

## Fostering Self Regulation Skills

As a family child care provider, you will work with children throughout each day and in various ways to help them in developing self-regulation. Understanding what self-regulation is, why it is important, and different ways that you can support the development of self-regulation at various ages is important for anyone who works with young children.

### What is self-regulation?

- Self-regulation involves learning to maintain control over body, emotions, and attention.
- During infancy, this is really a process of coregulation, which eventually builds toward self-regulation as caregivers support the child's gradual mastery of control of their own body, emotions, and attention.
- The individual child's physical needs and growth patterns, temperament, prior experiences, and feelings of security combined with the caregiving environment affect their ability to be soothed and begin to master self-regulation. When children feel secure in their relationship with their caregiver they are better able to learn how to self regulate.
- It is within relationships with caregivers that children are first learning about how and why to regulate themselves and seeing models for regulation. The caregiving relationship is bidirectional and the ways in which children's actions, words, and behaviors might challenge your own regulation as the caregiver is important to consider. Both caregiver and child have temperamental traits that may or may not easily be a good fit in the caregiving relationship.
- When a child is in a situation that is highly challenging to their physical, emotional, and/or attentional regulation, their ability to function cognitively will be diminished. So it is very important for a caregiver to provide an appropriate level of support to individual children that meets their needs for managing self-regulation.

### Infant/Toddler Co-Regulation Tasks (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)

Birth-2 months: Physiological Regulation—Caregiver is aware of newborn's cues related to sensory input and responds by limiting or organizing sensory input in the newborn's environment

*Example:* If the newborn provides a cue such as crying when there is a great deal of noise in the room, the caregiver might move the newborn to a quieter room or try to turn down the volume in the room (ask older children to try to engage in a more quiet activity)

2-7 months: Emotional Regulation—Caregiver is aware of infant's temperament and helps maintain an environment for the infant with a manageable level of stress

*Example:* An infant who has displayed a shy temperament might show signs of stress in a room crowded with people, so the caregiver might move the infant to an area of the room that is more secluded to help make the stress more manageable

7-15 months: Attentional Regulation—The caregiver offers the child opportunities for focusing and sharing attention with activities involving objects or social interactions

*Example:* When the child seems rested and alert, the caregiver might engage the child in an interaction with an interesting toy or in a face-to-face interaction (such as during meal time).

## **Preschoolers and Emotional Regulation (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)**

- Preschoolers are developing a sense of personal identity and also how to identify and understand emotions, as well as how to express emotions appropriately.
- Emotional expression and regulation is highly complex and involves biological (temperamental) and environmental (social and cultural) factors.
- Experiences with both peers and adults that allow children to practice and see models of regulation including a broad range of emotions are important for developing appropriate strategies for emotional regulation.
- Preschoolers still frequently need adult guidance in thinking through the regulation process and understanding the emotions of others. Adult guidance might involve using language to support regulation, offering a comfort or transition object, or encouraging a peer relationship that offers appropriate models for or opportunities to practice emotional regulation.

**“Regulation in early development is deeply embedded in the child’s relations with others.”**

**(Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p.94)**

## **Why is it important for children to develop self-regulation?**

Self-regulation is necessary in order to navigate the social world successfully. Throughout early childhood, if given appropriate strategies and support, children can gradually develop the ability to regulate their bodies, emotions, and attention. It is essential for children to build skills in self-regulation in order to be successful in school as well as the capacity to learn depends upon the ability to manage one’s body, emotions, and attention.

## **What are ways that caregivers can support self-regulation?**

- Stay calm and be aware of the ways in which your own regulation might be challenged and strategies that you might need in order to remain calm
- Provide supports or strategies that are suitable for the individual child and their age
- Offer alternatives
- Observe and read cues to try to understand why the child’s self-regulation is being challenged and be responsive
- Be proactive and create predictability by being consistent and using routines
- Create a developmentally appropriate environment with defined age appropriate limits

## **For More Information:**

Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000). From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early child development. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Day, M., & Parlakian, R. (2003). How culture shapes social-emotional development: Implications for practice in infant-family programs. Washington, DC: Zero to Three.

Tronick, E. (2007). The neurobehavioral and social-emotional development of infants and children. New York : W. W. Norton & Co.