



Parents, carers and staff play an important role in helping children learn about regulating their feelings and behaviour. There are many opportunities to do this in the normal experiences of day to day life. Some of the ways adults can support children's developing self-regulation skills include:

Observing closely

Observation is a good way of identifying children's strengths and needs. Through observation parents, carers and staff can see what children can cope with and where they might need more support. Children send out cues about what they need, for example, pointing at the kitchen cupboard when they are hungry, rubbing their eyes when tired or taking your hand and leading you when they want to play. By observing closely, adults will learn the times that children need support and comfort and when they are coping well on their own. Providing the support children need in times of difficulty such as when they are upset, tired or angry helps them to develop self-regulation skills.

Simplifying tasks

Parents, carers and staff can help children break down the complex skills and knowledge needed to practice self-regulation into simple, more manageable parts. For example, when two children have a disagreement over a game, finding out what happened and suggesting ways to work out their disagreement breaks down the event into smaller parts. In each of these parts children will have the chance to take turns in talking, waiting while the other child speaks, listening to the other child and working out what to do next. All these experiences help children practise the skills of self-regulation in manageable ways with the support and guidance of a trusted adult.

Modelling

Children can learn self-regulation skills by watching the behaviour of the people around them. When parents, carers and staff effectively regulate their own feelings and behaviour they model self-regulation skills to children. Adults model behaviour every day, such as the way that they talk to people, wait for the traffic lights to change or decide what TV program to watch. These all require self-regulation of feelings and behaviour.



Using Hints and Cues

Verbal directions, gestures and touch are cues for children that help them regulate their feelings and behaviour. When an adult points at interesting parts of a book, gently touches a child to take their turn in a game or says 'Look where I am pointing,' it gives the child hints and cues of what to do. Calmly naming feelings for young children like 'You sound angry'; or 'I wonder if you are frustrated?' helps them to recognise their emotions; something that is essential for the development of self-regulation. Saying things like: 'Let's relax'; or 'I am here to help you,' with a gentle touch can act as a cue for the child to start calming down. As children begin to use language, adults can provide cues about when and how to ask for help, when to take a break, or when to try a different way to do something.

Gradually withdrawing adult support

As children become more confident in their ability to work out their own difficulties (like sticking with challenging tasks or using words to sort out differences) parents, carers and staff can start to pull back a little. Young children's self-regulation skills are still developing, so ups and downs in how well they are able to manage their own feelings and behaviours are to be expected. Adults need to pay close attention and decide when and for how long they let children work things out on their own before offering support. Taking a step back and allowing a child time to work out how to put on their shoes or turn-taking in a game promotes healthy self-regulation skills.

Other suggestions to consider

Other suggestions that can be useful when helping children keep a balance and manage their feelings and behaviours are:

- ▶ being calm
- ▶ responding and acknowledging what children are trying to communicate
- ▶ using supportive boundaries, routines and limits to provide structure and predictability
- ▶ making sure experiences are suited to the age of the child
- ▶ showing empathy and care towards children.

For more information on these suggestions refer to *Component 2: Developing children's social and emotional skills 'Helping children to manage their emotions'*.



This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at www.kidsmatter.edu.au. The KidsMatter Early Childhood team also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



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