



A Simple Toolkit for Executive Function Resilience

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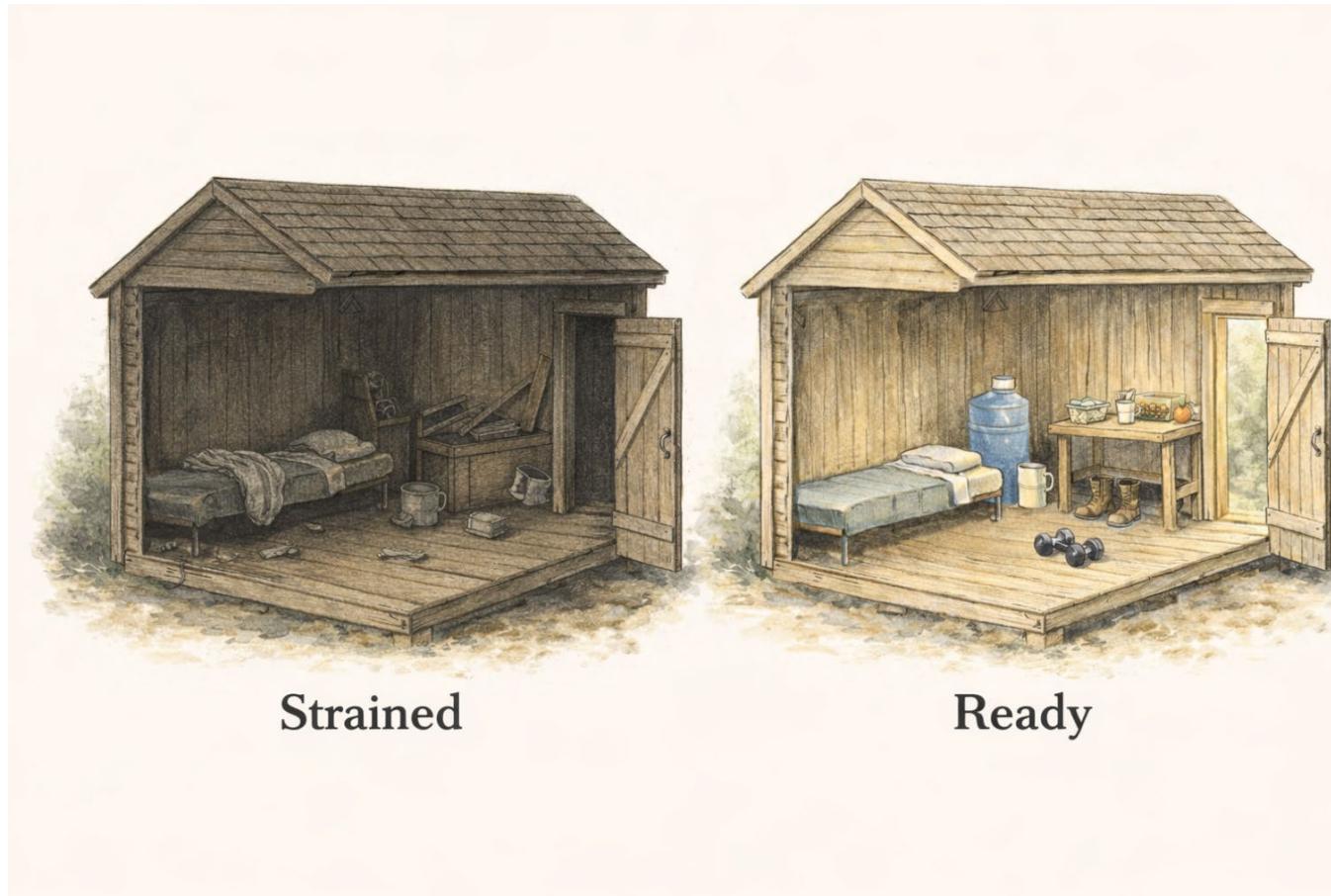
Objective 3: "Develop a simple, actionable toolkit to support executive function resilience in others or themselves"



“Start with SHED: Sleep, Hydration, Exercise, and Diet.” – Dr. Jim Russell

When SHED is strained:

- Attention becomes less stable
- Emotional reactivity rises
- Working memory is less reliable
- Task initiation gets harder



