

What every child needs for learning self-regulation

What self-regulation is ... and isn't

Self-regulation is not simply self-control. It is the ability to manage our energy states, emotions, behaviour and attention: the ability to return to a balanced, calm and constant state of being.

Lack of sleep, noise, flashing lights, an argument, certain foods, stress and trauma can all throw us off balance. Our energy depletes and managing our feelings, behaviour and attention becomes more difficult.

Self-regulation is vital for children to manage life's normal ups-and-downs: for concentration, social relationships and learning. It is a major task for a young child to regulate their feelings and behaviour consistently.

Learning to self-regulate begins at birth

For babies the world is an endless series of new experiences of movement, lights, sounds, tastes and textures. Babies are learning to self-regulate and need co-regulation from a safe attentive adult. Babies will regulate to a calm tone of voice, holding, rocking and gently touch as well as predictable routines with familiar adults. Eventually, they use the memory of comfort, created by calm regulating adult contact, to self soothe or regulate themselves.

Key factors assisting children to develop their capacity to self regulate include:

- being with calm adults who provide safety and security
- having predictable routines and clear boundaries
- being listened to and acknowledged
- watching the adults in their life manage their own feelings and behaviour
- knowing the names of feelings and being able to identify their feelings by name
- having adult support when they are upset, tired or angry
- having unstructured time to play and learn at their own pace

When self-regulation difficulties occur

Reasons difficulties with self-regulation arise can include lack of adult attachment figures, sensitivities in the child's body, stress and trauma. These difficulties can look like tantrums, fighting with peers, not

following adult direction, worry, anxiety, withdrawing from social situations and turning away from parent, carer or educator.

What children really need

We can support children finding the task of self-regulation too difficult by:

- showing empathy and care
- being close by until strong emotions pass
- teaching children calming strategies
- increasing 'feel good' hormones through exercise, healthy diet and plenty of rest
- creating environments that support children's developing capacity to self regulate

For more information about self-regulation:

- [Stuart Shankar: Self-Regulation - Foundations Issue 7 - September 2011](#)
- [How self-regulation difficulties affect children](#)
- [Keeping a balance: managing feelings and behaviours](#)
- [Franklin Road Childcare Centre: self-regulation in practice](#)
- [Coping skills for managing emotions](#)
- [Everyone feels overwhelmed at times](#)

Is there anything you need from your Facilitator?

You can call, email or arrange a video conference with your Facilitator, or get in touch on our Facebook page.

