



Newsletter

Show & Tell



Message from the President

Entering kindergarten can be the first big life transition for young children. For the first time, they are spending hours away from home and are subject to new rules and expectations. While kindergarten may mark the beginning of a child's formal education, it is just the continuation of a journey begun in infancy. Parents play a vital role in preparing their children for kindergarten and helping with their on-going success at school.

One of the most important abilities parents can foster in their children – especially their preschoolers -- is self-regulation or the ability to control behaviour. The foundations of self-regulation (or executive functioning) are set in the early years. Children who self-regulate their emotions, behaviour and attention adjust well to school.

Our *Welcome to Kindergarten*™ orientations, resources and activities help families nurture self-regulation. A recent *Welcome to Kindergarten* program evaluation conducted by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation found that children who attended *Welcome to Kindergarten* orientations were assessed by their teachers as exhibiting “a significantly greater number of behaviours indicative of executive functioning (self-regulation); and were significantly more eager to go to school than those who did not attend orientations, as reported by parents.”

In this issue of our newsletter, we're exploring why self-regulation is so important to early learning and how adults can help children develop this important skill. I hope you find the information useful.

Veronica Lacey
President and CEO, The Learning Partnership

Why is self-regulation important for learning?

Self-regulation is a skill we continue to master throughout life but the foundations are laid in our early years. Self regulation develops when caring adults respond sensitively to a child. A secure attachment promotes good self-regulation.

Self-regulation is a skill that is the central building block of early learning.

Children who self-regulate are able to:

- Calm down and focus
- Follow directions
- Get along with others (share, take turns, wait, be friendly)
- Cope with frustration
- Resist doing tempting things
- Solve problems and complete tasks



The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University has a great video on executive function in children. To view, go to <http://bit.ly/SkillsforLifeLearning>.

What does self-regulation look like in Kindergarten?

When at *circle*, children with good self-regulation will:

- Sit calmly with crossed legs
- Look at the speaker
- Listen to the speaker
- Raise their hand to speak
- Take turns speaking, helping, sharing, showing
- Do what the teacher asks

When playing, children with good self-regulation will:

- Listen to instructions
- Use materials safely and appropriately
- Talk using an inside voice
- Solve problems (share materials, take turns)
- Stop at signal
- Put materials away
- Clean up play area
- Move safely in the classroom

When eating, children with good self-regulation will:

- Wash hands with soap
- Talk with their neighbours using an inside voice
- Solve problems (clean up spills, open packages)
- Raise their hand and wait for help if they need it
- Clean up and put away their snack/lunch materials

*from Kindergarten teams in Durham District School Board



Helping children develop self-regulatory skills

Regulating their behaviour can be tough for very young children. Young children tend to live in the moment with their immediate wants or feelings, while adults can exercise control and decide what might be the most appropriate response. For example, adults can receive presents they don't like but still smile and say thank you. A young child will receive a gift she doesn't like and shout, "I don't want this!" and start to cry.

Self-regulation is part of the maturing process and most children do develop better self-regulatory skills as they get older. However, some children require more support than others.

How can parents help?¹

- provide a structured and predictable daily routine and schedule
- be an example by regulating their own emotions and behaviours
- eliminate distractions by turning off the TV, dimming lights, or providing a soothing object (like a teddy bear) when a child gets upset,
- role play on how to act or what to say in certain situations
- teach and talk about feelings and review home/classroom rules regularly
- stay calm and use a firm voice even when a child is "out of control"
- re-direct inappropriate words or actions when needed
- in play situations, pair children with limited self-regulatory skills with those who have good self-regulatory skills
- take a break when needed, as children with limited self-regulatory skills can try an adult's patience

¹Thompson, Ross A. (November 2009). Doing What Doesn't Come Naturally: The Development of Self-Regulation. *Journal of Zero to Three* Vol. 30 No. 2 (pp. 33-39).

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