



10 Hour Annual Training:

Supporting Self-Regulation in The Early Years

Class Information

This workbook is your class.

**Send all your assignments in by e-mail to
Washington State Training & Registry System
(STARS) Certified STARS Instructor:
[Elizabeth Bakke](#)**

starsclassesmerit@gmail.com

- Read this workbook and use it as a class resource. All your assignments are to be completed and submitted by E-Mail. Do not submit this workbook, it is to be kept for your future reference.
- The course assignments are listed in this workbook and you may find them quickly in the TABLE OF CONTENTS. Please complete each assignment, then e-mail each one separately to:
starsclassesmerit@gmail.com
As you finish one assignment go directly on to the next one.
- Please be sure to complete a Google search on this topic for current information that will help you complete your assignments. You may bookmark these to your computer for use in the future.
- Throughout this class, if you would like to network with peers on any topic of interest using the Blog [HELLO](#). This is provided by NAEYC. There are questions, answers & comments from Early Childhood peers Nationwide. Find great connections and a wealth of information.



This course reflects *The Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals*. To describe the basic foundations of best practice:

- Children need a supportive and nurturing environment in which to grow, learn and develop.
- Caregivers and teachers recognize that children are first educated by the family. In doing so, caregivers and teachers develop strong relationships with families and support their strengths.
- Cultural diversity including all ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds impacts areas of practice in early care and education. Professionals recognize that each family is unique in its structure, values, beliefs, traditions, and interactions. Professionals respect each family's worth and appreciate the richness of diversity that each family brings to the early care and education setting.
- Professional development requires self-reflection on practices to identify strengths, recognize areas for future growth, and incorporate new learning experiences. Reflection heightens awareness of one's performance and leads to personal change and growth.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices include:

- Matching early childhood practices to the ways children learn.
- Establishing a classroom environment that encourages creativity, exploration, and facilitates active learning.
- Considering the age range from birth to 8 years as a continuum of development.
- Using ongoing evaluation for decision-making and curriculum development.
- Utilizes real and/or concrete materials for teaching and learning.
- Provides objects and materials children can manipulate.
- Provides experiences that are relevant to the life experiences of children.
- Provides pro-social environments where children gain competence and skill in positive interactions with others. We realized that children are more likely to internalize information when:
 - It is familiar, meaningful, and contains an organization of its own that is on the child's level of thinking.
 - Children are actively involved in the learning experience.
 - Learning/activities have variety and provide creative experiences.
 - Learning experiences are presented to children based on their interests and intrigue them.

Student Outcome	Washington State Core Competency		
Outcome 1 Understanding Self-Regulation in Early Childhood	I: Child Growth and Development 1e. Understands that children and families have different needs.		
Outcome 2 The Teacher's Role in Fostering Self-Regulation in Early Childhood	I: Child Growth and Development <i>3a. Recognizes that interaction with people and the environment stimulates the child's brain function and therefore brain growth and development.</i>		
Outcome 3 Practical Strategies and Classroom Activities for Self-Regulation	I: Child Growth and Development 1f. Recognizes that children learn and develop through play.		
Outcome 4 Addressing Specific Challenges in Self-Regulation	I: Child Growth and Development <i>1g. Adapts and modifies care and education to children's changing needs and unique personalities.</i>		



Section 1

Objective:

Understanding Self-Regulation in Early Childhood

Self-regulation is one of the cornerstones of early childhood development, yet it is also one of the most misunderstood skills. In preschool and kindergarten classrooms, teachers often encounter children who cry easily, lash out, or simply cannot sit still. These behaviors are not signs of defiance or “bad” children—they are evidence of children still learning the skill of regulation.

Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, control impulses, and adjust behavior in order to achieve goals or adapt to different contexts. In the preschool years, it looks like being able to wait for a turn, follow a routine, or use words instead of hitting. In kindergarten, it might mean persisting through a tricky math task or walking calmly in the hallway even when excited. These small moments represent enormous developmental work.

When teachers understand the science and developmental process of self-regulation, they are better equipped to see beyond behavior and respond in ways that truly support growth.

Defining Self-Regulation

Researchers describe self-regulation as having three interconnected components:

1. **Emotional regulation** – Understanding and managing feelings. For example, a 4-year-old who takes a deep breath when disappointed about losing a game.
2. **Behavioral regulation** – Controlling impulses and actions. For example, a 3-year-old who waits (with reminders) before opening snack.
3. **Cognitive regulation** – Sustaining attention and adapting thinking. For



example, a 5-year-old who adjusts a block tower design after it falls down.

Together, these abilities are linked to the broader concept of **executive function**—a set of mental processes that allow children to remember instructions, stay focused, and adjust to change. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard (2023) notes that executive function skills are just as essential as early literacy and math in predicting later academic success.

In other words, a child who cannot regulate their emotions or behavior will struggle to fully benefit from academic instruction, no matter how skilled the teacher.

