Teaching Self-Regulation Skills to Promote Adaptability and Resilience in Young Children

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Disclosure

Dr. Murray is a trained mentor in the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Program, and receives compensation from community organizations for providing trainings and consultation.
AGENDA

• Self-Regulation: Definition and Development
• Self-Regulation Challenges
• Self-Regulation Skills Instruction
  - Content
  - Methods
What is Self-Regulation?
Self-Regulation is...

The act of managing *thoughts* and *feelings* to enable *goal-directed actions* such as:

- organizing behavior
- controlling impulses
- solving problems constructively

Why is Self-Regulation Important?

• Foundational for academic and school success
• Predicts wellbeing and long-term adjustment
• Problems with behavior regulation
  Suspension and expulsion from child care centers
  • 8,000 preschoolers suspended every year
  • Rates of expulsion 3x as high as for school-aged children
  • Disproportionately boys and Black children
  • About 20% are children with disabilities
  • More than 10% of NC Pre-k teachers reported having expelled a child

Gilliam, 2005, DOE 2014
What Self-Regulation Skills do Young Children Need to be Successful in School?

Vignette

• What skills are the children learning by interacting with this teacher?
• How will this help them learn and be successful in school?
• What other skills do they need?
# Self-Regulation Skills for Young Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Focusing and shifting attention</td>
<td>• Recognizing and labeling feelings in self and others</td>
<td>• Engaging caregivers for comfort</td>
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<td>• Holding information in memory</td>
<td>• Coping with frustration and strong emotion</td>
<td>• Adjusting behavior to achieve goals</td>
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<td>• Perspective-taking and empathy</td>
<td>• Self-soothing, using strategies to calm down</td>
<td>• Inhibiting impulses</td>
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<td>• Thinking flexibly to solve problems</td>
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<td>• Delaying gratification</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Listening, following rules and directions</td>
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<td>• Persisting to complete age-appropriate tasks</td>
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Self-Regulation Challenges
Common Self-Regulation Difficulties in Preschool

• Hitting, pushing, kicking, biting
• Not sitting in circle
• Not able to wait
• Not able to keep hands to self
• Temper tantrums
• Easily frustrated
• Not following rules or directions
• Unable to stick with new or difficult tasks
Self-Regulation Challenges

• What contributes to self-regulation difficulties?

• Think of factors about the environment as well as the child.
Common Self-Regulation Challenges and their Impact

• **Biology/temperament** – attention problems, “high motor” (hyperactivity), impulsivity, inflexible or sensation-seeking

• **Developmental or language delays** – can’t understand rules/directions or express needs with words

• **Stressed caregivers** – “attention-starved” children, distrust adults, lack confidence, low motivation

• **Poverty and its associated adversity** – can’t focus, over-react to frustration and stress, more vulnerable to future stress

• **Lack of learning experiences** – When caregivers are stressed and home environments are chaotic, children may not have the experiences necessary to learn to listen, wait, and engage in prosocial behaviors
Building Self-Regulation Skills: Content and Methods
What helps Strengthen Self-Regulation in Early Childhood?

Co-Regulation

Warm, responsive caregiving and behavior coaching or scaffolding

Skills Instruction

In cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains of self-regulation

Exemplar
Self-Regulation Interventions

Teacher Classroom Management Training
• Incredible Years (IY) and PATHS

Child Curricula
• Tools of the Mind
• Head Start REDI
• PATHS
• Incredible Years Dinosaur Program
• Second Step
Average Effects of Self-Regulation Interventions

Improved Self-Regulation

- Cognitive, like attention and problem-solving
- Emotional, like calm-down skills and empathy
- Behavioral, like cooperation and impulse control
- Motivation and persistence

Improved Functioning in Other Areas

- Academic achievement and language skills
- Interpersonal skills and relationships
- Mental health
How to Co-Regulate

Provide Warm, Responsive Relationship

Structure the Environment

Teach/Coach Self-Regulation Skills
Self-Regulation is a Skill like Literacy that can be Taught

