



Self-Regulation in the Early Years Setting Policy & Procedures

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Worcestershire Children First	Early Years and Childcare 01905 844048 EYCC@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk Contact us Information - Worcestershire Children First Education Services
Community Social Workers	How to contact Children's Social Care Worcestershire County Council How to contact Children's Social Care Worcestershire County Council
Local Authority Designated Officer	01905 846221 (or via the FFD)
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Pinvin Community Preschool current Policies and Procedures: Safeguarding and Child Protection; Health and Hygiene; Safety and Suitability of Premises; Environment and Equipment; Suitable People; Information and Records (including GDPR); Self-regulation in the Early Years; Equality and Diversity; SEND in the Early Years; The Role of the Early Years Educator; Covid-19 Response.	

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Introduction

From September 2021 the Early learning goals which are used to assess pupils at the end of their reception year will change. It is within Personal, Social and Emotional Development where two of the most significant changes can be found;

- Self-confidence and Self-awareness changing to 'Managing Self'
- Managing feelings and behaviour changing to 'Self-Regulation'

<p>Managing self; Children at the expected level of development will:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be confident to try new activities and show independence, resilience and perseverance in the face of challenge; • Explain the reasons for rules, know right from wrong and try to behave accordingly; • Manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs, including dressing, going to the toilet and understanding the importance of healthy food choices.
<p>Self-Regulation Children at the expected level of development will:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an understanding of their own feelings and those of others, and begin to regulate their behaviour accordingly; • Set and work towards simple goals, being able to wait for what they want and control their immediate impulses when appropriate; • Give focused attention to what the teacher says, responding appropriately even when engaged in activity, and show an ability to follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.
<p>Building Relationships Children at the expected level of development will:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work and play cooperatively and take turns with others; • Form positive attachments to adults and friendships with peers; • Show sensitivity to their own and to others' needs.

What is Self-Regulation?

Self-regulation can be understood as how we manage stress, and is fundamentally the ability to manage one's own emotional responses and consequent behaviours until we return to a place of calm.

Dr Mine Conkbayir (2020) suggests that self-regulation requires these 10 attributes;

1. Controlling own feelings and behaviours
2. Applying personalised strategies to return to a state of calm
3. Being able to curb impulsive behaviours
4. Being able to concentrate on a task
5. Being able to ignore distractions
6. Behaving in ways that are pro-social
7. Planning
8. Thinking before acting
9. Delaying gratification
10. Persisting in the face of difficulty.

[Articles - The Foundation Stage Forum \(FSF\) - Home of Early Years Foundation Stage \(eyfs.info\)](#)

This can prove to be a mammoth task for adults, let alone young children, so it is of vital importance as educators that we fully comprehend the enormity of this subject so we can then consider how best to support self-regulation in children.

The role of the Brain in Self-Regulation

If we are to support children to self-regulate then we need to understand how the brain works when responding to stress.

It is the limbic system that refers to the set of structures in the brain that play an important role in emotional regulation. It is made up of four main parts: the thalamus, the amygdala, the hippocampus and the hypothalamus.

Thalamus: Located in the central part of the brain, the thalamus processes and coordinates sensory messages, such as touch, received from the body.

