

The CSO Framework™

Capacity, Skill & Ownership

By Amee Hardy, LCPC

A developmental framework for sustainable independence in neurodivergent emerging adults.

Support matches usable capacity — not potential.

We assess where capacity breaks down, explicitly teach the missing skill, and gradually transfer ownership of that skill until independence is stable and self-sustaining.

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The CSO Framework™ is the original work of Amee Hardy, LCPC. Its architecture — the three-layer integration of *Capacity, Skill, and Ownership*, the fourteen assessable Skill domains organized into Executive and Wellness groups, the four-stage Ownership arc (*Activate, Stabilize, Empower, Sustain*), the per-domain Capacity Question, and the titration logic that governs movement across all three layers — was developed by the author through direct clinical practice with neurodivergent young adults and emerging adults, including the residents of Gemba Boise, an apartment-model transitional living program in Boise, Idaho. The Framework was articulated, named, and formalized for documentation and training use in 2025 and 2026, building on more than twenty years of the author's clinical practice as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor with neurodivergent adolescents, young adults, and their families across multiple clinical and residential settings. The architecture is the author's original synthesis, developed inductively from clinical observation rather than derived from any single prior model. Established bodies of literature whose conclusions converge with the Framework's claims are acknowledged in *Theoretical Convergences* and *Theoretical Influences*.

Neurodivergent emerging adults occupy a developmental space that existing frameworks are poorly equipped to address. The period between late adolescence and full adult independence, what Arnett (2000) termed emerging adulthood, is characterized by structural instability, identity exploration, and demands for autonomous functioning that frequently exceed the executive capacity of individuals whose neurological profiles were not well-served by the scaffolded environments of school and home. When those structures are removed, the result is rarely a smooth transition to independence. It is most often collapse.

The CSO Framework™ (*Capacity, Skill & Ownership*) was developed in response to a convergence of clinical problems: clients leaving structured treatment settings without the internal architecture to sustain functioning; coaches and support workers defaulting to deficit-based explanations for behavior that was better understood as a problem of access; and the absence of a framework that treated skill development and ownership transfer as

distinct, assessable, and sequentially related processes. The Framework is practice-derived, refined through direct clinical application with neurodivergent young adults in an apartment-model transitional living program, and designed for adoption by coaches, clinicians, and interdisciplinary support teams.

The CSO Framework™ is built on a single architectural insight: independence is not one thing. It is the convergence of three distinct layers — Capacity, Skill, and Ownership — and a person is independent only when all three are present. Capacity is whether access to the executive system is available. Skill is what the person can actually do across fourteen assessable domains. Ownership is who is holding the function. None of the three substitutes for the others. A person with capacity but no skill cannot function. A person with skill but no capacity cannot access what they know. A person with both, but no ownership, depends on someone else to hold the structure for them. The Framework's job is to assess each layer separately and build all three until they hold together.

Capacity fluctuation and ownership.

The CSO Framework™ assumes that capacity is dynamic rather than fixed. Nervous system regulation, cognitive bandwidth, emotional load, and environmental stressors fluctuate daily and across contexts. Independence therefore requires more than skill acquisition. It requires the development of self-awareness around capacity, the ability to recognize when capacity is high, limited, or depleted, and the ability to adjust effort, expectations, and recovery strategies accordingly.

Ownership transfer within the CSO Framework™ ultimately means that the young adult becomes the primary manager of their own capacity: noticing when to engage, when to scale effort, when to deploy supports, and when recovery is required to prevent burnout.

The three-layer architecture.

The CSO Framework™ rests on three layers that together describe what sustainable independence requires. Each layer stands alone. None substitutes for the others. Independence emerges only when all three are present and aligned.

Capacity.

Capacity is whether access to the executive and regulatory system is available right now. It is the upstream question that determines whether anything else is possible. Capacity is shaped by nervous system regulation, cognitive bandwidth, emotional load, sleep, sensory environment, and the cumulative depletion of masking, transitions, and unmet needs. It fluctuates daily, sometimes hourly. A person with strong skills and clear ownership cannot perform either when capacity is unavailable, and a coach who places demands on a system without available capacity will produce shutdown, not growth.

Capacity is assessed first because everything else depends on it. The first clinical question in the CSO Framework™ is not *what does this person know how to do, or who is responsible for it*. It is *whether the system is currently in a state that supports learning, performing, or owning anything at all*.

Skill.

Skill is what the person can actually do across the fourteen assessable domains of the Framework. Skill is the doing layer — the knowledge, practice, and applied competence that makes daily functioning possible. The fourteen domains are organized into two groups for clarity in assessment and teaching, but both groups sit within the same Skill layer and are assessed using the same architecture.

The Executive Skills group contains six domains: Activation Capacity, Time Orientation, Adaptive Bandwidth, Externalized Cognition, System Durability, and Regulatory Capacity. The Wellness Skills group contains eight domains: Emotional, Social, Occupational, Financial, Physical, Intellectual, Spiritual, and Environmental Wellness. Together they describe the full skill inventory required for adult life. A person may hold strong skill in some domains and underdeveloped skill in others; the Framework assesses each domain independently and tracks growth domain by domain.

