

Tip Sheets

Encouraging the Development of Self-Regulation Skills

Self-regulation is the ability to regulate with consistency a person's emotions, reactions, and feelings. Developing self-regulation is a cornerstone of positive mental health and social competency.

Emotional regulation begins in early infancy. It is a gradual process that relies on the success of the secure and trusting relationship between the caregiver and the child. Children nurtured by responsive caregivers early in life will more likely gain self-regulatory skills and better apply them later in life to more complex emotional situations.

Strategies to Encourage Self-Regulation Skills

- Establish a relationship of trust with every child.
- Teach specific methods to control impulses like
 - Stop and wait.
 - Slow down, stop, and think.
 - Take a deep breath and count to five.
 - Freeze and squeeze (tense up your body tightly).
- Model appropriate reactions and explain how you feel.
- Teach children about emotions using stories, role play, puppets, or dramatic play.
- Use visuals of facial expressions, and have the child practice making those faces.
- Ask children about their feelings at different times throughout the day.

- Help children to recognize each other's emotions by pointing them out.
- Respect feelings.
- Teach children different ways to express strong emotions by talking about "how big is your mad?" Help children gauge the level of emotion that is appropriate based on what they are experiencing.

It is helpful for us as caregivers to model appropriate regulatory skills. When we become frustrated or angry we can verbalize those emotions and show children appropriate ways to deal with strong feelings. As children observe others, they begin to make connections about what works and what doesn't. We must use these opportunities to teach the essential skills that foster healthy self-regulation.

Young children are just developing the pause button between impulse and action. We as the responsive adults in their lives are able to create an environment that allows the young child to practice and learn to manage strong emotions. This fosters the development of critical skills that will carry them into adulthood.

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Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.