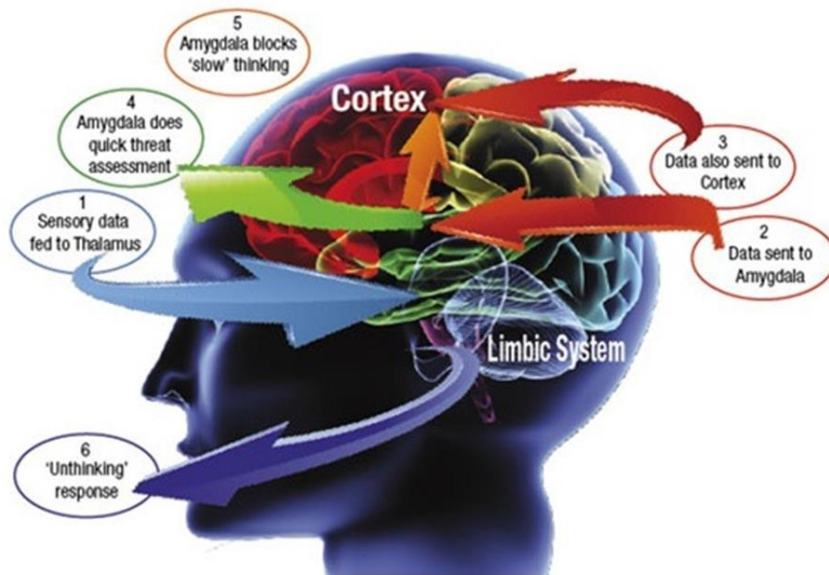
Amygdala: The amygdala is a limbic system structure that is involved in many of our emotions and motivations, particularly those that are related to survival. It is involved in the processing of emotions such as fear, anger, and pleasure.

Hippocampus: The hippocampus is involved in the consolidation of new memories, or the transcription of memories from short-term memory to long-term memory.

Hypothalamus: The hypothalamus regulates functions like thirst, appetite, and sleep patterns. It also regulates the release of hormones from the pituitary gland.

When stressed the brain may lose its normal function, sometimes known as an amygdala hijack.

Figure 1 Step-by-step process of an amygdala hijack



The term "amygdala hijacking" as defined by Daniel Goleman (1996) is; *'a personal, emotional response that is immediate, overwhelming, and out of measure with the actual stimulus because it has triggered a much more significant emotional threat'* (Goleman, 1996). Sometimes more commonly known as the fight or flight response.

Another way to envisage this is Dr Daniel Siegal's hand model of the brain.

Flip the Lid (Hand Model of the Brain)

Make a **Fist** with your thumb tucked inside your fingers. This is a model of your brain.




Figure 1. A model of the brain.

Thumb = Midbrain (Stem & Limbic) = Emotional Brain. This is where emotions and memories are processed. This is where the fight, flight & freeze is triggered.

Fingers = Cerebral Cortex = Rational Brain. Houses our ability to think and reason.

Fingernails = Prefrontal Cortex = Problem-Solving

When something triggers us, we are prone to “**Flip our Lid**” which means the Prefrontal Cortex (Fingernails) have a very poor connection with the Midbrain (Thumb), and we're not able to access the logical, problem-solving part of our brain. Our emotions are overriding our ability to think clearly.




Figure 2. Flipping your lid.

-Dr. Dan Siegal

Why behaviour should not be 'managed'

When a child has 'flipped their lid' their brain becomes dysregulated. This may present in changes to behaviour, mood, attention or their physical well-being. It is this dysregulated behaviour that we too often label as 'challenging', 'bad' or 'defiant'.

