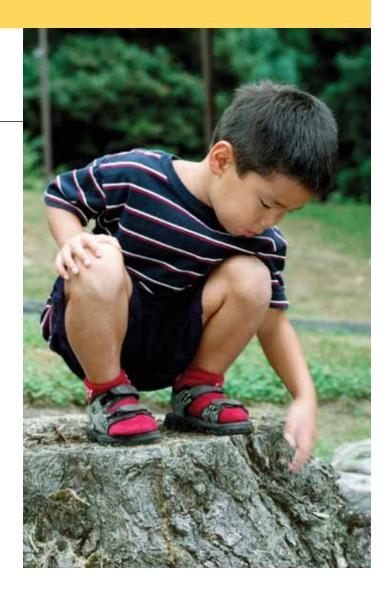
## Self-Regulation

## What is Self-Regulation?

Self-regulation is a child's ability to control his or her behavior. It develops over time, and involves many aspects of social, emotional, and cognitive development. Self-regulation can also be thought of as the successful integration of emotion (what a child feels) and cognition (what a child knows or can do) resulting in appropriate behavior.



# Some other things to know about self-regulation:

Self-regulation is not related to intelligence. Factors that help shape how well a child can self-regulate include:

- **★ AGE:** Self-regulation develops as children grow.
- ★ BIOLOGY: Your child's temperament and how he responds to stressful situations affect how and when he develops self-regulation.
- ★ RELATIONSHIPS: Your interaction with your child, including how you accommodate his temperament and respond to his needs, affect how he learns to self-regulate.
- ★ COGNITION: Using language (especially naming emotions) helps develop self-regulation and sets the stage for the child's future learning.

## Why Self-Regulation Matters

## Self-regulation appears to help children solve problems and develop coping strategies.

★ Self-regulation includes the ability to focus and to control impulses. The sooner a child can self-regulate, the sooner she will be prepared for school, where academic and social success require her to think for herself and meet the expectations of others.

## Children who don't learn to self-regulate usually have a harder time transitioning to school.

★ Being "ready for kindergarten" means knowing letters, colors, and numbers, but also means being able to sit still during circle time and get along with others.

## What to Expect, and When:

#### **INFANCY: Self-Soothing**

- ★ It is critical to understand that until your baby is at least six months old, he relies entirely on caregivers to manage his stress – he has no ability to self-regulate. This is why we say that "you can't spoil a baby" and that you need to respond to your baby's cues quickly and consistently.
- ★ Infants rely on caregivers to respond to their signals and meet their needs for food, sleep, comfort, and interaction.
- ★ During the first year, babies learn how it feels to have their needs met, and gradually learn to create that feeling (known as "self-soothing") with less help from you.
- \* Through this maturation process, the baby learns ways to calm himself when upset.

#### **TODDLERHOOD: Managing Emotions**

- During the toddler stage, children learn more about feelings, and begin to connect situations to emotions.
- \* This is a difficult, yet important time of growth for children, often filled with displays of emotional extremes (ranging from excitement to frustration).
- \* As children's self-regulation and language skills develop, their temper tantrums and emotional outbursts often become more manageable and happen less often.



#### **PRESCHOOL YEARS: Emotions in a Social Context**

- ★ Between the ages of 3 and 5, children begin to understand the relationship between their feelings and their behavior.
- \* This means that during these years, it is critical for parents and caregivers to help children identify and implement selfregulation strategies, such as practicing waiting and naming emotions.
- ★ For parents of preschool children, this involves setting limits and expectations for behavior. Preschool-age children have greater control over their impulses, and they are starting to think before they act.

### What Parents Can Do

#### **FOR ALL CHILDREN:**

- \* Provide structure and predictability.
- ★ Model self-control and self-regulation in your words and actions when you are frustrated, upset, or excited.
- ★ Seek help. If your child is struggling with managing her emotions or behavior, early identification and intervention can support both you and your child in developing these important skills.

#### **FOR INFANTS:**

- ★ Be responsive to your baby's needs, such as hunger or tiredness. When your baby cries, pick him up.
- Look for overstimulation cues such as turning away or arching the back; when they occur, give your baby a break and reduce the amount of stimulation.

#### FOR TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS:

- ★ Find ways to say yes rather than no. For example, "You can bang this pot with a spoon" instead of "Don't bang on the glass table."
- ★ Tell them what is possible rather than what is not. For example, say "Please walk" rather than "Don't run."
- ★ Name emotions, using words like happy, sad, embarrassed, and proud to describe how you feel.
- \* Anticipate transitions and announce changes to normal daily routines well in advance.
- \* Offer opportunities for creativity and play.
- ★ Be involved. Anticipate inappropriate behavior and re-direct it.