

# HELP! How do I ... teach my child to self-regulate?

Course Handout

## What is Self-Regulation?

Some of the major points of the TVO video are that self-regulation:

- ☞ Affects a child's ability to learn
- ☞ Helps a child manage school expectations such as sitting for circle time
- ☞ Helps avoid secondary, or resultant, behavior problems
- ☞ Helps children learn appropriate ways to interact with peers and to deal with conflict

Gillespie and Siebel (2006) recommend six important strategies for helping children learn to self-regulate:

- ☞ Observe children closely:
- ☞ Respond appropriately to children's behavior:
- ☞ Provide structure and predictability:
- ☞ Arrange developmentally appropriate environments:
- ☞ Define age-appropriate limits:
- ☞ Show empathy and caring.

Self-regulation is *NOT* the same as obedience or compliance. A self-regulated child behaves the same way whether or not an adult is watching.

Most children can calm themselves; children with regulatory difficulties lack strategies to calm.

## Common Signs of Self-Regulation Difficulty

- ☞ Fussy and irritable
- ☞ Change quickly from pleasant mood to intense cry
- ☞ Difficulty calming self
- ☞ Between 25 to 30 months, the most common problem is difficulty tolerating change
- ☞ Difficulty tolerating changes in their day
- ☞ Irritable and get upset quickly
- ☞ Sleep difficulties
- ☞ Limited food preferences or picky eater
- ☞ Limited play skills (picks same activity repeatedly), both alone and with peers

## Introduction to Strategies that Help!

- ☞ EARLY self-soothing, comforting, distraction, and help-seeking behaviors are CRITICAL to learning self-regulation skills.
- ☞ Warm support and guidance from parents and other attachment figures are fundamental for self-regulation development.

### 4 Strategies to help children achieve self-regulation:

- ☞ 1. Expand pretend play areas
- ☞ 2. Provide sleep assistance
- ☞ 3. Give behavior help
- ☞ 4. Teach calming tricks

#### Strategy 1: Expand Pretend Play

- ☞ Pretend play helps to build working memory - children must think of their own role and those of their peers while playing.
- ☞ Pretend play helps build inhibitory control – children must stop actions that are out of character or that disrupt the play activities.
- ☞ Pretend play increases flexibility – children must adjust to unexpected twists and turns in the developing plot.
- ☞ Pretend play increases attention span - encourage children to stay within their chosen roles and not leave a play scenario after a few moments.

#### Strategy 2: Provide Sleep Assistance

##### 1. General strategies

- ☞ Support regulation of sleep-wake cycles by establishing set times for naps
- ☞ Provide any type of ritual or routine (dim lights, soft music) prior to nap time
- ☞ Allow the child to use a calming device
- ☞ 2 types of sleepers: signalers and self-soothers
  1. Signalers:
    - Go to bed without a sleep aid (pacifier, toy, blanket)
    - Are often already asleep when put down
    - Cry when they wake up
  2. Self-soothers:
    - Use a sleep aid
    - Are put to bed/nap awake
    - Return to sleep on their own

##### 2. Specific strategies

- ☞ Place mattress or cot on floor away from doors and transitional areas.
- ☞ Use sleeping bag with 3 to 5 year olds.

- ☞ Provide body boundaries by placing cot against wall and a soft item (such as pillow) to hug.
- ☞ Use a small tent on floor.
- ☞ Provide white noise in background.
- ☞ Use Cool Banana's CD on a regular basis at sleep times
- ☞ Provide security objects at rest time, such as stuffed animals or blankets from home.
- ☞ Play games that teach comfortable separation such as peek-a-boo and hide-and-seek.
- ☞ Avoid active play prior to rest time.
- ☞ Darken sleeping room if possible.
- ☞ Introduce visually calming activities prior to nap as part of nap routine.
- ☞ Before rest times, read books such as *Go! Go! Go! Stop!* (see below) that are related to self-regulation and teach children about calming their bodies.

### Strategy 3: Give behavior help

- ☞ Place simple behavior picture cards in various areas of the classroom. Teach these behaviors individually, and then follow up consistently.
- ☞ If a child becomes overstimulated when playing in a specific area, provide him/her with short periods to explore that area and then take a break. Gradually build the time he/she plays; use a timer to give the child a visual support that the play time is ending.
- ☞ When verbal or physical aggression occurs, take time the NEXT DAY to talk with the child about what happened prior to entering the play area. Provide the child with idea of what he/she CAN DO in this play area.
- ☞ Keep one or two play areas consistent for children who have limited play skills (such as blocks or books). Introduce new items into each area gradually.
- ☞ Incorporate the *Breath, Think, Do* app by Sesame Street and/or *The Spy Who Loved Cookies* video series into your lesson plans to talk about how to deal with feelings.
- ☞ Use behavioral sequence strips to remind children of acceptable behavior. Sequence strips need to be introduced carefully, and then placed in several locations so children can see them when they are NOT IN THE MIDDLE of an emotional outburst.