Order of Operations

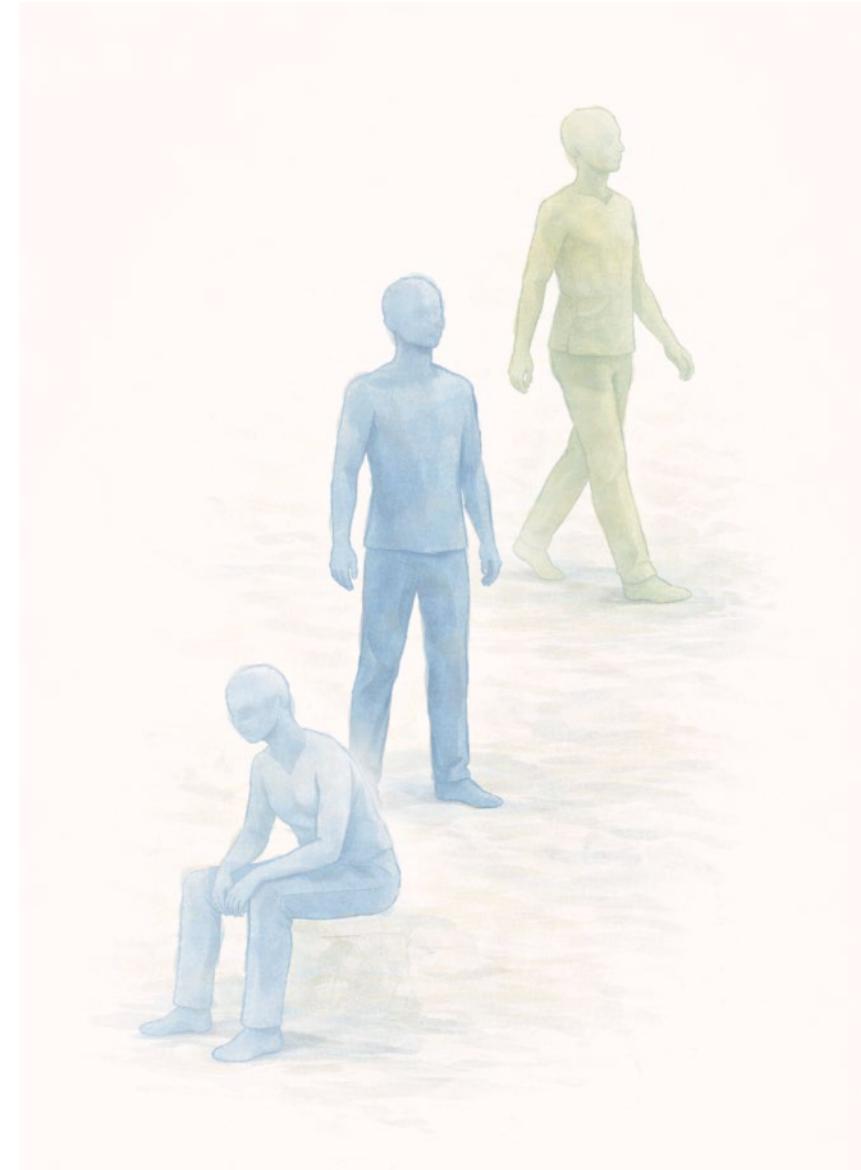
- **State:** Is the nervous system flooded or steady?
- **Start:** Is the first step small enough to begin?
- **Structure:** Is the environment doing its share of the work?



State Shift: Regulate first when emotion is high or hot.

You cannot coach, teach, or reason your way out of a flooded state. Instead try a 60–90 second state shift:

- **Move:** stand, walk, stretch, change posture
- **Exhale:** three slow exhales
- **Name it:** “This feels overwhelming / frustrating / urgent”
- **Choose:** “Two-minute start or help picking the first step?”
- **Result:** less conflict, faster re-entry, better decision-making.



The Start Rule:

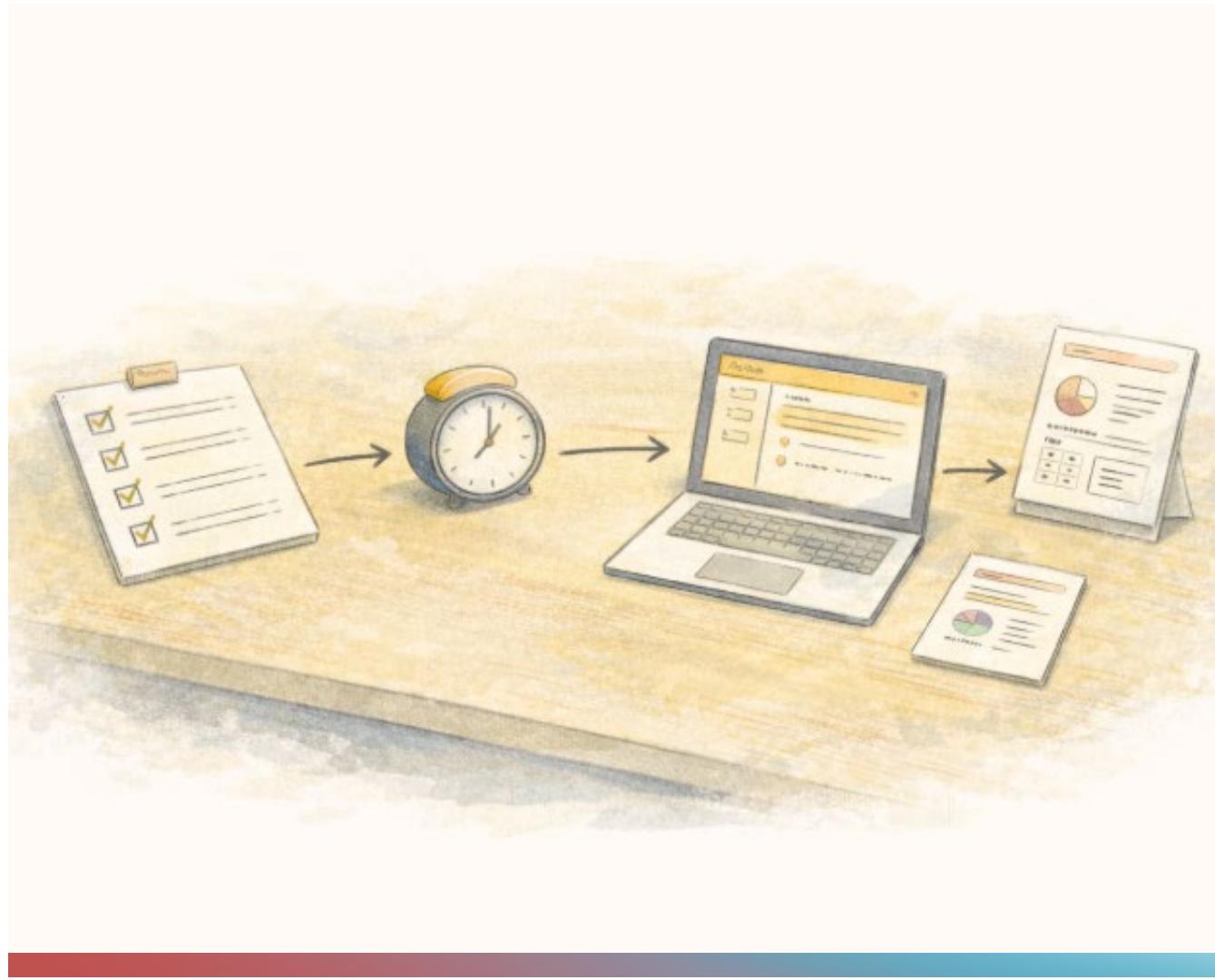
If you can't start, the first step is too big

Replace vague goals with a next physical action that takes two minutes or less.

Examples:

- “Write the paper”
→ “Open the doc and write the title”
- “Clean the room”
→ “Put all trash in one bag”





Externalize Working Memory:

If it matters, it should be visible.

Externalize with:

- a short checklist (3–7 steps)
- a timer (10–25 minutes)
- a template (starter structure)
- an example (model of “done”)
- visual steps (one page, one screen)



Reduce Friction

Default settings beat willpower. If inhibition is strained, environment matters more than intention.

Environmental optimization options:

- lower noise
- remove the phone or put it in another room
- materials staged in advance and clutter out of the way

First / Then

Structure motivation with short cycles

Formula:

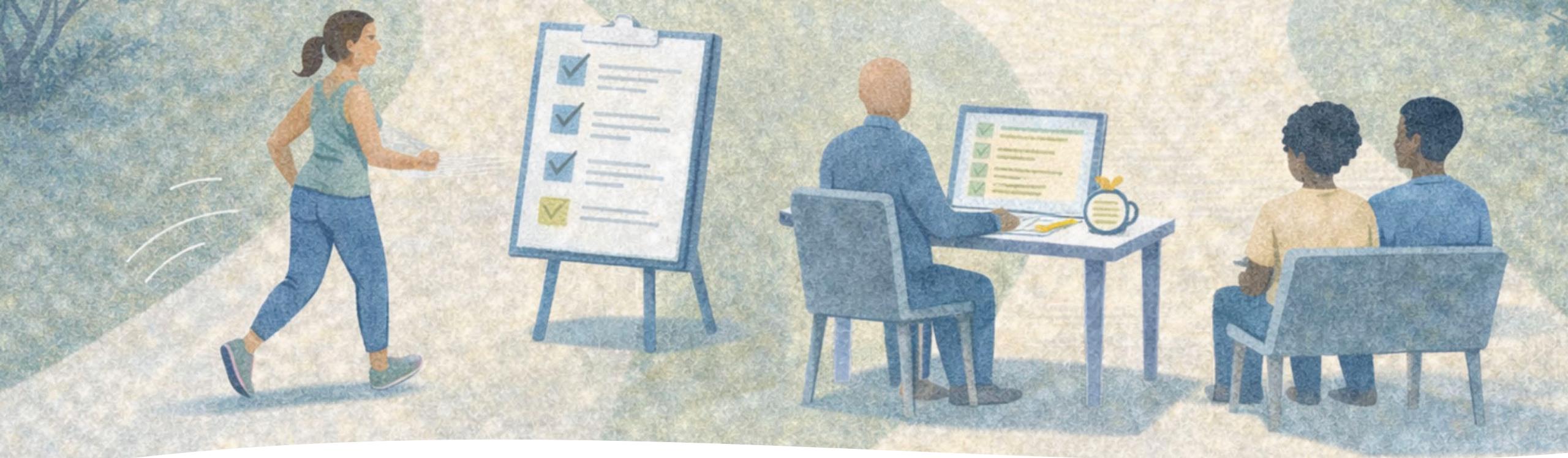
- **First:** 10 minutes of the task
- **Then:** 3 minutes of a small reward