Ownership.

Ownership is who is currently holding the function. It is the responsibility layer. A skill that exists only when a coach or family member is present has not yet been owned by the client; it lives in the relationship rather than in the person. Ownership is tracked across a four-stage arc — Activate, Stabilize, Empower, Sustain — that describes the gradual transfer of a function from external scaffold to internal practice.

Ownership is assessed independently from skill because the two can diverge in meaningful ways. A client may know how to do something but not yet hold it; another may have claimed full responsibility for a function they have not yet built the skill to execute. Both situations call for clinically distinct responses.

All three are required.

Independence is not produced by any single layer. It is produced by the alignment of all three.

- **Capacity without skill** is potential without execution. The system can support functioning, but the functioning has not been built.
- **Skill without capacity** is competence without access. The person knows how, but the system is not currently available to do.
- **Skill and capacity without ownership** is a borrowed life. The functioning is held by someone else, and disappears when they do.
- **Ownership without skill or capacity** is responsibility without resources. The person carries the weight without the means to hold it, which produces collapse, not independence.

How the three layers are assessed.

Each of the fourteen Skill domains in the Framework is assessed across all three layers. For every domain, the practitioner asks three distinct questions:

- **Capacity question:** Is access available to the underlying system this skill depends on?
- **Skill level:** Is the skill itself absent, inconsistent, reliable under low stress, or stable across contexts and stress?

- **Ownership stage:** Is the function currently held by the coach, co-held, client-led with support, or independently sustained?

These three readings are recorded separately. They are not averaged. A client may rate at high capacity, low skill, and Activate ownership in one domain, and at variable capacity, high skill, and Empower ownership in another. The Framework's clinical usefulness comes from preserving these distinctions, not collapsing them.

Theoretical convergences.

The CSO Framework™ was developed inductively from direct clinical practice with neurodivergent emerging adults. Its architecture — the three layers, the fourteen domains, the four-stage Ownership arc, and the titration logic that governs movement across them — was built from what the work itself required rather than assembled from existing models. Once the architecture was in place, a body of established literature came into focus as compatible, convergent, and corroborating. The frameworks discussed below are not the Framework's sources. They are the intellectual neighborhood in which the Framework operates, the prior work whose conclusions a practitioner using the Framework will recognize, and the literature that lends external validity to claims the Framework arrived at on its own terms.

Access, regulation, and the relational container.

The foundational reframe at the center of the CSO Framework™, that what looks like executive dysfunction is more accurately understood as a problem of access, was reached independently through clinical observation. Several established bodies of work converge on related ground.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012) reaches related conclusions from a different starting point. The CSO Framework™ treats tolerance for the discomfort of beginning as a teachable skill rather than a character trait, an insight built from watching the same activation pattern repeat across hundreds of sessions with neurodivergent young adults. ACT articulates a structurally compatible position through psychological flexibility, experiential willingness, and values-based action. Where ACT generally addresses the universal human relationship to discomfort, the Framework addresses the specific activation arithmetic of nervous systems that have learned, with good reason, to avoid the threshold because crossing it has historically been painful, effortful, or humiliating. Practitioners with ACT training will find familiar territory in several of the Skill domains; the Framework does not require that training, and it is not an application of ACT.

The relational stance the CSO Framework™ requires — that the coaching relationship is not incidental to the intervention but is the intervention's precondition — was arrived at clinically and is widely supported in the broader literature on therapeutic relationship. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) describes the secure relational base from which a person can tolerate the discomfort of beginning, the frustration of failure, and the vulnerability of being seen not-yet-capable. Rogers (1961) describes unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding, and congruence as conditions for change. Both bodies of work corroborate what the Framework treats as an operating condition: a client who is being evaluated, managed, or subtly shamed is a client whose nervous system is not in a state that supports learning or risk-taking. The relational container determines whether transfer is possible at all.

Graduated transfer and the costs of accommodation.

The Ownership layer's four-stage arc, *Activate to Stabilize to Empower to Sustain*, was developed to describe what is actually observed in coaching neurodivergent young adults: the gradual transfer of a function from external scaffold to internal practice, paced by capacity rather than by the calendar. Practitioners with leadership-development backgrounds will recognize that other staged models of graduated responsibility exist in adjacent literature, most notably Situational Leadership® II (Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Zigarmi, 1985), which describes leadership effectiveness as a function of matching direction and support to developmental level. The CSO Framework™ acknowledges this analog and is not derived from it. The stages, their definitions, the domain-specific assessment that drives movement between them, and the titration logic that governs that movement are the Framework's own architecture, built for the developmental task of transferring ownership of executive and wellness functions rather than directing performance within an organizational hierarchy.

