



# What you need to know about self-regulation

Self-regulation is an essential aspect of a child's development and their ability to learn<sup>1</sup>. It plays a key role in the acquisition of learning skills and in their success at school<sup>2</sup>. When a child struggles to master their emotions, their social adaptation may be hindered, and their struggle can also be a considerable risk factor for developing childhood behavioural problems, both internalized (anxiety and depression) and externalized (aggressiveness, opposition, etc.)<sup>3</sup>.

## What is self-regulation?

Self-regulating means that the child is able to identify the emotions they are feeling and to understand where those emotions are coming from, that they can control them in order to manage the situation appropriately, and express them correctly<sup>4</sup>.

Children who are able to self-regulate achieve a state of emotional wellness that promotes the adoption of the behaviours required for their psychological and social development as well as for their success at school. To reach their full potential, children have to work on developing the key skills of self-regulation, such as attentional capacity, memory and cognitive flexibility<sup>5</sup>.

Emotion regulation is one of the three primary mechanisms of self-control, alongside behavioural inhibition and behavioural regulation. Behavioural inhibition can be defined as the ability to hold back an automatic response to certain stimuli, such as not saying a comment which may be harmful to the receiver. Behavioural regulation can be defined as the ability to control our actions in order to direct them to a specific target, such as taking ourselves away from a conflict to prevent making the situation worse<sup>6</sup>.

1 Pascal, C. (2009). *Pour chaque enfant, toutes les chances : Curriculum et pédagogie du Programme d'apprentissage des jeunes enfants*. Toronto, self-published.

2 Baumeister, R.F. and Vohs, K.D. (2011). *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications*. New York: Guilford Press.

3 Massé, L., Verret, C., Picher, M.-J. and Couture, C. (2016). Comment aider les enfants à mieux gérer leurs émotions?. *Revue préscolaire*, 54(2), 27-29.

4 Ibid.

5 Pascal, *op. cit.*

6 Carlson, S.M. (2003). The development of executive function in early childhood: Executive function in context: Development, measurement, theory and experience. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 68(3), 138-151; Massé, Verret, Picher and Couture, *op. cit.*

## How you can promote self-regulation at school

Self-regulation skills are acquired gradually and every child acquires them differently depending on their learning pace, their temperament, their level of education, their past social experiences and family history.

At school, a child's self-regulation skills generally develop through interactions with their teacher and other students<sup>7</sup>. Children progressively acquire self-regulation skills through the implementation of a variety of learning activities, such as modelling, practical exercises and mindful meditation<sup>8</sup>.

## How modelling, role-playing and mindful meditation can help children develop self-regulation skills

There are several possible learning activities that can promote the development of self-regulation skills, including modelling (showing a child how to do something). Through modelling, teachers can demonstrate to their students the effects of their behaviours and actions. Whether you do this through play or learning activities, children should be given the opportunity to identify their emotions in the context of situations that they experience regularly<sup>9</sup>. Whereas role-playing gives children a chance to practise the social skills that can help them achieve set goals, such as resolving conflict.

Finally, breathing exercises and mindful meditation can help children learn how to regulate their emotions, develop their curiosity, their compassion, and be more flexible in their behavioural responses<sup>10</sup>.

## Don't jump in too quickly!

For many children, being forced to conform to an authority figure can negatively impact their ability to self-regulate<sup>11</sup>. Instead you should focus on the child's motivation to adapt to their emotional and social needs, decode them and to help them understand. A school environment that is too strict can reduce a child's perception of self-control and hinder their self-regulation development<sup>12</sup>.

To effectively support a child's self-regulation development, teachers must observe and encourage activities and best practices, and create opportunities for the child to self-regulate.

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7 Bodrova, E. et Leong, D. J. (2008, mars). Developing self-regulation in Kindergarten. Dans *National Association for the Education of Young Children, Beyond the journal – Young children on the web*. Repéré le 20 novembre 2015 à [http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200803/BTJ\\_Primary\\_Interest.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200803/BTJ_Primary_Interest.pdf).

8 Florez, I.R. (2011). Developing young children's self-regulation through everyday experiences. *YC Young Children*, 66(4), 46 54.

9 Massé, Verret, Picher et Couture, *op. cit.*

10 Schonert-Reichl, K.A. et Roeser, R.W. (2016). *Handbook of Mindfulness in Education: Integrating Theory and Research into Practice*. New York : Springer.

11 Bodrova et Long, *op. cit.*

12 Bronson, M.B. (2000). *Self-regulation in early childhood: Nature and nurture*. New York : The Guilford Press.



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