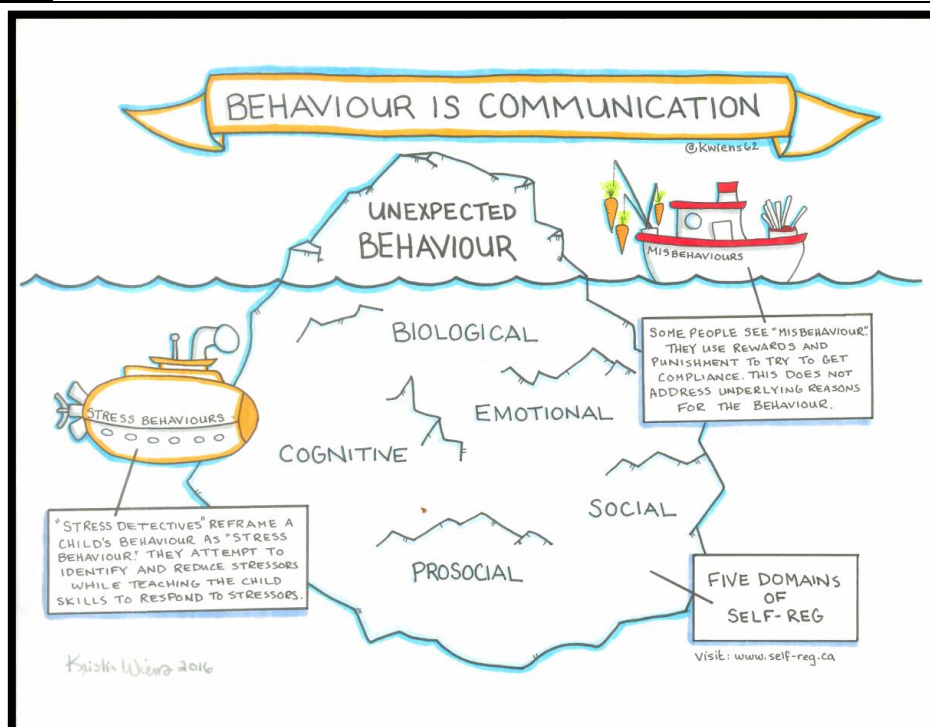
Historically early years settings and schools develop quite restrictive behaviour policies to 'manage' the behaviour of children. However, Conkbayir (2020) suggests 'a child who has become distressed or dysregulated needs adult support to help regulate limbic stress-behaviours as she/he could easily enter fight-or-flight when ordered to 'behave' or to "stop being naughty" or to "say sorry"'

At Pinvin Community Pre-school we believe that 'managing behaviour' is not conducive to self-regulation. Instead, we are committed to educating ourselves to understand the responses of children, moving away from 'managing' to a role as 'co-regulator'.

Behaviour as Communication

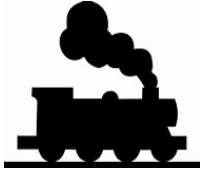
There is always a reason behind a behaviour and it is our role as co-regulators to become detectives to identify the stressors which cause the emotional response and to understand what the behaviour is trying to tell us. When doing this we need to consider the whole child and examine the five domains of self-regulation.

Biological	A child's energy levels and how they respond to what's around them. Consider factors; sleep, exercise, health, nutrition and sensory inputs.
Emotional	Controlling positive and negative emotions like excitement and fear. Consider factors; change in routine, new experiences.
Cognitive	How a child processes their own thoughts and then uses that information. Consider factors; time constraints or interruptions to their learning.
Social	Knowing and understanding social cues, and how to act in social situations. Consider factors; understanding of effect of their behaviour on others.
Pro-social	Knowing how to act with others and how to acknowledge feelings. Consider factors; feelings of injustice, empathy, sympathy and difficulty with coping with other persons stress



Our role as co-regulator

How many of us as parents use gentle bribes to avoid children feeling disappointment? A child not wanting to leave the park, bribed with a sweet treat. We may believe we are avoiding upset, but in reality, it is the adult wanting the crying to stop not the child. In fact, we are depriving the child the opportunity to experience disappointment, and the affirmation that it is okay to be upset.



The Train Analogy

This analogy quite simply suggests our emotions are tunnels and we are the trains travelling through them. We have to go through the tunnel to get to the peaceful light at the end of the tunnel.

When a child is struggling with difficult feelings – sadness, anger, guilt, fear, loneliness, embarrassment, we can often find ourselves trying to reason them out of it. We are of course trying to help the children as their pain hurts us deeply, and we can become extremely uncomfortable and anxious ourselves. However, it is these diversions/distractions that prevent the child from continuing their journey and getting to the end of the tunnel.

A child mid tantrum will not learn from a punitive response, or a down play on their emotions i.e., ‘you’re ok’, ‘stop being silly’, ‘stop acting like a baby’. We must respect the emotion they are experiencing as this is real to them. Instead, they need time and space to reach calm. This can take time and as the adult we must be comfortable to feel uncomfortable as they go through this process.

At Pinvin Community Pre-school we support children when experiencing powerful emotions by allowing them to go through this process. We will quietly and sensitively support them by listening, acknowledging feelings and allowing them to go through the motions. Using soft voice, body language, touch and visual calmers.

