Growing Calm: Nurturing Self-Regulation in Young Children

GROWING CALM: NURTURING SELF-REGULATION IN YOUNG CHILDREN

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Chapters

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Cover image by Adobe. (2024). *Adobe Photoshop.* [Generative Fill]. https://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop.html
Prompt: Kids at a tree planting event

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Growing Calm is a comprehensive book dedicated to empowering educators, parents, and caregivers in nurturing self-regulation in young children. This book explores the critical role of self-regulation in early childhood development and provides practical strategies for nurturing and supporting self-regulation in everyday settings.

Through a blend of theoretical insights and hands-on activities, *Growing Calm* offers a rich array of tools, including interactive growing activities and reflection prompts.

Each chapter is filled with reflective questions and practical exercises, making it an invaluable resource for educators and caregivers alike. By promoting a calm and supportive atmosphere, *Growing Calm* models a self-regulation approach to education and provides a framework for implementation.

"Growing Calm" by Sanaz Habibi CC BY NC SA 4.0

This textbook not only advocates for the importance of self-regulation but also serves as a call to action for educators to model self-regulation and well-being in young children. With its engaging content and practical approach, *Growing Calm* is an essential resource for anyone committed to nurturing the growth of all children.

ECE5J Course Learning Outcomes

The ECE5J Course Learning Outcomes are outlined in the *Growing Calm* chapter in which they align.

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PREFACE: THEORISTS & THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

ECE5J Course Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate knowledge of educational perspectives in early childhood education.
- Demonstrate an understanding of strategies to support families from a theoretical perspective.

Education continually builds upon the platforms of ideas and theorists. It is everchanging and continuously evolving as new ideas emerge. Education can be considered a building block of knowledge, and as our knowledge grows, we continue to build upon the blocks of knowledge before us.

It is important to reflect upon the ideas of theorists and theories to understand the blocks of knowledge that form our current tower.

We will be looking into the following blocks of knowledge that form the base. The foundational theorists are Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Friederich Frobel.

Interactive Navigation: Scroll down on each hotspot to read all of the content.

Foundational Theorists

Maria Montessori

- Believed in hands-on learning and fostering application skills.
- Created a philosophy of education that learning should be about children's interests and personalized, rather than traditional formal education.
- Promotes choice in learning.

Jean Piaget

- Believed in the importance of the environment in children's learning.
- Believed children move through 4 stages of learning: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational.
- Believed that children learn through their environment and described children as 'little scientists."

Lev Vygotsky

- Coined the Zone of Proximal Development- a theory that describes how adults scaffold a child's learning.
- Provides an understanding of how educators should interact with and support a child in their learning.
- The Zone of Proximal Development theory and scaffolding are still used today.

Friederich Frobel

- Believed that children learn best through play.
- Believed children learn best through hands-on experiences.
- His theories are catalysts in the play-based model of education.

These theorists and their theories have informed our current philosophies of education and impacted education as a whole. Education is continually evolving and building upon the ideas before us.

Self-Regulation Theorists & Theories

Similarly, some current theorists and perspectives have emerged out of these previous concepts, based specifically on the concept of self-regulation.

These theorists have built upon the previous blocks of knowledge:

Stuart Shanker

- Coined the *Shanker Self-Reg* framework, which aims to help individuals understand self-reg and stress among five domains (biological, emotional, cognitive, social and prosocial).
- Specifically, it distinguishes the differences between self-control and self-regulation.

Dr. Jean Clinton

- Dr. Clinton is a child psychiatrist who believes in the power of relationships in the development of a child's brain.
- Believes in the power of relationships and connecting on self-regulation.

The Kindergarten Program (2016)

- Ontario Ministry of Education Kindergarten Program focuses on the importance of self-regulation in children and provides theoretical frameworks for implementing self-regulation concepts.
- Supports the development of self-regulation in education.

How Does Learning Happen? (2014)

- Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years.
- Self-regulation is discussed within the *Well-Being Foundation*.
- Identifies that "Self-regulation is different from self-control or compliance. Self-regulation is about how a child can deal effectively with stressors and then recover." (Ontario Ministry of Education,2014, p. 30).

These self-regulation theorists provide the foundation for our book, and throughout this book, we will dive deep into some of these concepts, building upon the ideas of theorists before us.

Our goals in developing this textbook are for you to engage in the content, develop a greater understanding of self-regulation, and how to implement it in education.

Let's build your block of knowledge!

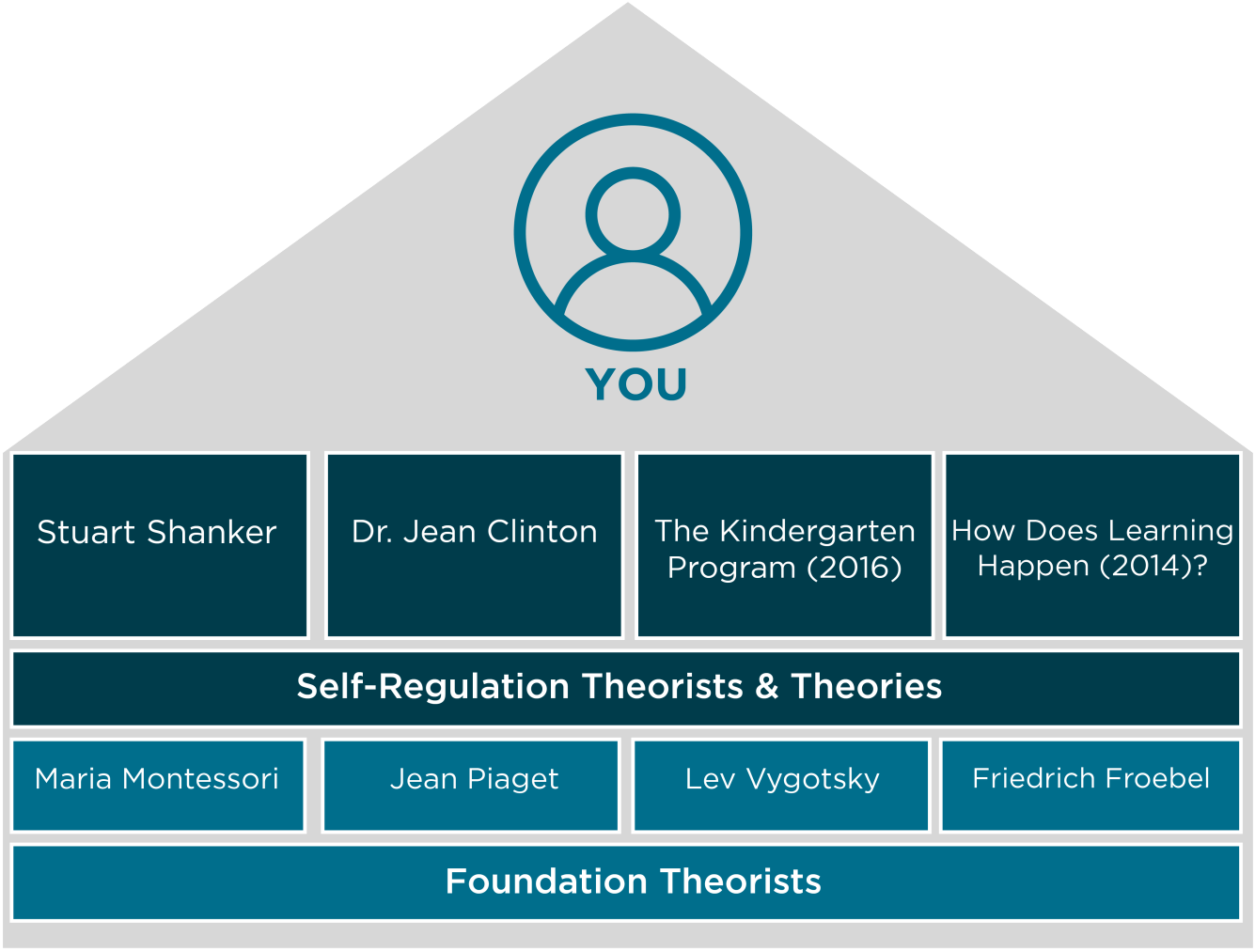


Image Description

The image depicts a graphic shaped like a house, with different names and theories organized in a structured hierarchy. At the top of the house is an icon representing a person, with the label "YOU" below the icon. The structure is divided into two main sections:

Self-Regulation Theorists & Theories Section. In this section, there are four rectangles arranged horizontally:

- Stuart Shanker
- Dr. Jean Clinton
- The Kindergarten Program (2016)
- How Does Learning Happen (2014)?