### Strategy 4 – Teach Calming Techniques

#### 1. Provide calming materials

- ☞ Provide toys and objects that promote visual exploration with limited physical manipulation
- ☞ Provide visually calming materials such as water tubes, mats such as Aqua doodle and magic doodle , kaleidoscopes, and fish tanks (see ordering information below)
- ☞ Provide calming fine motor manipulatives including playdoh, gak (see recipe below), and putty
- ☞ Provide alternative building materials besides blocks (Lego, Lincoln Logs, K'nex, tissue rolls, boxes, magnetic blocks)

- ☞ Encourage children to bring calming objects from home to have in the classroom

## 2. Provide calm spaces

- ☞ Create a quiet location within the environment where children can explore calming items
- ☞ Locate calming areas away from high traffic areas
- ☞ Display comfort items in a clear bin so children can see their object during the day, such as:
  - Stuffed animals
  - Favorite toys
  - Blankets
  - Water bottles
- ☞ Provide furniture that encourages calming and relaxation, such as:
  - Bean bag chairs
  - Floor cushions and pillow piles
  - Child-sized rocking chairs

## 3. Model calm behavior

- ☞ Remember to be a calming agent yourself
- ☞ Provide time for children to understand/process directions before giving more
- ☞ Use simple vocalizations and short sentences (“I see you are mad”)
- ☞ Use gestures paired with key words such as “wait, help, come, look”
- ☞ Model counting to 5 when upset to allow children time to think and adjust their behavior

## Resources

### 1. Videos

- ☞ Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame Street
  - ☞ iPad: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/breathe-think-do-with-sesame/id721853597?mt=8>
  - ☞ Google Play: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=air.com.sesameworkshop.ResilienceThinkBreathDo&hl=en>
- ☞ Cookie’s Crumby Pictures – variety of video’s that teach self-regulation and executive function skills including:
  - ☞ The Waiting Game with Guy Smiley: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsC2W587\\_Fc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsC2W587_Fc)
  - ☞ The Biscotti Kid: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6FDts-erVw>
  - ☞ The Spy Who Loved Cookies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz9u-oG3BgM>
  - ☞ Me Want It (But Me Wait): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PnbKL3wuH4>

☞ Gooden & Kraska's (2013) Human Development Institute Seminar, *Emotional Health and Self-Regulation in Young Children*. A discussion of critical factors for children's emotional health and self-regulation strategies. Available at <https://youtu.be/hBZz3HunBx4>

☞ Sesame Workshop – Season 44 PBS Kids

## 2. Manipulatives

☞ Mood thermometer: <https://gumroad.com/l/vLFQK>

☞ Pretend Play on Pinterest <https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=pretend%20play>

☞ Behavior Picture Cards on Pinterest

<https://www.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=behavior%20picture%20card>

## 3. Print Materials and Websites

☞ *American Journal of Play* at <http://www.journalofplay.org/>

☞ CSEFEL – Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning at

[http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training\\_infant.html](http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_infant.html)

☞ DeGangi, G. (2000). *Pediatric disorders of regulation in affect and behavior*. Available through

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/book/9780122087707>

☞ Gillespie, L. G., & Siebel, N. L. (2006). Self-Regulation: A cornerstone of early childhood development. *Young Children on the Web*. Available at

<http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/case-studies/21508263/self-regulation-cornerstone-early-childhood-development>

☞ High Scope's *Teaching Strategies that support pretend play*. Available at

<https://highscope.org/topic/highscope-curriculum-content-areas/creative-arts/>

☞ *Illinois Early Learning Project*

☞ NAEYC article on Self-Regulation <https://naeyc.org/our-work/families/help-your-preschooler-gain-self-control>

☞ Rice, M. (2012). *Understanding the Importance of self-regulation for preschoolers*.

Available at <https://wordpress.miracosta.edu/fmurillo/2014/10/12/understanding-the-importance-of-self-regulation-for-preschoolers/>

☞ Stepp, G. (2010). Vision insights and new horizons: Teaching children the art of self-control. *Vision Journal*. Available at <https://www.vision.org/teaching-children-the-art-of-self-control-517>

☞ [Virginia Dept. of Education's Training and Technical Assistance Center](#)