



Self-Regulation Development and Strategies in Early Childhood

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Disclosure

Dr. Murray is a trained mentor in the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Program, and receives compensation from community organizations for providing trainings and consultation.

AGENDA

- Self-Regulation: Definition and Development
- Self-Regulation Challenges
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences and Stress
- “Co-Regulation” and Self-Regulation Coaching
- Self-Regulation Skills Instruction
 - Content
 - Methods

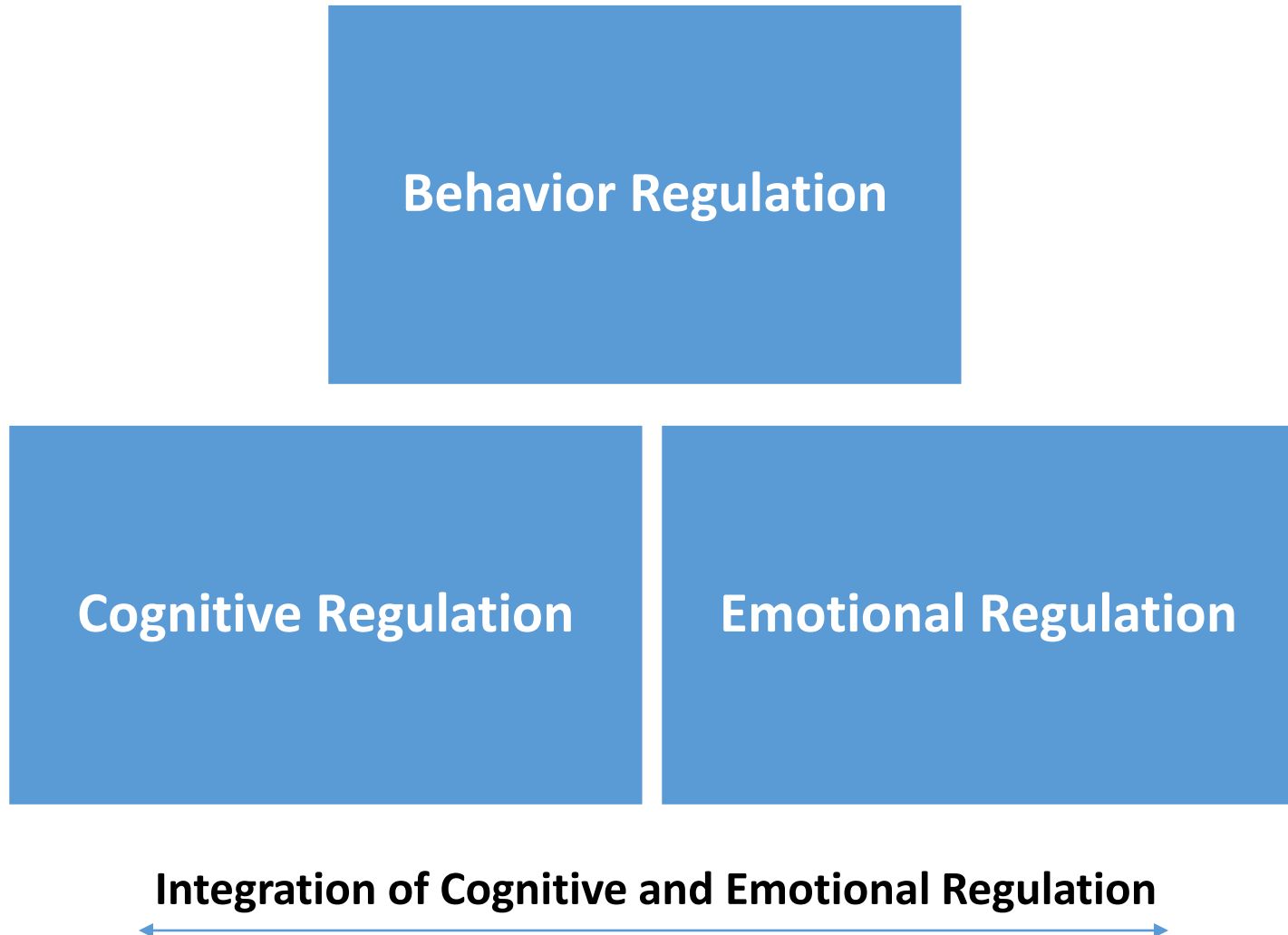
What is Self-Regulation?

