

Early Learning and Child Development



Key Takeaways:

1. Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, behaviour, and attention — and it develops over time with support.
2. Children learn self-regulation through consistent, caring relationships with responsive adults (co-regulators).

Self-regulation is the skill of handling emotions, behavior, and attention. Kids aren't born knowing how to do this — they learn over time by watching and practicing with adults who support them. This is called co-regulation. When adults stay calm and help children through tough moments, they build these skills together.

How to support the child or early learning space:

Stay calm and respond the same way each time. Create environments that support sensory needs, offer choices, and provide comfort. Use simple language and name emotions. Be patient — every child develops at their own pace.

Tips for the Environment:

- Use soft lights, calm music, and cozy areas to help children relax.
- Offer hands-on, sensory activities like water play, sand, fidgets, or climbing.
- Include familiar books and songs to build comfort and connection.
- Provide both active and quiet play choices to support different regulation needs.
- Set up creative sensory spaces like calming corners or themed play areas.

Tips for Relationship Building:

- Take time to build trust—get to know each child and their cues.
- Build strong connections with families to better understand each child.
- Stay calm and speak simply to help children name and understand emotions.
- Label emotions using words like “sad” or “frustrated.”
- Help children step by step — give just enough help so they can succeed.
- Give choices to help children feel in control.
- Use gentle reminders or touch to guide them.
- Watch for triggers and step in early with support.
- Use simple language (1–2 words) when children are upset.

Sources referenced in this tip sheet include:

Child Mind Institute – How Can We Help Kids With Self-Regulation?

Center on the Developing Child – Resilience

Scholastic Parents – Developing Self-Regulation

Siegel, D. J. (2010). Hand Model of the Brain, Mindsight.

Stuart Shanker – Self-Regulation for Educators (MEHRIT Centre).

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