





Why Play?

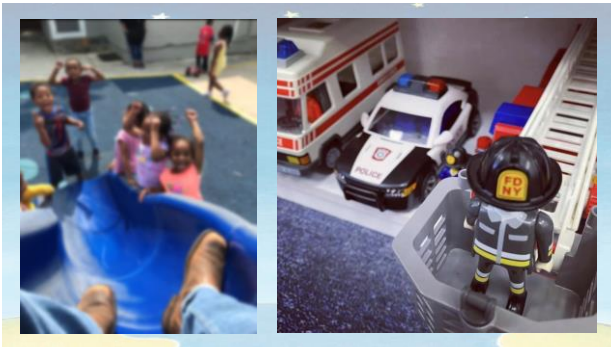
- Most natural means for expression and social-emotional learning
- Skills acquired through natural, unscripted interactions
- Rapport and Relationship

A photograph of a young girl with brown hair, wearing glasses and a white shirt, sitting on the floor and playing with a toy.



"The most important interactions happen through play. Building strong neural connections are the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health."

www.developingchild.harvard.edu







"You don't need to be a therapist to be therapeutic."
Neil Harms, PhD
Center for Child Development, Georgetown University

Christian

Parent

Teacher Coaching

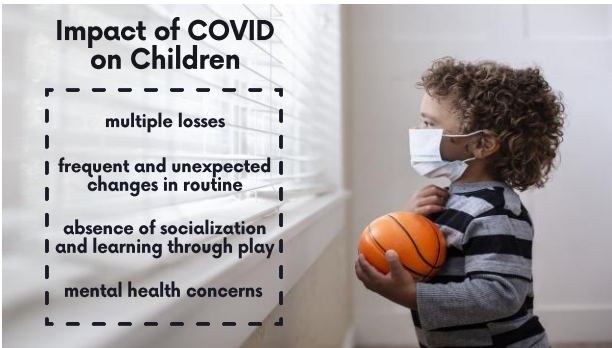
In a review of 93 studies conducted between 1953-2000:
"Utilizing parents (and teachers) produced larger overall treatment effects than individual play therapy conducted by a professional."
www.aapt.org

One in four children witness or experience trauma before the age of 4, and more than two-thirds by 16.
National Education Association, 2017

A photograph of a large teddy bear standing in a doorway, looking out into a brightly lit area. The bear is positioned in the center of the frame, with its back to the camera, looking towards the light.







Challenges for Parents in the Age of COVID


Loss of structure in the household

Frequent changes in routine

Balancing work responsibilities while facilitating children's learning


Job loss and financial stress

Social isolation




"Suffering in silence"
Coronavirus is a major challenge to NJ's child protection system.

Northjersey.com 4/21/20



COVID 19 and Access to Early Intervention Key Findings



The pandemic "highly impacted" early identification of developmental delays

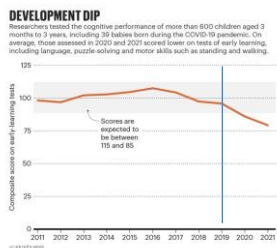
The number of children served has decreased since the pandemic

A majority of programs have transitioned to hybrid services

A Summary of Findings from the Act Early Response to COVID-19 Needs Assessment
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly

"We're talking about millions of babies."

- Pandemic-related stress
- Decreased interaction
- Less play and socialization
- Socio-economic factors



Mayer, MW (www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00027-4)

90% of children's brain development occurs before age 5



Sensitive Period: developmental time periods where individuals are *especially* sensitive to, and influenced by, environmental input

Attachment and Self-Regulation



**Speech and
Language**



Gross Motor



**Fine
Motor**



**Impulse
Control**



**Frustration
Tolerance**

Social Skills



Learning and Cognition



**Brain development
is "use dependent"**

"Exposure to abuse, neglect, trauma or other adversity reorganizes the developing brain, potentially creating serious emotional and behavioral issues, along with impaired cognitive development that can impact learning."



Pliska, M., Stadler, S. & Werner-Lie, A. (2021). Healing from Adverse Childhood Experiences Through The Therapeutic Power of Play. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 30(4), 244-271.

