



Self-Regulation Snap Shot #1: A Focus on Infants and Toddlers



Support of self-regulation is critical at each stage of development from birth through young adulthood.

Self-regulation is the act of managing thoughts and feelings to enable goal-directed actions.

Self-regulation develops through interaction with caregivers and the broader environment over an extended period from birth through young adulthood (and beyond).

Caregivers support self-regulation development by using three strategies in a process called “co-regulation.” Caregivers include parents, teachers, afterschool care providers, extended family members, and others.

Self-regulation includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills and processes that support children in coping with strong feelings, controlling impulses, learning, and getting along with others.

Self-regulation is important because it promotes wellbeing across the lifespan, including physical, emotional, social and economic health and educational achievement.

This snap shot summarizes key concepts about self-regulation development and intervention for infants and toddlers for practitioners and educators interested in promoting self-regulation for this age group. It is based on a series of four reports on Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress prepared for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). For more information, visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/toxic-stress-and-self-regulation-reports>

Self-Regulation Skills Developing in Infants:

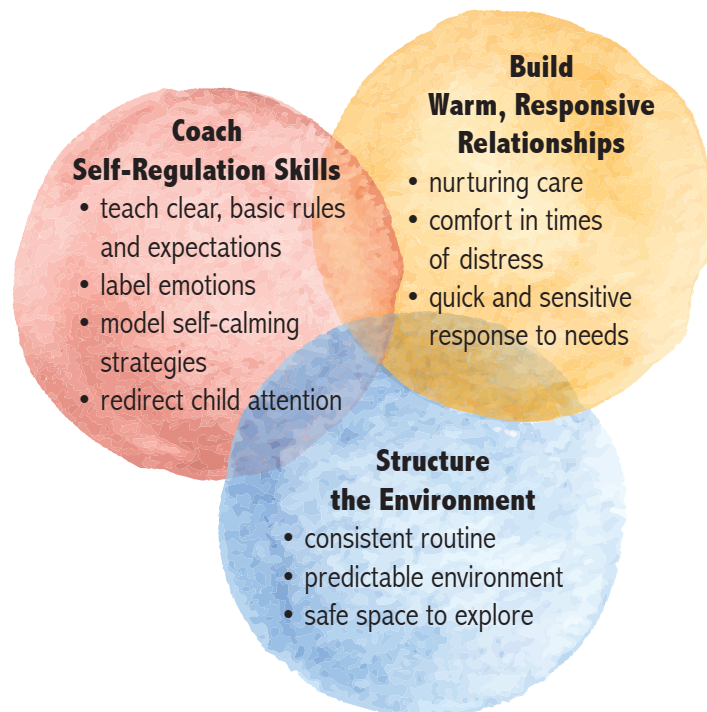
- Shifting attention or averting gaze when overwhelmed
- Self-soothing by sucking fingers or a pacifier

Developing in Toddlers:

- Focusing attention for short periods
- Adjusting behavior to achieve goals
- Briefly delaying gratification
- Beginning to label feelings
- Turning to adults for help with strong feelings



Self-regulation is influenced by stress and adversity in the environment as well as caregiving supports and children’s own biology, skills, and motivation.

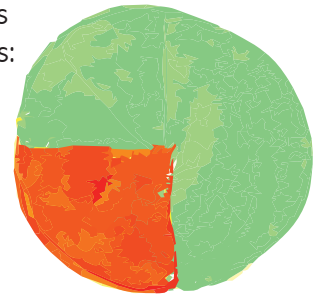


Three components of co-regulation for infants and toddlers

Lessons Learned About Interventions to Promote Self-Regulation in Infants and Toddlers

Across the lifespan, there are two intervention approaches that support development of self-regulation: skills instruction and co-regulation support. The combination of these approaches is believed to be most effective, regardless of the child's age. For infants and toddlers, existing interventions utilize these approaches as follows:

- 0% of studies focused on skills instruction alone;
- 70% focused on co-regulation alone;
- 30% combined both;
- 0% used other approaches



Based on a review of preventive interventions published between 1989 and 2013, 27 studies with comparison groups were found that targeted self-regulation development for infants and toddlers (ages birth through 2 years), with the characteristics described here.

Strengths:

- All studies were rigorous randomized controlled trials
- Racially/ethnically diverse samples with a focus on families most in need of support

Limitations:

- Relatively small number of studies
- Majority of child outcomes were based on parent report and may reflect changes in parent perceptions, attitudes, or skills rather than changes in child self-regulation

Conclusions:

- Broad meaningful effects seen on parenting skills and attitudes may translate into better parent-child relationships and long-term benefits for young children
- Considerable variability in findings suggests need for careful selection of programs
- Room for enhancement exists with greater involvement of parents and teachers

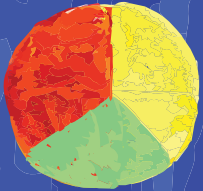
Key considerations for promoting self-regulation in infants and toddlers:

- Train teachers and child care staff in co-regulation skills, particularly warm interaction, responsiveness to child cues, and environmental structure
- Identify ways to support school and child care staff's own self-regulation capacity
- Share self-regulation information, ideas, and classroom approaches with parents/caregivers to support their co-regulation and promote consistency across environments

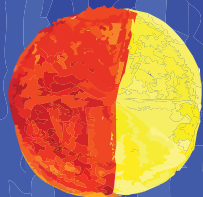
Outcome Assessed	# Findings	Average Effect Size*	% with Positive Effects*
Child Outcomes: Core Self-Regulation			
Cognitive	4	Medium	100%
Emotional	8	Medium	63%
Behavioral	22	Small to Medium	55%
Stress	6	Small to Medium	83%
Child Outcomes: Other Functional Domains			
Language/Learning	4	Medium to Large	100%
Interpersonal	20	Small to Medium	65%
Mental Health	6	Small	33%
Parent Outcomes			
Co-regulation	12	Medium	83%
Parenting Skills	14	Medium	100%
Parenting Attitudes	10	Medium	90%
Parent Mental Health	9	Small	44%

*Reported only if findings are based on at least two studies

78% of the children lived in adversity or were at-risk



The majority of the children were minority (36% African-American, 29% Hispanic)



More than half of the interventions were provided by clinicians



44% of studies targeted children;
96% targeted parents;
4% targeted teachers/
child care staff

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