Foundation Theorists Section

Beneath the self-regulation theorists, there is a second row of rectangles representing foundational theorists:

- Maria Montessori
- Jean Piaget
- Lev Vygotsky
- Friedrich Froebel

These two sections are connected to "YOU" at the top, illustrating a theoretical framework or foundation for understanding self-regulation and learning processes, with the foundational theorists forming the base of the "house" and the self-regulation theorists forming the middle layer.

CHAPTERS

Chapter Outline

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS SELF-REGULATION?

ECE5J Course Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate knowledge of educational perspectives in early childhood education.
- Demonstrate an understanding of strategies to support families from a theoretical perspective.
- Provide theoretical and background context on the process of Self-Regulation.

Self-regulation is a term we refer to or think about regularly in our observations of young children.

Reflect

Activity Text

Have you ever really taken the time to think about the definition of self-regulation? How do you define self-regulation?

Do you think your colleague's definition of self-regulation would be the same as your definition? Why or why not?

What is the Definition of Self-Regulation?

In 2014, Jeremy Burman, Christopher Green and Stuart Shanker took it upon themselves to "disentangle the ambiguity around the meaning of self-regulation" (Hoffman, 2021).

Growing Activity

Activity Text

Guess how many definitions of self-regulation were discovered by Burman, Green and Shanker?

These research results clarify why we need to differentiate between what self-regulation is and what is not to support the development of self-regulation in young children.

Did you know that self-regulation is often confused with self-control?

> A basic definition of self-control is the ability to adjust what one does to fit with what is socially acceptable. Self-control involves the ability to wait, go without, be patient and stop yourself from doing something you shouldn't. Self-control also involves the ability to initiate and carry out a plan over a period of time. It develops through positive and supportive caregiving practices (Gerber, 1993).

The foundational blocks of Dr. Stuart Shanker's research help us to recognize the difference between self-regulation and self-control. "Self-control is about inhibiting strong impulses. Self-regulation refers to how well we manage stress, how much energy we expend and how well we recover. More specifically, self-regulation makes self-control possible or not needed" (Shanker, 2016).

This foundational definition of self-regulation helps us to understand stress behaviour in young children as well as how to support children in recognizing and responding to their stressors.

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

Take some time to explore the building blocks of Shanker's self-reg concepts or get to know a little bit more about self-regulation through the articles and video below:

- What is Self-Regulation – Really?
- Psychology Today: Self-Reg vs. Self-Control

Video: “Self Reg Misconception #20: Self-Reg is Just Another Term for Self-Control” by The MEHRIT Centre [5:19] is licensed under the Standard YouTube License. *Transcript and closed captions available on YouTube.*

CHAPTER 2: SELF-REGULATION AND THE BRAIN

ECE5J Course Learning Outcome

- Demonstrate an understanding of the significance of repeated experiences and variety and nurturing relationships in the brain's development.

How Does Stress Impact the Brain?

When we encounter or perceive a threat or fear, our brain triggers an automatic survival response. This leads to the release of cortisol, a hormone that prepares the body to handle the stress. Cortisol is released, increases heart rate, raises alertness and prepares the body to react by activating the "fight, flight, or freeze" responses. Once the threat passes, cortisol levels gradually decrease, allowing the brain and body to return to a calmer, more balanced state.

Reflect: Quiet Night Scenario

Photo, Ron Lach, Pexels Licence

It's a quiet night. You're sitting on the couch at home; the soft hum of the refrigerator is the only background noise. The room is dimly lit by a few lamps and the glow of your TV screen. You're feeling calm, perhaps a little tired after a long day, and just starting to unwind.

Then, suddenly—BANG—a loud, jarring sound echoes from somewhere outside, followed by the unmistakable crash of something heavy hitting the ground. Your heart skips, and before you even fully process it, your body is already reacting.

After a few moments, the rational part of your brain (prefrontal cortex) starts to gain control again. You realize that the sound was probably something harmless—maybe a door slamming in the wind or a neighbour dropping something heavy. The initial spike of panic begins to settle as your body starts to relax. Your heart rate returns to normal, and the sensation of threat starts to dissipate. You may even laugh at yourself for reacting so strongly.

But for those few seconds, your limbic system—particularly the amygdala—had hijacked your body's response, putting you into a primal state of alertness, preparing you to face a danger that, in hindsight, was more imagined than real.

Think about the following questions:

1. What part of the brain is responsible for detecting the loud bang and triggering a stress response in the scenario?
2. How does the body physically respond when the brain perceives a threat, as described in the scenario?
3. What role does the prefrontal cortex play in the scenario, and how does it help balance the initial reaction?
4. What is the purpose of the release of cortisol and other stress hormones during a threat response?

The limbic system, which includes the amygdala, monitors the environment for potential threats and safety. At the same time, the prefrontal cortex helps regulate emotions and manage stress. Click on the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex for some brain highlights.

Activity Text

H5P Description goes here

Amygdala Highlights

- Limbic Alarm
- Automatic response
- Detects safety and threats
- Fight, flight or freeze
- Cortisol is released
- Bodily changes
- Reactive behaviours and emotions

Prefrontal Cortex Highlights

- Center for decision-making, problem-solving, and emotional regulation
- Keeps the amygdala in check
- Managing and regulating emotions
- Helps to manage stress more effectively
- Develops later than other regions of the brain

Together, the limbic system and prefrontal cortex maintain a delicate balance, with stress tipping that balance toward reactive, impulsive behaviours when the brain's stress systems become overstimulated.

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

Review the quiet night scenario and reflect on the following questions.

1. How do you think knowing about the brain's response to fear might help you manage your own reactions in stressful situations?

2. In the scenario, the prefrontal cortex tries to reason through the situation. How might we use our prefrontal cortex to calm ourselves in a real-life emergency?
3. What could you do to reduce the intensity of the body's stress response in a situation like this?
4. How might individuals with anxiety or trauma respond differently to a loud noise compared to someone with a calm disposition?

Stress Behaviour in Young Children

Recall the definition of self-regulation from Chapter 1: "Self-regulation refers to how well we manage stress, how much energy we expend and how well we recover".

This foundational definition of self-regulation helps us to understand stress behaviour in young children as well as how to support children in recognizing and responding to their own stressors. Remember, the prefrontal cortex is one of the last regions of the brain to develop; therefore, young children are less able to think logically, regulate emotions and deal with stress without the support of adults. When stress floods the brain, the child's limbic alarm signals fight, flight or freeze. Why is it important to recognize stress-related behaviour? It is important because stress behaviour is often mistaken for misbehaviour.

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

Read the article titled: Masking self reg the basics and Masking Stress with Misbehaviour and reflect on the following quote from the article.

"Dr. Stuart Shanker contends that when we see a person *differently*, we see a *different person* (Shanker, 2016). Any of the examples of misbehaviour listed above can be reframed

as *stress behaviour*, thereby deepening understanding of the roots of the behaviour and opening up new ways of responding" (Hopkins, 2023).

Growing Activity

Go back to the article and look at the behaviours presented and the impact of reframing the behaviour. If you look at these behaviours differently, you can see stress behaviour instead of misbehaviour.