Children can be resilient!

- Exposure
- Relationships
- Predictability
- Structure
- Sense of control
- Play

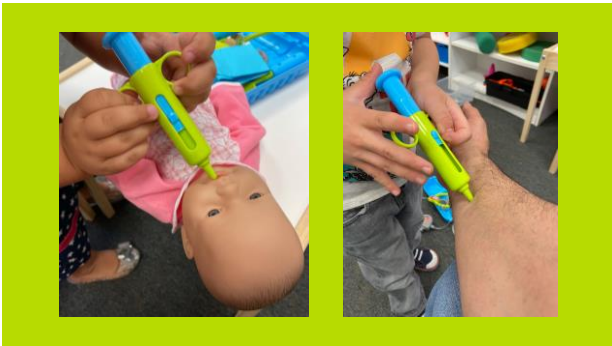
Bruce Perry, MD















Agenda

Part I: Using Play to Support Children's Expression and Social-Emotional Learning

Part II: Set Limits Through Play

Part III: Support Self-Regulation Through Play

How to support
children's social-
emotional learning
through PLAY!





Guidance

Indoor Play

Staff enter and exit play
interactions with discretion

Individual or small groups

Can be generalized

How Long?



"Long term and
enduring changes to
neural networks can
be created by an
intense period of
stimulation that lasts
less than a minute."

Bruce Perry, MD

Through natural, unscripted interactions...



children learn new skills!

8 Principles of Child-Centered Play Therapy

1. Develop a warm and responsive relationship
2. Child is unconditionally accepted
3. Create a permissive atmosphere
4. Feelings and expressions are reflected back to the child
5. Child has ability to problem solve and make choices
6. Child leads, the adult follows
7. Child determines the pace
8. Limits are to preserve safety and responsibility

Play-Based Strategies

Self-Regulation

Set Limits

Choices

Name Feelings

Describe Play

At the Child's Level

Allow the Child to Lead

Attunement

Allow the Child to Lead

How?

Child self-initiates play, adult follows



Why?

Expression

Connection

Control

“Under the proper conditions, children have an innate drive towards healing and emotional growth.”

Carl Rogers



Baby and adult brains “sync up” during play



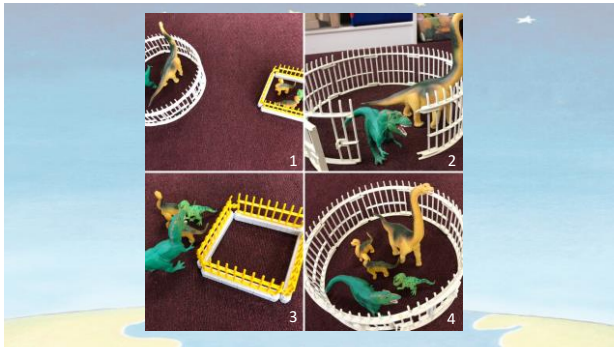
Strongest coupling: prefrontal cortex

Infant brains often “led” the adult brain, suggesting they may be guiding them towards the next thing they’re going to focus on, such as a toy.

www.princeton.edu/news/2020/01/09/baby-and-adult-brains-sync-during-play-finds-princeton-baby-lab

The Power of Child-Led Play









Attunement

"The ability to recognize, understand, and engage with another's emotional state."



How To Become Attuned

Physical Behavior and Body Language

Describing Play



Physical Behavior and Body Language

- How?** At child's level, monitor distance
- Why?** Connection and Safety
- Boundaries



