

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Who can use spark\*EL?

spark\*EL can help teachers, therapists, and assistants. spark\*EL is appropriate for 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.

### What should I expect from a child as she/he learns self-regulation?

We work slowly and carefully to build a solid foundation of skills. Changes in behavior or self-regulation, just like any learning, take time and practice. After a few weeks, most children show positive changes when they've had chances to practice 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. We emphasize positive language, making sure each child participates actively and understands the reasons for each skill. Because of this, 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. Parents, teachers and therapists will find the newsletters that accompany spark\*EL an effective tool.

## 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.

Visit the spark\* website at: [spark-kids.ca](http://spark-kids.ca)

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

Elementary Version

- 9 to 14 years of age -



## What is spark\*EL?

spark\*EL is based on spark\*, an evidence-based program 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 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
- Use slow breathing to keep 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 body parts can be used in many different ways—slowly, softly, quickly, loudly. Slow breathing is 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. The children also learn ways to explain their ideas to others.

**Emotional Self-Regulation.** This unit helps children learn to notice and understand gestures (body language) and emotions. They learn appropriate responses to these clues and to different people and settings; for example, someone in the family or strangers in a store.



### 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 each family's help, children identify when and where to use these new skills.

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

**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 if they're distracting or maybe just find a quiet place.



### EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION

- Notice gestures, facial expressions and people and setting differences
- Use this information for responding appropriately