

## What can I do at home?

- Get to know what your child's stressors
- Help your child to identify what causes them stress.



You know your child best!

- Canada Public Health Services recommends that children between 5-12 years old get a minimum of 60 minutes of vigorous exercise per day (2018).



Physical Activity

- Consider adding moments for self-reflection and mindfulness into your family's day.
- Try programs like martial arts or yoga to encourage mind and body to work together.



Mindfulness

- Set limits on the time that your child spends playing video games and watching television.
- Try and keep the screens off before bedtime.



Limit Screen Time

- As often as possible, try to have dinner together as a family.
- Keep bedtime consistent and create and keep to a routine that works for you



Keep routines

- Remember there is no such thing as a bad kid!
- Be patient with yourself!
- Talk to your child's teacher or access community support to get help.



Be patient and supportive



# SELF-REGULATION



## A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

### Websites for more resources and information:

[www.self-regulation.ca](http://www.self-regulation.ca) or [www.selfregulationinstitute.org/](http://www.selfregulationinstitute.org/)

### For additional support:



Children's Services Division  
605 Rossland Road East  
Level 1, P.O. Box 623  
Whitby, Ontario L1N 6A3

Telephone: 905-666-6238 or  
1-800-387-0642

Email:  
[childrens.services@durham.ca](mailto:childrens.services@durham.ca)

Website:  
[www.durham.ca/childrensservices](http://www.durham.ca/childrensservices)

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“self-regulation represents a very different way of understanding why a child might be having problems with self-control, and more important, what can be done to help that child.”

~Stuart Shanker, 2013

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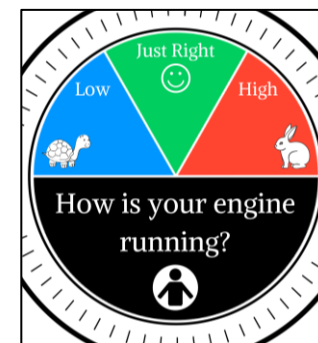
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## What is Self-Regulation?



Self-regulation is how a child manages their energy so they can maintain a calm, yet active state of mind. Effective self-regulation requires learning how to recognize and respond to stress, recover and restore well-being after facing a stressor (Mehrit, 2018).

Think of a car engine. When self-regulated, a child's engine is running at optimal speed, and the child can learn efficiently. But when self-regulation breaks down, two things can happen.



### 1. The engine revs too fast and overheats.

This often results in hyperactivity, impulsiveness, temper tantrums and/or aggressive behaviour.

### 2. The engine revs too slow and stalls.

A stalled engine leads to attention problems, disengagement and 'shutting down'.



*The goal of self-regulation is to keep the engine running at a sustainable speed, not too fast or slow.*

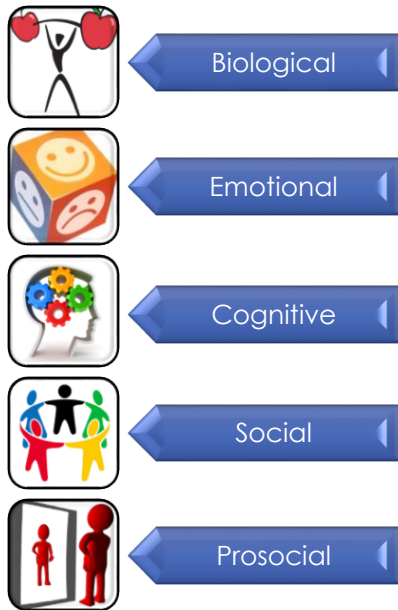
# What is a stressor?



We may forget that children have stress too! There are five main causes of stress, they are called domains. Some stresses may be smaller than others, some may be chronic and toxic for learning potential (Mehrit, 2018).

## 5 Domains

The five domains are part of a dynamic system. They influence one another in complex ways. The well-being of a child needs to be taken into consideration with the needs and well-being of the adults in their lives too (Mehrit, 2018). Examples of stressors include:



- Changes in routines
- Sudden or loud noises or bright lights
- Exciting situations
- Stimulating video games or toys
- Problems at home or with friends
- Anxiety or worries



## There are NO BAD KIDS!

If a child is struggling with self-regulation, they may exhibit poor behaviour. Things like tantrums, acting out, aggressive behaviours and crying may be indicators that a child is experiencing a *toxic stress response* because of too much stress (Siegel & Bryson, 2015). The earlier we help children to develop their executive functioning skills the better We should avoid punishing and provide a predictable environment where a child feels safe and secure (CDC, 2011).