Self-Regulation is...

The act of managing *thoughts* and *feelings* to enable *goal-directed actions* such as:

- **organizing behavior**
- **controlling impulses**
- **solving problems constructively**

Components of Self-Regulation



Self-Regulation



Willpower

Emotion Regulation

Executive Functioning

Self-Control

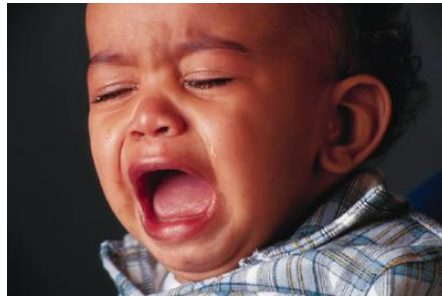
Effortful Control

*Self-
Management*

Self-Regulation Across Early Childhood Development

Turn and Talk

- What does self-regulation look like during early childhood?
 - Infancy
 - Toddlerhood
 - Preschool-Aged
 - Early Elementary School



Development of Self-Regulation

Cognitive

- Increased ability to focus attention
- Increased ability to shift attention
- Ability to hold information in memory
- Ability to see others' perspectives
- Ability to think flexibly to solve problems

Emotional

- Increased ability to self-soothe and calm down
- Ability to identify feelings in self and others

Behavioral

- Engage caregivers for comfort
- Increased ability to adjust behavior to achieve goals
- Increased ability to inhibit impulses and delay gratification
- Increased ability to follow directions and rules

What Self-Regulation Skills do Young Children Need to be Successful in School?

Vignette

- What skills are the children learning by interacting with this teacher?
- How will this help them learn and be successful in school?
- What other skills do they need?

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Self-Regulation Skills for Young Children

- Recognizing and labeling different kinds of feelings in self and others
- Coping with frustration and strong emotions
- Delaying gratification for increased periods
- Using a variety of strategies to calm down and inhibit impulses
- Focusing attention for increased lengths of time
- Listening, following directions and rules
- Persisting to complete age-appropriate tasks
- Perspective-taking and empathy
- Thinking flexibly to solve problems

Why is Self-Regulation Important?

- Foundational for academic and school success
 - Predicts wellbeing and long-term adjustment
 - Problems with behavior regulation
Suspension and expulsion from child care centers
- ➔
- 8,000 preschoolers suspended every year
 - Rates of expulsion 3x as high as for school-aged children
 - Disproportionately boys and Black children
 - About 20% are children with disabilities
 - More than 10% of NC Pre-k teachers reported having expelled a child



Recognition of the Importance of Self-Regulation in Early Childhood

- Division of Early Childhood Recommended Practices
 - Interactions that promote social-emotional development and problem-solving through modeling, teaching, feedback, and scaffolding
 - Instruction that plans, supports, and prevents challenging behaviors with coaching and consultation
- Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework
 - Identifies emotional and behavioral self-regulation as an approach to learning that caregivers can promote
 - Emotional functioning and relationships with peers and adults identified as foundational for school readiness

Division for Early Childhood. (2014). DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education 2014; Administration for Children and Families (2015) HS Early Learning Outcomes Framework

Self-Regulation Challenges

Common Self-Regulation Difficulties in Preschool

- Hitting, pushing, kicking, biting
- Not sitting in circle
- Not able to wait
- Not able to keep hands to self
- Temper tantrums
- Easily frustrated
- Not following rules or directions
- Unable to stick with new or difficult tasks



Take A Stand!

Young children generally
misbehave on purpose.

