

Simple tips to guide you towards improving communication, creating engaging learning environments, and meeting best practices.

Putting the Self Into Self-Regulation

Disruptive children can negatively impact the entire group, eliciting fear, resentment, or even imitation from other children. Teachers can become frustrated as their attention is repeatedly focused on the child who acts out, rather than the entire group. We might respond by setting up ways to control the child, hoping to get rid of the behavior. This usually works as long as the teacher is right there and is watching. This is an example of teacher regulation. Children need strategies they can manage on their own; they need to learn self-regulation. Self-regulation, the ability to think before acting, can be facilitated by the teacher with lasting and good results. Here are three quick, easy strategies used in HighReach Learning curriculum to aid teachers in supporting the development of this essential "think, then do" skill.

- Encourage more make-believe or pretend play with a variety of new and fresh ideas. The more imaginative children become in their play, the more they must think or plan their thoughts ahead of time – a skill that helps them on the path toward self-regulation. Children can stop momentarily and say, "I know what to do, I stop and count to two. One-two." Then help children to see potential ways to resolve the dilemma! This is a much better alternative than hitting or biting or crying. When children are struggling, whether working on a frustrating puzzle or reaching for the same toy, use the mantra and encourage the child's efforts at impulse control, then be ready to help problem solve!
- Help children focus on finding a comfortable place to sit near others with enough room – not an easy concept for egocentric young children! Help them manage their own personal spaces by finding the bubble around them. When children learn to manage their own needs, it becomes easier to take someone else's perspective and see how they all impact one another!
- Plan for transitions. When children need to be patient, wait for a turn, move to the next part of the daily routine, etc., provide simple strategies to encourage their internal thought processes and keep them occupied. For example, designate one child as the "painter." Help the remaining children find partners who share a similarity (both wearing similar shoes, both wearing something blue, both have long hair, etc.). If necessary, be the painter yourself so everyone has a partner. The pairs take turns announcing what their similarity is ("Courtney and George have green eyes!") The painter then uses an imaginary brush to put "magic glue" on the pairs' arms. The partners are then challenged to move to the next activity (or simply move around) while "stuck" together. This activity reinforces the "think, then do" mentality. The children have the opportunity to consider what they have in common with someone else, then the focus and coordination to work together with a partner makes it active and fun. They might even make new friends. Voila! Thinking, then doing.