**GROWTH MINDSET & INCLUSION**

INSTEAD OF THINKING... (FIXED MINDSET)	TRY THINKING... (GROWTH MINDSET)
• HE IS NOT READY FOR SCHOOL.	• HOW CAN WE GET SCHOOL READY FOR HIM?
• WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH RESOURCES.	• WHAT CAN I DO WITH THE RESOURCES I HAVE?
• SHE NEEDS TO BE PULLED OUT TO A SEPARATE SETTING.	• HOW CAN I MAKE SURE SHE HAS A SENSE OF BELONGING?
• I NEED MORE EDUCATION ASSISTANT TIME.	• WHAT CAN HE DO INDEPENDENTLY?
• WE HAVE TRIED THIS STRATEGY BEFORE.	• DID ANY PART OF IT WORK?
• I WASN'T TRAINED FOR THIS.	• WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

WHEN A FLOWER DOESN'T BLOOM YOU FIX THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH IT GROWS, NOT THE FLOWER.  
Alex Den Heijer

FREE DOWNLOAD: northstarpaths.com

# 5 Steps of Self-Regulation



**Dr. Stuart Shanker** is the founder of the **Mehrit Centre**. He is an eminent Canadian researcher and professor who has dedicated many years to learning more about self-

regulation and sharing his knowledge with educators, governments and parents around the world. He also founded the **Self-Regulation Institute** (SRI), a non-profit charitable organization. The SRI aims to further our understanding of stress and stress management through research.



The **five steps of self-regulation** is a guide for teachers and parents to help promote restoration, resilience and self-regulation.

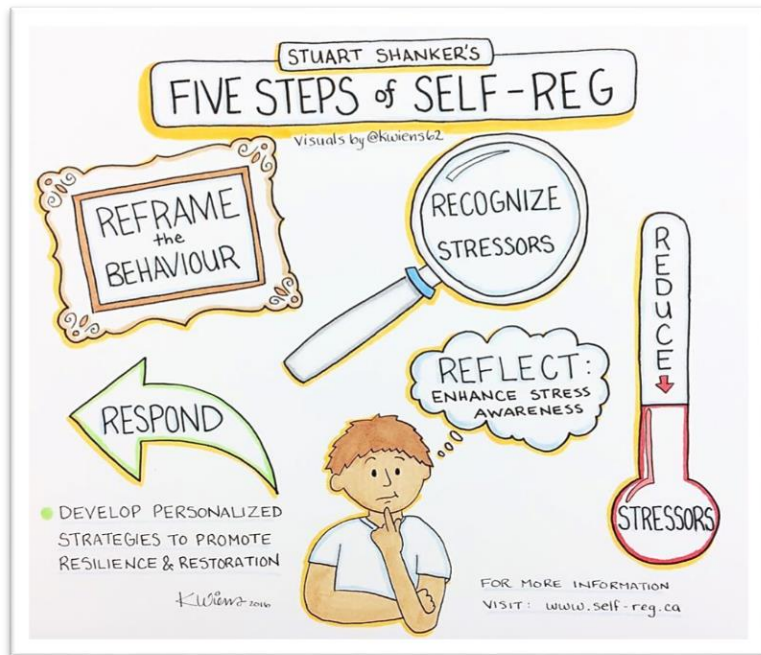


Image Source: Mehrit Centre, 2018

## Why is self-regulation important?

Being able to self-regulate means your child is in the **optimal mindset for learning**: a calm yet alert state. In this mindset, learning is natural and easy. Studies have shown that self-regulation in kindergarten is an accurate predictor of future academic success (CDC, 2011). Self-regulated students can control their behavior, leading to better interactions with friends and other people in their lives. It helps build strong relationships and happy people.

## How is self-regulation encouraged at school?

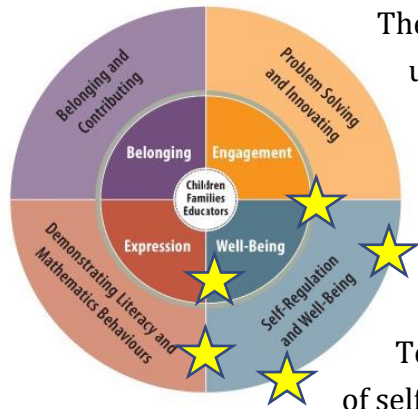
Teachers work with students to create an environment that promotes self-regulation. They collaborate with the children to establish rules and expectations for self-control, such as asking the children to walk in lines in the hall or to use 'indoor voices' in the classroom. Children have lots of opportunities to play together. While at play children learn how to take turns, cooperate and share materials. Lots of visual reminders and verbal cues help them monitor their own behaviour, actions and emotions.