Self-Regulation Challenges

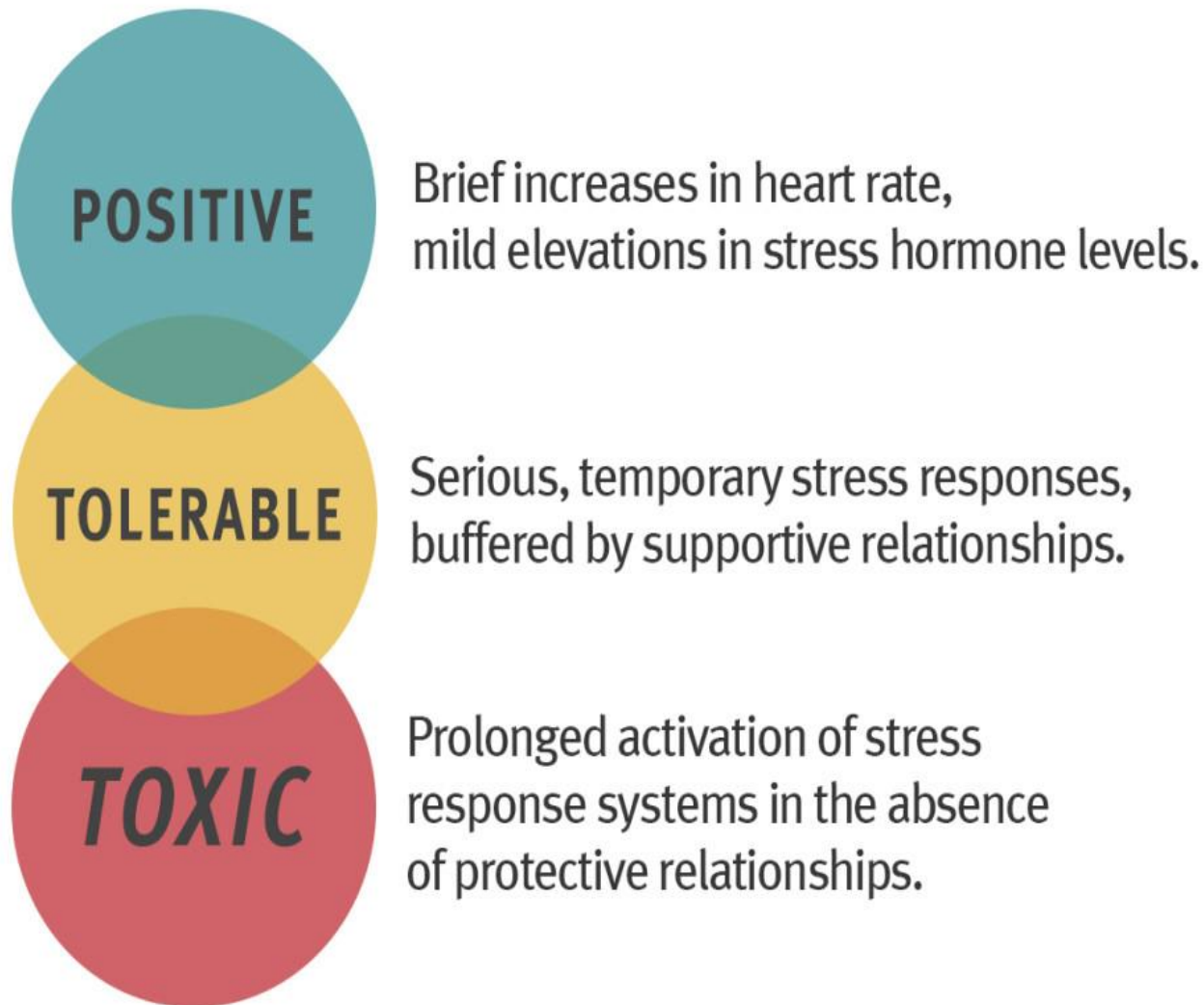
- What contributes to self-regulation difficulties?
- Think of factors about the environment as well as the child.



Common Self-Regulation Challenges and their Impact

- **Biology/temperament** – attention problems, “high motor” (hyperactivity), impulsivity, inflexible or sensation-seeking
- **Developmental or language delays** – can’t understand rules/directions or express needs with words
- **Stressed caregivers** – “attention-starved” children, distrust adults, lack confidence, low motivation
- **Poverty and its associated adversity** – can’t focus, over-react to frustration and stress, more vulnerable to future stress
- **Lack of learning experiences** – When caregivers are stressed and home environments are chaotic, children may not have the experiences necessary to learn to listen, wait, and engage in prosocial behaviors