How Self-Regulation Develops in Early Childhood

Self-regulation unfolds gradually, with wide variation among children. Genetics, temperament, environment, and relationships all play roles. Teachers must recognize what is developmentally typical and what may indicate a need for extra support.

- **Two-year-olds:** Begin to show early signs of impulse control (may wait briefly if reminded). Still rely heavily on adults for comfort.
- **Three-year-olds:** Can follow simple routines, begin to use words to express needs, but often act impulsively when frustrated.
- **Four-year-olds:** Show more awareness of rules, can calm themselves with adult coaching, may attempt simple strategies like self-talk.
- **Five-year-olds:** More capable of waiting, sharing, and persisting. Still inconsistent, especially when tired, hungry, or overstimulated.
- **Six-year-olds:** Begin to show more independence, can use coping strategies with reminders, and start to reflect on their own feelings.

Importantly, growth is **nonlinear**. A child may manage transitions smoothly one day and melt down the next. This does not mean failure—it means practice is still needed.

The Brain Science Behind Regulation

Self-regulation is rooted in brain development, especially in the **prefrontal cortex**. This part of the brain controls planning, decision-making, and impulse control—but it is far from mature in early childhood. In fact, it continues developing into a person's mid-20s.

Because of this, children need **co-regulation**—support from a calm, responsive adult who helps them through emotional or behavioral challenges. For instance:

- A toddler screaming after a toy is taken needs an adult to label the feeling, provide comfort, and guide them toward a solution.
- A preschooler frustrated with a puzzle may need a teacher to sit beside them, encourage persistence, and celebrate effort.
- A kindergartner nervous before a performance may need breathing exercises modeled by their teacher.

Neuroscience research (Blair & Raver, 2016) shows that repeated experiences of co-regulation literally shape the architecture of the brain, strengthening neural pathways that support independence later.

Why Self-Regulation Matters in Early Childhood Classrooms

Self-regulation impacts every area of learning:

- **Academic skills:** A child who can sustain attention during circle time is more likely to retain new information.
- **Social skills:** A child who can pause before reacting has more opportunities for friendship.
- **Independence:** A child who can calm themselves during transitions feels competent and confident.

Conversely, difficulties with regulation often appear as “behavior problems”—tantrums, running from group time, or refusing to participate. When teachers see these behaviors as signs of **skill gaps** rather than defiance, their responses become more supportive and effective.

Long-term research confirms the importance: children with stronger self-regulation in preschool are more likely to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally in later grades (McClelland & Tominey, 2022).

Environmental and Equity Considerations

Not all children come to school with the same experiences that support regulation. Children from stressful or inconsistent home

environments may have fewer opportunities to practice regulation. Cultural norms also shape how children are expected to manage emotions—for example, in some cultures, expressing strong feelings openly is encouraged, while in others, restraint is valued.

Teachers must approach regulation with sensitivity, avoiding one-size-fits-all strategies. Trauma-informed practices—such as offering safe spaces, predictable routines, and warm relationships—are essential in helping all children grow.

The Teacher’s Role in Early Regulation

Teachers are not simply observers of regulation; they are central players. Their calm presence, predictable routines, and intentional modeling create the conditions for children to learn. Examples include:

- Modeling strategies: “I feel frustrated too, so I’m going to take a deep breath.”
- Providing structure: Using visual schedules so children know what comes next.
- Offering choices: Giving children two options to reduce overwhelm.
- Celebrating effort: Acknowledging attempts at regulation, even if imperfect.

Teachers who regulate themselves set the tone. A calm teacher helps children feel safe enough to practice new skills.

Key Takeaways from Section 1

- Self-regulation is the foundation of learning and relationships in early childhood.
- It develops gradually, with wide variation by age and child.
- Brain immaturity means children require co-regulation.
- Strong regulation predicts long-term success in school and life.
- Teachers' role as calm, consistent models cannot be overstated.



ASSIGNMENT #1:

Please explain a bit about yourself. What are your experiences, background and training with young children? What would you like to get out of this class?

To deepen your understanding, write two or more sentences to answer each of the following questions.

1. Think about a child in your classroom who struggles most with self-regulation. What specific triggers seem to set them off? How could you adjust the environment or routine to reduce those triggers?
2. Recall a moment when your entire class seemed dysregulated (e.g., after recess or during a transition). What strategies helped bring them back to a calm state?
3. Which classroom activities naturally support regulation (such as building with blocks, dramatic play, or art)? How might you expand those opportunities?
4. How do cultural or family expectations about behavior influence the way children in your class express and manage emotions?
5. Consider your own childhood—what experiences or adults helped you learn self-regulation? How does this shape your teaching today?

To submit:

Be sure to put your class title, your STARS ID number, & your full name on the assignment. Please e-mail your assignment to:

starsclassesmerit@gmail.com

Your subject line should read: Self-Regulation - Assignment #1