



Early Learning Digest

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Learning Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is a child's ability to gain control of bodily functions, manage powerful emotions, and maintain focus and attention. Infants and toddlers need help from parents and caregivers to provide external regulation while they are developing this skill--especially when they are overwhelmed. Through caring relationships with adults, babies begin to develop their ability to self-regulate little by little.

When caring for an infant or a toddler, parents and caregivers need to support the child's attempts to regulate. For example, you might put a pacifier back in your baby's mouth, provide a soft blanket for a toddler falling asleep, and use consistent routines so your child knows what to expect.

Here are some strategies to help your child learn to self-regulate:

Observe closely. Babies and toddlers send cues that tell you when they are hungry, tired, or ready to play.

Respond. Be alert to your individual child's need for regularity, novelty, and interaction.

Provide structure and predictability. Use consistent approaches to routines such as feeding, sleeping, and diapering or toileting.



When your child becomes a toddler, define age-appropriate limits. Help your child feel safe and know what to expect. For example, if your child reaches for the door to go outside, gently redirect and say, "We don't open the door by ourselves. Please wait and we'll go outside together."

Show empathy and caring. When you recognize your child's needs and treat them as important, your child will feel good about himself and will be better able to handle strong emotions.

Self-regulation is influenced by a child's relationship with the important adults in his life. Providing the experiences, support, and encouragement that help very young children learn to self-regulate is a critical element for their development.

Source: "Self-Regulation: A Cornerstone of Early Childhood Development," by Linda Groves Gillespie and Nancy L. Seibel, Beyond the Journal: Young Children on the Web, July 2006.

Teaching "Timeliness"

The value of punctuality varies around the world. In American culture, timeliness is seen as a sign of integrity and responsibility. Being on time is associated with skills needed for learning, such as focus, perspective-taking, and organization. Some children are inclined toward organization and punctuality, while others take a more carefree attitude. How can you help a child who is not as in tune to the social norm of punctuality become more aware? Here are some ideas.

Help your child understand that being on time feels better. Try explaining, "When we're late, other people have to wait for us, which isn't fair to them. I feel grumpy and nervous when I'm late."

Keep a planner or a to-do list with your child. Using visual schedules and planners can help develop time management and organizational skills by making time a concrete concept for young children. Together with your child, create a calendar using symbols for bedtime, breakfast, etc. Go over the schedule so your child understands what to expect. "We're having breakfast now, and then we need to get dressed."

Continued on page 2.



If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or call 1-866-693-GROW (4769), to talk to a professional and find out how you can get connected with various resources in Minnesota.



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Building Self-Control in Young Children

Teaching children to delay gratification is an important life skill. Studies have shown that children who learn to practice self-control are more goal-oriented, get along better with others, and are more effective problem solvers. Consider the following activities to teach your children delayed gratification.

- Teach children ideas to distract themselves when they are waiting for another activity to begin. Some ideas to consider include singing a song, telling a story, reading a book, playing a game, etc.
- Use natural waiting times to reinforce this important life skill. When riding in the car, waiting for a friend to arrive or waiting at the doctor's office, talk with your child about how long you have to wait. Make suggestions of things they can do to make the time go faster.
- Recognize and talk with your child about how hard it is to wait. By acknowledging your child's feelings you are providing a powerful way to strengthen your child's patience.



- Provide opportunities for your child to develop imagination during waiting times by offering suggestions. "While you are waiting, can you think of a time you had fun with your friends?" Or "If you could have any food in the world, what would you choose?"

Self-control is one of the most important skills parents can teach their children. These skills are important for success in school and in adulthood.

Source: <http://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/e-family-news/helping-preschoolers-with-self-control/>.

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Build in extra time. The realities of family life can derail the most organized parent. The baby may need a diaper change as you are walking out the door. Your toddler dawdles over breakfast. Build extra time into your schedule to buffer lateness.

Get organized. Help your child organize his or her things the night before. Lay out clothing, pack the bag for daycare, place your keys by the door where you will readily find them. Getting things ready ahead of time can give everyone an extra 10 to 15 minutes every morning.

Allow for "child time." If you constantly feel rushed, look at your own schedule. Keep a calendar or daily planner where you can write down your commitments, including time to spend uninterrupted with your child.

Learning to be punctual takes practice. However, we will always have things come up that can make us occasionally late. Be patient with your child, but don't shelter him or her from life experiences or the natural consequences that come with tardiness.

Source: "Time Management Skills: Teaching Your Child About Timeliness," <http://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/e-family-news/time-management-skills-teaching-your-child-about-timeliness/>, retrieved October 2016.

Test Your Knowledge!

- 1) T F Using visual schedules and planners can help develop time management and organizational skills in children.
- 2) T F Babies and toddlers send cues that tell you when they are hungry, tired, or ready to play.
- 3) T F Teaching children to delay gratification to achieve a greater goal is not an important life skill.
- 4) T F Self-regulation is a child's ability to manage powerful emotions, and maintain focus and attention.



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Answers: 1) T, 2) T, 3) F, 4) T