Types of Stress



Impact of Toxic Stress on Self-Regulation

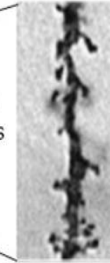
Adversity can cause brain-behavior changes that delay self-regulation development

Toxic Stress Changes Brain Architecture

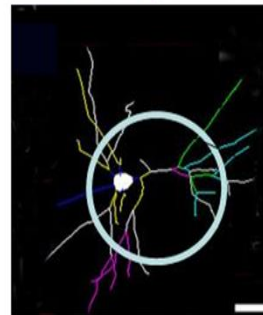
Normal



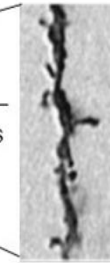
Typical neuron—
many connections



Toxic
stress




Damaged neuron—
fewer connections



Prefrontal Cortex and
Hippocampus

Sources: Radley et al. (2004); Bock et al (2005)

Center on the Developing Child  HARVARD UNIVERSITY

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/>

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

1. Emotional abuse or constant criticism, humiliation, or fear
2. Physical abuse by a parent or caregiver
3. Sexual abuse or molestation (attempted or actual)
4. Feeling unloved, uncared for, or not supported by your family or others
5. Not having basic needs met (food, protection, health care)
6. Parent separation or divorce
7. Domestic violence in the home
8. Living with someone who was an alcoholic or used drugs
9. Living with someone who was depressed or mentally ill
10. Caregiver/family member in prison

What Stress looks like in Young Kids

- Difficulties:
 - Paying attention/staying on task
 - Overly sensitive or emotional
 - Challenging rules or being oppositional
 - Aggressive towards others
- Patterns of behavior:
 - Fight
 - Flight
 - Freeze



How Families Influence Self-Regulation (100+ studies)

Positively

- Buffer the effect of stressors and adversity
- Parental warmth and sensitivity

Negatively

- Harsh discipline and maltreatment
- Parent mental health issues or substance use



Take a Stand!

If kids' home lives are stressful, there is little I can do as a [teacher] to make a difference in their life.

How EC Educators Influence Self-Regulation

- Positive Teacher-Child Relationship:
 - “Protects” from risks of stress & poverty
 - Promotes academic achievement and social adjustment
- Classrooms with effective behavior management:
 - Less disruptive, aggressive, and inappropriate behavior
 - Children more focused on learning



Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta et al., 1995; Silver et al., 2005; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2007, 2009

What helps Strengthen Self-Regulation in ECE?