**Learning self-regulation is not all hard work!**









Lots of games like "Freeze Dance" or "Red Light, Green Light" to build children's self-regulations skills and have fun. Playing games, dancing and being silly are all great ways to reduce stress and make children feel good about being at school. Bodrova and Leong (Lots of practice and experience gives children the opportunity to learn that it can be much more rewarding to cooperate, share and take turns.

# Kindergarten Curriculum



These are the four frames (categories) used for learning assessment in kindergarten. One of the four frames called, *Well-Being*. Self-regulation is considered a key component of a child's holistic well-being and development.

Teachers facilitate the development of self-regulation skills and are careful observers. A teacher can only report on what they **see** and **hear**. The teaching team uses the Kindergarten Program (2016) as a guide to both teaching and assessment. The chart outlines the some of the components for self-regulation and well-being.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•talk with other children?</li> <li>•talk with teachers?</li> </ul> <p><b>Communicate with others</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•take care of their belongings?</li> <li>•make safe choices?</li> </ul> <p><b>Independence and Responsibility</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•take turns, cooperate and share?</li> <li>•show acts of kindness?</li> </ul> <p><b>Identify and Use Social Skills</b></p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•persevere when challenged?</li> <li>•try new activities?</li> </ul> <p><b>Problem-Solving Skills</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•know about some nutritious foods?</li> <li>•care for their own toileting and hygiene?</li> </ul> <p><b>Healthy practices and well-being</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•use fine motor skills (eg: zippers, colour)?</li> <li>•participate in gym?</li> </ul> <p><b>Using small and large muscles</b></p> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•demonstrate coordination?</li> <li>•demonstrate spatial awareness?</li> </ul> <p><b>Develop movement skills</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•manage their emotions?</li> <li>•participate in music, drama and visual arts?</li> </ul> <p><b>Emotions and the Arts</b></p> 	<p>You can access more school curriculum information by visiting <a href="http://OntarioMinistryofEducation.ca">Ontario Ministry of Education</a> website.</p>

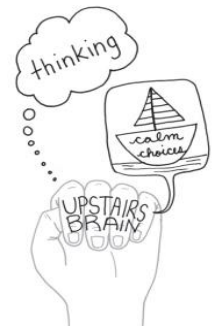
## HELP! My child ate the marshmallow!

The marshmallow experiment is a classic experiment to measure self-control (delay of gratification). **Stuart Shanker** suggests, if a child is under stress, they are in a depleted energy state and will find it harder to display self-control. The **key to helping children is to reduce stresses** so they are better able to control their impulses (Mehrit, 2018).



**Dr. Dan Siegel** has authored numerous parenting books and is a clinical professor of psychiatry. He suggests that we visualize the brain like a hand held in a fist. He uses the analogy that our brain has an *upstairs* and *downstairs*.

The **upstairs brain** is where you make good decisions and do the right thing, even when you're upset. It is where we plan, make decisions and regulate our behaviour and emotions. The BIG feelings come from the downstairs brain. The



**downstairs brain** is the more primitive part of the brain that acts on instinct and is responsible for fight or flight. When you "lose your cool", or "flip your lid" you are exposing your downstairs brain and losing control.



Image sources: Morning, T. (2015) *The Whole-Brained Child Workbook*.

**When the *upstairs brain* is functioning, a child is better able to self-regulate.**



## Mmmmarshmallows!

### What do marshmallows have to do with self-regulation?

In the 1960s Walter Mischel

orchestrated a series of experiments to explore self-control and the delay of gratification. They suggested that to function effectively, sometimes people must voluntarily postpone immediate gratification. In their test they presented the child with a treat (a pretzel, cookie or the infamous marshmallow) and told they could **eat one right away or wait and get two**. The longer a child could resist, delay gratification, was considered a greater level of self-control. Having strategies such as making a choice and generating distraction techniques increased waiting time (Mischel, Ebbesen & Zeiss, 1972).

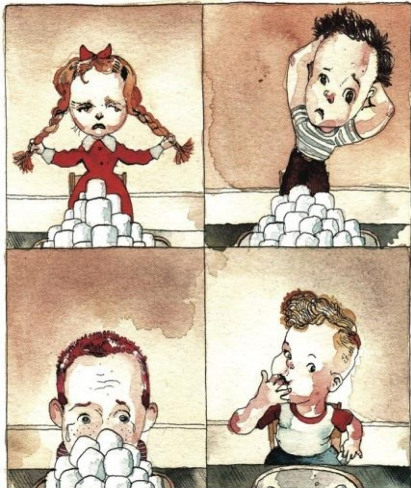


Image Source: Blitt, B (2009) *The New Yorker*

Follow up studies with the same children showed that the **ability to delay gratification** could be used to **predict academic abilities** and other **areas of competency** (eg: coping with social & personal problems (Mischel, Shoday & Rodriguez, 1989).

