



APERTURE EDUCATION

STRATEGIES GUIDE:

Self-Management

- 2018 -



Self-Management

A child's success in controlling his or her emotions and behaviors to complete a task or succeed in a new or challenging situation.

What is Self-Management?

Self-Management refers to a child's success in controlling his or her emotions and behaviors to complete a task or succeed in a new or challenging situation. Children who demonstrate Self-Management may appear conscientious, calm, on task, and ready to learn. For example, a child who is excited about an afternoon class field trip, but is able to remain focused during a challenging lesson demonstrates Self-Management. This child is able to control his/her excitement about an upcoming activity in order to remain attentive and engaged in academic work. A number of concepts are similar to the construct of Self-Management, such as self-regulation, self-control, conscientiousness, self-discipline, and effortful control. These related terms may refer to aspects of the DESSA Self-Management scale and represent competencies that require many of the same skills that a child may use to manage their emotions or behaviors.

Self-Management may seem to overlap with other social-emotional competencies on the DESSA, such as Personal Responsibility and Goal-Directed Behavior. In fact, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) combines the constructs of Self-Management and Goal-Directed Behavior and defines Self-Management as, "The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals (CASEL, 2012, p. 9)". The Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC) has separated the constructs of Self-Management and



Goal-Directed Behavior for simplicity, so that adults can more easily observe and develop these skills in children and youth. In the DESSA and accompanying strategies, Self-Management items reflect the ability to control emotions and behaviors in order to complete a task or succeed in new or challenging situations, while the construct of Goal-Directed Behavior emphasizes initiation of and persistence in completing tasks of varying difficulty.

The DESSA measures Self-Management with the following items:

- 43. pay attention
 - 44. wait for her/his turn
 - 46. focus on a task despite a problem or distraction
 - 48. act comfortable in a new situation
 - 51. perform the steps of a task in order
 - 53. think before he/she acted
 - 54. pass up something he/she wanted, or do something he/she did not like, to get something better in the future
 - 56. accept another choice when his/her first choice was unavailable
 - 67. adjust well to changes in plans
 - 33. work hard on projects?
 - 72. adjust well when going from one setting to another
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While each item on the DESSA Self-Management scale indicates an ability to control emotions or behaviors, items 43, 44, 46, 51, and 54 specifically indicate *controlling emotions and behaviors to complete a task*, whereas items 48, 53, 56, 60, 67, and 72 specifically indicate *controlling emotions and behaviors to succeed in new or challenging situations*.

The Different Aspects of Self-Management

As you use the Self-Management strategies, you'll notice that they may focus on one or more aspects of the competency. As mentioned above, we have identified two aspects of Self-Management: *controlling emotions and behaviors in order to complete a task* and *controlling emotions and behaviors in order to succeed in new or challenging situations*. You'll see that controlling emotions and behaviors is at the heart of each of these interrelated aspects, which may be demonstrated by remaining or regaining calm, not displaying inappropriate behaviors, delaying gratification, and/or remaining attentive and focused.

CONTROLLING EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIORS IN ORDER TO COMPLETE A TASK

An important aspect of Self-Management is the ability to *control emotions and behaviors in order to complete a task*. In school, children are asked to complete assignments, activities, and classroom jobs (e.g., passing out materials) both independently and in groups, while at home children are expected to complete homework assignments and household chores. These tasks often require focus and the ability to resist immediately rewarding activities in the service of long-term goals. Children may view a task as boring, challenging, or less desirable compared to other activities (e.g., socializing with friends), but the ability to remain focused and see the task through despite these negative emotional reactions is an example of Self-Management. These tasks also require children to be attentive and focused despite distractions, for example by turning off the television in order to concentrate on homework. For challenging or large tasks, children who can follow directions and perform each step of the task in order are displaying an ability to manage their behavior in order to successfully complete the task. Similarly, children who can control their emotional reaction to a difficult task (e.g., stop an



outburst due to frustration) are displaying this skill. In a group task, children demonstrating Self-Management will show an ability to wait for their turn and be able to remain an active participant in the activity despite possible distractions from peers, excitement, or frustration.

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CONTROLLING EMOTIONS AND BEHAVIORS IN ORDER TO COMPLETE A TASK

A second aspect of Self-Management is the ability to *control emotions and behaviors in order to succeed in new or challenging situations*. Each day, children may face a variety of situations that are new and/or challenging, such as transitioning to a new class, trying a new sport, having an activity cancelled due to poor weather, feeling like they know the answers and wanting to be called on, taking a difficult test, or getting into a disagreement with a friend. To effectively navigate these situations, children must manage their emotions by staying calm. Children demonstrating Self-Management will be able to pause, notice their initial response, and shift to a more appropriate behavior if needed. They will be able to adjust and to settle themselves, to focus on learning and on positive interactions with others. This aspect of Self-Management builds on an initial recognition of strong emotions, which is a skill of Self-Awareness, into the ability to respond to and manage those emotions in new or challenging situations. Although developing competence in Self-Awareness and learning the skills of Self-Management take time and intentional practice to apply, they are essential for success both in and out of the classroom.

