

## Strategies to help children self-regulate

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Strategies (adapted from Bronson 2000) must be individualized for each child in a setting. With each of the strategies that follow, one example is offered. You may want to discuss with your coworkers how to apply these ideas to children in your classroom or home care setting.

**Observe closely.** Babies send cues that tell you when they are hungry, tired, or ready to play.

Sarah, a four-month-old, signals her need for food very subtly by whimpering a little. Her caregiver knows this cue means she is ready for a bottle.

**Respond.** Be alert to individual differences in the need for regularity, novelty, and interaction.

Jacob's teacher knows he needs his favorite windup toy for sleeping. She always places it in his crib and covers him lightly with a blanket when she puts him down for a nap.

**Provide structure and predictability.** Babies need consistent caregivers and approaches to routines such as feeding, sleeping, and diapering or toileting.

The toddlers in Elizabeth's class know that as lunch ends, their teacher will be sitting in the book corner waiting to read to them before their nap every day. As children finish eating, they sit with Elizabeth and listen while she reads familiar stories.

**Arrange developmentally appropriate environments.** Low shelves, clear labels, and age-appropriate materials can provide some challenge and can be adapted to a child's quickly changing abilities.

In Emily's family child care home, two babies can crawl, and they are starting to cruise while holding on to furniture. Emily puts a few blocks and soft toys on a low, sturdy table, giving the babies something interesting to reach for when they pull up and stand.

**Define age-appropriate limits.** Help a child feel safe and help him know what is expected.

Twenty-one-month-old Sebastian inches toward the classroom door. He looks toward Pilar, his teacher, as he reaches for the doorknob. Pilar says, "Sebastian, you know we don't go out in the hall by ourselves. Wait for me and we'll take a walk together."

**Show empathy and caring.** When caregivers recognize children's needs and treat them as important, children feel good about themselves and are better able to handle strong emotions.

Sunil, who is eight months old, cries when his mother leaves in the morning. Mark, his teacher, talks softly to him: "It is so hard for you when Mommy leaves. You feel so sad. I know how hard it is." He holds Sunil gently until he settles down.

## Conclusion

Self-regulation in early development is influenced by a child's relationships with the important adults in her life. Providing the experiences, support, and encouragement that help very young children learn to self-regulate is a critical element in quality care (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000).

## *From Self-Regulation, A Cornerstone of Early Childhood Development*

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