

Tip Sheets

Encouraging the Development of Self-Regulation Skills



An important part of a young child's development comes through exploring and

learning about the world around them each day. The opportunities we provide for them give them the necessary practice they need to master essential skills.

Self-regulation is one of those critical life skills for all human beings. It is the ability to regulate with consistency emotions, reactions, and feelings. The development of self-regulation is a cornerstone of positive mental health and social competency. Research has shown that emotional regulation begins in early infancy and is a gradual process that relies on the success of the early secure and trusting relationship between the caregiver and the child.

Children nurtured by a responsive caregiver early in life will gain self-regulatory skills and will apply them later in life to more complex emotional situations.

Strategies that 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" and "Take a deep breath, count to five"
- "Freeze and squeeze" (tense up your body tightly)

Coming alongside a child when he/she is experiencing a strong emotion can help them decipher these feelings and begin to learn how to cope independently.

"When Joe takes the marker you wanted you can ask him if you can have it when he is done. He didn't know that you were planning on using the blue."

"Josie knocked down your tower-that makes you mad. You can tell her and maybe she can help you build it again. Hitting her will not help you fix your tower. Josie, Micah is telling you how he feels when you knock his tower over."

- Model appropriate reactions to children and explain how you felt
- 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
- Play a game using mirrors by having the children make different faces to match different emotions
- Help children explore how they are feeling by just asking them 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 them gauge the level 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 that we 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. They are academic difficulties. 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.

For more information on supporting selfregulation skills, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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