Co-Regulation

Warm, responsive caregiving and behavior coaching or scaffolding

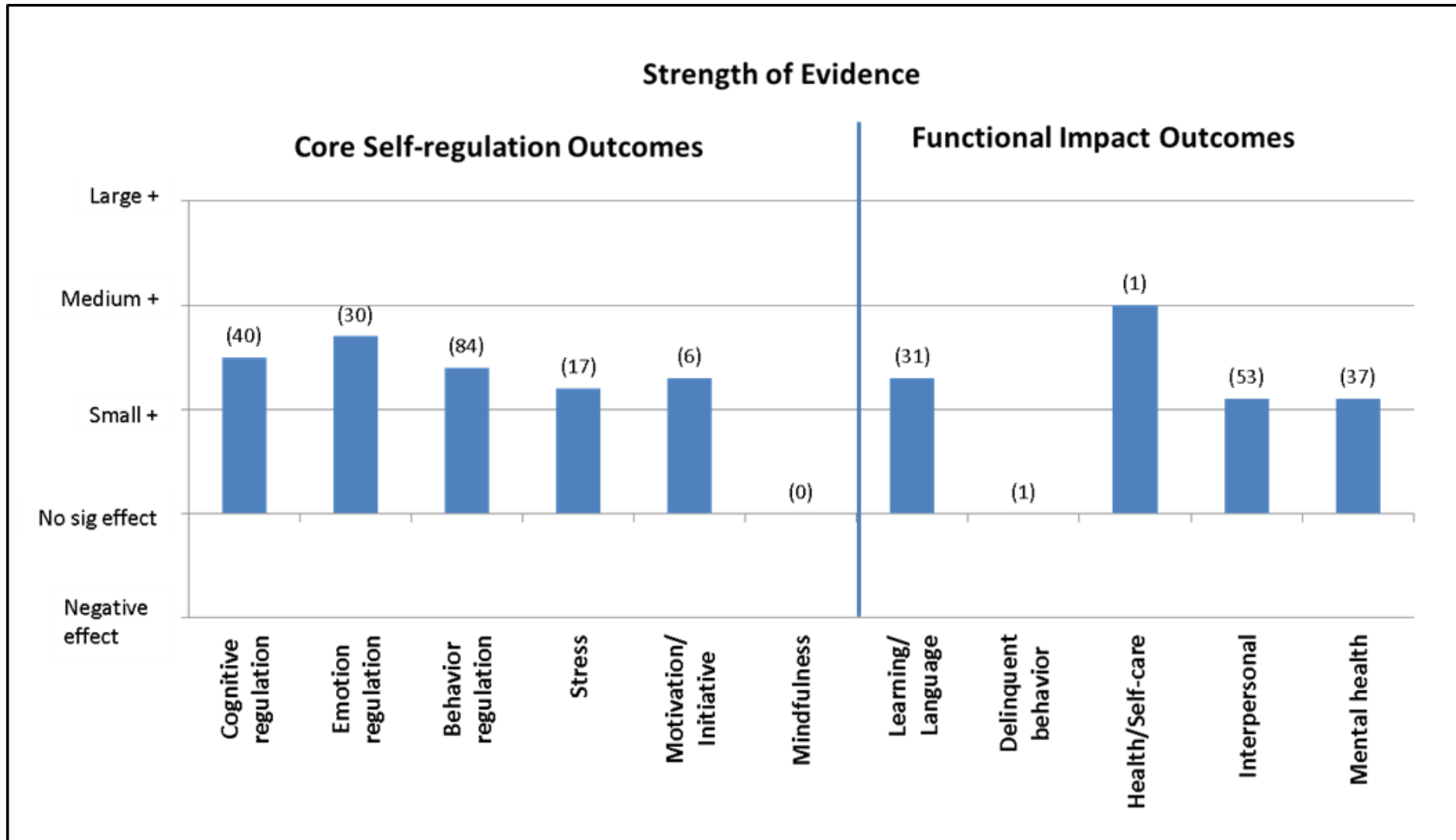
Skills Instruction

In cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains of self-regulation



Murray, Rosanbalm, Christopoulos, 2016. Report 2016-34. Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families.

Intervention Effects for Preschool-Aged Children (n = 75 studies)



Exemplar Preschool Self-Regulation Interventions

- Teacher Classroom Management Training
 - Incredible Years (IY) and PATHS
- Child Curricula
 - Tools of the Mind
 - Head Start REDI
 - PATHS
 - Incredible Years Dinosaur Program