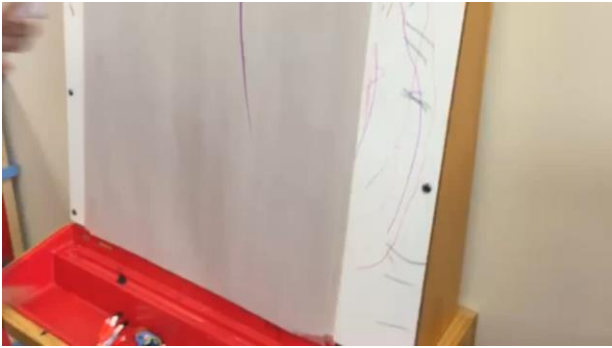


Describe the Child's Play

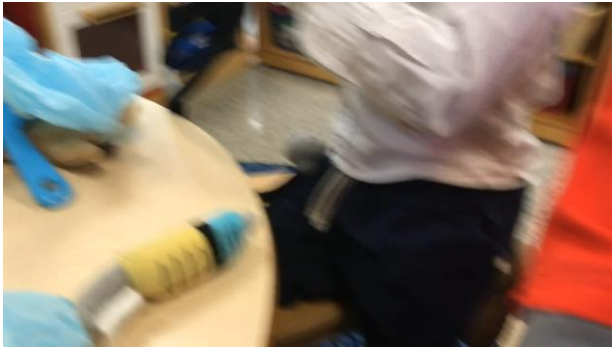
- How?** Describe play while avoiding questions



- Why?**
- Fosters Attunement
- Extends play
- Speech and Language Modeling







Benefits of Describing Play

**Supports
Attunement**



**Benefits of
Describing
Play**

Beginning

Middle

End



Attention Span



Benefits of Describing Play



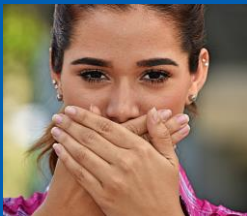
**Speech and
Language
Modeling**

**Benefits of
Describing
Play**

Relationships!



Pace, Timing, and Tone Matter!



Avoid Asking Questions





Practice

Small Groups

Alphabetical order by first name


A: Draw

B: Describe Play

C/D: Observe

Rotate every minute until everyone has practiced





Describing Play for Parents: How to Generalize

Describe child's actions while engaged in daily routines

Question: What if the child ASKS?

Why?

Empowers by
showing interest
in what they
think, feel, believe

Encourages
independence
and curiosity for
learning

**Answer: Return
responsibility!**



"Hairy Coconut"



"Water Broccoli"



When invited to play,
seek the child's
direction!







Name the Child's Feelings

How?

Name the child's feelings by reading:

Facial Expressions

Body Language

Tone of Voice



Why?

Feelings Vocabulary

Co-Regulation

Experienced in Body

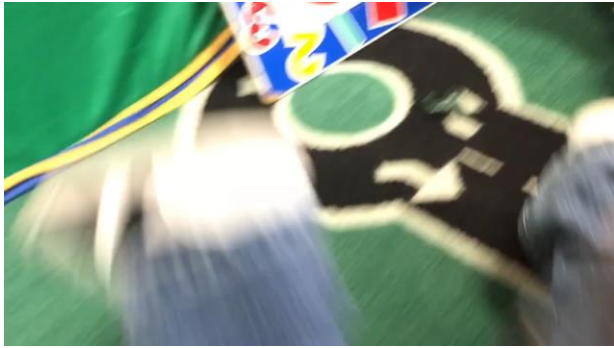




Facilitate Interactions!



Teach New Skills!



Co-Regulation

What?

Warm and responsive interactions help cope with feelings



Why?

Developing brain unable to self-regulate independently

"When a child's feelings are acknowledged and accepted by a supportive adult, they are experienced with less intensity by the child."

Garry Landreth



**Co-Regulation:
The origin of Self-Regulation**





puzzled

annoyed

displeased

irked

peevied

discouraged

"Frustrated"



pained

distressed

troubled

agitated

challenged

perturbed

upset

disappointed

**How to Teach about
INTENSITY**

"Your anger is really big."



"Let's make it smaller."





feelings are experienced in the body







Teach Empathy through Play

Describe how the child's behavior influences the toy







"Doll play activated parts of the brain associated with empathy and social skills."