Think about how the examples of stress behaviours were presented initially and the impact of reframing.

- What did you see differently? Does it change how you see the behaviour?

Think about a child who exhibits challenging behaviour.

- What if you take a moment to pause and reflect before you respond? If you reframe the child's behaviour, maybe you will see the child differently.

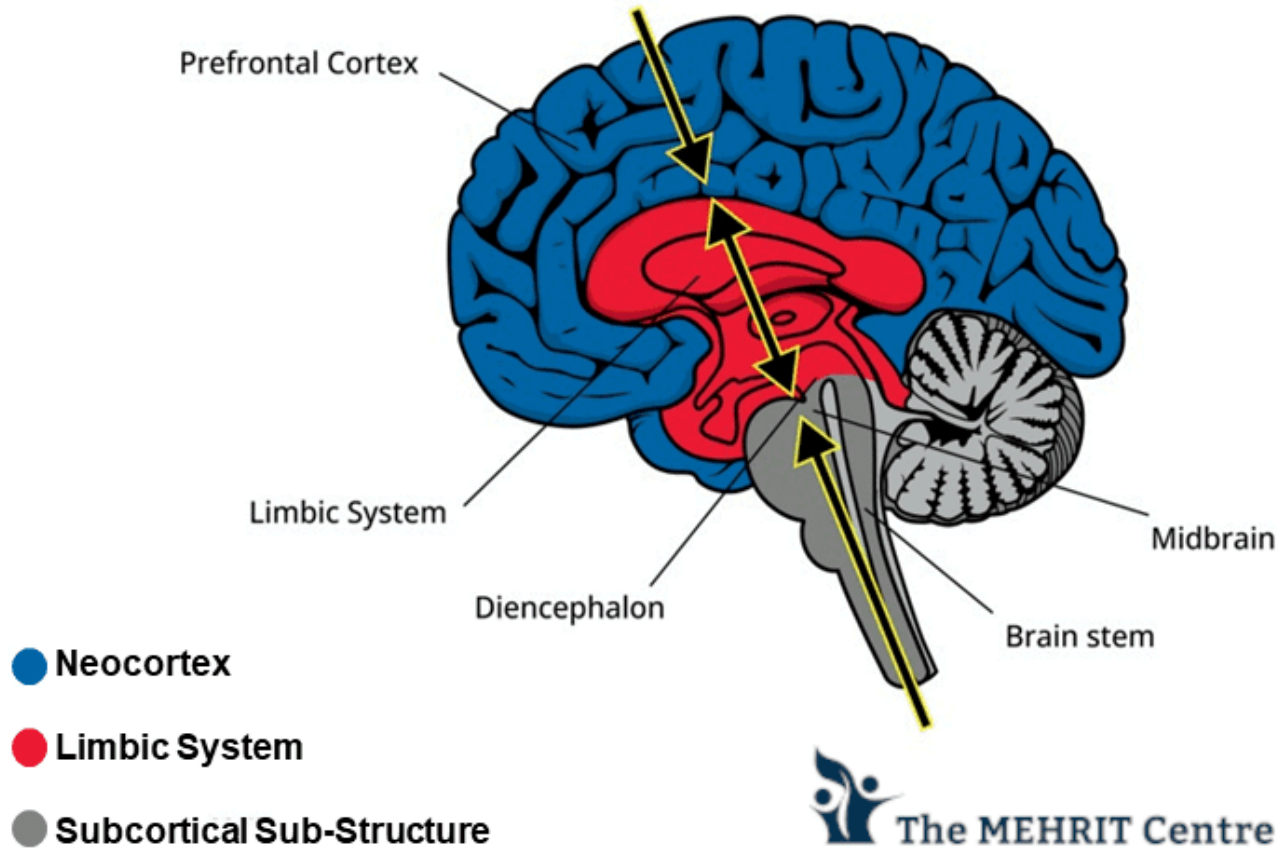
Blue Brain Red Brain – Based on the Work of Dr. Stuart Shanker

"Shanker Self-Reg® is a process for enhancing self-regulation by understanding and dealing with stress. In Self-Reg, we consider both our responses to stress and our underlying state of energy and tension when we encounter a stress" (Shanker, 2021b).

Read the article: Self-Reg: The Basics

The Merhit Centre's graphic below allows us to apply our basic knowledge of the limbic system (red brain)

and prefrontal cortex (blue brain) to help us understand the difference between stress behaviour and misbehaviour.



Graphic: The Merhit Centre, FDEd (CAN).

What is the difference between stress behaviour and misbehaviour? It depends on which part of the brain is in charge. The blue brain symbolizes the prefrontal cortex when the child is aware of their behaviour. The red brain symbolizes the limbic system, and for the child experiencing a red brain, stress is in charge of their behaviour.

Growing Activity

Let's dig a little deeper into explaining red brain and blue brain as part of the Shanker Self-Reg process.

Video: "The Self-Reg Triune Brain Glove: A great teaching tool" by The MEHRIT Centre [9:35] is licensed under the Standard YouTube License.*[Transcript]*

After watching the video, think about how you can support young children in self-regulating, reducing stress and tension, and returning to a state of calm. Similar to the quiet night scenario, we want to support children in noting their limbic reactions and when their amygdala is about to be hijacked. We want to support them to become mindful of their own reactions and to support them to develop strategies to get their prefrontal cortex back in charge of their executive brain functions. Create your own Red Brain Blue Brain glove for use as a future teaching tool.

Quiet Night Scenario Source

ChatGPT. (2024, November 10). ChatGPT. [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com/chat

- Prompt" Create a scenario: home alone at night, hear a loud noise. Include how the limbic alarm and the prefrontal cortex respond." Only used scenario created. Did not use the detailed explanation of what is happening in the brain when the limbic alarm is activated.
- Prompt "Now, what questions could I ask my students about the scenario?" 7 Sets of questions were produced. Selected two sets of questions most applicable to the key concepts highlighted by the scenario.
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CHAPTER 3: SELF-REGULATION AND EXPERIENCE ON THE BRAIN

ECE5J Course Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate an understanding of the significance of repeated experiences, variety and nurturing relationships on the brain's development.
- Examine the factors that impact on brain development.

Stress is a word we may use to describe how a person is feeling. For example, "I am so stressed out, I think they are stressed, or I thrive on stress." Understanding the definition of stress helps us to see the relationship between stress and self-regulation. "Stress causes us to burn energy to try to remain at our functional best" (Shanker, 2024).

Watch the video Self-Reg in 60 Seconds: What is Stress?

Video: "Self-Reg in 60 Seconds: What is Stress?" by The MEHRIT Centre [1:14] is licensed under the Standard YouTube License. *Transcript and closed captions available on YouTube.*