The Development and Importance of Self-Management

An individual's capacity to regulate their emotions and behaviors is critical throughout the life span. Young children must learn to express their frustration appropriately when observing another child playing with a desired toy, school-age children must attend to their teacher's instructions in the classroom rather than whispering with their friends, and adults need to shift attention from a disagreement with a colleague back to finishing their work for the day.



A critical time for building and using self-regulation skills is in the transition to formal schooling. Teachers report that Self-Management related skills are often more important than early cognitive and academic skills in the transition to kindergarten (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Similarly, kindergarten teachers know that many children need support in learning and practicing the skills of following directions, working independently, and getting along with and working with other children, all of which are important self-regulation abilities. These skills continue to be critical for success throughout children's schooling and beyond; therefore, parents, teachers, and other child-serving professionals must view Self-Management as a key tool in the toolbox of social-emotional skills that all children, adolescents, and adults alike must have in order to effectively navigate their environments.

DEVELOPING SELF-MANAGEMENT IN CHILDREN

Self-Management skills begin to develop early in life and, with support, continue to grow steadily throughout adolescence (Eisenberg, Duckworth, Spinrad, & Valiente, 2014; Morrison, Ponitz, & McClelland, 2010). The capacity to regulate behavior and emotion develops rapidly in the first three years of life (Kochanska, Coy, & Murray, 2001) and is considered a key developmental milestone with crucial implications for later development and outcomes. Early precursors to self-regulation, referred to as temperament and effortful control, have a strong biological basis but are also influenced over time by maturation and experience (Rothbart & Bates, 2006). In particular, early experiences with parents and caregivers have been shown to shape self-regulation abilities throughout early childhood. Adult behaviors characterized as warm, positive, responsive, and in sync with the child have been shown to promote children's self-regulation abilities (Calkins, Smith, Gill, & Johnson, 1998; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Eisenberg et al., 2014).



As children grow and enter the school years, children’s self-regulation continues to be supported by adults’ acceptance of showing emotions, direct teaching and explanation of limits, respect for growing autonomy, and the teaching and supportive use of self-control strategies (Eisenberg et al., 2014). Additionally, providing a home environment that is well-structured with stable routines and consistent expectations helps children develop better self-regulation skills (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Lengua, Honorado, & Bush, 2007).

The same factors that impact Self-Management skills in the home, including warm and positive adult relationships, acknowledgement and acceptance of emotions, consistent expectations, and structure are also important in the classroom and set the stage for developing social-emotional competence (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). Teachers and out-of-school time staff can support the development of self-regulation by acknowledging that emotions and distractions are natural, and by providing support and encouragement of children as they learn to manage their emotions and behaviors throughout the school day. The items on the DESSA refer to observable behaviors and can be used to aid adults in identifying situations when children may be faced with the need to control their reactions and emotions (i.e., “accept another choice when his/her first choice was unavailable” and “focus on a task despite a problem or distraction”). Anticipating challenging situations and pre-teaching effective strategies increases children’s likelihood of being well-prepared to use Self-Management skills in moments of stress or excitement.

Adults can support students in recognizing their emotions (a Self-Awareness skill), and then teach students specific strategies to help them to gain control of strong emotions throughout the day. They can also provide reinforcement or guidance in using these strategies during situations to increase student success

(Kress, 2006). Additionally, adults can model their own use of strategies to remain calm in times of frustration or anger and to refocus their attention following distractions (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Kress, 2006). While the Self-Management strategies included in Evo Social-Emotional are presented with developmental adaptations for the primary, intermediate, and middle school grades, it is important as an adult to be mindful of each student's unique developmental level. Age, maturity, life events and other personal and social factors have important influences on children's abilities to self-regulate.

THE BENEFITS OF GOAL-DIRECTED BEHAVIOR

A Self-Management, like all social-emotional competencies, is necessary for success in all areas of children's lives. With this in mind, the DESSA Strategies were written to include activities for developing children's social-emotional skills in the home, at school, and in the out-of-school time program.

IN THE HOME

Children with Self-Management skills are likely to contribute to a peaceful and structured home environment. In the home, children with strong Self-Management skills are able, to age-appropriate degrees, to complete tasks (e.g., chores) without distractions, to calm down when upset or frustrated, to adjust well to changes in plans, to delay the desire to socialize with friends until after their homework is finished, and to take turns when playing with siblings. Additionally, research has suggested that children who have skills related to Self-Management are likely to spend more time on homework, less time watching television, and are likely to start their homework earlier in the day (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

Parents of children who have the ability to regulate their emotions and behaviors will likely need to spend less time disciplining their children and



managing their behaviors for them (e.g., asking children multiple times to refocus their attention on their homework). They may also spend less time resolving conflicts between the child and their siblings or other family members. Parents who are able to model emotion regulation and healthy Self-Management present the most powerful teaching tool. To that end, engaging parents in the Evo Social-Emotional Home Activities has the added benefit of guiding parents in supporting their child's development through specific language and encouraging actions. Children with better self-control are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors such as making healthy food choices (Duckworth, Tsukayama, & Geier, 2010; Tsukayama, Toomey, Faith, & Duckworth, 2010) and avoiding more risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug use (Moffitt et al., 2011), all of which can reduce conflict and lead to a more positive home environment.

