



Self-Regulation Snap Shot #1: A Focus on Infants and Toddlers



Support of self-regulation is critical at each stage of development from birth through young adulthood.

Self-regulation is the act of managing thoughts and feelings to enable goal-directed actions.

Self-regulation develops through interaction with caregivers and the broader environment over an extended period from birth through young adulthood (and beyond).

Caregivers support self-regulation development by using three strategies in a process called “co-regulation.” Caregivers include parents, teachers, afterschool care providers, extended family members, and others.

Self-regulation includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills and processes that support children in coping with strong feelings, controlling impulses, learning, and getting along with others.

Self-regulation is important because it promotes wellbeing across the lifespan, including physical, emotional, social and economic health and educational achievement.

This snap shot summarizes key concepts about self-regulation development and intervention for infants and toddlers for practitioners and educators interested in promoting self-regulation for this age group. It is based on a series of four reports on Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress prepared for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). For more information, visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/toxic-stress-and-self-regulation-reports>

Self-Regulation Skills Developing in Infants:

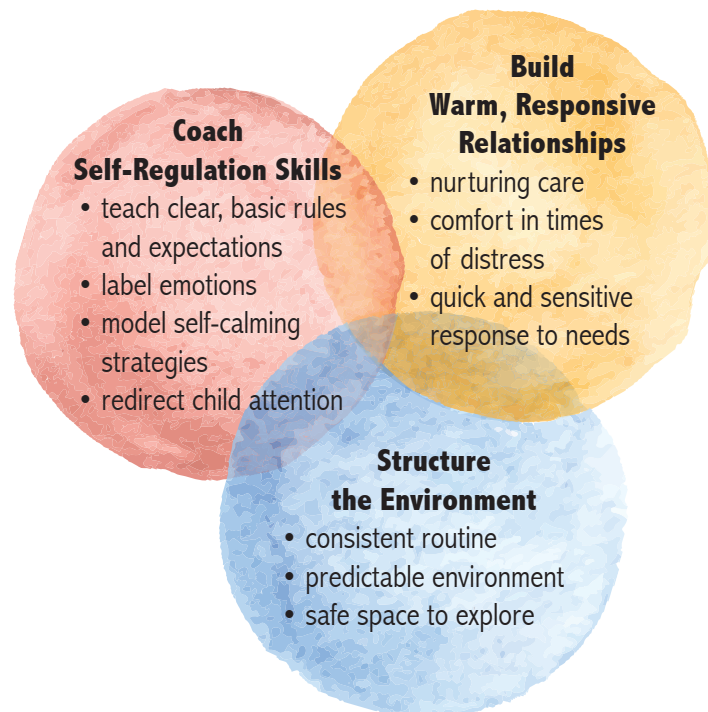
- Shifting attention or averting gaze when overwhelmed
- Self-soothing by sucking fingers or a pacifier

Developing in Toddlers:

- Focusing attention for short periods
- Adjusting behavior to achieve goals
- Briefly delaying gratification
- Beginning to label feelings
- Turning to adults for help with strong feelings



Self-regulation is influenced by stress and adversity in the environment as well as caregiving supports and children’s own biology, skills, and motivation.

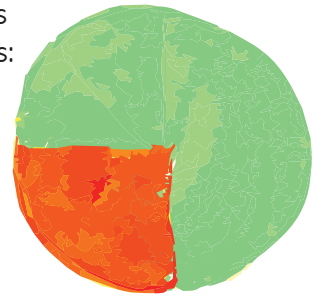


Three components of co-regulation for infants and toddlers

Lessons Learned About Interventions to Promote Self-Regulation in Infants and Toddlers

Across the lifespan, there are two intervention approaches that support development of self-regulation: skills instruction and co-regulation support. The combination of these approaches is believed to be most effective, regardless of the child's age. For infants and toddlers, existing interventions utilize these approaches as follows:

- 0% of studies focused on skills instruction alone;
- 70% focused on co-regulation alone;
- 30% combined both;
- 0% used other approaches



Based on a review of preventive interventions published between 1989 and 2013, 27 studies with comparison groups were found that targeted self-regulation development for infants and toddlers (ages birth through 2 years), with the characteristics described here.

Strengths:

- All studies were rigorous randomized controlled trials
- Racially/ethnically diverse samples with a focus on families most in need of support

Limitations:

- Relatively small number of studies
- Majority of child outcomes were based on parent report and may reflect changes in parent perceptions, attitudes, or skills rather than changes in child self-regulation

Conclusions:

- Broad meaningful effects seen on parenting skills and attitudes may translate into better parent-child relationships and long-term benefits for young children
- Considerable variability in findings suggests need for careful selection of programs
- Room for enhancement exists with greater involvement of parents and teachers

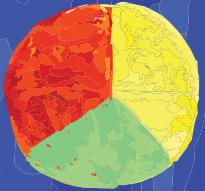
Key considerations for promoting self-regulation in infants and toddlers:

- Train teachers and child care staff in co-regulation skills, particularly warm interaction, responsivity to child cues, and environmental structure
- Identify ways to support school and child care staff's own self-regulation capacity
- Share self-regulation information, ideas, and classroom approaches with parents/caregivers to support their co-regulation and promote consistency across environments

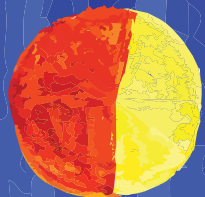
Outcome Assessed	# Findings	Average Effect Size*	% with Positive Effects*
Child Outcomes: Core Self-Regulation			
Cognitive	4	Medium	100%
Emotional	8	Medium	63%
Behavioral	22	Small to Medium	55%
Stress	6	Small to Medium	83%
Child Outcomes: Other Functional Domains			
Language/Learning	4	Medium to Large	100%
Interpersonal	20	Small to Medium	65%
Mental Health	6	Small	33%
Parent Outcomes			
Co-regulation	12	Medium	83%
Parenting Skills	14	Medium	100%
Parenting Attitudes	10	Medium	90%
Parent Mental Health	9	Small	44%

*Reported only if findings are based on at least two studies

78% of the children lived in adversity or were at-risk



The majority of the children were minority (36% African-American, 29% Hispanic)



More than half of the interventions were provided by clinicians



44% of studies targeted children;

96% targeted parents;
4% targeted teachers/
child care staff

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Suggested Citation: Rosanbalm, K. and Murray, D.W. (2017). Self-Regulation Snap Shot #1: A Focus on Infants and Toddlers. OPRE Report #2018-10, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This brief was funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under Contract Number HHSP23320095642WC/HHSP23337035T.

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