Tips for Supporting Children's Self-Regulation Skills

In early childhood, self-regulation skills are still developing. Self-regulation refers to the ability to monitor and control our own behaviours, thoughts, and emotions. Adults can work with children to support the development of these important skills. Below are some suggestions for how adults can help children improve their self-regulation skills.

Overall Self-Regulation

- **Role-model**. Children are always watching and learning from adults. When adults model positive ways to manage their own behaviours and emotions this can help to teach children good self-regulation skills.
- **Let off steam**. Physical activity can help children to let off steam. This can help children relieve tension or frustration.
- **Use self-talk**. Encourage children to work through problems by talking out loud to themselves. This can help them work through a problem using their words.
- **Mindfulness**. Encourage children to relax and refocus. Mindfulness activities such as deep breathing, counting to 10, or drawing can help children to unwind.

Behavioural Regulation

- **Teach words to express thoughts and emotions**. This can provide children with ways to express themselves through words rather than through acting out.
- **Create routines and make expectations clear**. This can help children with behavioral control as it gives them an idea of what to expect during daily routines.
- **Play games with rules**. Some examples of games with rules that help children manage their behaviours are "Simon Says" or "Hide and Seek".
- **Play games that help build impulse control**. Some examples of games that require children to stop and control their behaviours are "Stop and Go" or "Freeze".

Attentional Regulation

- **Work their memory**. Play memory games with children that require them to remember a sequence of colors, numbers, or animals.
- **Give children breaks**. It is important to give children breaks through the day to let them recharge. It also gives children an opportunity to reflect on events that may have happened in their day.
- **Change "have to" tasks into "want to" tasks**. Make a game out of chores that children need to complete, such as putting toys away or doing homework. Help children see that putting toys away can make them easier to find or that doing their homework can help them feel confident at school.

Emotional Regulation

- **Discuss emotions**. Young children have to do many things that they don't always want to. Letting children know that you recognize how they feel is important (such as saying "I can see that you are really sad"). This can help children put their feelings into words.
- **Play pretend**. Talk about and act out different scenarios with children that they might find frustrating, such as not getting a toy in a toy store. This can help build their skills in managing their emotions.
- **Decision making**. Encourage children to make their own decisions. This can help them understand the outcomes of their decisions and can also help them learn to improve their decision making skills.
- **Emotion chart**. Have visual cues such as a feelings chart that allows children to express how they are feeling through pictures. For example, have them point at the face that shows how they feel. See this link for an example of a feelings chart: sites.psych.ualberta.ca/PEERSlab/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PEERS-Emotion-Posters.pdf.

Excited

Silly

Sad

Happy