Repeat 2–4 cycles.

What makes it work:

- rewards are immediate and predictable
- the first work block is short
- the “then” is real, not vague
- you stop while it’s still doable





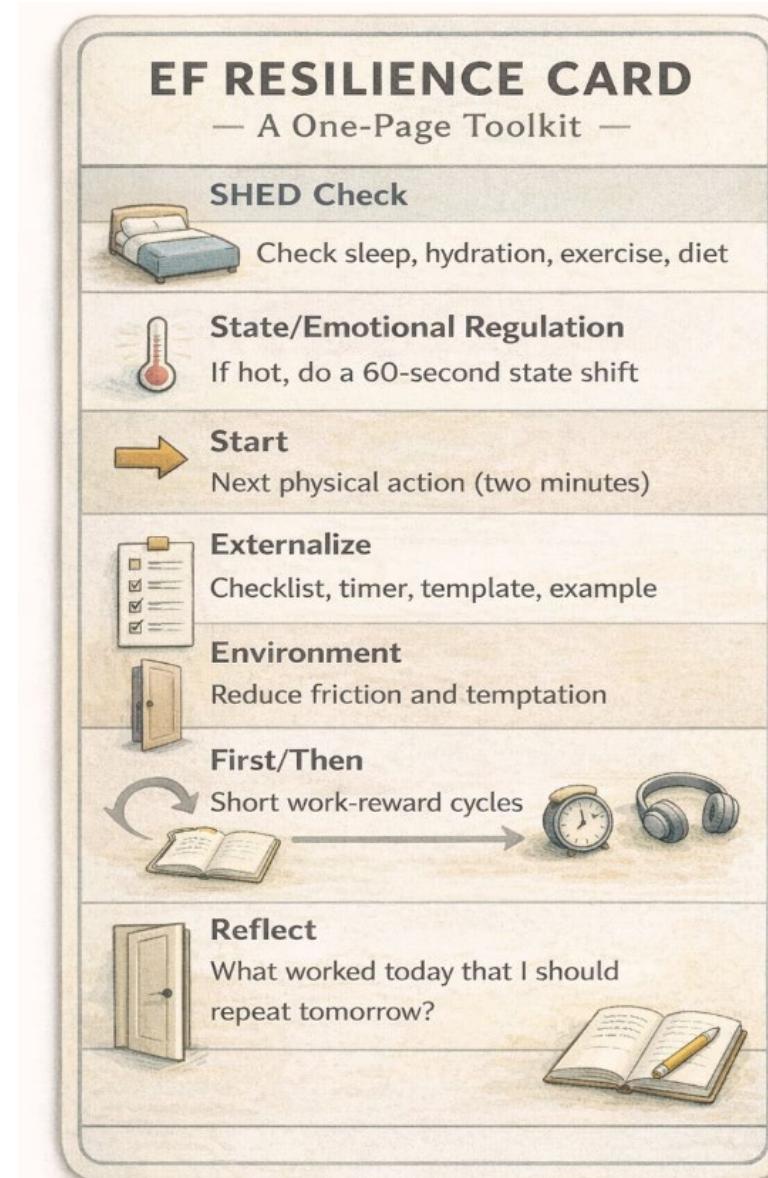
Strengths-Based Personalization

Same goal, different path

The toolkit should fit the person. Reflect on what works and choose a few supports to use regularly:

- Movement
- Visual
- Routine
- Social

Summary: Executive Function Resilience



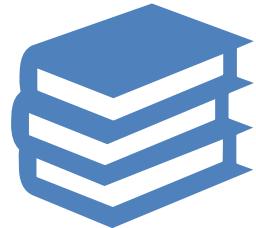
Thank you for being here today.

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References

Blake, K., Russell, J., & Braun,
J. (unpublished manuscript).
*Unlocking your executive
potential.*

