

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Who can use spark\*EL?

spark\*EL can help anyone wanting to help children between 9 and 14 years of age who have difficulty with self-regulation. This typically includes children with autism spectrum disorders, fetal alcohol disorder, Fragile X, and attention deficit but is appropriate to any child with self-regulation challenges.

### What should I expect from a child as they learn self-regulation?

We work carefully to build a solid foundation of skills. Changes in self-regulation, just like any learning, take time and practice. After a few weeks, most children show positive changes after practicing at home and in the community.

### Can spark\*EL be used with other programs?

Children participating in spark\*EL can be involved with other types of therapy. Because our goal is for children to learn to manage their own behavior, thinking, and emotions, children receiving more directive forms of therapy (such as Applied Behavior Analysis) at the same time may find the contrast striking.

### Are there other places I can learn more about spark\*EL?

You can go to the spark\* website to learn more about spark\*EL and its features. Newsletters that accompany spark\*EL are an effective tool for teachers, therapists and parents to learn more.

## About spark\*EL

The spark\*EL stands for the *Self-Regulation Program for Awareness and Resilience in Kids*. It was developed by Dr. Heather MacKenzie, a Canadian speech-language pathologist and educator, over many years of clinical practice.

spark\*EL is an upward extension of spark\*, an evidence-based program founded on current neuroscience research and developed from extensive clinical experience. It helps children with special needs make better decisions and become increasingly independent. As with all of Dr. MacKenzie's work, she focuses on nurturing strengths and talents in children to help them learn and thrive.

## CONTACT

-  Dr. Heather MacKenzie
-  [selfregcentral@gmail.com](mailto:selfregcentral@gmail.com)
-  [www.selfregcentral.com](http://www.selfregcentral.com)
-  [facebook.com/selfregcentral/](https://facebook.com/selfregcentral/)
-  [twitter.com/alertkids](https://twitter.com/alertkids)



## Self-Regulation Program for Awareness & Resilience in Kids

Elementary Version



## What is spark\*EL?

spark\*EL is a standalone program, based on spark\*, an evidence-based approach that teaches children how to manage and regulate their behavior, thinking, and emotions more effectively. They learn how and when to control their bodies, thinking, and reactions to things that happen around them. They also learn when and where they can 'let loose' and not worry about self-regulation.

With spark\*EL, children learn to:

- use breathing and stress monitoring to calm and center themselves.
- think ahead and plan what to do and not just 'dive in' or become overwhelmed.
- reconsider impulses or previous ways of doing things.
- remember important ideas and information.
- look at what they're doing and fix any mistakes and then use these ideas to help themselves in the future.
- think and behave more flexibly, adapting to different situations without 'melting down'.



### BEHAVIORAL SELF-REGULATION

- Control breathing and whole body
- Recognize own stress level and use breathing to self-calm

## What is spark\*EL about?

spark\*EL contains three different units (shown in the diagram across the bottom):

**Behavioral Self-Regulation.** This unit teaches children to modulate their breathing and whole bodies. Emphasis is placed on learning that their bodies can move in many different ways—slowly, softly, quickly, loudly. Slow breathing and stress monitoring are introduced to help children calm and center themselves.

**Cognitive Self-Regulation.** This unit helps children learn to use information more accurately, ignoring unimportant things. The focus is on learning to make sense of and remember what they hear and see. They also learn ways to explain their ideas to others in more organized and clearer ways.

**Emotional Self-Regulation.** This unit helps children learn to notice and understand gestures (body language) and emotions. They learn strategies for helping themselves remain calm and deal more effectively with meltdowns and other responses to stress and fatigue.



### COGNITIVE SELF-REGULATION

- Control attention, listen, make sure you understand
- Talk about ideas so others understand

## How does spark\*EL teach skills?

Each part of spark\*EL is presented and practiced in a progression of four important steps:

**Awareness of ability.** The focus is on helping children learn that they can control their bodies, thinking, and feelings. This promotes self-awareness.

**Awareness of need.** Children are then helped to learn when and where to use their new self-regulation skills and strategies. With family input, children identify when and where to use these new skills. This promotes generalization.

**Resilience.** This is one of the unique features of spark\*EL. Children learn how to use their new self-regulation skills even amid distractions and temptations or when stressed or anxious. This promotes self-reflection and better coping skills.

**Self-advocacy.** This is another unique feature of spark\*EL. Children learn how to change a situation to make it easier to cope and learn. For example, a child might ask other people to speak more quietly or might find a quieter place if they're feeling distracted.



### EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION

- Notice and understand gestures and facial expressions
- Recognize and use strategies to deal with emotions