

## SELF-REGULATION

Self-regulation is the ability to tolerate unmet wants or needs, handle disappointments and failures, and work toward success.

Self-regulation is such an important skill to teach children at a young age because it is how they will manage stress for the rest of their life.

Self-regulation is essential for success in school, work, and life. The critical window for self-regulation takes place from birth to age five when children develop the foundational skills for self-regulation. As children enter kindergarten good self-regulation includes focused attention, the ability to stay on task, ignores distractions, inhibits impulsivity, plans one's actions, is able to reflect on one's thinking and cooperate and demonstrate empathy to peers. Other skills include turn taking, following directions the first time given and communication of thoughts and needs verbally.

How do children learn to self-regulate?

1. Modeling. Teachers and parents can model for children how to handle emotions, and give positive feedback to the child when they see they have used self-regulation skills.

2. Setting age appropriate limits helps a child know what is expected of him. Even when the child balks at the limits set it is important to hold firm. If this does not happen your child will learn to constantly keep pushing the limits to get what they want. They need to learn to handle that frustration of not always getting their way.
3. Providing the necessary level of support to allow the child to be successful. And knowing when to back off the support.
4. Providing them many opportunities to practice using self-regulation skills by letting them make their own choices, and decisions, and sticking with them. They need to experience the consequences of their choices. Of course not everything can be a choice and not everything is negotiable. They cannot dominate every family interaction. Sometimes adults have to say "no".

Research finds that children and adolescents who exhibit poor self-regulation skills such as those with poor self-control and planning abilities are more likely to have aggressive behavior problems. Those who are impulsive are more likely to become obese, more likely to smoke, more likely to become dependent on alcohol or drugs and more likely to commit crimes. Poor self-regulation skills also contribute to truancy issues. When a child learns to tolerate some anxiety, he will be much less reactive and

impulsive. By being able to put a moment in between a feeling and an action, the child can take time to think, plan, and usually come up with an appropriate response to the current challenge. For example, if you want another turn, wait in line and learn to tolerate the frustration of not getting exactly what you want exactly when you want it.

By setting limits for your children, you help them learn self-regulation, that is, how to set limits for themselves.

What can children do to help themselves stay in control.  
Strategies for children to learn to help in regulating their emotions are:

1. Taking slow deep breaths.
2. Using self talk (Ex. "It's ok I can handle this", "calm down")
3. Take a break.  
Help your child to do this when they first start to get frustrated. Don't wait until they are already angry. You will have to teach them to use this strategy, but hopefully in time, they will be able to identify when they need to take a break and cool down on their own.  
Also teach your child to use calming strategies while they are taking a break.
4. Have them engage in an activity that they enjoy.

Drawing, listening to music, watching a funny movie, playing with their pet, reading a book, blowing bubbles, coloring, playing a game, etc.

5. Do something physical.  
Shoot baskets, ride a bike, go for a walk if you are at home. At school do wall push ups, chair push ups, or walk the gym, etc.
6. Use sensory items.  
Squeeze a stress ball or putty, have someone use deep pressure on them, use weighted items, etc.
7. Rock in a rocking chair, or swing.
8. Write about how they feel.
9. Teach your child how to use the 5 point scale to identify how they are feeling. 1=hyper, 5 = lethargic and not alert, and 3= just right. Kids can use those other strategies identified above to help them get back to feeling "just right".

Remember that what works one day to help calm an individual and regulate them, may not work the next. One needs to have a lot of tools in their toolbox!

### **Books for kids:**

- \*Let's Talk About Feeling...series by Joy Berry
- \*When Sophie Gets Angry by Molly Bang
- \*Stand in My shoes, Kids learning about Empathy by Bob Sornson
- \*Hands Are Not for Hitting by Martine Agassi
- \*How to be a Friend: A Guide to Making Friends and

Keeping Them, by Laurie Krasny Brown, Marc Brown  
\*Join in and Play by Cheri J Meiners

**Books for adults:**

\*The zones of Regulation

\*Calm, Alert, and Learning: Classroom Strategies for  
Self-Regulation by Stuart Shanker