

# INTRODUCING IT: It Takes Two: The Role of Co-Regulation in Building Self-Regulation Skills

 **READ IT** (6 minutes)

[It Takes Two: The Role of Co-Regulation in Building Self-Regulation Skills](#) (NAEYC, 2015)

**This resource shares how children use the important adults in their lives to establish the foundation of in order to begin building the critical skill of “self-regulation.”** Children need warm, secure interactions with their caregiving adults to model and exchange supportive, regulating interactions.

**Extend your learning in TRY IT!** through additional videos that help explain how co-regulation and self-regulation lead to improved executive function skills in children!

 **KNOW IT**

Here are the **important ideas** this resource offers:

- Self-regulation is person’s ability to consciously control thoughts, feelings and behaviors.
- Learning activities are difficult for children that are not able to self-regulate well.
- Adults help children learn to self-regulate through co-regulation.

- Co-regulation is defined as warm and responsive interactions that provide the support, coaching, and modeling children need to understand, express, and modulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- An adult co-regulates a children by being in relationship with the child – learning, understanding, and watching for the child’s cues, and showing the child consistent, warm and supportive responses.
- When still babies, children can give us cues about their needs, but they have very little ability to self-regulate. They depend on important caregivers to co-regulate – it is foundational to their healthy brain development.
- A baby’s ability to begin to self-regulate and manage the tasks of self-soothing, waiting, and transitioning between activities begin to emerge in the first year if they are experiencing supportive interactions with primary caregivers.
- Babies that have supportive, nurturing relationships learn that they can trust the adults in their world to care for them. This leads to babies understanding their needs will be met. In turns, babies test different ways to calm themselves. Using a pacifier, sucking a thumb or fingers, and twirling hair are all ways babies begin to self-regulate. They still need a **lot** of help from adults – particularly when they feel stress - but this lessens as children get older.
- Healthy development of self-regulation skills in children are influenced by external and internal factors.
  - Their environment and responsive caregivers that make a child feel safe, understood, and are consistent in responding to them are external factors.
  - A child’s temperament strongly influences self-regulation skills. This is an internal factor.
- Each child’s temperament is different, and so the way we co-regulate a child changes. All children have unique triggers, respond to stress differently, and respond with varying degrees of intensity. Our responses must be based on the individual child.
- The environment we create for children, the responsive relationship we have with them, the feelings of safety and security we offer, and our own example of

self-regulation are the best possible way to help children develop their own self-regulation skills.

Here are some **terms** in the resource that may not be familiar to you:

**Secure base** is the responsive adult that provides care to the child. These adults are the ones to whom a child turns with needs; when feeling unsafe, upset, or anxious; and to whom the child looks for cues.

**Temperament** describes the individual differences in emotion, motor activation and attentional reaction to stimuli. Characteristics of temperament include activity level, distractibility, adaptability, sensitivity, and quality of mood. There are three major types of temperament: easy, slow-to-warm-up, and difficult. Temperament plays a big role in shaping children's outcomes, it influences the way they interact with their environment, and it impacts how adults and other children respond to them.



## RECALL IT

Let's see what you learned from this resource! The answers are provided at the end of the guide.

1. **True or false:** Self-regulation is a person's ability to unconsciously control thoughts, feelings and behaviors.
2. **True or false:** A child's ability to self-regulate can positively or negatively contribute to how they do in school later in life.
3. **True or false:** Babies come into the world ready to show us how they feel, and know how to control those feelings.
4. **True or false:** The degree to which a child develops self-regulation skills depends upon his environment, the quality of care he receives, and his own temperament.



## THINK ABOUT IT

Take a few minutes to consider these questions. If you want to, write your thoughts down.

1. Think about the way that temperament influences children's behavior. Now think about two different children in your care and how each of them are learning to self-regulate. How have you co-regulated each of them? What is the same and what is different in your response to each child? Why? Was there anything in this resource that will make you consider changing anything about how you work with individual children? If so, what?
2. Think about the way you self-regulate when children in your care show you big behaviors. How important is your ability to self-regulate as you think about providing care? Why? Is there anything you might do differently after reading this resource? If so, what?



## TRY IT!

Here are some ideas to try:

- Are you interested in how self-regulation impacts school success? Watch the [Executive Function and Self-Regulation](#) video from Harvard's Center on the Developing Child!
- This resource - like so many others – talks about warm and responsive interactions with children. These responsive interactions are also known as “serve and return.” Watch the [5 Steps for Brain Building Serve and Return](#) video on serve and return to see what it looks like and how to do it yourself!
- Talk to the parents of the children in your care. Ask them to share what they do to co-regulate their child. Assuming they are using warm and responsive

behaviors, try using their approaches or techniques the next time their child shows behavior that is challenging.

- Incorporate at least one activity or practice every day that makes you feel internally calm, happy and regulated. It helps some people to make an “appointment” with themselves by adding it to their calendar. We need to keep our own cups full if we want to fill others’, too!
- Think about each of the children in your care. At a quiet moment when you don’t have any children present, write down the things you know about each child – what kinds of things stress the child? What times of the day or activities in the schedule are most difficult? Is there anything in the physical environment that makes the child feel frustrated by or challenged? What kind of temperament does the child have? Now think about the things the child does to self-soothe and what you do to help the child become regulated. What co-regulation can you do with this particular child? Make a list of a couple of ideas. Review them before children arrive to help you think about and notice each child.

RECALL IT! Answers: 1. F; 2. T; 3. F; 4. T