The titration principle at the core of the Ownership layer, that structure and ownership exist in inverse relationship, and that the practitioner's job is to transfer support rather than maintain it, addresses a pattern observed repeatedly in clinical work: well-intentioned scaffolding, held too long, becomes the obstacle to the very capacity it was meant to protect. Eli Lebowitz's SPACE Framework (Lebowitz, 2021) reaches a structurally compatible conclusion from a different population and a different clinical question, describing how family accommodation, the natural impulse to reduce a child's distress by taking over what they cannot yet do reliably, can inhibit the development of the capacity it is designed to protect. SPACE is a treatment protocol for childhood anxiety delivered through parents. The CSO Framework™ is a coaching architecture for emerging adults delivered directly to the client. The two arrive independently at the same insight about the developmental cost of over-scaffolding, which strengthens the clinical confidence with which the titration principle can be held.

The Framework's position that ownership cannot be assigned, only chosen, and that a function received under external pressure does not survive the removal of that pressure, is consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the conditions under which behavior becomes self-sustaining. SDT offers a well-established motivational psychology that corroborates the Framework's practice-derived insistence on chosen rather than assigned responsibility, and supports the Framework's broader equity stance: ownership transfer is invitational, paced by the client, and requires conditions the practitioner cannot manufacture but can deliberately create.

Social cognition, perspective-taking, and practitioner orientation.

The CSO Framework™ treats the hidden curriculum, the implicit social, civic, and relational rules that neurotypical individuals tend to acquire incidentally and neurodivergent individuals frequently do not, as a teachable Skill domain rather than a deficit to be diagnosed. Hidden curriculum gaps surface across several domains, particularly Social, Occupational, and Financial Wellness. Several established bodies of work in autism education and practitioner orientation operate in this territory and are recognized here as convergent.

Social Thinking®, developed by Michelle Garcia Winner (2007), is a well-established curriculum for teaching the implicit social rules that constitute much of the hidden curriculum. It overlaps in concern with the Framework's Social Wellness domain, particularly around interpersonal nuance, perspective-taking, and the

social reasoning required for context-appropriate behavior. The CSO Framework™ extends the hidden curriculum frame beyond interpersonal social rules to include the broader adult civic and financial literacy gaps that surface in Occupational and Financial Wellness: understanding how taxes work, what a lease obligates, how professional relationships differ from personal ones. The Framework does not adopt Social Thinking® methodology, and is not a derivative of it. Practitioners trained in Social Thinking® will recognize compatible terrain in Domain 8; the Framework’s structure does not depend on that training.

Autism Goggles, developed by Daniel Share-Strom and Maxine Share (n.d.), articulates a perspective-taking orientation in which practitioners are invited to inhabit the experiential world of the person they are supporting, understanding behavior from the inside rather than evaluating it from the outside. This stance is fully consistent with the coaching posture the CSO Framework™ requires, and Autism Goggles offers practitioners a concise vocabulary for it. A practitioner who has done that perspective-taking work is less likely to interpret shutdown as defiance, script-following as deception, or social withdrawal as disinterest, and more likely to ask the access question that the Capacity layer is built around.

The Arbinger Institute’s work on Outward Mindset (Arbinger Institute, 2016) offers an adjacent vocabulary for a distinction the Framework treats as central to coaching stance: whether the practitioner is operating from a stance that sees the client as a person with their own legitimate needs and inner reality, or from a stance that has subtly shifted, under pressure or familiarity, to seeing them as an object — a problem to manage, a vehicle for outcomes, or an obstacle to progress. The Framework holds this distinction as a clinical requirement rather than a values statement. Arbinger’s framework provides language and structure for recognizing when the shift has occurred and for returning to the stance the Framework’s relational container depends on.

Wellness as a whole-person frame.

The wellness dimensions named in the Wellness Skills group correspond to the multidimensional wellness construct established in health promotion and counseling literature by Hettler (1976) and elaborated by subsequent expansions, most notably the eight-dimension model articulated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2016), which adds Occupational, Financial, and Environmental dimensions to Hettler’s original six. The Framework’s contribution at the Wellness layer is not a new taxonomy of dimensions. It is the structural decision to treat each dimension not as a static state to be measured but as a Skill domain assessed using the same three-layer architecture as the Executive Skills group: capacity, skill level, and ownership stage, tracked domain by domain. Existing wellness frameworks describe what a healthy adult life looks like; they offer limited guidance on how to build one when capacity is unevenly available. The CSO Framework™ supplies that bridge.

In practice, this means wellness goals within the Framework are anchored to assessable skill, ownership is tracked stage by stage, and capacity fluctuation is built into the model rather than treated as failure to comply.

The fourteen domains.

The Skill layer of the CSO Framework™ contains fourteen assessable domains organized into two groups. Both groups sit within the Skill layer. They are not a hierarchy. The grouping exists for clarity in assessment, teaching, and curriculum design — coaches working on activation strategies and coaches working on emotional

regulation are doing recognizably different work, and the grouping reflects that. But both are skill development, both follow the same three-layer assessment, and a resident's growth is tracked across the full inventory.

Executive Skills (Domains 1–6).

The Executive Skills group describes the skills required to *run the underlying machinery* of daily functioning: starting tasks, anticipating time, managing depletion, offloading working memory, restarting after disruption, and regulating the nervous system. These are the skills that determine whether a person can do anything reliably.

Wellness Skills (Domains 7–14).