Exploring the Benefits of Doll Play Through Neuroscience
(2020) Hashmi, Price & Gerson. *Frontiers of Human Neuroscience*



Name Feelings: How to Generalize

Name and model feelings throughout the day



Describe Play and Frame as a Choice or Decision

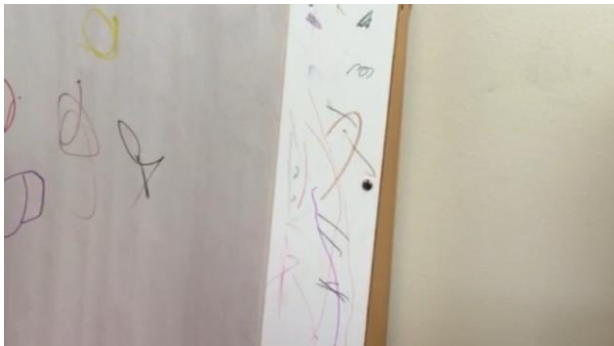
How?

Describe play, frame actions as a choice or decision, avoid questions



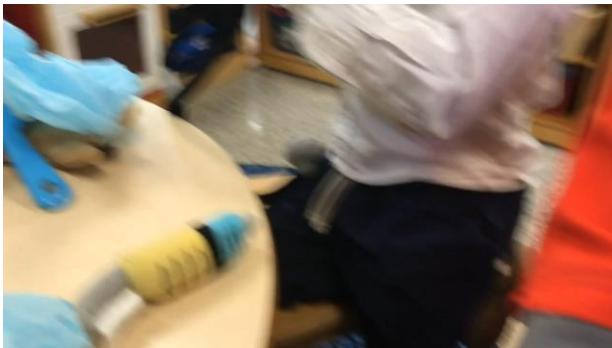
Why?

- Attunement
- Empowering
- Speech and language modeling
- Extends play
- Agency / locus of control

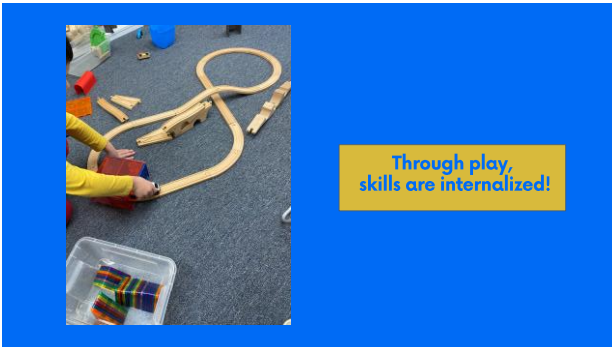














**How to Generalize:
Give Choices throughout the day**



**Adversity,
Anxiety &
Control**



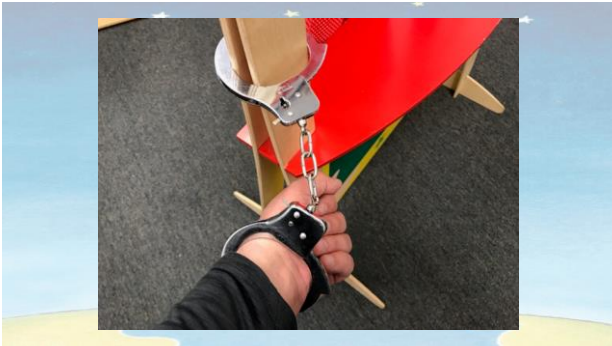
Anxiety:
a perceived
loss of control

















"Relationships are the agent of change, and the most powerful therapy is human love."
—Bruce Perry, MD



“To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world.”
—Dr. Seuss

Practice

Groups of three or four
Alphabetical order by first name

A: Draw

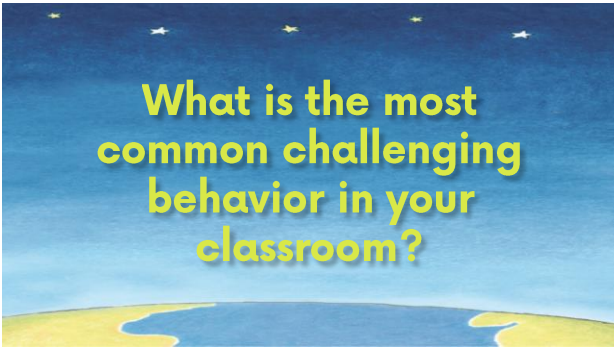
B: Describe play framing behavior as a choice/decision