IN THE SCHOOL OR OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAM

Children who display Self-Management skills contribute to a calm, organized, and effective classroom environment. Teachers and out-of-school time professionals with students who can self-regulate will likely spend more time on instruction and less time on behavior management and discipline. Additionally, they are likely to establish more positive relationships with their students (Eisenberg, Valiente, & Eggum, 2010; McKown, Gumbiner, Russo, & Lipton, 2009) which can lead to better instruction and increased learning opportunities (Murray & Greenberg, 2000). Self-Management skills have also been found to influence children's social development and experiences with peers, including acceptance by peers and the development and maintenance of friendships (Eisenberg, et al., 2010; Jensen-Campbell & Malcolm, 2007; Wilson, 2003). Furthermore, Kochanska, Murray, and Coy (1997) have demonstrated the contribution of effortful and



inhibitory control (e.g., delaying gratification, controlling impulses) in children's moral development throughout early school years.

As children enter formal schooling, the ability to manage emotions and behaviors plays an important role in children's success in making this transition and in their later academic outcomes (Duckworth & Carlson, 2013; Morrison, et al., 2010). For many children, the entry into kindergarten marks their first experience in a classroom setting where it is expected that they pay attention, follow directions, remain calm, and sit still for extended periods of time. Children who come to school with these skills are better able to handle this transition and fare better in the long-term (Duncan et al., 2007; Morrison, et al., 2010; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). For example, McClelland, Acock, and Morrison (2006) found that children demonstrating low self-management related skills in kindergarten remained behind their peers in both reading and math and continued to score lower than their peers throughout elementary school. Additionally, children's attention-span persistence (an important aspect of Self-Management) as rated by parents at age 4 was found to predict math and reading skills at age 21 as well as the odds of completing college by age 25 (McClelland, Acock, Piccinin, Rhea, & Stallings, 2013).

These skills continue to be critical as children proceed through school. For example, Duckworth & Seligman (2005) assessed eighth grade students' self-regulatory skills as measured by parent, teacher, and student self-report and performance on a delay of gratification task and found that self-disciplined students outperformed their less self-disciplined peers on a variety of academic outcomes, including report card grades and standardized achievement test scores. Additionally, self-discipline was found to predict these academic outcomes when controlling for IQ. Similarly, Duckworth, Tsukayama, and May (2010) found that

change in middle school students' self-regulation over time predicted subsequent changes in GPA. Evidence suggests that the self-management of attention and interpersonal behaviors (e.g., controlling aggressive impulses) predict successful high school completion (Duckworth & Carlson, 2013).

Taken together, these studies suggest that behaviors such as focusing attention on school work despite competing distractions, being able to settle oneself in the classroom to learn (e.g., after recess), and delaying a desire such as socializing with friends until after a group project is finished, are critical for students' success in school.

IN THE FUTURE

The ability to regulate one's emotions and behaviors is critical not only in childhood and youth but throughout adulthood as well. Self-Management related skills have been shown to predict a variety of long-term outcomes, including those related to educational and career attainment, health, and pro-social behavior.

The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 2000) identifies a number of characteristics outside of academic and technical knowledge and skills that are necessary for career readiness and employability. A number of these skills are related to Self-Management including maintaining a high level of concentration despite an unpleasant task, paying attention to details, adaptability and responding appropriately as the situation requires, exhibiting self-control, controlling emotions when responding to feedback, managing time, and planning and structuring work.

Accordingly, individuals able to self-manage tend to perform better in the workplace. They are likely to work hard, complete tasks thoroughly, stay organized, manage their time, and remain calm and engaged despite challenges, frustration, or difficult situations. They have been found to exhibit greater productivity than



their co-workers who are less skilled at Self-Management (Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama & Kwok, 2012; Moffitt et al., 2011). In contrast, lack of self-control could impact an individual's ability to find and keep a job (Moffitt et al., 2011), which consequently, can lead to greater financial instability (Moffitt et al., 2011). Studies show that Self-Management skills were related to income, savings behavior, financial security, and occupational prestige in adulthood (Moffitt et al. 2011; Duckworth, et al., 2012).

Individuals who display Self-Management are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors such as maintaining a proper diet and regular physical activity, and avoiding more risky, unhealthy behaviors such as drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, risky driving and sexual behavior, and violence (Boggs & Roberts, 2004). Consequently, the presence of Self-Management skills has been linked to better physical and mental health, reduced criminal convictions, and is predictive of longevity (Moffitt et al., 2011).

Promoting Self-Management can be essential to the short-term and long-term success of children in a variety of areas throughout their lives. Adults can use their everyday interactions with children intentionally to help build and support these critical skills. The strategies in this guide are a starting point for developing and supporting children as they acquire and strengthen their Self-Management skills, which will ultimately benefit them now and into the future.

The document above does not represent a comprehensive literature review, but a foundation for exploring the strategies found in Evo Social-Emotional. Please feel free to use the references below to further explore the construct of Goal-Directed Behavior.



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