The Wellness Skills group describes the skills required to *build a life worth running the machinery for*: emotional self-knowledge, relational connection, vocational engagement, financial competence, physical self-care, intellectual engagement, meaning-making, and environmental self-management. These are the skills that determine whether daily functioning adds up to a life the person actually wants.

A resident's profile across the fourteen domains will not be uniform. A young adult may rate at Sustain in several executive domains while remaining at Activate in Spiritual or Occupational Wellness, or the reverse. Both readings are clinically meaningful. The Framework treats unevenness as expected, not as a problem to be averaged out. Assessment is always domain-specific.

Executive Skills.

Six domains describing the skills required to run the underlying machinery of daily functioning. Each domain is assessed independently across capacity, skill, and ownership.

Activation Capacity

Can this person initiate action when capacity is available?

- Identifies a concrete first step for a multi-stage task without coaching prompt
- Tolerates the discomfort of beginning without requiring full clarity first
- Deliberately lowers the initiation threshold (reduces scope, shortens duration)
- Initiates within a self-defined window rather than waiting for an external prompt
- Task chunking and first-step scripting
- Threshold-lowering practice: start smaller than planned
- 60-second activation drills
- Building tolerance for the discomfort of beginning
- Environmental trigger design: cues that initiate action without internal effort

Coach defines the first step, provides the initiation cue, and uses body doubling or check-in to support task start.

Client participates in first-step identification; coach validates. Client experiments with threshold-lowering independently between sessions.

Client scripts their own first steps and selects activation strategies. Coach consults on refinement and holds accountability without stepping in.

Client independently designs initiation systems, adjusts when they break down, and initiates within self-defined timelines.

Time Orientation

Can this person connect present behavior to future consequence?

- Backward-plans from a deadline to identify a realistic start date
- Accurately estimates departure times when given a target arrival
- Identifies realistic time costs for multi-step tasks before beginning
- Describes future consequences with emotional weight, not only cognitive awareness
- Reverse planning templates: deadline to milestones to start date
- Time estimation practice with structured debrief
- Calendar rehearsal and departure planning sessions
- Future-self visualization and values connection exercises
- Time-cost tracking: recording actual vs. estimated duration over time

Coach manages the calendar, sets reminders, and structures departure planning within sessions on behalf of the client.

Client maintains their own calendar with coaching review. Client practices time estimation and debriefs gaps with coach support.

Client forecasts deadlines and plans backwards independently. Coach reviews for patterns and supports calibration rather than correction.

Client independently anchors present behavior to future consequence, adjusts plans in real time, and manages time without external scaffolding.

Adaptive Bandwidth

Can this person manage transition load and cognitive depletion?

- Recognizes personal depletion signals before full breakdown occurs
- Estimates the cognitive cost of a planned task switch with reasonable accuracy
- Builds buffer time into schedules without coaching prompt
- Recovers from unplanned transitions without extended disruption to functioning
- Depletion signal mapping: identifying personal early warning signs
- Transition rituals that reduce cognitive switch cost
- Buffer scheduling practice integrated into weekly planning

- Energy load sequencing: placing high-demand tasks before depletion windows
- Social and sensory pacing skills for high-stimulation environments

Coach structures the schedule to protect bandwidth, identifies depletion signals, and builds transitions and buffers on behalf of the client.

Client tracks their own depletion patterns. Coach and client co-design buffers. Client experiments with transition rituals between sessions.

Client designs their own bandwidth-aware schedule. Coach reviews and offers perspective. Client self-adjusts when depletion is recognized.

Client independently maps energy load, maintains proactive buffers, and adjusts schedule in real time in response to depletion.

Externalized Cognition

Is working memory being offloaded effectively to the environment?

- Consistently externalizes multi-step tasks before beginning, without prompting
- Maintains and uses checklists or task boards as a matter of practice
- Keeps visible next steps accessible without relying on memory to hold them
- Recognizes when cognitive stacking is occurring and offloads proactively
- Environmental design and visible task board construction
- One-step task sequencing practice
- Written instruction protocol development for recurring tasks
- Cognitive stacking audits: identifying where overload is building
- Reducing reliance on mental tracking through system design

Coach maintains tracking systems, writes session plans and next steps, and manages the full external record of client commitments.

Client begins contributing to and maintaining shared systems. Coach reviews for gaps. Client experiments with personal externalization tools.

Client builds and maintains their own externalization systems. Coach consults on design rather than managing content. Client identifies and fills their own gaps.

Client independently designs, builds, and maintains externalization systems. Environmental scaffolding is chosen and managed entirely by the client.

System Durability

Do this person's systems survive stress and disruption?

- Restarts a lapsed system within 24–48 hours without coaching prompt

- Designs systems at minimum viable complexity rather than aspirational complexity
- Distinguishes between a system failure and a temporary disruption
- Has a defined re-entry protocol and applies it after a breakdown
- Restart protocol design: explicit steps for re-entry after a miss
- 80% rule training: effective enough reliably beats perfect inconsistently
- Simplification audits of existing systems
- Disruption planning: identifying likely breakdown scenarios in advance
- Reset routines that lower the barrier to re-engagement

Coach prompts all system restarts, simplifies systems on behalf of the client, and normalizes breakdown as part of the process rather than evidence of failure.

