

Why is self-regulation important for learning?

Self-regulation is a skill we continue to master throughout life but the foundations are laid in our early years. Self regulation develops when caring adults respond sensitively to a child. A secure attachment promotes good self-regulation.

Self-regulation is a skill that is the central building block of early learning.

Children who self-regulate are able to:

- Calm down and focus
- Follow directions
- Get along with others (share, take turns, wait, be friendly)
- Cope with frustration
- Resist doing tempting things
- Solve problems and complete tasks



What does self-regulation look like in Kindergarten?

When at *circle*, children with good self-regulation will:

- Sit calmly with crossed legs
- Look at the speaker
- Listen to the speaker
- Raise their hand to speak
- Take turns speaking, helping, sharing, showing
- Do what the teacher asks

When playing, children with good self-regulation will:

- Listen to instructions
- Use materials safely and appropriately
- Talk using an inside voice
- Solve problems (share materials, take turns)
- Stop at signal
- Put materials away
- Clean up play area
- Move safely in the classroom

When eating, children with good self-regulation will:

- Wash hands with soap
- Talk with their neighbours using an inside voice
- Solve problems (clean up spills, open packages)
- Raise their hand and wait for help if they need it
- Clean up and put away their snack/lunch materials

*from Kindergarten teams in Durham District School Board



Helping children develop self-regulatory skills

Regulating their behaviour can be tough for very young children. Young children tend to live in the moment with their immediate wants or feelings, while adults can exercise control and decide what might be the most appropriate response. For example, adults can receive presents they don't like but still smile and say thank you. A young child will receive a gift she doesn't like and shout, "I don't want this!" and start to cry.

Self-regulation is part of the maturing process and most children do develop better self-regulatory skills as they get older. However, some children require more support than others.

How can parents help?¹

- provide a structured and predictable daily routine and schedule
- be an example by regulating their own emotions and behaviours
- eliminate distractions by turning off the TV, dimming lights, or providing a soothing object (like a teddy bear) when a child gets upset,
- role play on how to act or what to say in certain situations
- teach and talk about feelings and review home/classroom rules regularly
- stay calm and use a firm voice even when a child is "out of control"
- re-direct inappropriate words or actions when needed
- in play situations, pair children with limited self-regulatory skills with those who have good self-regulatory skills
- take a break when needed, as children with limited self-regulatory skills can try an adult's patience

¹Thompson, Ross A. (November 2009). Doing What Doesn't Come Naturally: The Development of Self-Regulation. Journal of Zero to Three Vol. 30 No. 2 (pp. 33-39).

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University has a great video on executive function in children. To view, go to <http://bit.ly/SkillsforLifeLearning>.

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