

Building Self-Regulation through Early Childhood Education Supports

Desiree W Murray, PhD, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

Self-Regulation Development and Co-Regulation from Birth to Age 5			
Developmental Stage	Characteristics of Self-Regulation	How Caregivers Can Provide Co-Regulation	Interventions With Positive Effects
Infancy (birth to ~age 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orient attention away from stressors • Engage caregivers as resources for comfort • Begin to self-soothe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interact in warm and responsive ways • Anticipate and respond quickly to child’s needs • Provide physical and emotional comfort when child is stressed • Modify environment to decrease demands and stress 	Home visiting and parent-child interaction programs, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC (Attachment and Biobehavioral Catchup) • Child First • Family Foundations • PALS
Toddlerhood (~1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to select and shift attention (attentional control) • Adjust behavior to achieve simple goals • Delay gratification and inhibit responses for short periods when there is structure and support • Emotions are stronger than cognitive regulation • Feelings of attachment support prosocial goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure and calm child when upset by removing child from situations or speaking calmly and giving affection • Model self-calming strategies • Teach rules and redirecting to regulate behavior 	
Preschool (~3-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused attention increases but is still brief • Begin to use rules, strategies and planning to guide behavior appropriate to situation • Delay gratification and inhibit responses for longer periods • Perspective-taking and empathy support prosocial goals • Language begins to control emotional responses and actions • Tolerate some frustration and distress apart from caregiver (self-calming skills emerge) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model, prompt, and reinforce (or “coach”) self-calming strategies when child is upset • Instruct and coach use of words to express emotion and identify solutions to simple problems • Coach rule-following and task completion • Provide external consequences to support emerging self-regulation skills 	Parenting programs and social-emotional curricula, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incredible Years • Parent Corps • Chicago School Readiness Program • Head Start REDI • PATHS • Tools of the Mind

Murray, Rosanbalm, Christopoulos & Hamoudi. (2015). Foundations for understanding self-regulation from an applied developmental perspective. OPRE Report # 2015-21, Administration for Children and Families.

Murray, D.W., Rosanbalm, K., and Christopoulos, C. (2016). Self-regulation and toxic stress Report 3: A comprehensive review of self-regulation interventions from birth through young adulthood and full appendix of programs studied and effect sizes for outcomes across domains. OPRE Report # 2016-34, Administration for Children and Families.

Fostering Self-Regulation Skills in the Classroom

Self-Regulation Coaching: providing intentional instruction and self-regulation skill support within the context of a warm, responsive relationship

- Prompt use of self-regulation skills in specific situations (e.g., taking deep breaths or pausing when upset)
- Anticipate self-regulation demands (e.g., during transitions and less structured times) and reviewing rules and strategies for managing
- Role-play strategies to support child's use of skills in the moment/situation
- Monitor the child while using skills and provide specific positive feedback on small steps and efforts
- Praise and reinforce the child/youth for success and teaching them to self-praise efforts
- Help the youth consider alternative solutions to problems when efforts are not successful

Example Self-Regulation Coaching Statements

- You keep trying even though that is a difficult math problem
- You look frustrated, but I can see you trying a different plan
- I can see you are upset, but you are keeping your body calm
- I know you want your turn now, but you are really waiting patiently
- I bet you will figure out that problem. You just keep on trying!
- You are becoming so strong at staying calm
- "I see that you all are taking turns, using friendly language, working together"
- "You are listening to your friend and accepting her suggestion"
- "It looks like you are being really helpful, compromising, apologizing, etc."

Building a Classroom Community that Supports Self-Regulation

- Prompt students to compliment each other (try a compliment circle!)
- Praise and/or provide incentives for teamwork, being a good friend, and group cooperation
- Prompt students to use social skills such as asking for a turn, joining in a group, sharing, etc.
- Communicate with parents about good friendship matches and specific social skills you are focusing on in your classroom
- Create a calm-down spot or cozy corner where students can go to be alone and calm down when they are upset