Characteristics of Both

• Have many sub-skills
• Require repetition over time
• Instruction should be developmentally appropriate
• Develop earlier in consistent and supportive environments
• Can be acquired later with intervention
• Some children need more instruction and support than others
Self-Regulation Skills to Teach

• School-readiness skills
• Emotional literacy skills
• Calm-down strategies
• Social problem-solving skills
School-Readiness Skills to Teach

- Listening
- Concentrating
- Sticking with it (persistence)
- Waiting
- Following directions
- Following class rules

How Do You Teach School-Readiness or School Success Skills?

*Turn and Talk*
Rule Teaching Demonstration
Emotional Literacy Skills to Teach

- Feeling words – positive as well as negative
- Recognizing “clues” that tell you about a feeling
- Recognizing that feelings can change
- Recognizing that you can have more than 1 feeling at a time
- Identifying feelings in others
What do you do to teach children emotional literacy skills?
Calm-Down Strategies to Teach

• Yoga and other mindfulness techniques

• Deep Breathing
  ▫ Smell the flower, blow out the candle, belly breathing

• Imagery
  ▫ Imagine you are relaxing in a soft cloud
  ▫ Think of a happy place

• Positive self-talk
  ▫ “I can do it”
  ▫ “Maybe next time”
Practice Calm-Down Skills
Space and Materials to Support Calming Down

• How might you use a calm-down spot in your classroom?
• What materials might you include in a calm-down spot?
• What rules might you set for your calm-down spot?
Social Problem-Solving Skills to Teach

• Use words to say how you feel or what you want
• Identify the problem
• Recognize the other person’s point of view/listen to your friend
• Think of solutions or “choices”
• Think of the consequences (what would happen if...?)
  • Is that safe, fair, and does it lead to good feelings for everyone?
• Trying another person’s idea
What do you do to teach children problem-solving skills?
Self-Regulation Teaching Methods

• Books/Stories
  • Vignette

• Puppets
  • Vignette

• Positive Practices
  • Demonstration

• Teacher Modeling
  • Self-reflection
Use of Books and Stories

**Vignette**

- What is effective about how this teacher reads to the students?
- How does she help them learn about feelings?
- How does she help them define the problem?
Use of Puppets

Vignette

• How does the puppet help children share their feelings?
• Why is it effective for puppets to model self-regulation skills (listening, taking deep breaths)
• What helps puppets be most effective?
Positive Practice

Turn and Talk
What types of “practice” can you have children do for the following? Pick at least one to discuss with a partner.

• Listening
• Raising a quiet hand
• Walking quietly in line
• Calming down
Teaching Ignoring Demonstration
Teacher Modeling

• Talk about what you are feeling, including positive feelings
• Model coping with negative feelings and positive self-talk
• Model calming down
• Model problem-solving
• Model self-praise

Of course i talk to myself, Because sometimes i need expert advice.

Turn and Talk
• When kids feel safe and secure in their environment, they:
  - Feel confident enough to take risks to try new things
  - Try again when they make mistakes

• When kids feel connected to their teachers, they:
  - Are motivated to please by making good choices
  - Want to do what they see their teacher doing
Taking Care of Yourself to Take Care of the Children

Teacher stress is real!
• Real effects on health, wellbeing, and interactions with students

Many strategies can help
• Mindfulness
• Peer support
• Relaxation techniques
• Positive self-talk
• Self-regulation Development:
  - Foundational for school success and long-term wellbeing
  - Critical development occurs during early childhood
  - Is strengthened by supportive classrooms with warm, responsive teachers and direct skills instruction

• Self-Regulation Supports:
  - “Co-regulation” through relationships, coaching, and teaching
  - Systematic and intentional teaching with developmental methods and repetition
For More Information

• Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress Reports posted online: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/toxic-stress-and-self-regulation-reports
  - Look for Briefs on Early Childhood and Co-Regulation

• Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Group Leader Training: August, 2017 – FPG e-News

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