

Consultants Corner: **What is Self-Regulation?**

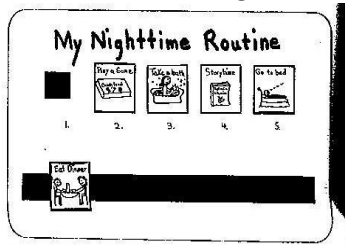
Parents and educators often ask how they can help their young children develop self-control, pay attention, and follow directions at home and in the classroom. First, what is self-regulation? It is simply a child's ability to attend to a task or situation with appropriate body control and awareness. This includes everything from sitting to eat a meal or playing with toys with peers to calming themselves when upset, or calming to fall asleep. Infants learn that a parent's soft voice or rocking helps them calm. Toddlers then learn that routine and it helps them feel in control. Preschoolers learn that if they sit calmly during circle, they are able to participate in the group learning.

Why does my child need to self-regulate? Self-regulation is a *process* and learning to self-regulate helps a child feel in control of themselves and better able to control impulses and emotions.

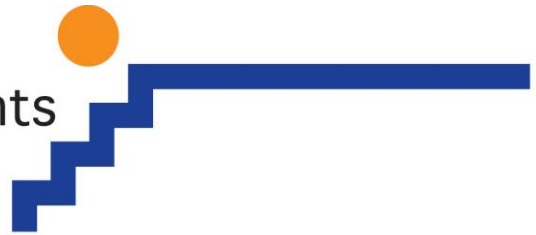
What does it look like when my child is dysregulated? At any given time, children may experience dysregulation. When a child is sick or there is a major change in their schedule, we often see more disrupted behavior. Dysregulation may look like: difficulty remaining focused, a shorter attention span, trouble transitioning from one activity to another, or even a lack of body awareness (frequently bumping into things and appearing clumsy). A child who has trouble falling asleep independently or calming down when upset can be particularly frustrating examples of dysregulation for parents.

How to help your child self-regulate more effectively:

- Provide them with a consistent schedule for eating and sleeping.
- Make home schedules with pictures until they can read: Review what has happened and what is going to happen. Show the steps and allow your child to remove the pictures. This helps them understand what is going to happen next and what they need to do, and is particularly great for bedtime and morning routines!



- Give warnings when a transition will occur, set a timer. Ask your child to repeat back what will happen when the timer goes off to be sure they "heard" your message.
- Teach Calm breathing: use videos such as Daniel Tiger's song: "When you Feel so Mad that you want to Roar" or Sesame Street's "Belly Breathe" sung by Elmo and Colbie Caillat.
- Try deep breathing using props:
 - Blow bubbles gently to create bubbles
 - Use pinwheels
 - Use a feather and blow it off your hand or table



- Practice “Balloon” breathing: Fill your belly like a big balloon over a count of 4 and then breath out; repeat. See the You Tube video “Two Minutes of Mindfulness: Balloon Breaths”
- When your child becomes dysregulated, stay calm, model deep breathing, and talk less!

Help a child calm and stay self-regulated by doing activities that provide proprioceptive (deep pressure into the muscles and joints) and vestibular input (to their movement system).

Activities that calm by providing proprioceptive input:

- Carry heavy items
- Push and pull weighted wagons or carts
- Wheelbarrow walks and animal walks
- Wall push-ups
- Provide pressure to your child with pillows or blankets (make a “sandwich” or “burrito”)
- Play with resistive materials such as playdough, therapy putty, silly putty
- Drink from a straw (try smoothies)
- Provide items to chew such as a chew tube and or gum

Activities that provide vestibular input:

- Ride a bike/tricycle or scooter before school (to give active movement before sitting!)
- Swinging, if swings are not available use a blanket or swing in a hammock
- Rocking chairs and rocking horses
- Gentle bouncing on an exercise ball
- Jump in bounce houses, mattresses, foam nuggets and mini trampolines with a bar

Resources: www.Childmind.org (The Child Mind Institute); [Self-Regulation Interventions and Strategies](#) by Teresa Garland; [Self Reg](#) by Dr. Stuart Shanker; <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/> search self-regulation for assorted articles and podcast episodes.

Child Development Consultants is a local team comprised of a speech language pathologist, an occupational therapist, and an early childhood special educator/behavior specialist. Child DC partners with nursery schools, childcare centers, and independent schools around the DMV to provide support, coaching and resources to teachers and families. For more information go to www.childdc.com