

# 4 Body self-regulation

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The Body self-regulation unit comes first because it forms a foundation for Cognitive and Emotional self-regulation.

In the Body self-regulation unit, our goals are to help your child:

1. learn that he can control when, where and how he moves his body,
2. practice self-regulating his body even in challenging situations,
3. help himself if he feels he's becoming un-regulated or stressed, and
4. begin using slow breathing to calm and center himself.

In the information that follows, you'll learn more about each goal, where and when you might practice the skills with your child, activities you can do with him to improve his self-regulation, and resources you can use. Remember, you can move on to another area but still practice things you've done before.

Use everyday situations, like while you're driving the car (please be careful to give proper attention to your driving, however) or going for a walk. It's more fun to include other children and adults whenever you can – the more the merrier! We keep special materials to a minimum – any extras you might need will be on the Self-

regulation Everyday website (<http://www.self-reg-everyday.com>). Keep expenses to a minimum - suggested storybooks can be borrowed from your local library.

## Order of skills

1. Start by helping your child learn to control his **body and body parts** at different speeds, intensities (lightly or with a lot of force) and in different ways (for example, like a butterfly or an angry bear).
2. Our next area is learning to use slow steady **breathing** to calm and center himself. You and your child will use Turtle Breathing. This is slow, steady breathing in and out of your nose or mouth. Some children have a difficult time figuring out how to breathe just through their noses so we'll accept breathing through his mouth in the beginning.
3. Next, we focus on self-regulation of **voice** volume. You and your child can have fun singing songs and rhymes loudly, softly and somewhere in between.

## Self-Regulation of hands, feet and whole body

### *Stage 1 – I can do it!*

**The goal of these activities is to help your child learn that he can control his hands, feet and whole body and move them at different speeds, intensities, and manners all by himself.** The main executive functions practiced at this stage are:

- inhibitory control - your child has to change speed, intensity and manner of movement and stop himself from moving in other ways
- self-monitoring - asking him what he thinks about his actions (for example, "How did your hands do that time?").

For Stage 1, introduce and practice self-regulation doing things your child enjoys. Go back to page 26 to review your child's likes and dislikes. Use songs, rhythm and music whenever possible. Music often engages children and prompts them to participate.

## ACTIVITIES

Choose a safe place for practicing. If your child is running around, make sure he won't fall or run into difficulty. Some children are very conscious of being watched so choose a private space for just the two of you to practice. You can practice in the car when driving, in the bathtub, while waiting in lines or just about anywhere.

**Different speeds:** Remind your child that you can move quickly or slowly. Ask your child how he wants to move. Let him decide and do the action, rhyme or song at his pace. Partway through, change the speed, and add in "stop" and "go". Have fun and keep it playful.

**Different intensities:** Tell your child that sometimes you can do actions to songs and/or movements really hard and sometimes really softly. Ask your child to choose how he wants to do the activity: hard or soft. Let him decide and do it his way. Part way through, change the intensity. Take turns with your child deciding on the intensity and mixing in some changes of speed.

**Different manners:** Tell your child that sometimes you can move like creatures. You can do actions like a bunny, a butterfly or a bear. Ask your child how he wants move. Show pictures of creatures in the beginning, particularly with younger children. An assortment of pictures is in the resources on the Self-regulation Everyday website ([www.self-reg-everyday.com](http://www.self-reg-everyday.com)) – you can also use stuffed animals, puppets and action figures. Let him decide and do actions like that creature. Part way, change the creature. Take turns with your child deciding on the creature and mix in some changes of speed and intensity also.

### Language of spark\*

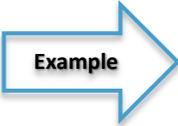
Introduce the activity with "Let's .." or "How about we ...?" These emphasize shared participation.

Give feelings of competence by telling your child, "You really know how to control your ....."

Increase your child's sense of control by letting him decide the speed, intensity or manner of action.

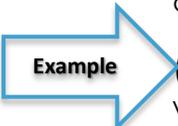
Play imitation games, like *Follow the Leader*, and songs using different speeds, intensities and manners. These will improve your child's body self-regulation and encourage imitation.

Many suggested materials and resources are on the Resources page of the Self-regulation Everyday website. There are materials and resources suitable for all children from two through eight years of age.



**Example**

(in the car – please be very careful about doing activities while driving and only do them if they don't take your mind off the road) "Let's sing *If You're Happy and You Know It* (check the Resources files on the website if your memory needs refreshing). Are you ready?" Sing one round with your child, then suggest, "How about we do that again but clap really loudly?" Sing the round again. "Okay, let's do the next part really fast. Are you ready?" Sing the next round. "Wow, you really controlled your hands and told them what to do. Well done! (OR "It looks like you have to tell your hands what to do. Let's tell them, hands, you need to clap fast") How do you want to do the actions for the next one, stomping your feet quietly, loudly, slowly or fast?" Sing the next round doing the actions the way your child chose. "Nice job! You really told your feet what to do. (OR "Keep trying. Those silly feet need to listen better. You tell them.") Okay, let's do one more round. How should we do the actions this time?" After the next round, ask "How did your feet and hands do this time?" If his judgement of his performance was accurate, praise him. If it wasn't very well done, say, "Hmm, it didn't look like the best they can do. Let's do it again and really watch how your feet/hands work."



