

Self-regulation News from spark*EL



Over the next while, we're going to work on self-regulation skills. Your child will learn to control their body and manage their thinking and emotions.

We're using spark*EL which stands for *Self-Regulation Program of Awareness and Resilience in Kids—Elementary Version*. This program uses a systematic approach to teaching your child how to be more aware of their behavior, thinking, and feelings and to control them on their own.

We'll work on small but essential steps. This makes sure your child builds a solid foundation before moving to new skills. It's really important that we don't jump ahead or expect your child to self-regulate before they've learned all the necessary basics.

The spark*EL Model

The goal for every child is to learn to take more responsibility for their behavior. That means they'll learn things like how to calm themselves and how to keep from getting distracted. They'll also learn to understand social signals, like gestures, and clues, like facial expressions.

We'll work together to help each child learn:

1. They can control their body, thinking, and feelings. They don't have to let their hand grab or their brain get distracted.
2. When and where they need to control themselves and when and where they can let loose.
3. How to cope with excitement, distractions, and changes. They'll learn to resist some things and use strategies so they don't interfere.
4. Things they can do to make life easier for themselves in everyday settings. These might include going to a quiet place so they can concentrate better or asking another person to help them.

The first area we'll work on is helping your child understand self-regulation. We review the key executive functions (explained in the next newsletter) so each child becomes

How do you know a child needs help with self-regulation?

Children who have difficulties with self-regulation struggle with:

- Planning and organizing—they don't know where to start a project, have problems knowing what's most important, may lose their train of thought
- Impulse control—they may blurt out inappropriate things, do something risky, or over-react to small things
- Remembering—they have trouble remembering directions or recalling a story
- Checking and evaluating how they're doing—they may be surprised when something doesn't work out or they get negative feedback
- Thinking flexibly—they do the same thing in the same way and get frustrated if asked to think about something from a different angle

These may look like 'bad' behavior or poor attention some times.

By working on self-regulation, all of these can be improved.



aware of how their brain works. This will help them take over more control of their behavior, thinking, and emotions.

Next, we'll focus on **Behavioral Self-regulation**. Your child will learn to use Turtle Breathing to calm themselves. They'll also learn to Identify their stress level and use Turtle Breathing when appropriate. We'll help them resist impulses, like grabbing things, and learn when and where different actions are appropriate. For example, you can run and yell in the playground but not at the library or at the mall.

The next area we'll focus on is **Cognitive Self-regulation**. Your child will learn to look at and focus on the most important information when doing something. They'll find out how to ignore things that aren't important. Next, we'll help them learn to make sure they understand what they hear and read and what to do if they're not sure. We'll also work on how to organize and explain their ideas so other people can understand.

The third area is **Emotional Self-regulation**. Your child will be helped to identify basic gestures and facial expressions—critical things for navigating the social world. Then we'll work on helping them deal with meltdowns and other reactions to stress and fatigue. The strategies will let them begin to manage their emotional reaction to changes, unexpected events, and other situations.

In the weeks ahead

Each newsletter will explain what your child's working on and how you can help by practicing at home. We'll include activities and materials you can use in your daily activities.

We'll also ask you for suggestions about places and times where your child needs help with self-regulation. This will make sure we focus on the most important things in your lives.

How is teaching self-regulation different?

Learning self-regulation is different from most other approaches to changing behavior in children. Usually, you wait for your child to misbehave (you might even warn them beforehand about what not to do), then you reprimand them when they do. You may penalize them by giving them a time-out or by losing some privilege, hoping they've learned from the experience.

With self-regulation, you teach your child before anything happens. You make sure they know how to modulate and control their behavior, thinking, and emotions in different situations. You help them understand what they need to do, why and when. You increasingly give up control so they can be more independent. Ultimately, you can put your parental eagle eyes away and assume the role of coach and cheerleader to your child.



Welcome to **spark*EL**

