

Self-Regulation/Self-Control: Tips and Strategies



- ❖ Model appropriate anger management behaviors yourself:
 - Don't overact or let your emotions get the best of you. State your feelings when you get angry and frustrated and explain to the children how you are going to handle those feelings
 - Reframe your own responses to children who are aggressive or acting out. Do not get angry or frustrated yourself, and make sure to tell the children you understand that they are angry.

- ❖ Prepare a Special Calming Place:
 - Establish a safe and private space inside a large box or a corner in your room.
 - Offer soothing furniture and comfort items in that space
 - Lots of pillows, cushions, bean bag chair
 - Rocking chair
 - Blanket
 - Stuffed animals
 - Squishy balls

- ❖ Teach a child to label his/her feelings and express their feelings using words

- ❖ Teach the child self-calming techniques:
 - Deep breathing
 - Play dough
 - Listening to calming, soothing music using headphones
 - Sound blocking headphones
 - Watching calming videos- For example, Living Arts makes audio and video mood enhancing DVDs for the TV screen (wallpaper screens).
 - Provide guided imagery/visualization for the child. Guided visualization is a form of meditation in which you as the adult help the child to envision some type of peaceful, relaxing scene or experience.
 - Find a comfortable place



- Have the child close her eyes and help her relax her body
 - Have the child take 3 or 4 breaths (inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth)
 - Guide the child through a peaceful, relaxing scene. For example say, *“Think of yourself walking along a path with lots of flowers around you and green trees and a gentle breeze. The sun is shining and it is warm and quiet except for the birds singing. You sit down on the green grass under a tree and you can smell the flowers. What color are the flowers?...What kind of flowers are they?... What do you see on the ground around you?... What do you hear?... What do you smell? Etc.*
 - Use self-calming cards created by Elizabeth Crary with a child who has low self-control. Each of the 24 illustrated cards in the deck describes how a child can sooth himself/herself with a different method- physical, auditory/verbal, visual, creative, self-nurturer and humor. These cards can be purchased from Parenting Press found on the following web site: www.parentingpress.com/b_calmcd.html or on Amazon.com
 - Sensory Activities
 - Water play with warm water
 - Finger painting
 - Sandbox
 - Crumple, crinkle paper
 - Easel painting
- ❖ Encourage the child to complete an “I” statement by filling on the blanks: *“I feel _____ when you _____ because _____ and I want _____.”*
- ❖ Children may need cues and reminders to help them substitute positive behaviors for negative ones. Anticipate a child’s outburst (spend time observing the child so you know what the triggers are) and provide the child with a signal or sign to go to the calming place set up in the classroom. For example, if one of the triggers for a child is proximity to other children in large groups and this occasion occurs while waiting in line (jostling, bumping etc.), hold up a piece of red paper to signal to the child to “STOP” and get herself to the calming place you have arranged in the classroom.
- ❖ Children can be helped to put a name to their problems in terms that point the way to a solution. For example, a child diagnosed as having ADHD could see the problem as “impulsiveness” and the solution “learning to think before you act.” The child can be helped to understand that being impulsive is a trait characteristic of his diagnosis which people learn to deal with in different ways.
- ❖ Teach problem solving/conflict resolution skills. Children with behavioral problems often act without thinking about the consequences of what they are doing. Teaching problem-solving skills can be effective way to enhance self-control and communication, while encouraging more adaptive behaviors. Children should be taught a five-step conflict resolution procedure. For very young children who need some help and support in this process, the adult may have to verbalize several or all of the steps for the children involved in the conflict.

- Name/describe the problem
- Brainstorm solutions
- Evaluate the solutions and choose the best one
- Try it out
- Modify the chosen solution as necessary



- ❖ For children who exhibit difficult behaviors during transitions:
 - Reduce waiting time- make sure one staff member is ready to lead the children in the next activity as the other staff person is finishing up the current activity.
 - Provide a visual schedule of routines and activities that the child can see and know what is coming next.
 - Provide a 3 or 4 minute pre-warning cue to let child know when an activity is going to change and what will happen next.
- ❖ Provide clear, concrete visual supports with behavior development strategies to promote independent reasoning skills. Describe unacceptable behaviors- be specific. Describe replacement behaviors you would like to see instead of the difficult behavior. Try this:
 - Divide an 8 1/2 by 11 inch piece of paper into six squares. Using a red marker, draw stick people inside red squares depicting 3 of the unacceptable, inappropriate behaviors (ie. yelling, tantrum, hitting). Using a green marker, draw stick people inside green squares depicting 3 of the replacement behaviors (ie. calming center, breathing, using words). Laminate the pictures. Set aside some time every morning to talk about **red STOP** behaviors and **green GO** behaviors.
- ❖ When children exhibit explosive or “melt-down” behavior, the adult must become the surrogate frontal lobe and do the thinking for the child that he is unable to do for himself in the midst of frustration. By doing this over and over again, the child’s going to learn how to do it and then he won’t need you anymore.