**Example**

(walking to the park) "Let's walk like rabbits. How about we do it five times? Let's do it." Hop five times, counting each hop with your child. "How should we walk this time, like a dinosaur, a fairy, a kangaroo, a bear? How many steps should we take?" Move in the way your child suggests. "Let's walk really fast until I say to stop." Walk quickly, eventually saying "Stop". "Ha-ha, I caught you! Tell your feet to stop as soon as you hear "Stop".

**ILLUSTRATION – seven year old boy (Jack) - continued**

Jack's mom is worried that he's going to think these activities are 'stupid' and 'babyish'. What to do? There are lots of 'gross' songs and rhymes for older children in the resources – remember "Great green gobs of greasy grimy gopher guts"? Jack'd like that kind of song. Put some actions to it and he'd practice. Just be sure to talk to him about his ability to control his body. He needs to be consciously aware of it.

He also likes YouTube and some contemporary music. Try different actions ... and, of course, dancing ... to them. Actions to songs like Gangnam Style would be perfect. The idea is to control where and how your body moves.

Jack's mom could also find CDs he likes and slow the music down, speed it up, or stop it so he has to listen and control his body.

He probably would be willing to help a younger child learn these skills. He seems to like being the 'big guy' and 'teacher' so helping someone else could probably get him engaged. This would be a good way to get him to talk about times and places when he needs to control his body and when he can let loose.

He'll probably pick this up pretty quickly. Move on to Stages 3 and 4 whenever you can. That's where you can coach him to help himself and praise him for his attempts.

Along the way, Mom should make his teacher aware of their work on self-regulation. She should update her along the way so the teacher can keep an eye open for changes. The teacher can also remind Jack of strategies if appropriate and she might even have the rest of the children join in.

***ILLUSTRATION – four year old girl (Emma) – continued***

Emma loves dancing to classical music so planning activities isn't a problem. She may balk at moving in different ways and at different speeds but, if you let her tell others what to do, she'll probably be okay.

Emma should enjoy most of the songs and games included in the Resources site as well.

Mom should keep Emma's preschool teacher updated on things they're doing in self-regulation. The teacher can watch out for changes and try out some of the strategies in the classroom.

Now you can tell me how to walk and when to stop. Are you ready? How do you want to walk, fast, slow, tiptoeing, stomping?" Once he decides how to walk, start off and wait for him to say "Stop". If he forgets, pretend you're exhausted and remind him to say "Stop". Praise him for controlling his feet and body. As you practice more, ask your child, "How did your body do that time?" If he's accurate in his evaluation, say, "I agree, I think you did a wonderful job of telling your body what to do." If his judgement isn't accurate, say, "Well, I'm not sure. I think your body could probably do a little better. Let's give it another go and be sure to watch your body really carefully."

### **Stage 2 – I can do it here and here**

Move on to this stage when your child shows that he can easily move his hands, feet and body at different speeds, with different intensities, and in different manners. Continue practicing like you did in Stage 1 whenever you can – it's fun and good for everyone.

**The goal of this stage is to help your child understand where and when he can use different speeds, intensities and manners of movement.** The main executive functions focused on at this stage are:

- inhibitory control - your child has to change speed, intensity and manner of movement and stop himself from moving in other ways
- planning and organization - thinking ahead to different locations and what changes in movement might be needed
- working memory - comparing each situation to rules about how to move
- cognitive flexibility - changing how he moves his body dependent on the situation

### Language of spark\*

Understanding meaning and purpose is encouraged by asking, "Why do you think that's a good/not so good idea?"

Prompt him to think on his own by asking questions like, "What should you tell your (body part)?" and "How can we help ourselves remember?"

Help your child feel competent with statements like, "Good thinking!", "How did you know what to do?", "You're so clever."