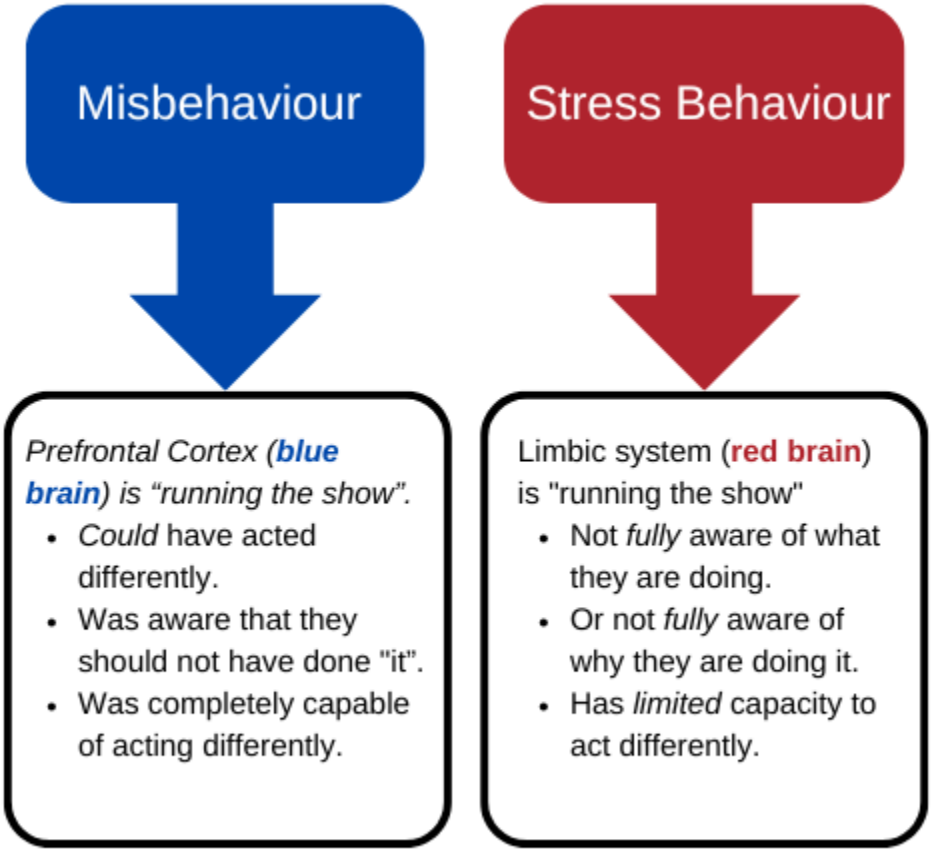
> At its core, self-regulation refers to the manner in which a child recovers from spending the energy required to deal with stressors. Prolonged and excessive stress (allostatic overload) can put a child into fight or flight, or freeze, which greatly affects "higher" functions such as language, social cognition, executive functions and, indeed, self-control (Shanker, 2021a).

The ability to self-regulate is related to our ability to manage our stressors. When the stress load for a child is

too high, we often see behaviours that we might conclude to be misbehaviour. We must reframe the way we look at a child's behaviour to understand the difference between stress behaviour and misbehaviour.

Misbehaviour vs. Stress Behaviour

Stress behaviour is caused by a stress load that is too high.



Adapted from The Merhit Centre, Self-reg.ca, FDEd (CAN).

Image Description

The prefrontal Cortex (blue brain) is "running the show".

- Could have acted differently.
- Was aware that they should not have done "it".
- Was completely capable of acting differently.

The limbic system (red brain) is "running the show."

- Not fully aware of what they are doing.
- Or not fully aware of why they are doing it.
- Has limited capacity to act differently

What are Stressors?

A stressor is "anything that causes a brain-body stress response" (The MEHRIT Centre., n.d.).

Stressors ...

- change from day to day
- amplify or reduce
- are unique
- are both observable and hidden.

We can support the development of self-regulation in young children by helping them understand their stressors.

> Enhancing self-regulation by understanding and dealing with stress. In Self-Reg, we consider our responses to stress and how stress affects our ability to maintain a healthy energy/tension balance. Self-Reg looks at stress across five domains: biological, emotional, cognitive, social, and prosocial (Shanker, 2021a).

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

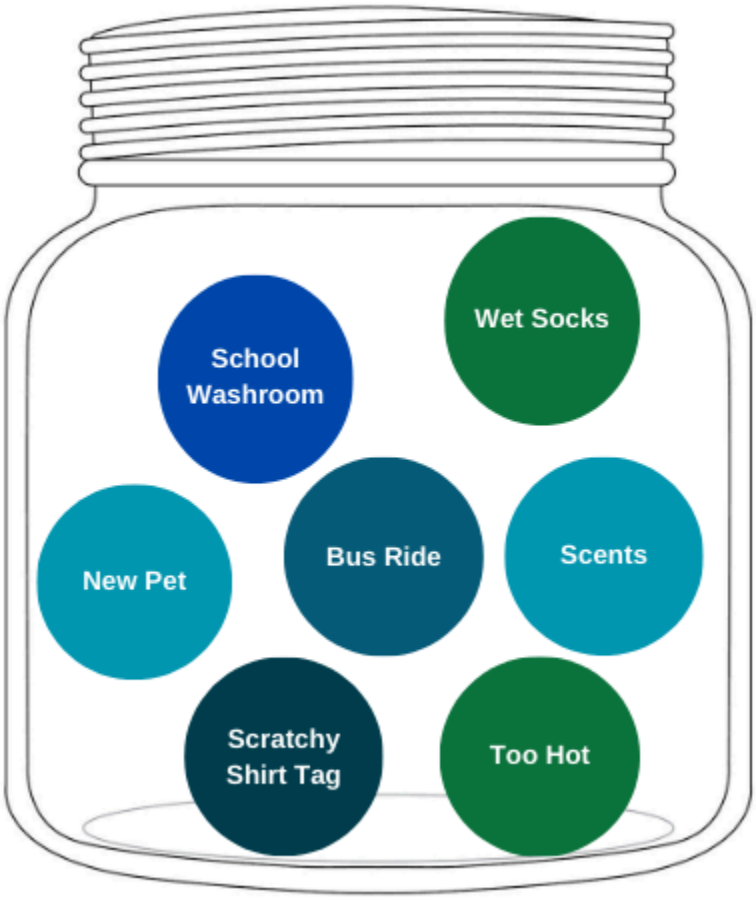
Self-Reg in the Early Years

Stress Collection Jar

What if we could collect our stressors in a jar?

- What would your jar look like?
- Think about a child who is displaying challenging behaviours. What stressors might fill the child's jar?

Each stress collection jar would be filled with different stressors.



"Stress Collection Jar" CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Image Description

An open jar containing balls of stress that are labelled: school washroom, bus ride, wet socks, new pet, scratchy shirt tag, scents, too hot,

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

Review the article: The Self-Reg Framework: The Five Domains of Stress

Spend some time reading about the domains and exploring the stressors graphics for each of the five domains.

- Can you relate to these?
- Were you surprised to see stressors that you have never considered to be a stressor?
- Did you note any positive stressors?

Heightened stress in any or all of these domains leads to problems in behaviour, mood, learning, and overall development. Identifying and reducing children's stressors is the first step towards easing their stress levels and bringing them back to a calm and focused state, and ultimately improving their ability to self-regulate (Shanker, 2021a).

Supporting the development of self-regulation in young children requires us to observe children and begin to recognize the signs of stress behaviours.

We have to learn to think about the possible stressors behind the behaviour before we react to the behaviour.

Growing Activity

What's in your jar?

This exercise gives you a tangible opportunity to recognize your stressors in each of the five domains.

- Find a jar with a lid.
- Record your stressors on individual pieces of paper.
- Add each paper to your stress collection jar.
- After you are complete, reflect on your own stress jar.
    - Are you surprised at how many there are?
    - How can you help reduce your own stressors?

Photo, Kier in Sight Archives, Unsplash Licence

CHAPTER 4: SELF-REGULATION & OBSERVATION

ECE5J Course Learning Outcomes

- Use observation to make interpretations regarding brain development.
- Utilize a variety of observation techniques to enhance work with children and families.

To truly practice self-regulation ourselves and nurture self-regulation in our students, we must first understand the importance of observation.

Observation requires us to stop 

and notice 

Observation is a challenging skill in our fast-paced lives, and with the inundation of technology, it has become even more of a challenge.

Growing Activity: Sit Spot

Find a spot outside, and sit on the ground in your 'sit spot' for 10 mins. You can put a timer on to help you. Do not have any distractions (phone, paper, etc). Just sit and observe. As you observe, think about the following:

- What do you notice?
- What do you see?
- What do you feel (physically and emotionally)?
- Focus on the colours, textures and sounds you hear.