Client and coach co-design restart protocols. Client begins applying re-entry steps with coaching check-in. Debrief replaces stepping in.

Client independently applies restart protocols after breakdown. Coach monitors patterns and supports refinement. Deferred support is intentional to build re-entry confidence.

Client self-corrects after system breakdowns without coaching input, maintains minimum viable systems under stress, and adapts re-entry strategies to context.

Regulatory Capacity

Does current nervous system regulation support the demands being placed on it?

- Identifies their current nervous system state with reasonable accuracy
- Knows at least three regulation tools and selects appropriately by context
- Scales expectations or task demands in response to recognized depletion
- Differentiates between avoidance and genuine capacity limitation in the moment
- Nervous system state identification: building a personal capacity vocabulary
- Regulation tool repertoire development and context-matched selection
- 10% day protocol: defining minimum viable functioning for low-capacity days
- Capacity rating scales used before and after sessions
- Distinguishing recovery from inertia: when to pace vs. when to re-engage

Coach assesses capacity before placing demands, adjusts session expectations in real time, and co-regulates when the client is dysregulated.

Client begins rating their own capacity at session start. Coach and client calibrate session demands together. Client experiments with regulation tools between sessions.

Client independently identifies state and selects regulation strategies. Coach reflects and consults rather than adjusting. Client leads expectation calibration.

Client self-regulates, scales demands in response to capacity, and applies the 10% day protocol without coaching input. Regulation is self-held and strategically used.

Wellness Skills.

Eight domains describing the skills required to build a life worth running the machinery for. Each domain is assessed independently across capacity, skill, and ownership using the same architecture as the Executive Skills group.

Emotional Wellness

Can this person identify, process, and recover from emotional experience without losing access to functioning?

- Names current emotional state with specificity beyond “good” or “bad”
- Identifies the precipitant of an emotional shift when prompted to reflect
- Selects coping strategies matched to intensity and context
- Recovers from emotional disruption without extended functional collapse
- Seeks support intentionally when self-soothing is not sufficient
- Emotional vocabulary expansion and granularity practice
- Distress tolerance skill-building (drawn from DBT and ACT)
- Coping strategy repertoire development with context tagging
- Recovery time tracking: how long before re-engagement after disruption
- Differentiating emotion suppression from emotional regulation

Coach holds emotional containment, names what they are observing, and provides co-regulation. Client may be unable to identify or process emotions independently.

Client identifies emotions with coaching support. Coping strategies are inconsistent. Client recovers with structured support and reflection.

Client manages most emotional responses independently and selects coping strategies in real time. Client seeks support when needed without coaching prompt.

Client sustains emotional balance across stressors, copes effectively with life demands, and creates satisfying relationships informed by emotional self-knowledge.

Social Wellness

Can this person build and maintain reciprocal relationships that meet their needs and reflect their values?

- Identifies people in their support system and the function each person serves
- Initiates contact with chosen connections at a sustainable cadence

- Calibrates self-disclosure appropriately to relationship type and depth
- Repairs relational ruptures rather than withdrawing or escalating
- Recognizes and responds to others' needs as part of reciprocal connection
- Support system mapping: who, what function, what cadence
- Social Thinking® concepts for hidden curriculum and perspective-taking
- Initiation practice with structured low-stakes contact opportunities
- Reciprocity tracking: noticing balance of giving and receiving
- Repair protocol development for low-stakes relational ruptures

Coach scaffolds social connection through structured opportunities and explicit instruction. Client may be socially withdrawn or without an identified support system.

Client engages in emerging connections with coaching support. Support system is forming. Social skills are inconsistent across contexts.

Client maintains meaningful relationships independently. Reciprocal support is present. Client identifies and works on relational growth edges.

Client holds a strong support network, contributes to community, and sustains a developed sense of belonging and connection.

Occupational Wellness

Is this person engaged in work, study, or vocational activity that aligns with their strengths and values?

- Identifies personal strengths and how they map onto vocational options
- Articulates what they want from work beyond income
- Maintains stable participation in chosen vocational activity
- Recognizes signs of burnout and adjusts engagement before collapse
- Connects daily work tasks to longer-term vocational direction
- Strengths identification through structured inventories and reflection
- Values clarification specific to work and vocational identity
- Vocational exploration: informational interviews, shadowing, trial engagement
- Workplace executive function strategies: task management, communication norms
- Sustainable engagement planning: pacing, recovery, and burnout prevention at work

Coach holds vocational exploration, identifies possible directions, and structures low-demand engagement. Client may be unable to identify strengths or sustain engagement.

Client explores vocational options with coaching scaffolding. Performance is inconsistent and motivation fluctuates. Strengths are emerging but not yet stable.

Client finds satisfaction in work or school, identifies vocational strengths, and maintains stable participation with periodic coaching consultation.

Client derives meaningful satisfaction from work, holds a role aligned with values, and sustains enriching engagement across capacity fluctuations.

