

What is self-regulation?

Region 11 Behavior Specialist

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Preschool-age children struggle with self-regulation. Some children have a more difficult time learning to control their urges than other children do. To help children learn to master this skill, it is important to understand what it means. Self-regulation is the ability to control one's impulses and refrain from acting on emotions. It doesn't mean the urge is not present; instead, it means not acting on the urge. Self-regulated children can delay gratification and suppress their impulses long enough to think ahead to the possible consequences of their actions or to consider alternative actions that would be more appropriate. Self-regulation (also known as self-control) is a skill that becomes mastered the more it is practiced.

Here are some ways to help children learn and exercise self-control:

Play games that require step-by-step directions such as board games. Follow a recipe that gives a specific list of what needs to be done. Do an activity that cannot be completed in one sitting. For example, planting a seed in a cup that will take time to grow and will need to be watered and nurtured. This requires patience by not leading to instant gratification. A child does not get to see the seed mature to a full blown plant instantly. It takes time for the plant to grow and the child learns patience and self-control through this process. Playing games like "Freeze dancing" helps children learn to control impulses. Turn the music on and let the children dance and move around. Tell the children when the music stops they need to "freeze" in place and stop moving. Self-regulation is a skill children will need and use over the course of their entire life. Additionally, Kindergarten teachers indicate self-regulation is a skill they hope to see children have when they enter their classroom at the beginning of the school year. Having this skill helps children get the most out of their school experience and helps them be ready to learn and be successful.

Classroom Self-Regulation Strategy Limit the number of children that can use an activity area at a time. Not only will this help manage the classroom environment better, it will also help teach children self-control. Allow children to switch to a new activity center when a space is available. It is a good idea to set a limit of one child at the computer station. Using a timer will help keep computer activities under control so other children have an opportunity to take a turn.

Behavior Tip of the Month: Blow bubbles and let the children pop as many as they can. Then, help children practice self-control by asking them to resist popping the bubbles you blow (even if one lands on their nose!)