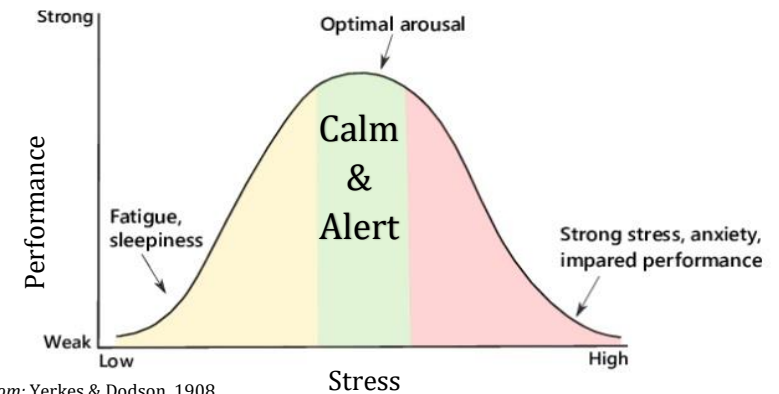
Mischel explained that it wasn't just about the treats. Some

studies used coloured poker chips. He said, "**the studies are about achievement situation and what influences a child to reach his or her choice**" (Urist, 1994).

## Why Self-Regulation Strategies Fail

Adults and children can use strategies to promote self-control and monitor their emotions. One of the greatest challenges is that when someone is under stress, **they can't use those strategies**. When our bodies are responding to stress we are in a **fight or flight** response. This limits our ability to reason and to perform cognitive tasks or reason.

A stressor is anything that burns energy to keep internal systems running smoothly (Shanker, 2016).



It is best to identify what things stress us and to address those problems. These strategies are only successful when we are **calm and alert**. Building routines and healthy habits to combat stress will help children to be in this zone more often.

### SELF-REG: THE FIVE CORE STEPS

1. READ THE SIGNS AND REFRAME THE BEHAVIOUR
2. IDENTIFY THE STRESSORS
3. REDUCE THE STRESSORS
4. BECOME AWARE OF WHEN YOU'RE OVERSTRESSED
5. FIGURE OUT WHAT HELPS YOU CALM, REST, AND RECOVER



Image Source: Mehrit Centre, 2018

## Building the Brain's 'Air Traffic Control'

Harvard University's *Centre on the Developing Child* (CDC) describes the importance of **executive function** development in childhood. They describe executive function as a brain's air traffic control system in a busy airport that needs to manage arrivals and departures. Executive functioning is the foundation for children to improve their social and academic skills. These functions are involved in:



### Working Memory

- Remembering and holding information in your head
- Following multiple steps of instructions
- Aids in planning and organizing

### Inhibitory Control

- Helps us to stay on task and persevere
- Aids in turn-taking and sharing
- Resisting impulsive or negative responses & ignoring distractions

### Cognitive Flexibility

- Ability to transition from one activity to another
- Helps with problem-solving & creative thinking
- Adapting to new challenges or conditions

Children who lack the ability to stay focused and resist impulsive responses, they are at increased risk for academic achievement and problem behaviours such as aggression (CDC, 2011). In a kindergarten study, a lack of inhibitory control was found to be the most strongly correlated with poor math and literacy skills (Blair & Razza, 2007).

*"In many ways, coming to school with a solid base of these executive function skills is more important than whether children know their letters and numbers." ~ CDC, 2011*

## Supporting Brain Development with Early Experiences



Relationships with parents and caregivers are the most important in a child's life. The *Centre on the Developing Child* (2011) suggest that there are many ways that an adult-child relationship can help children practice their skills and improve their executive functioning. Sensitive and responsive caregivers can help a child by providing them lots of opportunities to:

- Make decisions and choices whenever possible
- Direct their own activities
- Interact socially with others

### Three phases of 'following the rules'

#### 1. Follow the Rules

- Engaging in games and activities with set rules.
- At home you can try playing card games like "Go Fish", "Crazy Eights" or board games like "Snakes and ladders"

#### 2. Set Rules and Monitor

- Encourage children to set their own rules and decide what happens if the rules aren't followed.
- This often happens naturally when children engage in pretend play. Maybe they can put on a show for you and have designed a whole sequence of performances.

#### 3. Apply the Rules

- Experts in rule following are able to apply rules to new situations.

*Adapted from: Bodrova & Leong, 2008*