

The Principal's Primer

Research-Based Supports for Early Learning Classrooms



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Supporting Development of Self-Regulation Skills in Young Children

Self-regulation is defined as the conscious control of thoughts, behaviors, and emotions (McClelland & Tominey, 2015). Young children in pre-K are developing skills to learn to focus, pay attention, manage their emotions by inhibiting responses, and make reasonable adjustments to transitions and change. As children develop these skills it enables them as they mature to direct their own behavior towards accomplishing tasks and meeting goals.

The ability to self-regulate may be a combination of the child's temperament and learned behaviors influenced by their environment. When babies are upset and distressed they may have trouble self-soothing and this behavior may persist in emotional self-regulation troubles as they age. Helping children learn to develop appropriate responses to situations can be a skill taught in Pre-K.

"Preschoolers need support to develop self-regulation skills. No 4-year-old has mastered the art of waiting patiently or solving disagreements. Teachers and administrators should support the development of those skills, not punish children for lacking them. Behavior management approaches that are popular in older grades, like color-coded behavior charts, can confuse and possibly even harm young children" (Bouffard, 2018).

Having a high-quality classroom management practice in place can contribute to children's ability to meet expectations and minimize the need for extensive behavior management. Having relevant classroom rules and routines; supportive structures such as center management charts and helper charts; planning a balance of direct instruction with indirect instruction in a way that enables children to work independently, and to manage and guide each other and themselves; and handling conflict as it arises in a way that respects children allows them to keep their dignity and prevents future conflict. These all support children's varying emotions that influence their ability to self-regulate.

Responsive classrooms help children establish positive relationships with teachers and

peers in order to participate effectively in the classroom community. The classroom community is built by creating a structured, predictable environment to help prevent conflict and enable children to manage themselves successfully. Teachers create a positive, warm classroom community when they:

- Set the tone for a caring, nurturing classroom by modeling kind, helpful behavior and actively encouraging children to do the same.
- Empower children to assert independence in appropriate ways and accomplish tasks that are meaningful to them without infringing on the rights of others.
- Provide opportunities for children to practice and develop meaningful and rewarding relationships using responsive interactions with each other and adults.
- Help children become aware of and fluent in talking about their feelings, emotions, abilities, likes, and dislikes.

Reference

Bouffard, S. (2018, February 13). Principals aren't ready for public pre-k. *Education Week*, 37(20), 22-23. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/02/14/principals-arent-ready-for-public-pre-k.html>

McClelland, M. M., & Tominey, S. L. (2015). *Stop, think, act: Integrating self-regulation in the early childhood classroom*. Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315798059.

Teachers use scaffolding techniques to support the expected behavior. These are often seen as contingent responses to a child's signals about their emotional state. Below are some strategies teachers can use both planned and in the moment with groups or individual children to promote self-regulation.

Strategies to Use with Groups of Children:

- Use the same verbal and nonverbal signals (e.g., clapping, lights, songs, pictures, bells) consistently before and during transitions or to signal specific behaviors (e.g., everyone quiet, hands up).
- Minimize number and length of transitions; provide activities (songs, guessing games, etc.) during wait time.
- Encourage self-monitoring and helping others during transitions.
- Involve children in creating rules that address noise, movement, materials, and interactions with others.
- Provide variety and choice within the day's schedule (indoor vs. outdoor, active vs. passive, quiet vs. loud, teacher led vs. child directed).
- Prepare children ahead of time for changes to routines or schedules.
- Give clear, simple directions and only when you have children's attention.
- Use explanations and reasoning to communicate rules and standards.
- Use Center Management Charts to limit the number of children participating in centers.
- Play games that allow children to practice paying attention, waiting their turn, and modulating emotion (e.g., Simon Says, Red Light/Green Light, and Duck Duck Goose).
- Discuss read alouds. Have children talk about characters' feelings and behavior that could or did result.
- Use puppets or role-playing to model feelings and behaviors that could result during specific situations, and have children help generate and discuss potential solutions.
- Label your own and others' feelings.
- Discuss feelings that arise in certain situations and what situations make us feel certain ways.
- When discussing feelings, focus on connections and differences between feelings and behaviors.
- Teach songs and movements for expressing feelings.
- Teach strategies for calming down (e.g., shaking out wiggles, deep breaths).
- Keep pacing of group activities lively and introduce new materials to help children maintain attention.

Strategies to Use with Individual Children:

- Give positive feedback (verbal and nonverbal) for appropriate behavior during transitions, for following rules, and for remembering routines.

- Check in with a child as steps of a new routine are completed.
- Respond promptly to requests for help.
- Intervene immediately when behavior escalates.
- Provide a quiet place in the classroom for children to go when they need time to calm down or relax before rejoining the group.
- Use guidance, persuasion, and distraction rather than power assertion to redirect a child's behavior.
- Encourage children to express their emotions honestly as long as they do not hurt others.
- Validate feelings but not inappropriate behaviors that result from them (e.g., "It's ok to feel angry, but we need to use words instead of hitting; hitting hurts people.").
- Ignore inappropriate attention-getting behavior when possible.
- Focus on what a child should do, rather than not do.
- Provide warm reassurance and support during emotionally challenging times (e.g., saying goodbye to family members, show and tell).

Helpful CLI Engage Resources Supporting Self-Regulation Development

CIRCLE Progress Monitoring System (Pre-K) Social and Emotional Checklist

Use online for data collection and analysis.

https://cliengage.org/user-guides/CPM-Social_Emotiona l Checklist.pdf

eCIRCLE Professional Development Series

Classroom Management and Social and Emotional Learning Courses.

Enroll and launch certificate courses.

<https://cliengage.org/public/training/support/how-to-guides/accessing-the-ecircle-training-resources-and-how-to-guides/>

Classroom Observation Tool (COT)

Classroom Management and Social and Emotional Development domains.

Use online for teacher goal setting.

https://www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/media/99101/cotrevised_91216.pdf

CIRCLE Activity Collection: PreK

Find a multitude of activities to try in the classroom under the Domain: Social, Emotional and Regulatory Development.

https://circleonline.uth.edu/pre-k/en/activity/social_emotional_regulatory/how-i-feel-right-now/

"Effective leaders align and focus systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success, love of learning, the identities and habits of learners, and healthy sense of self."

(National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 12)

CLI Engage is part of the Children's Learning Institute at UTHealth
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