

Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to attain, maintain, or change how alert we feel, which influences our ability to engage in tasks or situations we encounter each day. Some children have difficulties changing their level of alertness which compromises their optimal functioning. An optimal state of arousal leads to a sense of well-being, improved self-confidence, and enhanced self-esteem. Listed below are tips for observation, how to explain self-regulation and strategies to assist your child.

How To Observe Self-Regulation In Your Child

What does low arousal look like?

- Hard to get going, lethargic
- Appears to lack interest
- Avoids physical activity
- Limited facial expressions
- Hard to wake up in the morning or after a nap
- Moves very slowly

What does high arousal look like?

- Can't sit still, "hyper", on the go
- Seeks out movement, climbing, running, jumping, pressure
- Distractible
- Talks fast, loud, a lot
- Can't calm self-down for sleep
- "Intense" or highly sensitive
- Difficulty with transitions, stress, or changes in routine
- May get agitated, stressed and lose control of emotions (tantrums), finds it hard to calm down
- Needs to have a predictable routine and get their own way

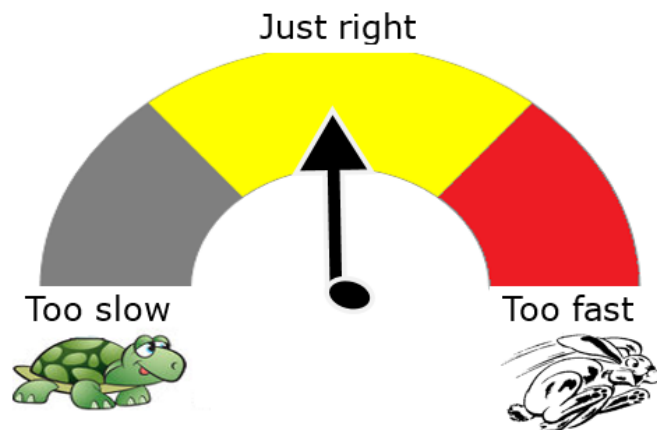
What does optimal arousal look like?

- Relaxed, calm and controlled
- Able to focus and explore tasks, activities, and environments
- Able to concentrate, listen and follow instructions
- Has appropriate and meaningful interactions with people and environment
- Maintains good eye contact
- Can adapt to stressful situations and changes in routines
- Has self-control, calms down after distress

Self-Regulation

How To Explain Self-Regulation To Your Child

Explaining self-regulation to children can be challenging. There are a range of programs that teach children how to identify their arousal state. The Alert Program talks about your body as a car engine. Sometimes we go too fast, too slow, or just right. You can change the analogy to suit your child, for example, a tortoise and hare, a train, an aeroplane etc. It is important to demonstrate these different arousal levels to your children so they gain a greater understanding. To demonstrate going too slow let your body droop towards the ground and make little eye contact. When going too fast wiggle your arms and legs, look around the room constantly and breathe more quickly. Finally, when you are demonstrating looking just right, ensure you have an upright posture, breathe regularly in a relaxed way, and smile. A visual you can use with your child is below:



Strategies To Assist Your Child

To be able to assist your child, the first step is to understand the strategies you utilise to ensure optimal arousal throughout the day. Do you need to take a shower as soon as you wake up? Do you need a coffee to get going? Do you like to exercise straight away to wake up? Or perhaps you put on the TV or some music. These are just some of the strategies we all use on a daily basis. Think about changing your arousal (engine) level in 5 different ways: put something in your mouth, move, touch, look, and listen.

Mouth: drink from a straw, chew gum, use oral-motor fidget toys, eat crunchy foods etc.

Move: animal walks, star jumps, wall push-ups, obstacle course, chair push-ups etc.

Touch: utilising different textures, warm bath, cold shower, fidget with items (toys/pencils) etc.

Look: watch oil and water toys, look out the window, watch fish tank etc.

Listen: utilise a quiet space, use sound cancelling headphones, provide warnings for sounds etc.

Health & Wellbeing



Self-Regulation

References:

- Dunn, W. (1999). *Sensory profile user's manual*. USA: Psychological Corporation.
- Kranowitz, C.S. (2005). *The out-of-sync child*. New York, NY: The Berkeley Publishing Group.
- Williams, M.S & Shellenberger, S. (2010). *Introducing the Alert Program through song*.
Albuquerque, NM: TherapyWorks Inc.
- your