

Self-Regulation

What is it?

- how efficiently and effectively a child deals with a stressor and then recovers (Shanker, 2018)
- the ability to manage emotions and behavior in accordance with the demands of the situation (ChildMind Institute)

Why is it important?

- A self-regulating child becomes aware of her/his brain-body responses to stressors and applies personalized strategies to return to a state of "calm, alert focus".
- When children are calmly focused and alert, they are best able to modulate their emotions; pay attention; ignore distractions; inhibit their impulses; or feel empathy for others. (Shanker, 2013)

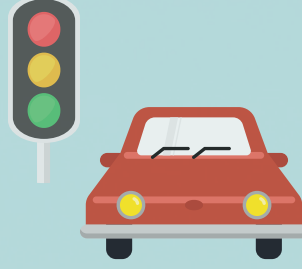
Calm-Alert



- Calm-alert refers to the optimal state of arousal (or alertness) -- a balance of calm and alert.
- Optimal calm-alert balance depends on situation.
 - i.e. reading a book requires a different calm-alert state than playing a sport

"Engine Speeds"

To help children develop awareness, different states of alertness can be described as engine speeds.



Our personal "engines" run at different speeds throughout the day.

- Running high or too fast (overstimulated, high emotions) ↑
- Calm-alert balance. (running just right for the situation) =
- Running low or too slow (under stimulated, lethargic) ↓

There are lots of things that can have an effect on our ability to self-regulate

Here are some examples....



Environment

- familiarity
- temperature
- noise level
- lights
- accessibility
- flexible features



Our Body

- hungry
- thirsty
- pain
- fatigue
- cold/hot
- discomfort
- illness



Daily Events

- accomplished something
- started day on "wrong foot"
- anticipating fun activity
- had an argument



Who We Are

- age
- maturity
- cognition
- self-awareness
- feeling of safety
- supportive relationships

Our capacity to handle stress and self-regulate is influenced by multiple factors.

Our Senses and Self-Regulation



- We receive information from our environment through our senses (smell, taste, touch, sight, hearing, movement)
- Sensory experiences can change our engine speeds by making us feel more calm or alert
 - ex. a noisy, bright, and crowded environment is alerting
- We can use sensory experiences strategically to support self-regulation. Sometimes called sensory strategies.

Sensory Based Strategies for Self-Regulation

Who Uses Sensory Based Strategies?

Everybody! From the baby who enjoys being swaddled, the child who likes rocking, to the adult who chews gum to stay alert - everyone uses sensory strategies whether we realize it or not!

How?

Often they are automatic we may not realize we are using them (ex. twirling our hair, biting nails). Other times they may be used purposefully when needed (ex. playing soft music, a stretch break)

When?

Anytime! The time of day may determine what types of strategies are used. For example, bedtime may include low lighting, a fan for background noise, quiet reading, and minimal body movements to help calm. In the morning, we may use strategies to alert us - shower, exercise, stretches, turning lights on.

Where?

Sensory strategies are used wherever we go. The type of environment may determine what sensory strategies are used. For example at home, a child may wrap self in blanket to calm, at school they may prefer to use a squishy/stress ball, and on the bus they wear headphones.

What?

The sensory strategies that work for someone is unique to the individual and may change depending on day, environment, age etc. See below for some examples.

Examples

MOVE BODY	MOUTH Movement	TOUCH	LISTEN	SEE
Heavy Work 	Suck, Chew 	Play, Fidget, Hold 	Find a Quiet Space 	Adjust the Lighting
Run or Walk 	Blow Bubbles 	Touch Something Soft 	Listen to Music 	Observe Nature

Helping Children to Use Self-Regulation Strategies

Co-Regulation

Adults can regulate a child through voice, facial expressions, body language, and gestures - an interactive and supportive process. (Shanker, 2018)

Environment

Reduce potential stressors in the environment where possible. Provide routine. Make tools available (visuals, objects) to support sensory strategies.

Modelling and Prompting

To help the child learn, demonstrate how to use strategies. When you have established what strategies are effective, remind the child when and how to use them.

Respect and Understanding

Respect their sensory preferences. Understand what works for you may not work for them and that strategies that work one day, may not always work. Be flexible to their needs.

***It should not be expected that young children use strategies independently.**

The ability to use self-regulation strategies is a skill developed with time and guided practice -the first step is co-regulation.

Links: Click Below for Ideas for Strategies at Home

Co-Regulation Strategies 	Sensory Strategy Choice Board 	Heavy Work Ideas for Kids 	Sensory Tools Short Videos Equipment Demonstration 	"Portable" Strategies Visual
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References

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