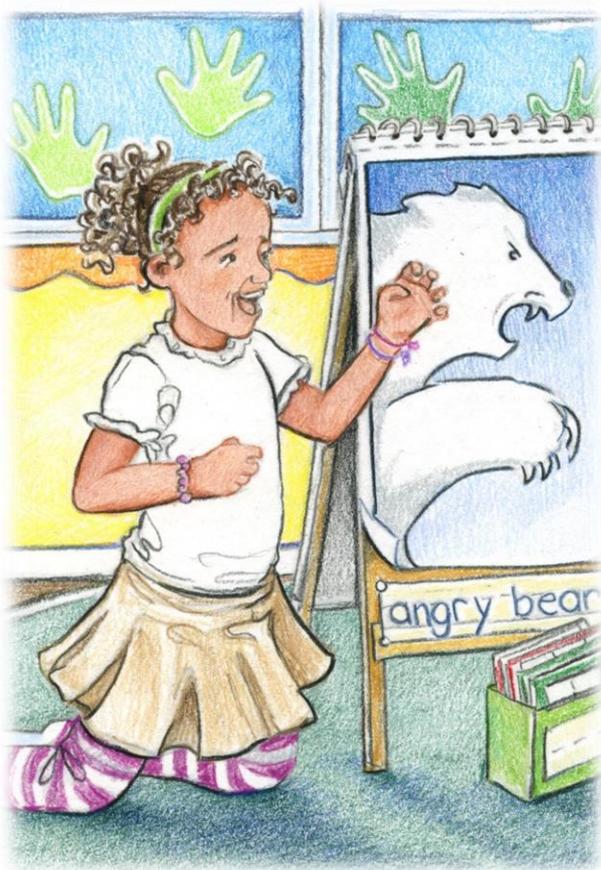
## ACTIVITIES

Talk to your child about when he can run, when he should walk, when he should move slowly, when he should tiptoe, and when he can move like a bunny. Use situations at home and in the community to practice (for example, at the grocery store, at the shopping mall, at religious services).

### Example

"I'm thinking about what we need to do with our bodies in different places. How about if (person) is having a nap? What should we tell our bodies to do?" Act out the situation as needed. Let your child take a turn being the sleeping person. Stomp your feet as you walk by. Then

ask him, "Hmm, do you think that would be a good idea? What should I tell my feet to do?" If he chooses telling his feet to walk quietly, praise him. If he's not sure, act out an exaggerated scene with your child pretending to sleep and you stomping your feet. Ask, "Is it easy to sleep when I'm making so much noise? It's really difficult, isn't it? We need to tell our feet to walk quietly. How can you help yourself remember to use quiet feet when someone's sleeping?" Accept any suggestion your child makes. You can also suggest things that you might use to remind yourself. Explore other



places, where he can run and stomp (like the playground) or where he needs to control his body (for example, a place of worship, doctor's office).

Introduce storybooks with characters moving in different ways that are appropriate (like the gingerbread man who's running away) and inappropriate. Discuss these

characters and their choices about moving their bodies in different ways. Talk about why and where it's appropriate. You'll find suggestions for different storybooks in the resources on the Self-regulation Everyday website ([www.self-reg-everyday.com](http://www.self-reg-everyday.com)) that are suitable for children from two through eight years of age.

You could have fun putting together a little storybook or video that shows him moving his body in ways appropriate to different settings. Draw pictures or make a video of him walking quietly in a library, running in a gym or playground, or using soft hands when petting the family pet. Storybooks and videos are excellent ways to let your child review things he's learned.

When you're at home or out in the community with your child, comment about how he's controlling his body or letting loose. If he forgets to regulate his body, say, "It looks like your hands/feet/body forgot what to do. What do you need to tell your hands/feet/body?" Point out when you forget to control your body and model how you remind yourself.

### **Stage 3 – I can do it even when ...**

Move on to this stage after your child shows he understands that he can move his body in different ways in different places - where he can let loose and where he needs more control. Practice like you did in Stage 1 whenever you can – it's fun and good for everyone.

**The goal of this stage is to help your child cope in situations that might challenge his self-regulation.** The main executive functions focused on at this stage are:

- inhibitory control – he can control his body even with temptations, distractions and other influences

### Language of sparkx

Prompt your child to think on his own with comments like, "You really told your hands what to do. What did you tell them?" Model statements like, "Hands, you need to help Mom with the groceries right now."

Help your child feel competent with statements like, "Good thinking!", "You really know how to tell your hands, body, feet what to do."

***ILLUSTRATION – seven year old boy (Jack) - continued***

Jack has a tendency to grab things from other people and wander off in stores. His mom focuses on those issues with him.

She also asks him for suggestions. He can think of lots of ideas for other people. His mom decides to help him figure out how to help them use their self-regulation in different places. This is a great opportunity to talk about the need for different behaviors in different places. Remember, Jack doesn't like being singled out so focusing on other people will be a lot easier for him. It'll still give Jack a chance to talk about changes in self-regulation for different settings.

***ILLUSTRATION – four year old girl (Emma) – continued***

Emma is often a force to be reckoned with. She's usually slow to warm up to new situations and people and fairly bold around people she knows. This is a chance to work on both.

In new situations, she often hides behind her parent. She could work on standing beside them. That can be one way she regulates her body.