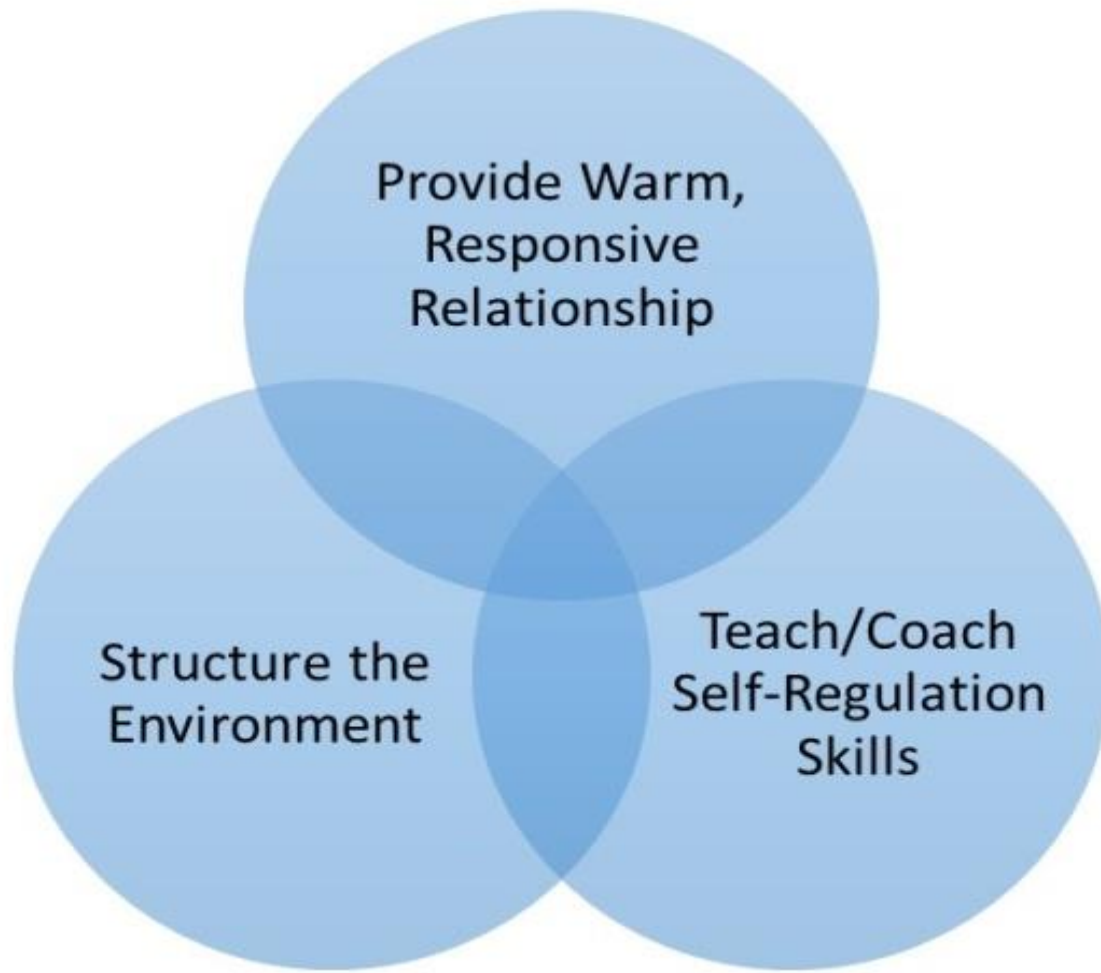
Co-Regulation and Self-Regulation Coaching

“Co-Regulation”

Caregivers, educators, and professionals interact with young children to facilitate a child's ability to **understand, express, and manage their feelings, thoughts and behavior**



How to Co-Regulate



Co-Regulation for Infants



- ✓ Interact in warm and responsive ways
- ✓ Anticipate and respond quickly to child's needs
- ✓ Provide physical and emotional comfort when child is stressed
- ✓ Modify environment to decrease demands and stress

Co-Regulation for Toddlers In Action



VIGNETTE: What does the teacher do to help this child manage separation and self-regulate?

Co-Regulation for Toddlers



- ✓ Reassure and calm child when upset by removing child from situations or speaking calmly and giving affection
- ✓ Model self-calming strategies
- ✓ Teach rules that support impulse control
- ✓ Distract and redirect to regulate behavior

Co-Regulation for Preschoolers In Action



VIGNETTE: What does the teacher do to help these children learn to wait and solve problems?

Co-Regulation for Preschool-Aged Children

- ✓ “Coach” (model, prompt, praise) self-regulation skills like:
 - ✓ Using words to say how you feel and solve problems
 - ✓ Waiting, Persisting, Staying calm
- ✓ Teach and reinforce clear rules and expectations
- ✓ Provide logical consequences in a clear but firm manner

How to “coach” self-regulation

- **Model** self-regulation behaviors and label what you are doing
- **Describe** when child is showing self-regulation
- **Praise and provide incentives** for self-regulation behaviors
- Create lots of **practice opportunities**
- Provide enough “**scaffolding**” to set children up for success



What do I actually do and say if I want to coach self-regulation?

- Describe examples of self-regulation that you see, using descriptive commenting:
 - “You are....”
 - “I see....”
 - “It looks like....”
- Praise self-regulation behaviors
- If a child is having trouble regulating:
 - Give coping statement
 - Make a positive prediction

I bet you will...



Application of Self-Regulation Coaching

Turn and Talk

- Think of a challenging student with self-regulation difficulties who you work with.
- What specific self-regulation behaviors could you “coach”?
- How could you coach? What will you do or say?

