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 youth in coping with strong feelings, controlling impulses, learning, and getting along with others.

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

This snapshot summarizes key concepts about self-regulation development and intervention for middle-school aged youth 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 Snap Shot #4: A Focus on Middle-School Aged Youth

Self-Regulation Skills Developing in Middle-School Aged Youth:
- Completing longer and more complex tasks
- Self-monitoring
- Planning, prioritization, and time management to achieve goals
- Using strategies to manage stress
- Using health-promoting strategies to calm down when distressed
- Considering consequences before acting
- Making effective decisions “in the moment”
- Solving more complex problems independently
- Goals, behavior, and decision-making guided by empathy and concern for others

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

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

Build Warm, Responsive Relationship
- consistent positive regard
- support and empathy in times of distress
- responsivity to needs

Coach Self-Regulation Skills
- goal-setting
- problem-solving
- stress management
- time management
- organization
- planning

Structure the Environment
- time and space to relax and calm down
- monitoring to limit risk opportunities
- rules and consequences to incentivize good choices

Three components of co-regulation for middle-school aged youth
Lessons Learned About Interventions to Promote Self-Regulation in Middle-School Aged Youth

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 youth’s age. In middle-school aged youth, existing interventions utilize these approaches as follows:

- 74% of studies focused on skills instruction alone;
- 6% focused on co-regulation alone;
- 14% combined both;
- 5% used other approaches

Based on a review of preventive interventions published between 1989 and 2013, 78 studies were found that targeted self-regulation development for middle-school aged youth (ages 11-14 years), with the following characteristics:

**Strengths:**
- Large number of studies with diverse samples
- Many universal interventions exist for high-poverty schools

**Limitations:**
- Few interventions target parents and teachers
- Interventions are more diffuse and less focused on emotion regulation than for younger youth
- Majority of outcomes are youth self-report
- Effects across interventions vary greatly

**Conclusions:**
- Positive impact seen in cognitive and behavioral regulation as well as delinquency
- Effects may be somewhat smaller than for younger youth
- Room for enhancement with more focused interventions that target emotion regulation and involve parents and teachers

**Key considerations for promoting self-regulation in middle-school aged youth:**
- Encourage a positive school climate for all students
- Deliver self-regulation skills training in at-risk schools
- Train teachers and afterschool staff to teach, model, reinforce, and coach self-regulation skills
- Identify ways to support school and program staff’s own self-regulation capacity
- Provide parent education supports that address co-regulation

**Outcome Assessed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Assessed</th>
<th># Findings</th>
<th>Average Effect Size</th>
<th>% with Positive Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Outcomes: Core Self-Regulation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Small to Medium</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>None to Small</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation/Initiative</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>None to Small</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Outcomes: Other Functional Domains</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language/Learning</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delinquent Behavior</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health/Self-Care</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Small to Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<td>46%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Outcomes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parenting Skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Small to Medium</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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