Support of self-regulation is critical at each stage of development from birth through young adulthood.

Self-regulation is the act of managing thoughts and feelings to enable goal-directed actions.

Self-regulation develops through interaction with caregivers and the broader environment over an extended period from birth through young adulthood (and beyond).

Caregivers support self-regulation development by using three strategies in a process called “co-regulation.” Caregivers include parents, teachers, afterschool care providers, extended family members, and others.

Self-regulation includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills and processes that support youth in coping with strong feelings, controlling impulses, learning, and getting along with others.

Self-regulation is important because it promotes wellbeing across the lifespan, including physical, emotional, social and economic health and educational achievement.

This snap shot summarizes key concepts about self-regulation development and intervention for middle-school aged youth for practitioners and educators interested in promoting self-regulation for this age group. It is based on a series of four reports on Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress prepared for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). For more information, visit: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/toxic-stress-and-self-regulation-reports

Self-Regulation Snap Shot #4: A Focus on Middle-School Aged Youth

Self-Regulation Skills Developing in Middle-School Aged Youth:

• Completing longer and more complex tasks
• Self-monitoring
• Planning, prioritization, and time management to achieve goals
• Using strategies to manage stress
• Using health-promoting strategies to calm down when distressed
• Considering consequences before acting
• Making effective decisions “in the moment”
• Solving more complex problems independently
• Goals, behavior, and decision-making guided by empathy and concern for others

Self-regulation is influenced by stress and adversity in the environment as well as caregiving supports and children’s own biology, skills, and motivation.

Three components of co-regulation for middle-school aged youth

Build Warm, Responsive Relationship
• consistent positive regard
• support and empathy in times of distress
• responsivity to needs

Coach Self-Regulation Skills
• goal-setting
• problem-solving
• stress management
• time management
• organization
• planning

Structure the Environment
• time and space to relax and calm down
• monitoring to limit risk opportunities
• rules and consequences to incentivize good choices
Lessons Learned About Interventions to Promote Self-Regulation in Middle-School Aged Youth

Across the lifespan, there are two intervention approaches that support development of self-regulation: skills instruction and co-regulation support. The combination of these approaches is believed to be most effective, regardless of the youth’s age. In middle-school aged youth, existing interventions utilize these approaches as follows:

- 74% of studies focused on skills instruction alone;
- 6% focused on co-regulation alone;
- 14% combined both;
- 5% used other approaches

Based on a review of preventive interventions published between 1989 and 2013, 78 studies were found that targeted self-regulation development for middle-school aged youth (ages 11-14 years), with the following characteristics:

**Strengths:**
- Large number of studies with diverse samples
- Many universal interventions exist for high-poverty schools

**Limitations:**
- Few interventions target parents and teachers
- Interventions are more diffuse and less focused on emotion regulation than for younger youth
- Majority of outcomes are youth self-report
- Effects across interventions vary greatly

**Conclusions:**
- Positive impact seen in cognitive and behavioral regulation as well as delinquency
- Effects may be somewhat smaller than for younger youth
- Room for enhancement with more focused interventions that target emotion regulation and involve parents and teachers

### Outcome Assessed | # Findings | Average Effect Size* | % with Positive Effects*
--- | --- | --- | ---
**Youth Outcomes: Core Self-Regulation**
Cognitive | 48 | Small to Medium | 63%
Emotional | 9 | None to Small | 22%
Behavioral | 64 | Small | 64%
Stress | 4 | Small | 25%
Motivation/Initiative | 19 | None to Small | 10%

**Youth Outcomes: Other Functional Domains**
Language/Learning | 9 | Small | 56%
Delinquent Behavior | 29 | Small | 79%
Health/Self-Care | 7 | Small to Medium | ---
Interpersonal | 26 | Small | 46%
Mental Health | 43 | Small | 56%

**Parent Outcomes**
Parenting Skills | 5 | Small to Medium | 80%

*Reported only if findings are based on at least two studies

Key considerations for promoting self-regulation in middle-school aged youth:
- Encourage a positive school climate for all students
- Deliver self-regulation skills training in at-risk schools
- Train teachers and afterschool staff to teach, model, reinforce, and coach self-regulation skills
- Identify ways to support school and program staff’s own self-regulation capacity
- Provide parent education supports that address co-regulation