



# Self-Regulation Snap Shot #6: A Focus on Young Adults



**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 youth 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 is one of six snap shots focused on different age groups based on a series of four reports on Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress prepared for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). This fact sheet summarizes key concepts about self-regulation development and intervention for young adults for practitioners and educators interested in promoting self-regulation for this age group. For more information, visit: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/toxic-stress-and-self-regulation-reports>

## Self-Regulation Skills Developing in Young Adults:

- Goal setting and commitment
- Maintaining orientation toward the future
- Planning and organizing time and tasks to achieve goals
- Self-monitoring and self-reinforcement in pursuit of goals
- Effective decision-making in the context of strong emotion and peer influence
- Complex problem-solving considering consequences and others’ perspectives
- Recognizing and accepting emotions
- Tolerating distress
- Using healthy coping strategies to manage stress
- Using empathy and concern for others to guide goals and decisions



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

### Build Warm, Responsive Relationship

- consistent positive regard
- acceptance and validation of emotional experiences
- calm, respectful support that is responsive to needs

### Coach Self-Regulation Skills

- complex decision-making and problem-solving
- healthy stress management
- long-term goal-setting

### Collaboratively Identify and Create Supportive Environments

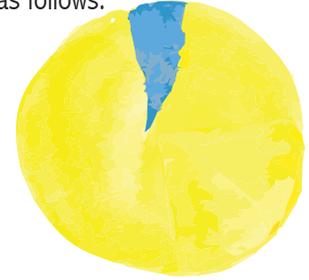
- people and places that encourage wellbeing
- strengths matched to work demands
- routines that build self-sufficiency

## Three components of co-regulation for young adults

## Lessons Learned About Interventions to Promote Self-Regulation in Young Adults

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 youth's age. For young adults, existing interventions utilize these approaches as follows:

- 96% of studies focused on direct instruction alone;
- 0% focused on co-regulation alone;
- 0% combined both;
- 4% used other approaches



Based on a review of preventive interventions published between 1989 and 2013, 23 studies were found that targeted self-regulation development for young adults (ages 18-25 years), with the following characteristics:

### Strengths:

- Large, consistently positive effects seen on core self-regulation as well as some functional outcome domains

### Limitations:

- Relatively small number of studies
- Study samples lack diversity and include few youth with risk characteristics
- Interventions are narrowly focused and brief; many are computerized
- Majority of outcomes are youth self-report and assess skills very similar to those practiced in the intervention

### Conclusions:

- Positive effects may not generalize to those with the greatest need and may not impact outcomes like relationships and employment
- Intervention research is greatly needed for youth living in adversity and to support employment success, self-sufficiency, and healthy relationships
- Caregiver roles in co-regulation are transitioning toward assisting young adults in creating their own supportive environments. These co-regulation supports remain important, but are notably absent from existing interventions for this age group.

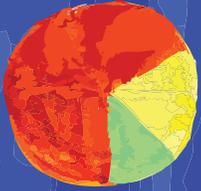
### Key considerations for promoting self-regulation in young adults:

- Communicate the relevance of self-regulation for employment success and self-sufficiency
- Teach specific self-regulation skills in youth development, healthy relationship, and employment programs
- Train youth program staff including mentors and job coaches to teach, model, reinforce, and coach self-regulation skills
- Involve partners and peers in supporting youth's self-regulation
- Identify ways to support the self-regulation capacity of youth program staff including mentors and job coaches

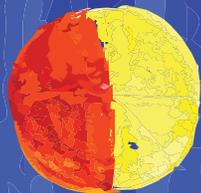
Outcome Assessed	# Findings	Average Effect Size*	% with Positive Effects*
<b>Core Self-Regulation Outcomes</b>			
Cognitive	16	Medium	75%
Emotional	20	Medium	85%
Behavioral	3	Medium to Large	100%
Stress	7	Medium to Large	86%
Mindfulness	5	Large	100%
<b>Other Functional Domains</b>			
Language/Learning	5	Small	50%
Health/Self-Care	3	None to Small	67%
Mental Health	10	Medium	80%

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

About 17% of the youth lived in adversity or were at-risk



33% of youth were minority (22% African-American, 11% Hispanic)



52% of the studies were implemented with college students



100% targeted youth; 0% targeted caregivers, teachers, mentors, or job supervisors

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Suggested Citation: Murray, D.W. and Rosanbalm, K. (2017). Self-Regulation Snap Shot #6: A Focus on Young Adults. OPRE Report #2018-15, 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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