Financial Wellness

Can this person manage the financial systems required to sustain independent adult life?

- Tracks income and expenses across a defined period without prompting
- Meets recurring financial obligations on time without external reminders
- Distinguishes needs, wants, and obligations in spending decisions
- Maintains financial systems that survive disruption and capacity dips
- Plans for future financial goals with realistic timelines and steps
- Budgeting structure design at minimum viable complexity
- Bill management system construction and externalization
- Banking literacy: accounts, transfers, statements, dispute processes
- Tax basics and recordkeeping appropriate to income type
- Future-goal financial planning anchored to realistic timelines

Coach manages financial tracking, builds systems, and supports decision-making. Client may have no awareness of finances or rely fully on others for financial decisions.

Basic awareness is emerging. Budgeting is inconsistent. Client needs coaching to manage finances and may rely on shared systems with coach or family.

Client tracks income and expenses, meets obligations, and develops financial plans with periodic coaching consultation rather than direction.

Client manages finances independently, plans for future goals, and is satisfied with their financial situation across variable income or expense conditions.

Physical Wellness

Is this person consistently meeting their body's needs for sleep, nutrition, movement, and medical care?

- Maintains a sleep pattern that supports daytime functioning
- Eats with consistency and adequacy, accounting for sensory and capacity factors
- Engages in movement that fits their body, preferences, and life context
- Manages medical appointments, medications, and symptoms proactively
- Recognizes the bidirectional link between physical state and executive capacity
- Sleep hygiene routines designed around individual chronotype and sensory profile

- Sustainable nutrition planning that accounts for ARFID, sensory needs, and capacity
- Movement integration matched to interests rather than prescribed exercise
- Medical self-management: appointment scheduling, medication systems, symptom tracking
- Physical-cognitive feedback loops: noticing how the body affects access

Coach scaffolds physical routines, prompts hygiene and meals, and manages medical logistics. Client may be neglecting physical needs or severely dysregulated.

Client is aware of physical needs but follow-through is limited. Some routines are forming with coaching support. Physical needs are inconsistently met.

Client maintains basic physical routines, recognizes needs for activity and nutrition, and manages most medical self-care with coaching consultation.

Client consistently meets physical wellness needs, is proactive about diet, sleep, and activity, and sustains healthy routines across capacity fluctuations.

Intellectual Wellness

Is this person engaged in learning, curiosity, or creative pursuit that expands rather than depletes them?

- Identifies personal areas of interest and intellectual curiosity
- Pursues learning in chosen domains beyond required engagement
- Applies skills and knowledge to new situations across contexts
- Recognizes and develops creative or expressive abilities
- Distinguishes intellectually energizing engagement from depleting performance
- Interest inventory and curiosity mapping
- Self-directed learning structure design at sustainable pace
- Creative practice scaffolding: lowering the barrier to expression
- Special interest integration as a capacity-building rather than restricted activity
- Differentiating learning for joy from learning for performance or compliance

Coach scaffolds intellectual engagement and identifies possible areas of curiosity. Client may avoid learning or challenge or be unable to identify interests or abilities.

Some curiosity is present. Client engages with support or prompting. Creative or intellectual strengths are emerging but not yet self-directed.

Client pursues learning in areas of interest independently, applies skills to new situations, and recognizes their own creative or intellectual abilities.

Client actively expands knowledge and skills, seeks intellectual enrichment proactively, and integrates learning into a sustained sense of self.

Spiritual Wellness

Does this person hold a sense of meaning, purpose, or values that organizes their daily life?

- Articulates personal values with specificity
- Connects daily actions to a longer-term sense of meaning or purpose
- Distinguishes externally imposed expectations from internally held values
- Returns to a values-anchored worldview after disruption or distress
- Engages with practices, communities, or frameworks that support meaning
- Values clarification using ACT-informed exercises and reflection
- Meaning-making narrative work: identifying a coherent personal story
- Differentiating values from rules, expectations, and obligations
- Practices that anchor values to daily action (rituals, reflection, community)
- Existential questions held with curiosity rather than resolved with certainty

Coach holds space for existential exploration without imposing direction. Client may experience no sense of purpose, existential confusion, or distress around meaning.

Client begins exploring values and meaning with coaching support. Purpose is unclear but curiosity is present. Reflection requires structured prompts.

Client identifies personal values, holds a growing sense of purpose, and connects meaning to daily actions with periodic coaching consultation.

Client lives in alignment with values, holds an expanded sense of purpose and meaning, and sustains a worldview that survives disruption.

Environmental Wellness

Does this person's physical environment support their capacity, regulation, and daily functioning?

- Maintains a living space that is safe, functional, and sensorily tolerable
- Recognizes how environmental conditions affect mood, regulation, and capacity
- Adjusts environment proactively to support upcoming demands
- Distinguishes aesthetic preference from functional need in environment design
- Sustains environmental order across capacity fluctuations
- Sensory profile mapping for environment design
- Minimum viable order: defining "functional enough" for individual baseline
- Environmental cue placement to support executive function
- Reset routines for re-establishing order after capacity dips
- Distinguishing environment as scaffolding from environment as performance

Coach scaffolds environmental management, prompts cleanup and organization, and helps simplify systems. Client may experience chaotic or unsafe living space.

