

Supporting Self Regulation and Social Emotional Learning



Allison Boothe, PhD
Tulane University School of Medicine



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What is Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation?

- A method of supporting the healthy development of infants and young children.
- **Designed to support ALL children, teachers, and families involved in early education & education environment.**
- Focus on overall school/program and specific children as needed.

- Kindergarten teachers **rate motivation and social emotional skills as more important** to school success **than being able to read** upon entering kindergarten. (National Institute of Early Education Research, 2008).



School Readiness

- Acquiring Self-Regulation
 - Emotions, behaviors and attention
- Communicating and Learning
 - Language, reasoning and problem solving
- Getting Along with Peers
 - Parent-child relationship is the first opportunity to experience trust, love, and nurturance and forms the basis for learning to relate well to others

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000)

Social-Emotional Skills

- self-confidence
- friendliness
- develop relationships with peers & adults
- concentrate & persist on challenging tasks
- effectively communicate
- pay attention, listen to instructions & solve problems
- self-regulation
- executive function skills

Executive Function and Self-Regulation

- What are executive functions?
 - Working Memory (holding & manipulating information)
 - Inhibitory Control (not doing something)
 - Attention Shifting/Cognitive or Mental Flexibility



Executive Function and Self-Regulation

- General cognitive skills associated with planning, reasoning, problem solving
 - connecting current and past information and actions



Importance of Attention

- Test score gaps
 - Attention problems > aggressive behavior, SES, race/ethnicity, and gender
 - 7% lower in math
 - 8% lower in reading

Georges et al., 2012



Importance of Attention

- Being in a classroom where other children had attention problems also affected gains in test scores over the school year
 - Not the case with aggressive behavior

Georges et al., 2012



Preschool Attention Span

- Attention span-persistence at age 4 had a significant effect on college completion by age 25.
- Reading or math at age 7 or 21 had no significant effect on college completion by age 25

McClelland et al., 2012



ADHD

- Symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity related to underlying difficulties in executive function including self-regulation

Barkley, 2011



Self Regulation Predicts Adult:

- Wealth
- Criminal convictions
- Health
- Substance Dependence

Moffitt et al., 2011



How do Social-Emotional Skills Develop?

- Young children's executive capacities & social-emotional skills develop **in the context of their caregiving relationships**-in and outside of the home.
- Those adult-child relationships that are **consistent, sensitive, & responsive** to the child's needs support social-emotional growth.



Relationship Relationship Relationship



Supporting social-emotional development

(Center of the Developing Child; Harvard University)

1. Train & support teachers in effective classroom management skills through/with mental health consultation.
2. Train teachers to model and teach children social-emotional skills.
3. Teach executive function skills directly (e.g., Tools of the Mind, PATHS).



How can we support Self-Regulation for all children?

- Environmental Supports
- Exercise
- Intentional Teaching
- Play



Environmental Supports

- Externalize motivation
- Frequent breaks between activities requiring high levels of self-regulation
- Provide external cues
 - Posting Schedules
 - Posting Rules
 - Adults must refer child to cues often



Exercise

- Evidence that exercise improves executive function/self-regulation skills:
 - Inhibition
 - Cognitive flexibility
 - Working memory
 - Greater participation in exercise produced greater results

Hillman et al., (2014)



Intentional Teaching of Social Emotional Skills

- Social Emotional curricula provide students with opportunities to learn important skills
- By building into the academic day, teachers, students, and parents realize the importance of social emotional development



Example: PATHS

- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies
- Available for preschool through 6th grade
- Lessons implemented 3-5 times per week for 15 minutes



PATHS Impact on Students

- Improves Self-Regulation
 - Teacher report increase in self control
 - Teacher report lower rates of hyperactivity and inattention
- Improves Executive Function skills
 - Increases inhibitory control



PATHS Impact on Students

- Builds social emotional skills
 - Increase emotion vocabulary
 - Decrease in aggressive solutions to problems
- Reduces aggressive behavior
 - Aggressive behavior decreases
 - Increases frustration toleration
- Improves Academic engagement
 - Up to 20% increase on cognitive skills test



Supporting “Real” Play

- Mature Play in which:
 - Children create an imaginary situation
 - Take on and act out roles
 - Follow a set of rules determined by these specific roles
- Children must plan this type of play & inhibit behaviors that do not fit within the play role

Vygotsky, 1967



Play & Self Regulation

- Children may show higher levels of self-regulation in play than in non-play contexts
- Example: Children asked to be a “look out” in play were able to stay still for an average of 12 minutes compared to children just asked to stay still (average of 4 minutes).

Manuilenko, 1975



Mature Play is Rare Today

- 5 and 6 year olds who should be at peak of real play often play as one would expect toddlers and younger preschoolers to play.
- They use limited imaginary props, limited range of themes, stereotypical scenarios



Self-Regulation Has Declined

- Positive correlations between levels of play and self-regulation.
- Comparing 5 & 7 year olds from 1940s to 2000s:
 - 7 year olds today demonstrate self-regulation abilities similar to 5 year olds in 1940

Berk et al., 2006; Germerouth et al., 2013; Smirnova & Gudareva, 2004



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For more information or for full reference list contact:

Allison B. Boothe, PhD
aboothe@tulane.edu