"Contemplating something", Vernon Fowler, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

When your timer goes off, describe what you observed during your 'sit spot.' Did you see things you often overlook? Or maybe you noticed something you never observed before?

This activity highlights the importance of observation and how we often 'see' but don't 'observe'.

Dig Deeper: What is the difference between 'seeing' and 'observing'?

Observation requires us to pay attention to the small details of a child. How are they manipulating a loose part? Where are they drawn to in their play? What facial expressions do they have when engaged in play?

Observation is the first step in fostering self-regulation and observing the child and their interests. Observation is imperative to noticing small changes in behaviour and becoming observant about each individual child.

Every child is unique, and every child deserves to be observed individually. Observing a full classroom is very different than observing each and every child individually in that classroom.

When we think about self-regulation, we need to think about the importance of giving every child the time needed to truly observe each individual child. Only in careful observation, can we notice the small changes in a child, especially when it comes to behaviour.

Through observation, we can gather information about a child, including but not limited to environmental concerns, triggers, preferences, strengths and areas requiring strengthening.

Observation leads us to better understand a child and, therefore, better support a child in developing their own self-regulation.

Observation also allows us to observe ourselves and our impact on children.

Reflect

When the fluorescent lights are on in our classroom, does that impact a child's energy? What happens when we turn off the lights and just have the sunshine through the windows? Is there an impact on children when they have opportunities to move their bodies, or different types of seating available? When your tone of voice changes, what is the impact on the child?

Photo, stayhereforu, Pexels Licence

Observation is about reflecting on both the child and ourselves. It is about noticing the big and small changes in order to cultivate a classroom that supports every child in their own continuum of self-regulation.

When you participated in your sit spot, you likely found yourself noticing new details around you. Perhaps details that you would not have noticed before or never had the time to observe. Observation and self-regulation are about finding the time to observe every child so that you can notice changes and adapt your classroom to better support children in their self-regulation journey.

Icon Source

“Stop Sign”, amonrat rungreangfangsai, Flaticon License

“Notice Sign“, Aranagraphics, Flaticon License

CHAPTER 5: SELF-REGULATION, SENSE OF SELF & CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

ECE5J Course Learning Outcomes

- Prepare and implement guidance strategies that maintain a healthy sense of self.
- Examine the goodness of fit between child and adult.

Let's begin this chapter by thinking about challenging behaviour.

Imagine you have a student identified as having severe challenging behaviour by educators before you.

Perhaps they even 'warned' you about this student.

Let's pretend he is a flight risk; he hits when he gets upset and often screams at the top of his lungs.

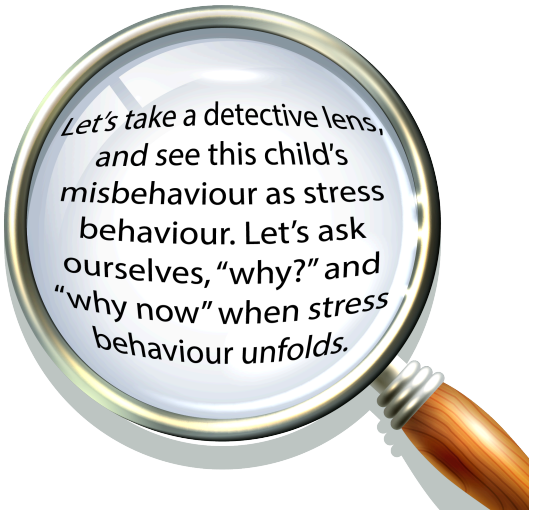
Photo, Mindaugas Danys, CC BY 2.0

Reflect

What are your preconceived biases before even meeting this student:

Activity Text

Bias #1, Bias #2, Bias #3



"Detective Lens" by Sanaz Habibi,CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Now, imagine how dis-advantaged this student is before even knowing him.

Imagine the perception the staff and the students have before he even walks into your classroom.

Now, let's reframe this student.

Let's take a detective lens and see this child's misbehaviour as stress behaviour. Let's ask ourselves, "Why?" and "Why now" when stressful behaviour unfolds.

As Stuart Shanker states, "There is no such thing as a bad kid" (Shanker, 2019).

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

Read the full article here by Stuart Shanker No Such Thing as a Bad Kid

When we reframe how we view the child and see them for who they are and what they can become, instead of the labels they are given, we can see a different child. This perspective shift allows us to recognize that behaviours, no matter how challenging, are often expressions of unmet needs, not an indication of a child's nature. Every child has the potential for growth, learning, and change, and when we approach them with empathy and understanding, we empower them to succeed. The idea that there is no such thing as a "bad" child encourages us to focus on analyzing the environment around the child, providing guidance and support instead of judgment.

When children are consistently given negative labels, they can begin to internalize them, shaping how they see themselves and how they approach challenges. Labels like "troublemaker" or "lazy" can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading children to act in ways that align with those expectations.

Have you ever considered how a child's negative label shapes how we see them? If we only see the child as their label (for instance, "bad"), we only notice the "bad" behaviour reinforcing what we believe about this child.

What if we were able to see this child differently? Would we see a different child? Understanding your role in shaping how the child sees themselves, allows you to see the child differently and to help change the child's trajectory.

Growth Activity

Reframe the label below from a negative term and transform it into a growth-oriented term.

Activity Text

Match the negative labels below to their growth-oriented term.

1. Troublemaker → _____

2. Lazy → _____
3. Disruptive → _____
4. Shy → _____
5. Bad listener → _____

Possible answers:

- A student who may need an educators support with time management.
- A thoughtful and observant individual who may need time to open up, or a different modality for participation.
- A student who is passionate and eager to engage in the lesson.
- A potential leader who challenges the rules to create change.
- A person who may need clearer communication from their educator.

Read, reflect & Reimagine

Read the article about a school that has re-imagined kindergarten orientation with a self-reg lens:

- A Different Lens, A Different Environment, A Different Student
- Self-Reg in the Early Years – Self-Regulation in Preschoolers

Watch the video Be a Mr. Jensen.

Video: "Be a Mr. Jensen" by Clint Pulver [3:12] is licensed under the Standard YouTube License. *Transcript and closed captions available on YouTube.*

CHAPTER 6: SELF-REGULATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

ECE5J Course Learning Outcome

- Examine the goodness of fit between child and adult.

When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not to join their chaos.
– L.R. Knost

Children are developing their self-regulation skills throughout their early childhood years.

In these formative years, children need to feel safe; they need to know that we will accept their emotions and that we will support them to return to calm.

Photo, Tadeusz Lakota, Unsplash Licence

Educators can play an important role in

> supporting self-regulation by providing environments that reduce stressors while recognizing and supporting children's efforts and increasing their ability to self-regulate. Educators can also support children's developing ability to self-regulate by being responsive and attuned to children's individual cues, arousal states, and responses to various stressors (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 30).

Sensitive and responsive caregivers co-regulate with young children to support the development of self-regulation. Children need us to co-regulate with them until they can start to recognize when they are stressed and when they need a break or help to return to calm.

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

Read the article titled Am I Co-escalating or Co-regulating

Co-regulation

When we co-regulate, children need us to provide a sense of calm, to be calm in our interactions, and to ensure the child feels safe. Sometimes, we may feel our stress levels rising, and we must take a moment to pause before we respond. This could be something as simple as counting to 10 yourself before responding. When we take a moment to return to calm, we contribute to the calm rather than the chaos. We also model our self-regulation strategies through coregulation with the child.

> Educators can also support children's self-regulating ability by being responsive and attuned to children's individual cues, arousal states, and responses to various stressors. They can help children learn strategies for becoming or staying calm and focused by enabling them to recognize and modulate their emotional states and impulses and become more aware of the effects of their actions on others (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 30).

Our role in the development of self-regulation in young children is fundamental. We are growing self-regulation from external guidance to internal balance.