Managing Dysregulation

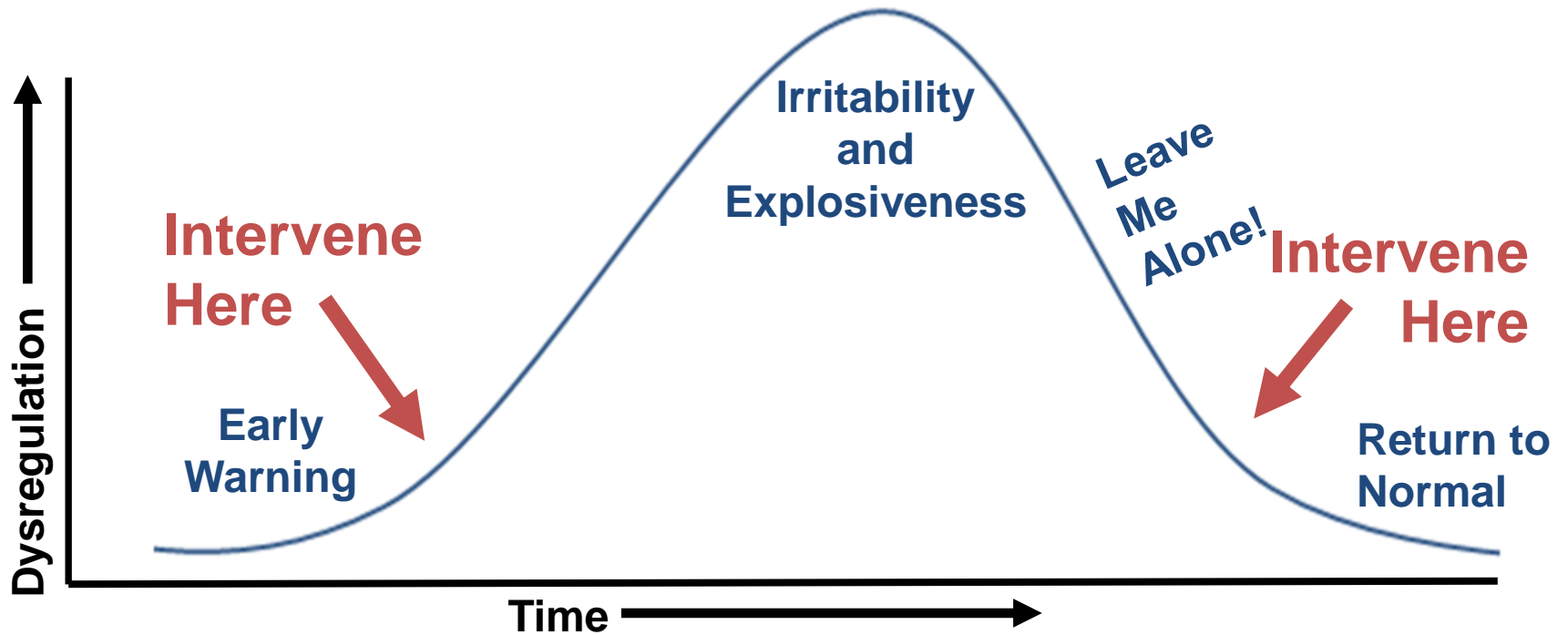


VIGNETTE

What does the teacher do that is helpful when these boys get too dysregulated to solve their problem?

How do you tell when kids are too upset to problem-solve?

Intervening when children are “dysregulated”



© Thomas Gordon, 1995

When Dysregulation becomes a Tantrum



VIGNETTE

How does giving a child time and space to calm down help with self-regulation?

Space and Materials to Support Calming Down



Turn and Talk

- How might you use a calm-down spot in your classroom?
- What materials might you include in a calm-down spot?
- What rules might you set for your calm-down spot?



