

Why Self-Regulation Is Important for Young Children



What Is Self-Regulation?

There has been a lot of buzz around self-regulation. But what does it mean?

Self-regulation is a young child’s ability to:

1

Be calm and alert enough to learn new things, take part in activities, and interact with others.

Every child is different. Some children are naturally calmer, while others are easily overwhelmed. Some children struggle to pay attention, while others may not. Remember that these abilities can change for each child throughout the day too. For example, a child might do a great job of listening all day at school but might be too tired by bedtime to listen to his parents.

2

Recover from stressors

A “stressor” is anything that makes it difficult for your child to feel calm and engaged. A stressor might be the sights and sounds along a busy sidewalk. It could be feeling hungry or tired. It could even be emotional, like missing out on something he’s been looking forward to. Imagine a child who’s been told he can’t have something he really wants. He might struggle with the disappointment and start to cry, while other children might be able to recover more easily.

Why Is Self-Regulation Important?

Self-regulation is an important building block for a child’s development.

It can help with:



1 Learning language

2 Success at school

3 Attention and problem-solving skills

4 Mental and physical health

What Might Affect Your Child's Ability to Self-Regulate?

There are lots of things that could affect your child's ability to self-regulate. You know your child best and can probably recognize when he's starting to struggle. What do you find usually helps him return to being calm and alert?



You might consider:

1

Your child's nature and personality

By nature, some children are easily flustered. For example, your child might find meeting new people stressful. If so, it might help to give him a little extra time to warm up to people. Other children struggle to pay attention by nature. For example, your child might become bored or distracted while reading a book. If so, he might need to move around a bit to help him stay engaged.

2

Your child's environment

Your child's surroundings can have a big impact on self-regulation. It's important to consider the space you're in. Take a look around – is there anything in the space that could be distracting or overwhelming to your child? If so, it might be making it hard for him to focus.

3

The way you interact with your child

There are two main things you can do to help your child with self-regulation:

- **“Tune in” to your child's cues** – Watch for signs that your child is starting to struggle with self-regulation. Notice how he's reacting to a situation – is it how you expected him to react? Or is he over- or under-reacting to it?
- **Respond with the right kind of support** – For example, if your child is becoming flustered, it might help to use a quieter voice and calmer movements. On the other hand, if your child is not paying attention, it might help to try a new tone of voice or add some movement to the activity.

Try to follow your child's lead by observing, listening and responding to his ideas. When you do this, you are helping him to interact in a meaningful and engaging way. This will help your child with his self-regulation and will encourage him to stay motivated, calm, and attentive!

If you are concerned about your child's self-regulation, be sure to talk to a professional such as your child's speech-language pathologist (SLP), therapist or educator for specific techniques you can use to meet his individual needs. If you don't have an SLP, please see the directory of Hanen-trained SLPs at <http://www.hanen.org/membersearch>.

About The Hanen Centre

The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit organization committed to promoting the best possible language, literacy and social skills in young children. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically. For more information, visit www.hanen.org.