

# Self Regulation: Searching intentional practices – Part 1

The following is Part 1 of a two part series on self regulation. For Part 2, read tip page 11-6

Researchers believe that most children are born with the ability to acquire self regulation skills. Self regulation has many definitions: ability to gain control of the body and its functions, ability to manage emotions, ability to focus and pay attention, and ability to control impulses. As early educators know, this is one of the most complex skills to develop and is individual to each child.

The stages of infancy through early childhood have proven to be critical in developing self regulation. Although most children acquire self regulation through positive early experiences, experts suggest that self regulation is a skill that needs guidance or to be taught. With these concepts in mind, what intentional practices can support self regulation?

## Searching intentional practices

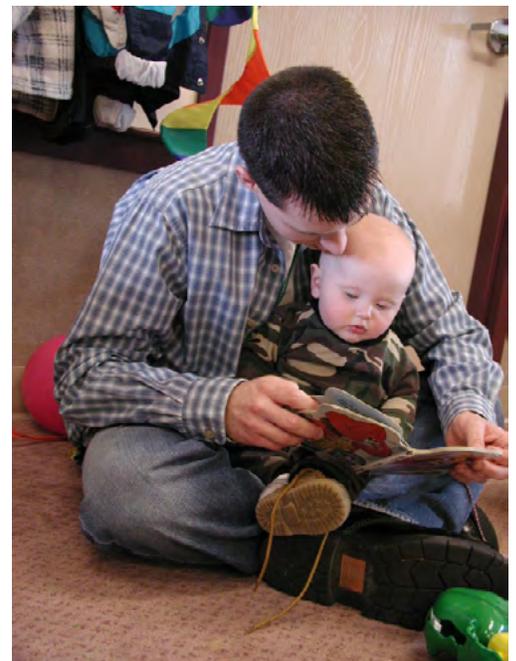
With a basic understanding of what self regulation is, early educators can begin to look at each child's overall development to determine what practices may work.

## Children need secure, attentive, nurturing, predictable adults

Infants and young children rely on predictable, nurturing care from adults in their lives. This relationship sets the foundation whereby children become aware that their needs are met; therefore they can feel joy, comfort, and low levels of stress.

### Intentional practice:

Along with meeting basic needs, try singing soothing songs to infants and very young children. Spend snuggle time reading with toddlers and preschoolers. Incorporate eye contact, gentle touch, conversation, and listening. When you cannot get to a child's need right away, let her know that you hear her and will help her soon. "I hear you calling to me, Josie. I am changing Daria's diaper right now, but I will come to you as soon as I'm done. Let's sing our turtle song while we wait."



## Children need adults to understand temperament

Every child has his own unique way of “being.” Temperament describes characteristics that are displayed consistently. It is important to understand each child’s specific temperament and adjust yourself to that temperament. Some temperaments may be challenging to you. Reflect on your feelings and explore how best to support the child.

### Intentional practice:

Consider adjusting yourself, the environment, or the experience to fit with the child’s temperament. For example, a very shy, quiet child may not like a lot of attention drawn to him with big “hellos” for the start of the day. Soften your voice and show a warm smile; key into his signals. Parents are a great resource to help you understand their child’s temperament and what might help.

## Children need adults to know the importance of “self talk”

When you hear young children talking out loud (usually to themselves), this is a good sign that the play or experience is interesting to the child and is not too frustrating. As children develop, they will use this type of self talk silently.

Experts have noticed that children with self-control problems often don’t show self talk. This important private speech helps children communicate with themselves, connecting conscious thought (awareness and planning).

### Intentional practice:

Prompt self talk by asking open-ended and problem solving questions such as, “I need to have the color turquoise for my painting, but we don’t have it. What should I do?” Also talk out loud about what you are doing. “I’m going to have to stop playing and go wash the apples for snack. Then I’ll have to cut them. I’ll need to think how many apples I will need. One, two, three...”

Searching intentional practices that guide and encourage self regulation adds not only to quality care, but to helping each child learn to take care of herself. As with most development, gaining self regulation skills takes time. We all need self regulation in being part of a family, community, or society. How wonderful (and powerful) it is that early educators can contribute to a child’s development of self regulation by being well attuned to the child, meeting his needs, and planning thoughtful, intentional practices.

## References

Bodrova, Elena, and Deborah Leong. “Vygotskian/post Vygotskian Research on the Development of Children’s Intentional Make-Believe Play.” National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Conference session 2007, Pittsburgh, PA.

Fong, Vicki. 2007. “Self-regulation abilities, beyond intelligence, play major role in early achievement.” Summary of article by Blair, C. and R. P. Razza in *Child Development* 78 (2). retrieved April 3, 2007, <http://live.psu.edu/index.php?sec=vs&story=23368&pf=1>

Perry, Bruce D. “Self Regulation: the Second Core Strength.” Retrieved August 13, 2007 from <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/keep-cool-school-self-regulation-second-core-strength>

**Searching intentional practices that guide and encourage self regulation adds not only to quality care, but to helping each child learn to take care of herself.**