

## What is self-regulation?

**Self-regulation is the means by which we control our responses to a situation. It involves understanding our emotions and developing strategies to manage them. It also incorporates being able to think a problem through and plan how to approach it.**

Some children find it easier than others to self-regulate, but all will need support as they develop this skill. The presence of nurturing adults who model how to manage situations and support children's emotional and behavioural responses is called 'co-regulation', and it is a vital part of the learning process.

People who are able to self-regulate well do not turn off their emotions; they acknowledge them and use them to think through potential strategies for what to do next. This means that when they experience anger, worry or boredom, for example, they are able to come up with a plan for how to move on rather than remaining in the grip of the emotion.

Self-regulation is a tool for life. Studies consistently show that children with well-developed self-regulatory skills are successful learners who are able to persist and adapt when facing new challenges. If children are to begin to develop self-regulatory skills in their early years, they need opportunities to experience challenges that they can try to overcome. This does not mean you just leave them to it, however! Instead, it means trusting children to make their own decisions, and providing opportunities for them to do so. With this in mind, it is probably a good idea to keep this set of stones in a place that the children can access at all times.

## Ideas for using Self-Regulation Stones

The stones are designed to be tactile and appealing, so let the children explore and play freely with them, observing what they are drawn to. Is there one design, for example, that fascinates them, or are they interested in the physical properties of the stones, stacking or sorting them? Such observations will inform your interactions with the children.

### Dancing stones

Dance with the children to some lively music. Pause the music and select one of the stones. Ask the children to perform a simple action based on the image shown, such as:



**Two hands**  
Find a friend.



**Bucket**  
Mime lifting a full bucket by the handle.



**Cave**  
Find somewhere to hide.



**Castle**  
Stand straight and tall.



**Snowflake**  
Freeze.



**Monster**  
Snarl and hold hands like claws.



**Tree**  
Open your arms out wide.



**Sad face**  
Make a sad face.



**Sun**  
Draw a big circle in the air.



**Storm**  
Make jagged shapes with arms and legs.



**Candle**  
Stand and sway from side to side.



**Seedling**  
Curl up small and stretch one hand in the air.

Continue for a few more rounds.

After the game, reflect with the children on what these actions may look like in everyday life.

- When might you need to find a friend?
- What situations make you want to hide?
- When is it good to freeze, stopping what you are doing and giving yourself a chance to think?
- Can you make yourself feel brave? How do you do it?

### Story time

Choose a story that your children love and use some of the stones to start a discussion. For example, how does Goldilocks feel when the bears discover her in their house?

- Like an overflowing bucket? Is everything too much for her?
- Like a seedling? Nervous, wondering what will happen to her?
- Like a thunderstorm? Upset and angry?

Help the children to discuss how a chosen emotion may affect what Goldilocks does next. Discuss what she could do to manage her feelings. Repeat with other emotions.

### Time to talk

When a child has become distressed, provide them with an opportunity to play with the stones to help them to calm down and reconnect. You can use the stones as conversation starters. A child may like to use the stones to explain how they felt. If the child finds this difficult, you can model how to do it, or make suggestions about what might have happened. You can also help by supplying the necessary emotional vocabulary that will help the child to articulate their experience. Do not be afraid to go beyond basic descriptions, such as 'happy', 'sad' and 'cross'. Children experience frustration, impatience, disappointment, excitement, confusion and feeling overwhelmed, and need to learn to understand these feelings too. The stones can be used to help children acquire the skills of recognising and then describing their emotional situations, both key aspects of self-regulation. The stones can also help shape discussions about what to do next, or how to manage a similar situation in the future.

### What would you do?

Use puppets or small world characters to present the children with scenarios that they may face in real life: trying to build a construction model that keeps falling down, seeing a group of friends playing and wanting to join in, or an argument about a toy. Situations that the children have recently experienced work well. Use the stones to encourage the children to explore what is happening and to suggest possible solutions. When similar situations occur, use the stones to help remind the children of their ideas. Listen carefully to the children's responses as they will help you understand how they approach challenges, and how you may be able to support them.

*Enjoy using these stones to help build new connections  
with your children.*



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YD1148

