

Teach self-regulation

Practice brief

The practice

Teachers foster self-regulation in students by providing systematic instruction.

How does it help?

The fostering and ongoing development of self-regulation is a key part of the early years of schooling. Student capacity to regulate their feelings and behaviour increases together with their recognition of the need for adherence to rules and the growth of an internal system of values. For students, the ability to regulate and manage their feelings and behaviour without adult support has a positive impact on engagement and learning. When students are able to self-regulate, teachers can focus on the teaching and learning process, rather than on redirecting unproductive or prompting productive behaviours. The majority of students acquire the strategies they require to regulate their feelings and behaviours by observing those around them. However, some students may benefit from systematic instruction in the use these strategies.

What is it?

Emotional and behavioural self-regulation is the ability to control or modulate one's feelings and behaviours. Over time, students gradually develop an understanding of which behaviours are acceptable, and which behaviours are not, in particular situations. Self-regulation is influenced by each student's temperament, gender, cultural factors, parenting styles, and life experiences.

How does it work?

Students learn to regulate feelings and behaviours by observing others in the world around them and internalising over time what they can and can't do at home, school, and in the community. Teachers can foster student self-regulation in the classroom by modelling strategies and behaviours that students can use to control and manage their feelings and behaviour during activities, routines, and transitions. The teacher observes when students can and can't self-regulate their feelings or behaviour and take note of potential stressors. They identify one or more behaviours which may assist students to self-regulate. Finally, they explicitly teach the targeted behaviours. Students on the spectrum are given multiple opportunities to practice, using the behaviour/s taught to self-regulate when they are calm.



How do I do it?

- Observe when students can and can't self-regulate their feelings and behaviour and take note of potential stressors.
- Identify one or more behaviours (e.g., deep breaths, taking a break) which might enable students to regulate their feelings or behaviour.
- Explicitly teach students the acceptable behaviour/s for particular situations.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to practice the behaviour/s.
- Model using the identified behaviour/s to regulate your own behaviour.

It works better if:

- the behaviour/s taught has been selected for instruction because it meets student need
- students' feeling-word vocabulary is concurrently developed.

It doesn't work if:

- students are taught expected behaviour/s that are too hard for them to use even with scaffolding and support (that sit outside of the zone of proximal development)
- teacher response to unregulated behaviour is punitive rather than instructional.

How will I know if it's working?

Students regulate their feelings and behaviour with increasing frequency and success.

Where can I go to find out more?

- Kid Sense Child Development: "Self Regulation"
<https://childdevelopment.com.au/areas-of-concern/sensory-processing/self-regulation/>
- Early Childhood Australia: "Self-regulation development: Strategies for working with children & parents" <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/shop/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ECA-Learning-Hub-webinar-self-regulation-slides.pdf>
- Starnet: "Thoughts, Feelings and Actions: Self-Regulation in Early Childhood"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGpK74qL4yg>

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)

Implementing this practice will meet the following Australian Professional Standards for Teachers:

- 1.1 - Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students
- 3.3 - Use teaching strategies
- 4.3 - Manage challenging behaviour