In familiar settings, she can get a little pushy with other children. Discussions and rehearsals can center around situations like that and how she can control her hands, feet and body. She would respond well to storybooks that present characters that have difficulty with body self-regulation, acting out the parts.

- working memory – he remembers what he's supposed to do in different settings
- self-monitoring - checking to make sure he's controlling his body or letting loose, depending on the situation
- cognitive flexibility - changing his self-regulation depending on the situation

## ACTIVITIES

Now that your child has practiced the different skills and understands why and where they're important, it's time to take them on the road. Choose places that are safe even if your child forgets to control his hands, feet, or body. These should increasingly be places where he had difficulty regulating himself in the past.

You can do some preventive work with your child by talking to him about the things he has to remind his hands, feet or body to do. For example, "We're going to the grocery store and you remember the last time that your hands kept trying to put some candy in our cart. I said that we didn't need any candy. What could you tell your hands this time?" You can help your child control his body by engaging him in something that will keep him busy. Have him push the grocery cart, hold the grocery list and check to make sure you buy everything on it, holding groceries or helping to put them on the conveyor at the check-out.

### Example

(in the grocery store where your child usually picks up a candy bar at the checkout) Catch him before he touches the candy bars and say, "Wow, look how you told your hands to control themselves and how you just looked at the candy bars. That's fantastic! Good for you! Well done!" (I don't believe you can lay on too much praise for work well done). "What did you tell your hands?"

### Example

(in the mall where he usually runs ahead of you) If he starts to run ahead, stop him and ask, "What do you need to tell your body?" If he's unsure, remind him how you talked about staying together at the mall so you can see him (remember, you have to give it meaning and purpose). Ask him again, "What do you need to tell

your body?" If he's still not sure, ask what would happen if he runs ahead (you can't see where he is and that makes you worry). Then ask him one more time, "What do you need to tell your body?" If he doesn't have an answer, tell him, "Body, you need to slow down and stay with Mom." You could also help keep him with you by engaging him in activities like pushing a cart or carrying shopping bags. These tasks will help slow him down a little and give you a chance to notice and praise his self-regulation. Stay especially alert with younger children and be ready to step in front of him or take hold of his shirt if needed to stop him.

#### **Stage 4 – I can help myself by ...**

Move on to this stage when your child shows he can control his body most of the time in important places. He doesn't have to have perfect control – it's a work in progress.

**The goal of this stage is to help your child support his own self-regulation in different settings by advocating for himself.** The main executive functions focused on at this stage are:

- inhibitory control – he controls his body even when there are distractions and temptations
- planning and organization - thinking ahead about how he can help himself and keep himself under control
- working memory - comparing the present situation to rules about self-regulation and how he might help himself
- self-monitoring - checking to see how he's doing with his self-regulation
- cognitive flexibility - changing his self-regulation for different situations

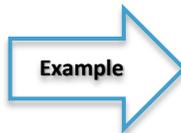
#### *Language of spark\**

Prompt your child to think on his own with comments like, "What can you do to help yourself?"

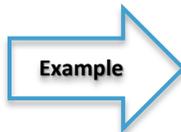
Give your child many opportunities to demonstrate his new skills. Stand back and let it happen.

## ACTIVITIES

Now that your child has practiced self-regulation in different places with your support, it's time for him to take over more control. Go places you often go (grocery store, place of worship, preschool or school, shopping mall). Be ready to prompt him to think of ways to help himself if he's having a difficult time controlling his hands, feet or body. No matter what he suggests (it may not be what you had in mind), if it'll help, let him do it. He might say something that sounds ridiculous (like, "I can hold my ear and that'll help my body stay still"), let him give it a go. It might just help. Ideas your child comes up with are usually more powerful for him than ones you suggest.



(at a movie theatre and he's squirming in his seat) Put your hand on his shoulder and quietly say, "It looks like your body's having a hard time staying still. (NOTICE: we avoided using a negative like "Your body is squirming all over the place" and we avoided directly referring to him as in "You're squirming all over the place"). What could you do to help yourself?" If he comes up with an idea, praise him. If he has no idea, suggest something like, "You know when I have a hard time keeping my body still, I talk to it and say, "Just a little while longer until we go." You could also ask to go and take a little walk. Maybe we could go and get a drink of water so your body has a chance to get the squirmies out."



(playing with brother/sister/friend who's knocking down the building he's constructing) "I noticed that (person) is trying to bug you. What could you do to help yourself?" If he comes up with a solution (like moving away, getting his brother/sister/friend another toy to play with), praise him and prompt him to do it. If he has a difficult time coming up with ideas, describe what you see, "Well, it looks to me like (person) wants your attention. Do you want to stop building and see what could you do to help him?" If he can't come up with ways to help, ask him, "If you want to keep building, can you think of something else he could do or could s/he help you?"

