

## Using Music and Movement in Impulse Control and Self Regulation.

### Helping Children Develop Impulse Control

From the Illinois Early Learning Project. <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>

Excitement, joy, anger, frustration, and disappointment are all part of growing up. Learning how and when to show these emotions is known as impulse control. Here are some facts about impulse control:

Impulse control helps children make and keep friends

Children who can control their anger and frustration, and use words to express their feelings, are likely to be able to make and keep friends. And making and keeping friends can boost self-esteem and later school success.

Early experiences can contribute to later success with impulse control.

- **Infants** need a responsive and predictable environment. When you respond to their physical needs with love and care, they learn to expect order in their world. They also learn that their actions affect others.

- **Toddlers** need to feel independent and capable. You can help them use their developing language skills to label their own and others' actions. Learning to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings with words is key to having good impulse control.

- **Older preschool children** learn to control their impulses by taking turns or sharing their toys. They are increasingly able to use language to control their emotions and interact with others.

You can encourage the development of impulse control in your 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds in the following ways:

- **Suggest words that your child can use to say how she feels.** If your child gets mad while playing a game, encourage her to use words to show her anger, such as "That really makes me mad!" or "I don't like it when you play the game that way!"

- **Make it clear that hurting others is not allowed.** When your child gets mad playing a game and pushes or hits another child, take him aside and remind him that hurting others is not allowed.

- **Help your child think of new ways to solve problems.** When your child has a disagreement with another child, suggest solutions such as taking turns or sharing.

- **Respond to your child's misbehaviour with words.** When you tell your child the reasons behind rules and explain the consequences for misbehaviour, you help her develop inner controls on her behaviour.

- **Model self-control when dealing with stress or frustration.** Your child learns many behaviours from observing you. When you model self-discipline and self-control in difficult situations, your child will learn to follow your example.

## **Using Music and Movement in Impulse Control and Self Regulation.**

“A child with greater self-regulation will be able to sustain a task longer and be less distracted. He will be more self-directed and successful at organizing his work. Greater impulse control allows a child to stifle inappropriate impulses and behave in a more socially acceptable way. Emotional control helps a child remain calm in a challenging situation. Therefore, self-regulation is foundational in a child’s development.” ( Margaret Kelly).

In our resources and training sessions, we use many music, movement and yoga activities to help young children develop self-regulation. Pretend play provides the scaffolding to achieve this. For example, young children may pretend to be a frog sitting so still on a lily pad, waiting to catch a fly, or a train getting faster, then slowing to stop at the station. In this type of drama play, children are able to have more movement control than they normally could.

Children can be slow old elephants to slow music, scurrying mice to fast music, they can pretend to be scared or brave on a bear hunt, or crouch and wait to leap up to give a surprise as the jack-in-the-box. A good music/movement program for young children will include lots of pretend play, which helps develop self-regulation.

Music that asks children to stop or freeze when there is a pause in the music is a great learning activity. Movement is so much easier than stillness for a young child’s brain. They need lots of practice at going out of balance as they move, then challenging the balance system to help control movement by stopping still. Once they have acquired confidence with their whole body movements, then we can ask preschoolers to do the same on a percussion instrument, playing, then stopping when the music stops. Music can assist children to learn to wait, e.g. moving or playing an instrument, only on a particular part of a song, or by taking a turn as the leader playing a drum or in a dance where everyone copies the action they perform.

Using a song or dance tune that has a sequence of sounds, or movements, asks children to listen, remember and to control their movements to conform to the song or music. Songs and rhymes with changes in volume or tempo (i.e. soft/loud, fast/slow) require lots of practice in self control.

A quality music program will include many ways to help children develop self- regulation. And for children this is all about play. The more fun they have the more they learn!

For the article that inspired this, see: Music & Movement: The Fun Way to Develop Self-Regulation by Margaret Kelly

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