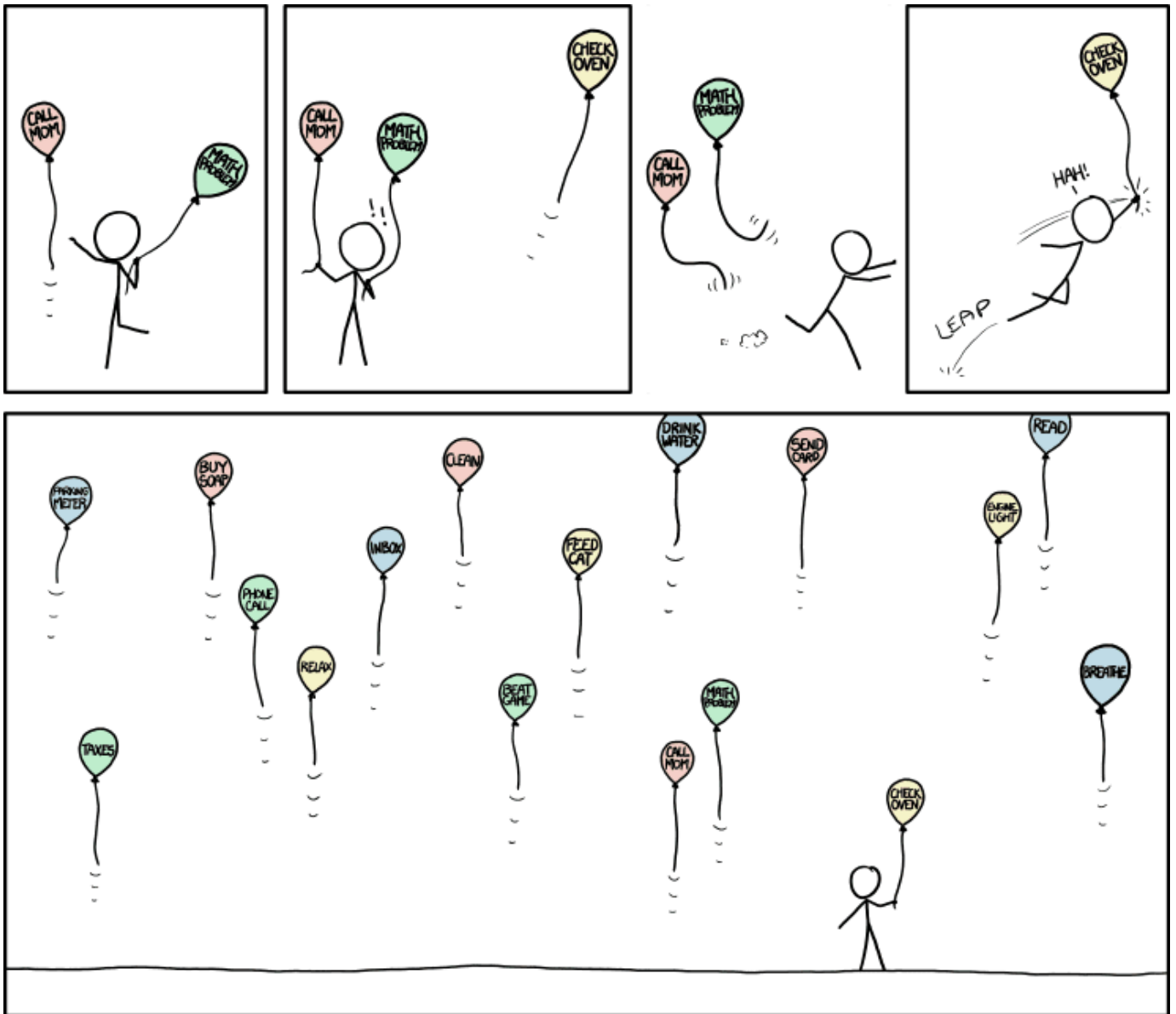


Useful Links:

TED Talk - How Your "Working Memory" Makes Sense of The World (9 Minutes) In this funny, enlightening talk, educational psychologist Peter Doolittle details the importance -- and limitations -- of your "working memory," that part of the brain that allows us to make sense of what's happening right now.

Alberta Health Services - Mobile Tools to Promote Mental Wellness Mobile mental health supports to cope with COVID-related stress and anxiety.

Alberta Health Services - Help in Tough Times Comprehensive list of social, community, mental health, and financial supports available through Alberta.



A Note For Parents

We want to hear from you. Changes, even good ones can be stressful. These have been weeks full of change and we worry about how to best support families as you navigate all the new routes you are taking as a family. What topics would you like to hear more about?