Listen to the podcast: Marie Poss, Kristy Timmons & Lorraine Purgret: Conceptualizing #SelfReg in Early Care and Education.

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

Read the article titled The Power of Coregulation.

The Regulating Teaching Style

A regulating teacher reframes behaviour, tries to discover the stressors and how to reduce them, and models calming or self-regulating strategies.

- How does one become a self-regulating teacher?

An important step towards embracing the regulating teaching style is to reflect on your current teaching style.

- What do you see when you look at yourself in the mirror?
- Can you see the teaching style children see, co-workers see, and families see?

Photo, Taylor Smith, Unsplash License

Growing Activity

Your task is to create a list of 10 prompting questions for self-reflection.

Context: This is an opportunity to reflect on what regulating teaching looks like as a teaching style. Consider what it means to co-regulate and to contribute to the calm rather than the chaos in the classroom. Additionally, consider your relationship with the child and the child's family. Use this information to help create questions for self-reflection and to prompt you to examine your own regulating teaching style.

Examples:

1. What is my body language communicating to the child?
2. How do I feel about the child at the end of the day? Are my thoughts positive or negative?
3. Am I modelling my own strategies for positive health and well-being?

Activity Text

Create a list of 10 prompting questions to ask yourself.

CHAPTER 7: SELF-REGULATION & THE ENVIRONMENT

ECE5J Course Learning Outcome

- Prepare and implement guidance strategies that maintain a healthy sense of self.

The environment may be a key factor to analyze in regard to self-regulation. It has the power to contribute to self-regulation or disrupt self-regulation. Just as you find yourself calmer in different locations (i.e., your home, outside, etc.), children do as well.

The environment plays an important role in contributing to how we feel and, in turn, how we behave.

Let's practice the impact of the environment on ourselves through the activity below.

Photo, Liana Mikah, Unsplash Licence

Growing Activity

Choose one of the following activities to complete (or do them both!):

Learning in Different Spaces

Choose three different areas in your home to read and study in. Spend 15 minutes studying or reading in each space, and pay attention to how your concentration, comfort, and productivity changes depending on the environment.

1. Study in your kitchen for 15 mins. Reflect on your concentration, comfort and productivity.
2. Study in your bedroom for 15 mins. Reflect on your concentration, comfort and productivity.
3. Study outside for 15 mins. Reflect on your concentration, comfort and productivity.

Lastly, reflect on how each environment impacted your focus and learning.

Sound & Focus

Take a book (or textbook), and read and make notes in three different times, with different noise levels around you.

1. For the first session, read and make notes in complete silence.
2. For the second session, read and make notes using soft background music.
3. For the third session, read and make notes with a TV playing loud.

Lastly, reflect on how each environment impacted your focus and learning.

When we complete activities like the one above, it helps us to reflect on the impact of the environment on our learning. When we notice changes in our learning, it highlights the importance of environmental factors on children.

"Think about light, colour, sound, walls, room arrangement, furniture, and temperature; all of these can affect children. Be sure to provide quiet spaces, private spaces, personal spaces, spaces pleasing to look at, space for physical movement, space for sensory motor (sand/water), mirrored spaces, and spaces that encourage collaborating. And remember to consider the children's personalities, home life, and family/culture when developing environments" (Penn State Extension, n.d.). Sometimes, the simple act of changing the environment can make a monumental difference for a child.

"The influences you support in self-regulation can make a positive difference each day" (Penn State Extension, n.d.).

Read, Reflect, and Reimagine:

Read the article about a teacher who has completed an environmental checklist and found a unique and creative learning environment for her students!

- From Under The Stairs To In The Classroom: Contemplating Biological Stressors In Shared Learning Environments

Growing Activity:

Complete an environmental self-regulation checklist in your current classroom. If you do not have a current classroom, choose a classroom you have been in a placement, or think of the last classroom you were in:

- Link: Classroom Environment Checklist

This checklist was created by Dr. Stuart Shanker to be used by educators in the classroom.

The outdoors is an important environmental factor to consider with children, and studies support the calming nature of the outdoors as having a significant positive impact on children.

"A growing body of research suggests that connecting to the natural world contributes to children's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being (Louv, 2005). Children's natural curiosity and sense of wonder can be fostered by providing many opportunities to learn outdoors. The learning that takes place in classroom experiences can be explored in the "extended classroom" that nature provides" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

Reflect

Activity Text

How does your mood change when you go outside?

Read, Reflect, and Reimagine:

Read the article about a teacher who, not only brings her class outside, but also acknowledges the importance of reflective practice in the outdoors.

- Outdoor Play Routine: Did Self-Reg Make A Difference?

CHAPTER 8: SELF-REGULATION & FAMILIES

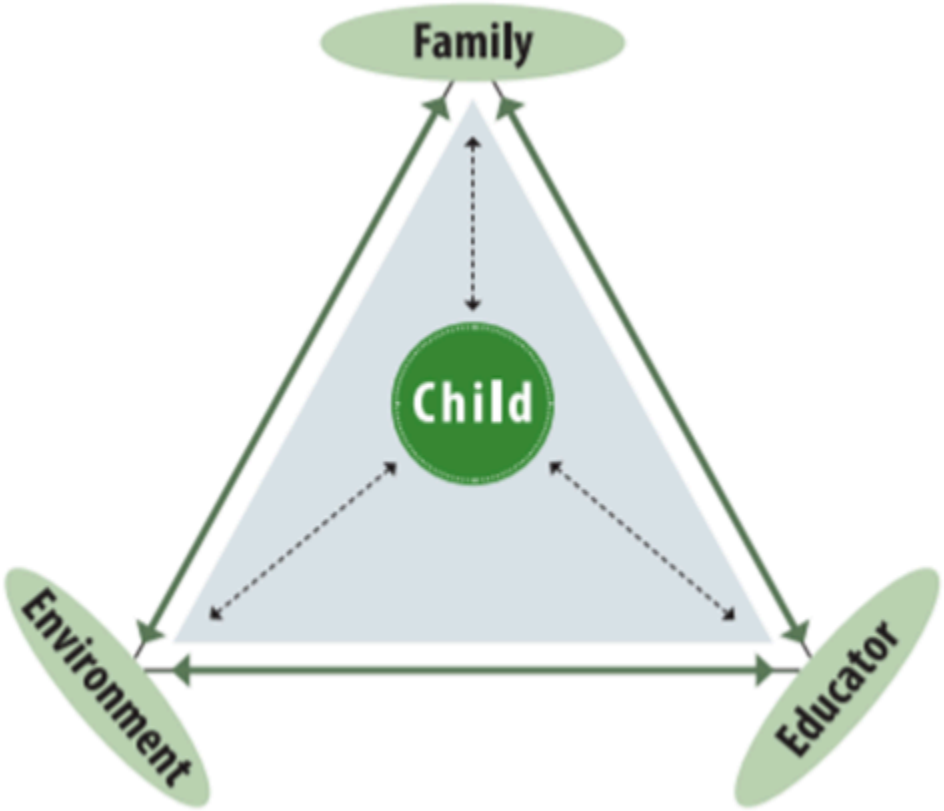
ECE5J Course Learning Outcome

- Utilize a variety of observation techniques to enhance work with children and families.

How Does Learning Happen? (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) discusses the "importance of creating a sense of belonging through fostering relationships and connections." The family connection is a key component of a high-quality program for children, and understanding the impact of family connection is essential for any early childhood educator.

> "Families love their children and want the best for them. Families are experts on their children. They are the first and most powerful influence on children's learning, development, health, and well-being. Families bring diverse social, cultural, and linguistic perspectives. Families should feel that they belong, are valuable contributors to their children's learning, and deserve to be engaged in a meaningful way." (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 10).

