

Self-regulation is an aspect of cognitive development that can predict school readiness and success. It relates to control. When it's missing, we wonder, who is that rabble-raising kid? Why won't they stop interrupting? Why don't they pay attention? Why can't they stay in line?

Self-regulation leads to **executive functions**; a set of mental processes that help us connect past experiences with present day actions. It enables us to set and carry out goals of daily life. People with executive function weaknesses have difficulty planning, paying attention to and remembering details, organizing, strategizing, and managing time and space. They show weakness with **working memory**, information we hold temporarily in our brains that helps us reason and guides our daily decision-making and choices.

How can parents, guardians, and educators support young children in our homes, childcares, and preschools to develop self-regulation in healthy ways? Read on.

✿ Impulse control, planning and flexibility:

1. Withhold a desired object (e.g., food) for the count of 3-5 before presenting. Slowly increase holding time when it feels right. But don't go over one minute.
2. Review activities about to happen. E.g., "First, snack, then outside playtime." "First we go to the library, then the grocery store, then we'll go home." Have the child repeat the steps.
3. Allow one child to direct others in a familiar simple activity. Switch that role when appropriate. When comfortable, children often thrive taking different roles in play.

*Regulating others can regulate oneself, and inhibit impulsive behavior, leading to **taking turns**. Knowing what's about to happen, develops **planning and organizational skills**.*

✿ Attending to and recalling details:

1. Find things (e.g., people, objects, animals, colors) in pictures (e.g., find the mouse in Goodnight Moon pictures).
2. After looking at an object or picture for a short time (e.g., 30 seconds), hide it, then describe it.
3. Name members of familiar categories (e.g., foods, toys). Listing family members, including extended family can be fun.

*Attending to details increases **focus and attention**. Reciting members of categories develops **vocabulary and internal organization**.*

✿ Managing time and space

1. Talk through daily routines. E.g., "After dinner, let's read a book." Occasionally ask, "What will we do next?" "What did we do first?"
2. Make clean up fun. Assign specific places for items. E.g., "Put the blocks in the green box."
3. While completing a task, narrate and explain your actions.

The more one knows about their surroundings and daily activities, the more comfortable they become with themselves, others, and daily life.