5 Steps of Self-Regulation

When supporting children's emotional responses, we will consider Dr Stuart Shanker's five steps of self-regulation, helping educators to move towards a 'connect before correct' approach to supporting positive behaviour. This approach invites us to pause and think about the child's needs in that moment, to put ourselves in their shoes, attempting to understand their reality.

1. Reframe the behaviour
2. Recognise the stressors (across the 5 domains)
3. Reduce stressors
4. Reflect (enhance stress awareness)
5. Respond (develop personalised strategies to promote resilience and restoration)

[Self-Reg 101 - Self-Reg \(self-reg.ca\)](http://self-reg.ca)

Developing a Safe Place

If we think back to the train analogy and the importance of children going through the tunnel to enable them to practice self-regulation skills and build resilience, then we need to provide a safe place where this can happen.

A safe place is one where;

- ✓ Educators are responsive and sensitive to the emotional needs of the children, treating children with respect.
- ✓ The setting promotes reflective practice at individual and group level.
- ✓ Educators encourage children to talk through their emotions.
- ✓ Children's emotional vocabulary is nurtured.
- ✓ Educators scaffold the behaviour they want to encourage.
- ✓ There are clear boundaries and routines.
- ✓ Children are praised for the attempts they make at managing overwhelming emotions.
- ✓ Models are used that can be imitated and applied to a range of scenarios.

- ✓ Educators refrain from making unhelpful judgements as these do nothing to nurture alternative behaviours.
- ✓ Key persons share strategies with parents/carers but are careful that these conversations are held away from the children. A child may become embarrassed and ashamed about their behaviour which can be counter-productive to self-regulation. Their 'safe space' may no longer feel so safe if they are worried about repercussions.
- ✓ Educators view challenging behaviours as learning opportunities.
- ✓ Children are involved in decision making.
- ✓ The setting finds alternative ways to diffuse emotions for example, glitter jars or liquid waterfalls.

A safe place within a safe place

We believe self-regulation skills can only really happen when children feel safe, secure and motivated. Attending a setting where there are 20 other children can sometimes be overwhelming so creating a self-regulation space is crucial. At Pinvin Community Preschool we provide a safe, quiet place where children can process their emotions. This is located outside of the main room and is a cosy area with sensory resources aimed to promote calm. Children know they can go there if they are feeling stressed, anxious or upset.

The passive, quiet child

As educators we can sometimes become so focused on children that are outwardly emotional and forget the passive, quiet child. A quiet, passive child may present this way because this is the behaviour, they have learnt, if they have learnt their behaviour is wrong, they may repress this behaviour, becoming passive. This may mean a child will not be able to stand up for themselves which from a safeguarding perspective is a huge concern. They may also lose their voice and ability to defend themselves. Children need to learn to harness their emotions and build up confidence or this may have implications in later life.

Meditation on the upbringing of children by Dorothy Lowe Nolte

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn;

If children live with hostility, they learn how to fight;

If children live with ridicule, they learn to be shy;

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty;

If children live with tolerance, they learn to be patient;

If children live with encouragement, they learn to have confidence;

If children live with praise, they learn to appreciate;

If children live with fairness, they learn justice;

If children live with security, they learn to have faith;

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves;

If children live with love around them, they learn to give love to the world.

The Problem with Reward and Consequence

In many schools and some early years settings across the UK you are likely to come across zone boards, where children are judged on behaviours and moved up and down charts accordingly being placed on rainbows or at the other end of the scale the thundercloud. These charts are designed to teach children the concept of reward and consequence. However, what are we really teaching children through these systems?

A child who is placed on a colour or image representing their behaviour score in the class will learn;

- ✓ I have to keep the adults happy
- ✓ If I make a mistake I am going to be shamed and the adults will be unhappy
- ✓ I must follow the adult rules
- ✓ Deny, hide, deny
- ✓ If I get things wrong, I am in trouble
- ✓ I am an angry child

- ✓ I hurt others
- ✓ I am bad
- ✓ If the adults are happy life is better
- ✓ It's stressful being around these adults as sometimes they get upset with me
- ✓ Life is better if I look, act, and say certain things
- ✓ I am not acceptable just as I am
- ✓ I have to get things right
- ✓ They will tell my parents what I did to upset them
- ✓ My parents will be upset with me
- ✓ No one looks with compassion beyond what I have done to understand why?