- Let the child know you know there’s a problem and you understand what it is. This is the code to access the child’s frontal lobe. Say back to the child what you heard him say to you or to another child.
- Invite the child to a problem solving party. The first word to the invitation is “Let’s”- “Let’s think how we can work that out.” The adult is doing the thinking for him. You are the problem solving team. You can’t have a pre-arranged solution. Don’t revert to expressing a desire to collaboratively problem solve and then provide the solution yourself.
- When a child’s brain is not working well because of his anger/frustration/stress, the adult acting as the surrogate frontal lobe can:
 - Help the child stay calm in the midst of the anger/frustration/stress
 - Help the child define the problem, help the child anticipate the problem
 - Help the child evaluate alternative solutions
 - Help the child see the “big picture”
 - Help the child delay gratification, help the child with communication skills
 - Help the child accurately interpret the situation



- ❖ Use classic games where children must follow directions and wait to take turns may be particularly suited for the development of self-regulation. Try these:
 - **Red Light, Green Light** One child is the stoplight, the other children are the cars. When the stoplight yells “Green light!” the children run toward the stoplight. When the stoplight yells “Red light!” all the children must stop. If a child doesn’t stop, they must go back to the starting line. A popular variation is to include a “Yellow light!” where children must walk instead of run. Excellent for developing self-regulation skills because children must learn to pay attention, follow directions, and wait their turn.
 - **Simon Says** When Simon says, “Simon Says jump!” the children must jump. But if Simon only says, “Jump!” and somebody jumps, that person must sit out for the rest of the game. The last person standing becomes the new Simon. To make the game more challenging add the rule that the children must follow the command when the phrase “Simon says” **isn’t** used! This requires children to pay attention and remember new instructions.
 - **Hide n’ Seek** One child is “it” while the other children hide. After counting to ten, the “it” player must look until all the other children are found. The first player found becomes “it”. Good for developing self-regulation because children must learn to wait patiently and quietly.
 - **Role Playing** Role playing games in which children pretend to be another person for an extended period of time may also provide opportunities for children “to think about their choices and not give in to their immediate impulses.” For example, have one child pretend to be the teacher while the rest of the children pretend to be the students.



❖ **Sensory Activities (Consult with your OT & PT first!)**

- **Proprioceptive Activities (sense of what the muscles and joints feel)**
 - Joint compression
 - Push down on shoulders, head, arms
 - Roll up tightly in a blanket
 - Walking
- **Vestibular Activities (sense of overall movement and gravity- these activities may also wind a child up so observe child closely for a reaction)**
 - Slow swinging
 - Trampoline or mini trampoline
 - Jump rope
 - Rocking chair
 - Sprint running
 - Jumping jacks
 - Riding toys
- **Deep Pressure (a combination of tactile and proprioception)**
 - Squeeze hands/feet
 - Bear hug
 - Ace bandage wrap
 - Swim cap
 - Firm massage
 - Weighted blanket or vest (x ray apron works great, like a Thundershirt!)
 - Support belt



- Make child into a sandwich between sofa cushions or mats
- **Deep muscle work**
 - Pushing (moving wheelbarrow full of dirt, moving furniture)
 - Pulling (bungee rope attached to tree or post)
 - Pressing (crushing aluminum cans in can crusher, crumpling paper)
 - Carrying heavy items from one place to another
- **Oral (chewing, sucking, crunching)**
 - Chewing helps to organize
 - Sucking helps to calm
 - Crunching is alerting
- **Tactile Activities (your skin is your largest sense organ and contains the most receptors to the brain)**
 - Vibration (vibration bug or toy)
 - Brushing (medical brush, bath glove, loofah)
 - Massage
 - Sensory roller
 - Wind (small fan)