Environment is inconsistently managed. Client is aware of the space's impact on functioning. Improvement efforts are emerging but not yet self-sustaining.

Client maintains organized, functional space, recognizes environment's impact on wellbeing, and engages in pleasant settings with periodic coaching consultation.

Client occupies a stimulating, supportive environment, proactively creates wellness-supporting spaces, and sustains environmental order independently.

Three-layer assessment architecture.

Each of the fourteen Skill domains is assessed independently across all three layers of the Framework. The table below summarizes the rating logic shared across every domain in both the Executive Skills and Wellness Skills groups.

#	Skill level	Ownership stage	Coaching stance	Titration
1	Skill absent or not yet emerging	Activate — Coach holds all structure	High structure, body doubling, reduced decision load	Increase scaffolding
2	Skill present but inconsistent	Stabilize — Co-owned between coach and client	Collaborative, barrier-focused, tolerance-building	Maintain structure; build consistency
3	Skill reliable under low stress	Empower — Client leads with coaching support	Reflective, deferred support, increased accountability	Reduce structure; increase ownership
4	Skill stable across contexts and stress	Sustain — Client holds independently	Consultation, strategic refinement, step-down	Step down; monitor for access fluctuations

Note. Capacity, skill level, and ownership stage are assessed independently, per domain. A client may rate at high capacity but low skill in one domain, and at high skill but Activate ownership in another. Ratings are not averaged into a global score without clinical consideration.

Agency, consent, and client autonomy.

The CSO Framework™ is invitational by design. Nothing in this framework is imposed upon a client, and the ownership arc cannot be advanced without the client's active and ongoing consent to move forward. A client who is not ready to take on more responsibility is not failing the Framework — the Framework is being applied without adequate attention to their current capacity and expressed readiness.

This principle is not merely ethical, though it is that. It is also clinical. Ownership that is assigned rather than chosen does not generalize. A client who takes on a function because a practitioner decided they were ready will

not maintain that function when the external pressure to perform it is removed. Ownership that is freely chosen, because the client has determined they want it, and have had the opportunity to practice it safely, is the only kind that sustains.

In practice, this means the pace of movement through the arc is set by the client, not by the program, the family, or the practitioner's clinical judgment about what should be possible by now. It means that a client who chooses to remain at Stabilize in a given domain is exercising a legitimate form of agency, and the practitioner's role is to reflect that choice openly, explore it collaboratively, and respect it rather than pathologize it. When a client withdraws from engagement, the first clinical question is not *what is wrong with them* but *what the withdrawal is communicating about their current experience of the support being offered*.

Coaching agreements are living documents. When circumstances change, capacity shifts, or a client's goals evolve, the agreement is revisited collaboratively rather than enforced as written. Confidentiality is the default. Any disclosure to third parties, including families, programs, or referral sources, requires explicit, informed consent from the client.

The coaching relationship in the CSO Framework™ is not a contract in which the client receives services in exchange for compliance with a growth plan. It is a collaborative relationship in which the practitioner holds expertise in building capacity and transferring ownership, and the client holds expertise in their own experience, their own readiness, and their own life. Both forms of expertise are required. Neither is sufficient without the other.

Using the framework.

Assessment sequence.

For each of the fourteen Skill domains, the assessment follows this sequence:

- 1 **Observe.** What patterns are present in this domain? What does the breakdown look like in practice?
- 2 **Read capacity.** Is access to the underlying system available right now? Is the client in a state where skill use and ownership transfer are realistically possible?
- 3 **Assess skill.** Which indicators are present? Which are absent or inconsistent across contexts?
- 4 **Assess ownership.** Which stage most accurately describes who is currently holding the function?
- 5 **Identify the gap.** Is the primary barrier in capacity, skill, ownership, or some combination?
- 6 **Match support.** Select coaching stance and development focus based on the identified gap and current stage.
- 7 **Titrate.** As capacity stabilizes, skill grows, and ownership expands, adjust structure proportionally.

When capacity, skill, and ownership diverge.

The three layers are read independently because they tell the practitioner different things about what intervention to choose.

A client may possess a skill at level 3 or 4 but remain at Activate or Stabilize in ownership, particularly common when a client can perform a skill within the session but has not yet internalized it as self-held. In these

cases, the coaching focus shifts from skill development to ownership transfer: graduated withdrawal of scaffolding, deferred support, and increasing accountability.

The reverse is also possible: a client at Empower or Sustain in ownership who encounters a new domain requirement and temporarily regresses in skill. Here, the intervention is targeted skill development within the existing ownership framework — the client remains in the driver's seat while the coach provides specific tools.

And a client with strong skill and clear ownership may still fail to perform reliably if capacity is depleted. In this case, the intervention is not more skill teaching or more accountability. It is capacity restoration. Pushing skill or ownership work on a depleted system reliably produces collapse, not growth.

Titration principle.