[Why are rewards and consequences still used in early year's settings????? | Jane Evans \(thejaneevans.com\)](https://www.thejaneevans.com)

We must remember the behaviour is an emotional reaction to a stressor, it is our role to co-regulate with children, to help them identify the stressor and work through the process of self-regulation until they get to their place of calm. Scoring behaviour will not make a child behave better.

Instantaneous Reward

Although we may not condone reward chart's we still need to find ways to celebrate achievements. We do this best through instant verbal gratification, this requires no props, and can be done in the moment. We are teaching children that we value them and their efforts. We are using intrinsic methods so children's motivation is driven by the learning experience and not for extrinsic reward. This supports us in our overarching ambition to help children to become life-long learners.

We recognise that the move from extrinsic to intrinsic reward is quite a U-turn from normal practice so we will support this with individual praise books to share achievements with parents and the occasional use of stickers for specific activities.

Having a Consistent Approach

To support children in the setting we have clear rules which educators communicate naturally through play. This supports us in teaching the children about socially accepted behaviours without it becoming a prescriptive list of rules, with little value. Taking a consistent approach, we can avoid confusion for children, however it is equally important to continually reflect on these rules and professionally challenge these if needed. Educators should feel confident to change rules to fulfil an objective. The most important thing is to communicate this to both adults and children.

Example; the setting has a walking feet rule. The children are very boisterous and are exploring the slippiness of the floor when wearing socks. It is not possible to get outside due to time constraints and extreme weather. The educator creates an area where the children can practice skidding.

The educator says, '***normally we have walking feet in preschool but I can see you are enjoying your game and you have worked hard to see how you can slide better. I have made you this space especially.***' The educator then establishes rules with the children, giving them the opportunity to assess risk for themselves. They ensure colleagues have heard these discussions so are aware of the reasons behind the change.

When opinions differ

Professional opinion will differ. Some topics can be quite emotive, especially around healthy eating, the management of risk, sharing or saying sorry. As carers we want to keep children safe and have developed our own responses from our personal experiences. It is therefore important you create a safe space where educators can explore this at a deeper level. By reflecting on personal values and beliefs we can understand ourselves and others better and a compromise can be made.

Thinking on your feet

Opportunities to celebrate children's emotional responses will happen throughout the day so it is important educators use these as teachable moments to the wider group, providing the child can cope with the attention.

Tools to Support Self-Regulation

Ideas taken from: [Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Get Active!](#)

<p>Attune to the Child</p>	<p>Ask yourself what are they;</p> <p>Thinking</p> <p>Feeling</p> <p>Sensing</p> <p>Imagining</p> <p>In this moment?</p>
<p>'Name it to tame it' (Siegel, 2012) – listening to the child and helping them to name and talk about emotions is a highly effective way to diffuse their intensity for a child.</p> <p>Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Name It To Tame It</p>	<p>Example: A child becomes anxious when out in the park and a dog comes near.</p> <p>Validate their emotion; 'I understand the dog scares you' Instead of keeping the child in a state of stress, this teaches them that their emotions are perfectly okay. This is the first step of self-regulation.</p> <p>To support them in their next steps of self-regulation, assess the situation and then plan activities and learning opportunities for example, soft toy dogs, stories about dogs, maybe leading up to a visit from a well-trained dog to the setting. Speak with parents/carers to explore if there is an underlying cause for this emotional reaction.</p> <p>Speak with colleagues, is this a sensory issue? If we shut children down without validating their emotions, we may miss these crucial signs.</p>
<p>Mindfulness</p> <p>Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Mindful Moments</p>	<p>Practising mindfulness alone and together is scientifically proven to reduce cortisol levels and, therefore, stress reactivity.</p>