Families are experts on their children, and as such, they can be a valuable component of understanding each child's unique needs and how best to support them. When families are engaged and a part of the learning environment, they contribute to the overall classroom atmosphere by bringing insights that help tailor learning experiences to each child. This partnership fosters a nurturing environment where children feel seen, understood, and supported, enhancing their confidence and willingness to explore, learn, and grow. Family involvement also strengthens the bond between home and school, creating a consistent, encouraging space that benefits the entire classroom community.



Family, education and the environment contribute to the child's success, in "How does learning happen?" © 2013 Queen's Printer for Ontario, FDEd (CAN)

Growing Activity: "I wish my teacher knew this about me..."

Reflect on what you wish your teacher knew about YOU, and write your wishes in the following textbox below.

What do you wish your teacher knew about you, and reflect on why you think it is an important thing for a teacher to know about you?

Activity Text

I wish my teacher knew this about me...

Photo, Ksenia Chernaya, Pexels Licence

Involving families in the classroom creates a rich and supportive learning environment. Families bring valuable cultural knowledge, which can be a valuable asset for educators to know and understand. As noted in The Kindergarten Program (2016), "It is important for educators and children's families to work together to support the continued development of a child's first language" (p.69). By collaborating with families, educators can better understand and respect each child's linguistic foundation, building upon it to enhance literacy and communication skills. This partnership also reinforces the child's identity in their heritage, fostering a classroom atmosphere that respects and celebrates diverse cultural backgrounds. Together, families and educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for every child.

Families can also provide insight into activities, hobbies, and traditions that are important to their child, enriching the classroom with each family's unique interests. When children are encouraged to share these aspects of their lives, they feel more involved and seen in the classroom, which fosters a sense of belonging and helps them connect more deeply with their peers and educators. Perhaps a child skis every winter, or maybe their favourite food is pistachio ice cream; when families and children share their interests with their school community, they bring a piece of their personal world into the classroom. This sharing helps children feel valued and recognized, builds stronger connections with peers, and allows educators to weave these personal touches into the learning experience, making it more engaging and relevant for each child.

Growing Activity: Family Engagement Ideas

Create a list of 3-5 ideas you have for engaging families and helping to form a strong family connection for students.

Some ideas may include asking families to send in a family photo for a family picture wall in your classroom or asking families to be guest speakers by sharing an activity or hobby of theirs with the class.

"Families also have valuable insights into their own children. When educators foster a more reciprocal relationship with families, both educators and families will have a more complex understanding of the children." (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p.28).

Read, Reflect & Reimagine

Read the article about a school that has re-imagined kindergarten orientation with a self-reg lens:

- Transitioning to Kindergarten Without The Stress

CHAPTER 9: SELF-REGULATION & YOU

ECE5J Course Learning Outcome

- Prepare and implement guidance strategies that maintain a healthy sense of self.

Throughout this book, we have learned a lot about self-regulation, but we must also begin to understand our self-regulation needs.

What are things you can do to help restore yourself?

We must apply the self-regulation concepts to ourselves, recognize when we need to step back and use strategies like deep breathing or positive self-talk to regain focus and calm. In the classroom, self-regulation can be a powerful tool for you and your students. By modelling calmness, patience, and thoughtful responses to challenges and stress behaviour, you can create an environment where students feel safe to express themselves.

Growing Activity

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Think of mindfulness as a superpower!

Superheroes have incredible powers, and while mindfulness might not let us leap over buildings or swing through the streets on a web, it is a superpower in its way. Mindfulness is a strategy we use to reduce tension and return to a state of calm. When we notice our amygdala is about to hijack our brains, we can become mindful of our own reactions and can use strategies to get our prefrontal cortex back in charge. When we feel ourselves getting overwhelmed or reactive, mindfulness helps us take a step back and regain control. Just like superheroes train their powers, we can practice mindfulness to sharpen our ability to stay calm, think clearly, and make thoughtful choices.

Mindfulness could mean taking a deep breath, counting to five, or simply pausing before reacting. Discovering our own mindfulness superpowers better prepares us for helping children and families practice mindfulness. When we are mindful of ourselves, we become more attuned to the emotions of others.

Growing Activity

Growing Activity:

What is your mindfulness superpower?

Your task is to portray yourself as a superhero who has a mindfulness superpower. Your mindfulness superpower is a strategy you use to reduce tension and return to a state of calm.

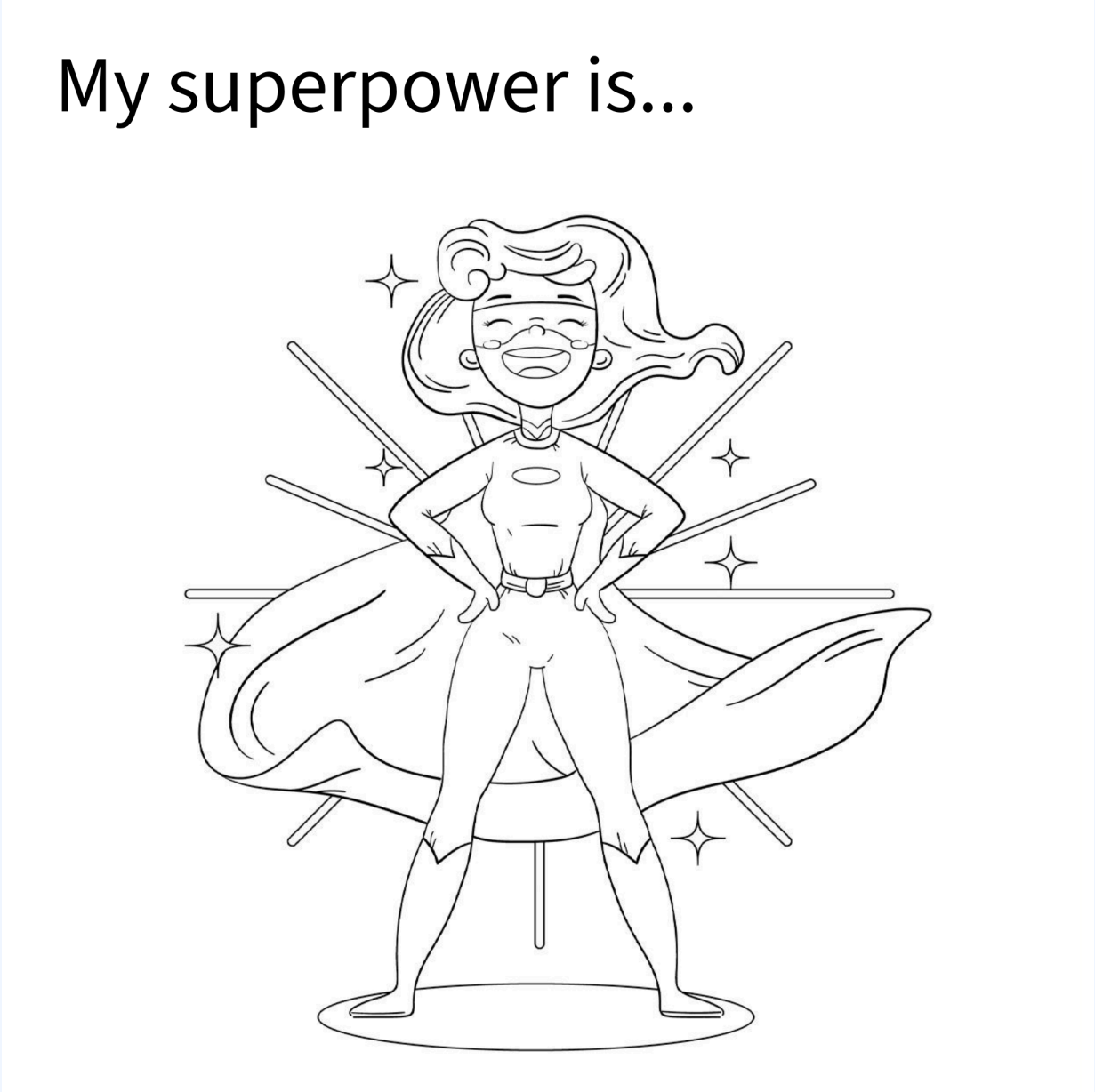
Activity Text

What is your mindfulness superpower? How would you use your mindfulness superpower?