Self-Regulation Skills Instruction: Content and Methods

Self-Regulation is a Skill like Literacy that can be Taught

Characteristics of Both

- Have many sub-skills
- Requires repetition over time
- Instruction should be developmentally appropriate
- Develops earlier in consistent and supportive environments
- Can be acquired later with intervention
- Some children need more instruction and support than others



Self-Regulation Skills to Teach

- Staying focused and thinking hard (**attention**)
- Sticking with something when it is hard (**persistence**)
- **Ignoring** distractions or being bothered by others
- Trying different ways to solve a problem (**cognitive flexibility**)
- Seeing another's point of view (**perspective-taking**)
- Trying a friend's idea (**social flexibility**)
- Identifying feelings in self and others (**emotional literacy**)
- Staying calm when you are frustrated or upset (**emotion regulation**)
- Waiting (**delay of gratification**)

School-Readiness Skills to Teach

- Listening
- Concentrating
- Sticking with it (persistence)
- Following directions
- Following class rules



Turn and Talk

What do you do to teach children school readiness skills?



©The nered b's Young

Emotional Literacy Skills to Teach

- Feeling words – positive as well as negative
- Recognizing “clues” that tell you about a feeling
- Recognizing that feelings can change
- Recognizing that you can have more than 1 feeling at a time
- Identifying feelings in others



Turn and Talk

What do you do to teach children emotional literacy skills?



©The Parenting Coach

Calm-Down Strategies to Teach

- Yoga and other mindfulness techniques
- Deep Breathing
 - Smell the flower, blow out the candle, belly breathing
- Imagery
 - Imagine you are relaxing in a soft cloud
 - Think of a happy place
- Positive self-talk
 - “I can do it”
 - “Maybe next time”



Turn and Talk

What do you do to teach children calm-down skills?



©The Mindful Moments

Social Problem-Solving Skills to Teach

- Use words to say how you feel or what you want
- Identify the problem
- Recognize the other person's point of view/listen to your friend
- Think of solutions or "choices"
- Think of the consequences (what would happen if...?)
 - Is that safe, fair, and does it lead to good feelings for everyone?
- Trying another person's idea



Turn and Talk

What do you do to teach children problem-solving skills?



©The nered beYours

Self-Regulation Teaching Methods

- Books/Stories
- Puppets*
- Positive Practices*
- Teacher Modeling*



*Identified as effective instructional methods by Weare & Nind (2011) and in What Works Clearinghouse (Epstein, 2008)

Use of Books and Stories



Vignette

- What is effective about how this teacher reads to the students?
- How does she help them learn about feelings?
- How does she help them define the problem?

Use of Puppets



Vignette

- How does the puppet help children share their feelings?
- Why is it effective for puppets to model self-regulation skills (listening, taking deep breaths)?
- What helps puppets be most effective?

Positive Practice

Turn and Talk

What types of “practice” can you have children do for the following? Pick at least one to discuss with a partner.

- Listening
- Walking quietly
- Ignoring distractions or teasing
- Calming down

IGNORING DEMONSTRATION

Putting it all Together: An example small group lesson



<https://hml.fpg.unc.edu/Play/3230>

Teacher Modeling

- Talk about what *you* are feeling, including positive feelings
- Model coping with negative feelings and positive self-talk
- Model calming down
- Model problem-solving
- Model self-praise

*Of course i talk to myself,
Because sometimes i need
expert advice.*



Remember: Learning is Relationship-Based

- When kids feel safe and secure in their environment, they:
 - Feel confident enough to take risks to try new things
 - Try again when they make mistakes
- When kids feel connected to their teachers, they:
 - Are motivated to please by making good choices
 - Want to do what they see their teacher doing



Taking Care of Yourself to Take Care of the Children

Teacher stress is real!

- Real effects on health, wellbeing, and interactions with students

Many strategies can help

- Mindfulness
- Peer support
- Relaxation techniques
- Positive self-talk



Take Homes



- Self-regulation Development:
 - Foundational for kindergarten readiness and long-term wellbeing
 - Critical development occurs during preschool years
 - Can get off-track with stress and adversity
 - Is strengthened by supportive classrooms with warm, responsive teachers
- Self-Regulation Supports:
 - “Co-regulation” through relationships, coaching, and teaching
 - Systematic and intentional teaching with developmental methods

For More Information

- Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress Reports posted online:
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/toxic-stress-and-self-regulation-reports>
 - Look for Briefs on Early Childhood and Co-Regulation
- Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Group Leader Training: August, 2017 – FPG e-News

SELF-REGULATION INSTRUCTION IN ACTION

BREAK OUT SESSION