

“Memory Boosters: Strengthening Working Memory” (CBT, Executive Functioning Coaching, Mindfulness, Play-Based Learning)

Objective:

Support clients in understanding and practicing skills to improve **working memory**—the ability to hold and use information in the short term during tasks, conversations, or problem-solving.

Introduction (5 minutes)

Therapist Prompt:

“Let’s try a fun challenge! I’m going to say 5 things—see if you can remember them and say them back to me in order.”

(Use a list like: “apple, shoe, rainbow, train, pencil.”)

Let them try, then say:

“What you just used is called your *working memory*! It’s like a mental backpack that holds info just long enough to use it.”

Psychoeducation (10–12 minutes)

Therapist Script:

“Working memory helps us follow directions, stay focused, and solve problems. It’s what lets you hear something—like ‘go upstairs, grab your shoes, and feed the cat’—and actually *do* all three things.”

Break it down:

- It’s different from long-term memory.
- It can get overloaded—especially when we’re stressed or distracted.
- It’s something we can strengthen with practice—like a muscle!

Use metaphors kids/teens can relate to:

- A backpack (too full and things fall out)
- A sticky note (but the wind can blow it away if we’re distracted)

Normalize:

“Everyone drops the ball sometimes—especially when our brains are tired. That’s totally okay!”

Skill Building Activity (15–18 minutes)

Activity Title: “Repeat, Picture, Chunk!”

Teach and practice 3 quick strategies to boost working memory:

1. **Repeat:** Say it out loud (or silently) to remember.
2. **Picture:** Turn it into a visual in your mind.
3. **Chunk:** Break it into smaller parts (e.g., 2 + 2 instead of 4 steps at once).

Game: Give a series of 3–5 instructions or steps. Let the client try all three techniques, then complete the task.

Example: “Pick up the red marker, clap twice, and spin in a circle.”
Let them try repeating, picturing, and chunking the instructions first.

Add visuals or drawings if needed to support different learning styles.

Reflection and Discussion (5 minutes)

- “Which strategy helped you the most—repeat, picture, or chunk?”
 - “When do you notice your memory getting ‘too full’?”
 - “How can these tools help with school, chores, or remembering what friends say?”
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Homework Options

1. Memory Game Challenge

Play a memory game with a friend or family member. Write down or draw what you used to remember things.

2. **3-Step Tracker**

Try remembering a 3-step task each day this week (e.g., “brush teeth, put on socks, feed pet”) and track your success.

3. **Draw Your Memory Backpack**

Imagine your working memory as a backpack. Draw what it looks like when it's organized vs. when it's full and spilling over.

Worksheet: Memory Boosters – Strengthening Working Memory

Instructions: Use this worksheet to try out strategies for improving your working memory. You'll practice Repeat, Picture, and Chunk techniques and reflect on which ones help the most.

- Repeat: Ask someone to give you a 3-step direction. Say it out loud twice, then try to do it from memory.
- Picture: Imagine a funny or colorful picture in your mind for each step of a direction. What did you imagine?
- Chunk: Take a 4-step instruction and break it into 2 smaller parts. How did that help?
- Draw your 'Memory Backpack.' What's inside when it's organized? What happens when it's overloaded?
- Bonus: Write down a real-life moment this week where you forgot something. What might help next time?