Growing Activity

Download the photo below and express yourself! Add a little pizazz or a pop of colour. Then, share what your superpower is.

Link to Download



Superhero Image, Freepik, Freepik License

Activity Source

OpenAI. (2024, November 16). ChatGPT. [Large language model]. https://chat.openai.com/chat

Prompt: Please critique my idea: "Superheroes have superpowers, and some might consider the ability to be mindful a superpower as well. Although mindfulness does not mean we will be able to leap over tall buildings, cast spider webs to swing out of trouble or make a quick exit at the speed of light, a mindfulness superpower is a strategy we use and teach others how to reduce tension and return to a state of calm. When we notice our amygdala is about to be hijacked, we become mindful of our own reactions, and we use strategies to get our PFC back in charge of our executive brain functions. Discovering our own mindfulness superpowers or what works for us, better prepares us for helping children and families practice mindfulness. The more mindful we are of what is going on within ourselves, the more mindful we become of what is going on within others." Content has been edited – some phrases changed, words replaced/removed/added based on feedback from ChatGPT.

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VERSION HISTORY

This page provides a record of changes made to the open textbook since its initial publication. If the change is minor, the version number increases by 0.1. If the change involves substantial updates, the version number increases to the next full number.

Version	Date	Change	Affected Web Rage
1.0	December 2024	Publication	N/A

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Video Transcript: The Self-Reg Triune Brain Glove : A great teaching tool

Hello everyone, we want to introduce you to a really quick version of the Triune brain metaphor and then some options about how you can use our Triune brain glove so over to you first of all Stuart for explaining what the metaphor is.

For self-reg, there was a sort of pivotal event, which we describe as the start of a paradigm revolution, and it was in 1990 when a neuroscientist called Paul McLean published a book called The Triune Brain and Evolution and his idea was that our human brain is composed of really three separate brains. So we have an ancient brain what he called The Reptilian Brain, and that brain is around 300 million years old and it was designed for solitary creatures that needed mechanisms to deal with danger or to hunt, and it was preserved in us, according to Mclean to oversee our core metabolic functions, but also as this sort of survival system that sends us into fight or flight or freeze when we are threatened.

Then 100 million years later, a new kind of species evolved mammals and these are social creatures and according to Mclean they needed a brain suited, designed for social existence and that meant a brain that that was equipped for raising babies, for forming alliances, but also a brain that was constantly on the lookout for friend, or foe. Sort of a sentinel and when it sensed potential danger send a message down to that brown brain to that Reptilian Brain saying you know I need I need adrenaline I need you know either to fight or free.

And then finally around 3 million years ago the neocortex which has been evolving for a long time suddenly took a leap forward it began to fold and make these these grooves in itself that dramatically increased our capacity to plan to be aware of things aware of ourselves and so this neocortex is what we call the home of the learning brain. So that's the Triune brain in a nutshell. Three brains in one. Each of these brains in us has its own quite distinctive rules and functions and we shift back and forth seamlessly from one brain to another depending on what kind of conditions we are in. So it is very funny here I feel like Vanna White with the fancy nails.

You know people are asking how to use this. The Triune brain model glove is is something that we designed a

couple years ago basically taking everything Stuart just explained and pairing it with an idea that Dan Siegel first put forward, which was about flipping your lid with a hand model and so when working with kids we created our own, and I'll give you some ideas if you don't actually have a TMC version. You can make these yourself quite easily, but the idea is again the brown brain, The Reptilian Brain that Stuart was talking about that's the one that takes over in times of threat or danger the danger response all these sort of automaticity pieces the limbic brain which is your social brain which we just use the thumb and that's in the in the center of the brain and that's the social brain it's what connects us but it's also the one that's on the lookout for for you know threat danger, but equally safety which is the friend or foe that Staurat was referring to. The blue brain which is the neocortex. This is a metaphor so when you're teaching it to adults or children you're not suggesting I often will crack a joke that you know it's the brain is not three colours or three separate pieces it's not it's a metaphor, but it really or story it can help you understand a little bit about what's going on and figure out what to work on.

So by that I mean that some of the ways you use it is I've taught this to to kids as young as three and without a glove I literally had just my hand and explained you know that I put a marker or a little red dot on my thumb sometimes and explain that that their brain has shifted and we call it gone into a red green state to help them, so its shifted and told them there is danger and its gone into red and brown brain processes going on to keep you safe. So when we do that we focus on getting blue brain back online so that's great language for for a child especially one that gets in trouble a lot okay so cuz they're thinking I'm a bad kid no no you've just gone red brain and you work on that. So that's an in the moment thing.

Another thing that you can do is you can make yourself some of these gloves my very first one just like this and I bought a blue glove and you know that you can see it's even too small for me and I bought a blue glove and cut out the thumb and made my own so you don't have to you know you can do it that way we've had people that paint their nails so they paint their thumb red and then they paint the fingernails blue or put a sticker on and it's just a way of recognizing it's it's like a visual reminder of it's not misbehaviour comes from the blue brain but this is a visual reminder that sometimes it's not online. As I say that you know that it is more complex than than but it helps kids cocus on getting the blue bain and getting focused. You can also use it in stories.

So if you're reading you know any fairytale You know and I and you know think of some of the ones that you absolutely love I love Mortimer, which is one of the my favorite stories but you take any one of those, interrupting chickens is another great great story. You can actually talk about the red brain and blue brain with any story you know conversations with the children about noticing you know whether there was a red brain state was part of what was going on it moves you away from this idea that it is all about self-control and all about should. To beginning to think about different things you can do so different solutions so all the sudden you're making suggestions for any character that's having a really rough time in a in a story about what they could do differently and it's not about choosing different behaviours it might be going take a break,

have a bowl of cereal maybe go outside and look at their favourite pond or you know play with their pet for a little bit and then and then come back and solve it later they'll look later.

The final one that I'll leave you with is is that you know you can do this with teenagers too it's not just little kids it's just you know with teenagers I was working with one group and I showed them this and you think that they wouldn't be that interested and they were they wanted to learn more science so they needed to know a little bit more about the brain but there's tons online there's lots of ways you can learn about that. We also have a game based learning that you can do with kids to learn more about that but then it became a bit of a joke you know going a little bit red brain, a little bit of noticing it but you're trying to invite it almost like recognizing a sneeze is coming so you see a kid and you can read the signs when you know a kid you can read the signs and they they know what to do about it they take a moment and do whatever that is right go and take a walk around the school or whatever it is that they need to kind of catch themselves in the moment.

So the last one I suggest is you strongly model it for kids by that I mean teaching them you have red brain moments too and that the whole class can be going a little bit red brain and that's that's one of those moments that you just sense we call it high energy in the class but it's not that high energy can be a real positive thing right it's it's that uncomfortable energy that you just sort of feel is you know rumbling and you know about this okay let's get ourselves back to blue brain as a group and figure out what we can do.

The idea is that there's a little bit of science here you can go deeper and I suggest you do if you've got kids that are older or really interested in in the different parts of their brain but it's more about recognizing that you're not talking about misbehaviour we are recognizing the signs of stress excess of stress on our bodies and brains and and beginning to to use this metaphor this story of the brain and to try to decide as a group what we can do about it. Preventative, upstream. What can we do to lower, or dial down the tension a little bit so we are all feeling better.

So those are some ideas please share yours those were a few I use with my gloves on both hands here, but I strongly invite you to share some more because that's really you know we love to have a bank of ways people use the Triune Brain metaphor and the glove and the idea and with their own classroom so we can share it with others.

Attribution