

SELF-REGULATION: *Ideas to Guide Early Practice*



Renita Williams Thomas, BSN, RN

Early Childhood Supports and Services

State Project Director

Goals of Workshop:

Participants will be able to:

- Define self regulation
- Will be able to identify milestones in self regulation at various ages
- Will understand the influence of regulatory abilities for later social emotional, motor, self help, and attention skills.
- Will understand how the construct of self regulation can be applied to parenting
- Will be acquainted with some disorders of regulation



Definition of self regulation

- Increasing independence in the management of:
 - Homeostasis
 - States
 - Emotions
 - Behavior
 - Attention



Defining Self Regulation

- Regulatory tasks include:
 - Physiological indicators- temperature and sleep
 - Emotional indicators- state regulation, deliberate control of behavior
 - Cognitive indicators- deliberate attention, persistence in problem solving



Recognizing Self Regulation

- As development proceeds, regulatory development is recognized as a gradual shift from dependence to independence.

*Milestones in self regulation
at various stages of
development*





WHAT ARE MILESTONES?

- **Milestones are developmental factors that represent regulatory progress as well as the foundation for further self regulation.**
- ***Nature and nurture* are evidenced**



Exercise:

- For each of the following age ranges think about how the child manages states, emotions and behavior. Think about deliberate versus reflexive control. How is language useful? Think about the degree of adult control needed for behavior control and regulation of attention. How about the brain?:
 - Newborn,
 - Infant,
 - Toddler and
 - pre-School/Kindergartener



Milestones: Newborns (Birth to 4 months)

- Physiological milestones- temperature control, nursing
- Beginnings of state control (recovery from stress, self soothing)
- Habituation and more organized response to stimuli
- “Primitive” interactive abilities
- Rudimentary awareness of cause and effect



Milestones: Infants

(4 months to 12 months)

- Milestones:
 - Regulation of sleep-wake cycles
 - Responsive interaction with caregivers
Responsiveness to routines
 - Dawning of voluntary efforts to control motor responses
 - Cause and effect

■ Reference: M. Bronson (2000)



Milestones: Toddlers (12 months to 3 Years)

- Milestones in emotional and Behavior development
 - Conscious control of behavior developing- increasing restraint or impulse control-
 - Compliance ability is advancing
 - Language and symbolic thinking and planning
 - Increased drive for independence
 - Pays attention to “models”
 - Reference: Bronson



Milestones: Preschoolers

- **More capable of managing emotions and self control**
- **Understanding of rules firmly developed**
- **Can use language to regulate behavior**
- **Beginning to understand reciprocity**
- **Empathy at a higher level of development**
- **Internalization of standards of behavior**
 - **Bronson (2000)**



Milestones: preschoolers

- Voluntary Control: Preschoolers begin to understand the distinction between emotions and behavior. They can choose how to express their strong emotions.

*Milestones in brain development
and self regulation of emotion and
behavior*





Overview of brain development

- Neural connections
- Myelination
- Development of frontal lobes
- Pathways between the frontal lobes and the limbic system

Supporting Emotion Regulation in Children



Role of caregivers-

See handout “self regulation applied in parenting intervention”



EXERCISE:

- Given what we know about the development of self regulation, what do children need at various ages to fulfill their potential for control of emotion, behavior, and attention?



Promoting Emotion Regulation in Infants-

■ *Role of caregivers**

- *Sensitivity and Responsiveness to infant cues and signals*
- *Sensitivity and responsiveness to infant temperament (regularity, stimulation, novelty etc)*
- *Predictable caregiving*

**The environment is especially important in the very early development of self regulation*



Promoting Emotion Regulation in Infants

- *Role of the environment*
 - *At least one consistent caregiver*
 - *Predictable routines and response to infant distress/discomfort-*
 - *Later sensitively deferred response to infant distress (raising the bar)*
 - *Daily routine includes periods of interaction and rest.*
 - *Bronson, 2000 and Greenspan, 1999*



Promoting Self Regulation in Toddlers

- **Avoid coercive strategies- instead emphasize choices and inner control**
- **Routines and patterns**
- **Set up environment for mastery- kid proof, sensory materials, positive direction, cause and effect, appropriate levels of freedom and restraint (LIMITS)**
- **Scaffolding**
- **Help children work through their own scuffles**



Promoting Self Regulation in Pre-School Children

- Adults can model social-emotional control
- Encourage children to use language to guide action
- Support developing inner controls- talk about it
- Tell children the why behind the rule
- Expect children to take an active part in solving disputes with peers
- Help children learn about emotions through play, songs and art

Discipline and self regulation



See: Emotion regulation Parenting
Discussion



Regulation and parenting- Central elements

- Understand developmental milestones
- Focus on child's temperament
- Discipline is teaching (avoid coercive or punishment based strategies)
- Regulation involves increasing child's independence



Central strategies

- Help child become cognitively aware of emotions and acceptable ways to express them (help them learn their triggers)
- Set limits and explain *why behind the rule*
- Provide choices and remind child that you expect him to learn self control
- Praise more than punish

*The connection between self
regulation and emotional
wellbeing*





How is self regulation related to emotional development?

- Attachment
- Becoming independent (mastery over body and behavior)
- Self awareness
- Social skill
- School success



Self Regulation and Emotional Development

- According to Greenspan's Playground Politics, self regulation is a primary milestone that must be mastered before kindergarten for emotional and intellectual well being.

Disorders of regulation



*Regulatory challenges in typical
infants*



Regulatory challenges in typical infants

- Fussiness
- Sleep difficulties
- “Spirited” behavior

Intervention





Focus of Intervention

Parent support- most important!

Increase parent knowledge of self regulation and child development in general.

Increase parent's understanding of their baby's behavior style or temperament

Help parents help their baby practice regulatory skills (self soothing)- increase touch, consistency, sensitivity.