<p>Be Active Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Get Active!</p>	<p>Get active! Exercise exerts a positive impact on the brain and body. Regular, rigorous exercise is an effective way to release cortisol and adrenalin while releasing endorphins (chemicals) which trigger a positive feeling in the body. It also creates new neurons (brain cells) in the hippocampus! (The brain region that plays a key role in learning and memory).</p>
<p>Respond honestly Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Questions - Questions</p>	<p>Answer children’s questions honestly, in ways that you know they can best understand. Do not worry about not knowing the answers to some questions.</p>
<p>Puzzles Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Puzzle Power</p>	<p>Completing puzzles together is a great way to quieten that downstairs, emotionally reactive brain and swiftly engage the upstairs, thinking brain.</p>
<p>Practice tapping Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Tap It Out</p>	<p>Tapping out words or rhythms is reported to be effective for some individuals who suffer from anxiety.</p>
<p>Role play Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Act It Out</p>	<p>Encourage role play – it is invaluable in enabling children to practice self-regulation while expressing their thoughts and fears.</p>
<p>Notice triggers Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Troublesome Triggers</p>	<p>Notice any patterns to your child’s fight-flight-freeze response and try to prevent the triggers from taking hold.</p>
<p>Take a break Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Take a Break</p>	<p>Take regular breaks to recalibrate your stress response, this can simply mean going to another room to practice some deep breathing or another self-regulating strategy of your preference.</p>

<p>Sound therapy Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Soothing Sounds</p>	<p>Use sound therapy. Our favourite is birdsong and when we're particularly stressed and need to get our upstairs brain back in control quickly, we try to count the different types we can hear.</p>
<p>Music Keep Your Cool Toolbox - Lost in Music</p>	<p>Play calming music, to help your mind unwind.</p>
<p>Breathing Keep Your Cool Toolbox - And Breathe</p>	<p>In times of stress and distress, our breathing becomes erratic which compounds physiological feelings of light-headedness and tightness in the chest. Helping children to focus on their breathing can help regulate it, which can then help their upstairs brain regain control.</p>

For further information on self-regulation; [Dr Mine Conkbayir and Ursula Krystek-Walton Are Starting a Self-Regulation Revolution | Family](#)

Documentation

Traditionally alongside behaviour management policies we would practice the completion of behaviour forms, shared with parents for transparency and partnership working. However, on reflection the completion of behaviour forms can be counterproductive, making parents feel anxious, concerned, as if they are to blame and their child abnormal. Parental reactions maybe to punish the child, to withdraw themselves from the setting, affecting key person relationships and ultimately the child experience.

Instead of behaviour forms we use observations to support our understanding of the child, and share these with parents. Observations when written correctly are factual and help us to identify triggers. We can assess observations against the EYFS and explore if behaviours are developmentally normal or if there may be other issues.

We will share this self-regulation with parents for transparency of our approach and reflect and review this policy from feedback of parents/carers and staff. If a child injures another during an emotional response an incident form would be completed.

THE EMOTIONAL CUP

Imagine that every child has a cup that needs to be filled -- with affection, love, security, and attention. Some seem to have a full cup most of the time, or know good ways to get a refill. But most children get a little nervous when their cup gets near empty.

Some ways that children deal with having an empty cup:

- steal from other people's cups
- misbehave to get your attention and show that they need a refill
- seem to have bottomless cups, or need constant 'topping off'
- can't sit still for refills or actively refuse them
- bounce off the walls when they approach 'empty'
- think they have to fight or compete for every refill

What fills a child's cup:

- play
- friendship
- one-on-one time
- love and affection
- connection
- succeeding
- doing what they love to do or what they choose to do



What empties the cup:

- stress and strain
- rejection by peers
- loneliness and isolation
- yelling and punishment
- failing
- fatigue
- doing what they're forced to do or they hate to do

upbidity

Publisher of Therapy Resources

STAR Observation Chart

	SETTING/SITUATION	TRIGGER	ACTION	RESPONSE
Day & Time	Where did it happen? Who was nearby	What seemed to set the behaviour off?	Describe clearly the child's behaviour	What did people do in response?