

Stop, Think, Act:
Supporting executive functioning and self-regulation
from birth through early childhood

19th Annual Birth to Three Institute
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**Yale Center for
Emotional Intelligence**
ei.yale.edu

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Learning objectives

1. Become familiar with research on the importance of self-regulation
2. Learn about how self-regulation develops from birth through early childhood
3. Gain specific strategies for promoting self-regulation in early learning settings (classroom and home)

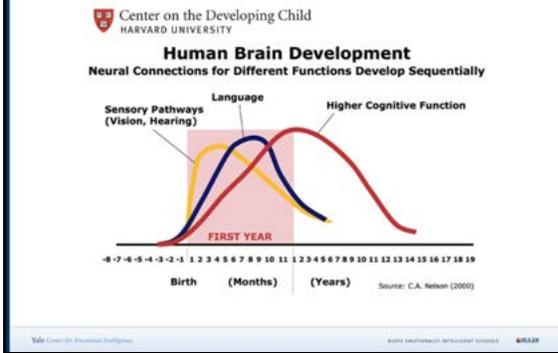
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Every child is an individual

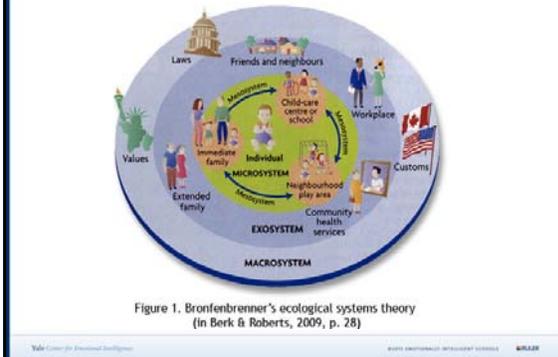


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Early brain development¹



It takes a village²



Thought questions

If you had to choose one word to describe the community you want children to grow up in, what would it be?

What is one word you would use to describe the community you want to foster in early learning settings (school and home)?



Key definitions

Executive function (EF):

1. Attentional/cognitive flexibility³
2. Working memory⁴
3. Inhibitory control⁵

Self-regulation:

The integration of EF skills into behavior. In other words, the conscious control of thoughts, emotions, and actions – the ability to stop, think, and THEN act.⁶

What self-regulation looks like in early learning settings

- Participating in group activities
- Following directions
- Taking turns
- Waiting for a turn
- Showing awareness of self and others
- Paying attention
- Listening
- Asking for help
- Regulating emotions



Executive function: cool and hot⁷



Integrating hot and cool

Imagine a child hits another child during circle time. How do you respond?

It depends.

What if the child hit the other child because he feels...

- **angry** because the other child took his toy.
- **frustrated** because he likes the other child and does not have the words to say, "Will you play with me?"
- **bored** because the circle time activity was too long and is now looking for something else to do.

This same thought process can also be applied at home.

Why self-regulation is important

Self-regulation relates to:

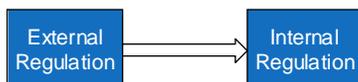
- relationship quality⁸
- physical activity and health⁹
- short and long-term academic success^{6, 10}
- decision-making, wages, and employment¹¹

Self-regulation is a protective factor for children at risk.¹²

How self-regulation develops¹³

Laying the foundation

- From external to internal regulation
- Attachment relationship
- Temperament and goodness of fit



Promoting self-regulation^{13, 14}

1. Lay the foundation for a secure attachment
2. Promote critical thinking through caregiving
3. Model self-regulation
4. Embed self-regulation in classroom management
5. Teach self-regulation skills

Tip 1: Lay the foundation for a secure attachment

How do you want children to feel?

- Get to know children and families as individuals
- Demonstrate sensitivity and responsiveness
- Be present and engaged
- Share personal stories

Tip 2: Promote critical thinking through caregiving

- Say what you see
 - Promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Practice shared attention



Tip 3: Model self-regulation

- Identify opportunities for modeling self-regulation
- Practice, practice, practice
- Realize developing self-regulation is a process
 - Be forgiving of yourself and others

Tip 4: Embed self-regulation in classroom management

- Create and maintain routines/schedules (at school and home)
- Provide visual and oral cues
- Embed self-regulation into the environment
 - Lights, music



Tip 5: Teach self-regulation skills^{13, 15}

- Play self-regulation games
 - Freeze dance
 - Quiet, loud
 - Simon says
 - Deep breaths
 - Yoga/stretching
- Use books to support self-regulation development
- Teach transition activities
 - Songs and fingerplays



Supporting self-regulation development^{13, 16}

- Give opportunities to practice across multiple contexts
- Practice self-regulation OUTSIDE of challenging moments
- Support self-regulation during challenging moments
- Consider the emotions that underlie behavior
- Provide supportive feedback



- Consider how we teach a child to cut with scissors.
 - Self-regulation needs to be practiced and learned.
 - Help children see themselves and others as learners (and help families do the same).



Thank you!

Questions?

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Additional resources (books and articles)

Books

Stop, Think, Act: Integrating Self-Regulation in the Early Childhood Classroom. Authors: Megan M. McClelland and Shauna L. Tominey. Publication date: September 2015. Publisher: Routledge. *Book in press*

Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs. Author: Ellen Galinsky. Publication date: 2010. Publisher: Harper Collins

Say what you see for parents and teachers. Authors: Sandra R. Blackard. Publication date: June, 2012. Publisher: Language of Listening.

Articles

McClelland, M. M. & Tominey, S. L. (2014). The development of self-regulation and executive function in young children. *Zero to Three Journal*, 35(2), 2-8.

Tominey, S. L. & McClelland, M. M. (2011). Red light, purple light: Findings from a randomized trial using circle time games to improve behavioral self-regulation in preschool. *Early Education and Development*, 22(3), 489-519.

Additional resources (web-based)

Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function

http://developing-child.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp11/

Building Social and Emotional Skills at Home

<http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/building-social-and-emotional-skills-home>

Developing Young Children's Self-Regulation Through Everyday Experiences

http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/201107/Self-Regulation_Flowr_OnlineJuly2011.pdf

Helping Children Make Transitions Between Activities

<http://csefel.yale.edu/resources/www/www4.html>

Helping Your Child Begin Developing Self-Control

<http://www.youthresearch.org/child-development/social-emotional-development/teaching-your-child-discipline-and-self-control.html>

Self-Regulation: A Cornerstone of Early Childhood Development

<https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/200607/Gillespie2006STJ.pdf>

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Images and Figures

- a. & b. Shauna Tominey
- c. <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>
- d. http://www.beststart.org/OnTrack_English2-pro motehealth.html
- e. Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence
- f. <http://www.fs-inc.org/services/programs/family-discovery-center>
- g. <http://www.parenting.com/article/5-tips-for-talking-about-racism-with-kids>
- h. <http://www.teachpreschool.org/2011/04/sorting-it-all-out-in-preschool/>
- i. <http://missingsecrettoparenting.com/antiracism-acting-attitude-diffuse>
- j & k. Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence
- l. Shauna Tominey
- m. & n. Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence
- o. http://hellogiggles.com/quit-tearing/shutterstock_191728364-people-tearing/
- p. <http://www.newkidscenter.com/Preschool-Cutting-with-Scissors.html>
- q. <http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/cutting-scissors-printables>