Structure and ownership exist in inverse relationship. As capacity stabilizes, skill grows, and ownership expands, coaching structure decreases proportionally. The goal is not to remove support — it is to transfer it. At Sustain, the client has not lost their supports; they have become the holder and operator of those supports.

This transfer is paced by the alignment of all three layers. A client may possess the technical skill to perform a task and have claimed ownership while still lacking the available capacity to perform it consistently across contexts. In these cases, scaffolding is maintained until all three layers — capacity, skill, and ownership — are stable enough to hold the function independently.

Guiding principles of ownership transfer.

- 1 **Capacity precedes reliable skill use.** Skills cannot be accessed consistently when nervous system regulation or executive bandwidth are depleted. Capacity is assessed before intervention begins.
- 2 **Skill precedes sustainable ownership.** A client cannot durably own a function they have not yet built the skill to execute. Ownership transfer follows skill development, not the other way around.
- 3 **Development is domain-specific.** Capacity, skill, and ownership develop unevenly across the fourteen domains. A client may function independently in one area while requiring full support in another.
- 4 **Capacity fluctuates.** Capacity is not stable across time, environments, or stress levels. Independence requires the ability to recognize these fluctuations and adjust accordingly.
- 5 **Scaffolding fades gradually.** Supports are not removed abruptly. Structure and ownership exist in inverse relationship and are titrated intentionally as all three layers stabilize.
- 6 **Ownership means managing capacity.** Independence includes the ability to notice capacity states, scale effort, deploy strategies, and recover when systems are depleted.
- 7 **Sustainable growth prevents burnout.** Long-term independence requires pacing, recovery, and sustainable engagement rather than short-term performance achieved through overextension.

Theoretical influences.

The CSO Framework™ is practice-derived and refined through ongoing application with neurodivergent young adults in residential transitional living at Gemba Boise, with longitudinal outcome tracking via the Path to

Independence framework. Formal empirical evaluation is a planned future direction. The following works are recognized as convergent literature, established bodies of work whose conclusions are compatible with, and in several cases corroborate, claims the Framework arrived at independently through clinical practice.

- 1 Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the Strange Situation*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Empirical foundation for attachment classifications and the developmental significance of the relational base.
- 2 The Arbinger Institute. (2016). *The outward mindset: Seeing beyond ourselves*. Berrett-Koehler. Distinction between object-oriented and person-oriented stances; vocabulary for the practitioner's internal orientation in coaching practice.
- 3 Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469–480. Emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental stage characterized by identity exploration and structural instability.
- 4 Barkley, R. A. (2012). *Executive functions: What they are, how they work, and why they evolved*. Guilford Press. Behavioral inhibition and self-regulation theory.
- 5 Blanchard, K., Zigarmi, P., & Zigarmi, D. (1985). *Leadership and the one minute manager: Increasing effectiveness through situational leadership II*. William Morrow. Situational Leadership® II (SLII®); a staged model of graduated responsibility transfer in the leadership-development literature. *Situational Leadership® is a registered trademark of Leadership Studies, Inc. dba The Center for Leadership Studies. SLII® is a registered trademark of The Ken Blanchard Companies.*
- 6 Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books. Foundational articulation of attachment theory and the secure base from which exploration, risk, and learning become possible.
- 7 Dawson, P., & Guare, R. (2018). *Executive skills in children and adolescents: A practical guide to assessment and intervention* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press. Conceptual foundation for executive function as a developmental capacity that can be scaffolded.
- 8 Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press. Building tolerance for discomfort as a foundation for skill development under pressure.
- 9 Hettler, B. (1976). *The six dimensions of wellness model*. National Wellness Institute. Foundational multidimensional wellness construct treating wellness as a multidimensional state rather than the absence of pathology. The eight-dimension expansion used in the Wellness Skills group adds Occupational, Financial, and Environmental dimensions to Hettler's original six (see Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016, *Creating a healthier life: A step-by-step guide to wellness*, SAMHSA Publication No. SMA-16-4958).
- 10 Lebowitz, E. R. (2021). *Breaking free of child anxiety and OCD: A scientifically proven program for parents*. Oxford University Press. SPACE (Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions); family accommodation patterns and the developmental costs of over-scaffolding.

- 11 Porges, S. W. (2011). *The polyvagal theory: Neurophysiological foundations of emotions, attachment, communication, and self-regulation*. W. W. Norton. Nervous system regulation as foundational to learning, connection, and skill access.
- 12 Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin. Unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding, and congruence as conditions for change.
- 13 Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness as conditions for sustained motivation and ownership.
- 14 Share-Strom, D., & Share, M. (n.d.). *Autism Goggles*. <https://autismgoggles.com>. Perspective-taking framework inviting practitioners to inhabit the experiential world of autistic individuals; vocabulary for the coaching stance the Framework requires.
- 15 Winner, M. G. (2007). *Thinking about you thinking about me* (2nd ed.). Think Social Publishing. Social Thinking® methodology; structured curriculum for hidden curriculum and perspective-taking instruction. *Social Thinking® is a registered trademark of Think Social Publishing, Inc.*

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