

What You Need to Know.

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Self-Regulation: 10 Self-Reg Lessons Learned

1. Build a relationship. Supporting and enhancing self-regulation in young children is only made possible, and proceeds from, a strong relationship.

2. Keep your eyes on the target. The focus, when we're doing Self-Reg, has to be on the self-regulation itself and the stressors that are affecting the child rather than some secondary problem that may have arisen from or been exacerbated by an excessive stress load.

3. Pay attention to individual differences. In building self-regulation skills we need to present children with all sorts of choices, allowing the opportunity to experiment so that children can learn what self-regulation strategies bring them back to a calm and alert state.

4. Proceed gradually. Self-Reg takes time to figure out. Going step-by-step often requires tremendous patience: a matter of not trying to go too far too fast.

5. Don't go too metacognitive. Present the self-regulation concepts in ways children can fully grasp, in their body as well as in their minds. Children need an embodied understanding of what words like "calm" mean for them.

6. Don't expect everyone to have the same capacities. Some children have less 'gas in the tank', or are burning too much energy during a task and so must work much harder to concentrate on a task.

7. Expect the unexpected. Expect that what works beautifully for one child may have the opposite effect on another, or something that has worked beautifully will suddenly stop working for reasons that you may never understand.

8. Change a trajectory. In Self-Reg, the starting point for changing a child's trajectory begins with our perception of that child; for this has far more bearing on how he perceives himself than we might ever dream.

9. Be culturally attuned. Successful Self-Reg initiatives are culturally-relevant and driven by interest and curiosity rather than a manual. Approach self-regulation in different cultures with an open and inquiring mind.

10. Take it personally. Self-Reg is always personal. Building relationships is the first principle of practicing Self-Reg. In order to do Self-Reg we also need to honour our own personal needs. The importance of relationships and honouring personal needs should be addressed in training and supports for early childhood educators.