



School Readiness Tip Sheet

Developing Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation is the ability to manage our own emotions, thoughts and behaviors. It is what helps children handle disappointment or frustration. Self-regulation helps children focus their attention on learning when they might be distracted, upset or excited. Self-Regulation has a stronger impact on school success than IQ or academic abilities.

A child's home environment can have a dramatic impact on his or her ability to develop self-regulation.

Here are some things you can do help your child develop self-regulation:

- **Show your child how** you can react calmly to stress and how you stay in control in different situations. This teaches your child how to react and behave.
- **Set limits, natural consequences and follow through consistently.** Review home/school rules regularly with your child. Children who have consistent limits feel more secure and learn to manage disappointment and frustration.
- **Be sure you mean what you say.** If you say things you do not really mean ("If you don't come now I am leaving without you.") your child will learn your words are not trustworthy.
- **Provide predictable structure and consistent routines** in your child's day.
- **Encourage your child's independence.** Give children child-sized choices. Give children time and support to do things for themselves. Children who have some control in their lives are more able to self-regulate.
- **Encourage your child's efforts** ("You figured out how to move the pieces around to get that puzzle together") rather than praise general traits ("You're smart").
- **Stay calm** and firm in your voice and actions even when your child is out of control.
- **Encourage your child** to "play by the rules" during family game times. Learning how to wait for your turn or even how to "lose" gracefully are all parts of self-regulation.
- **Play games** like "Freeze": Move (run, dance) when music is on and "freeze" in place when the music stops. "Red Light/Green Light" is another good game to practice self-control.
- **Talk aloud as you plan** an activity so your child learns what is involved in planning. For example, "We are going to visit Grandma. First, I need to get our clothes ready to go then I'll pack some snacks for the car."
- **Be an "emotion coach" for your child.** Refer to the "Expressing Emotions" tip sheet.
- **Make a regular bedtime routine and stick to it,** especially on school nights. Children who do not get enough sleep have a much harder time regulating their emotions.