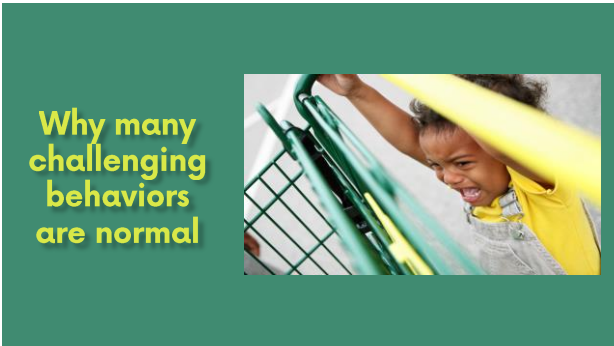
C/D: Observe

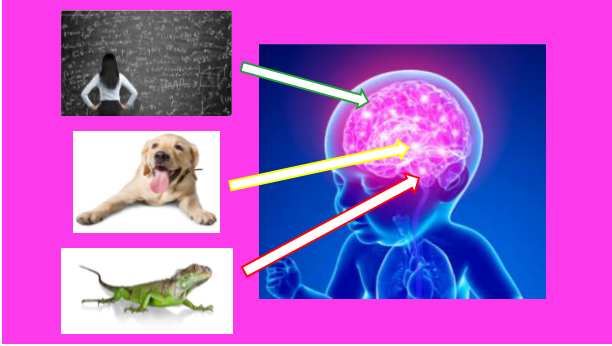
Rotate every minute until everyone has practiced



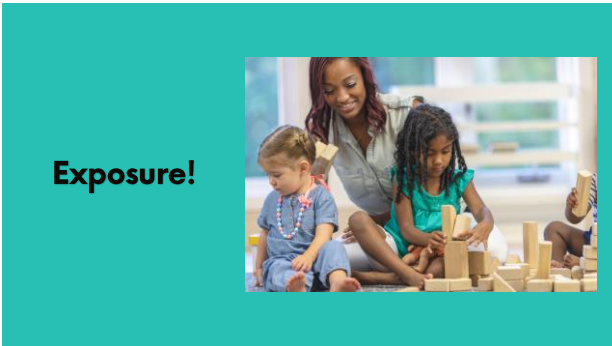






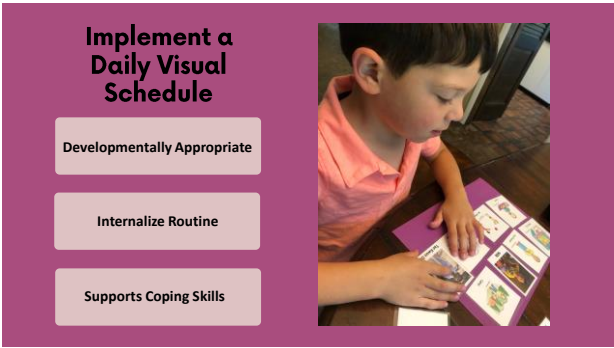














Utilize a Travel Schedule

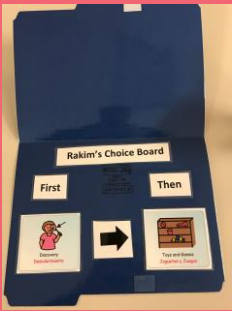
"He goes to school in person Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday to work with me, and Thursday and Friday he's home with his grandmother. His schedule goes everywhere and helps him cope with all the change."





Support transitions from desired to undesired activity

**Individualize
Transitions**



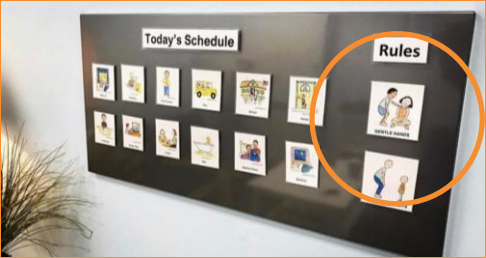
**Use a
Visual Timer**

Adds structure

Supports Coping
Skills



Establish Clear Expectations for Behavior



**Use Frequent
Descriptive Praise**

1. Describe behavior

"You asked for a turn!"

2. Acknowledge effort

"You are trying so hard
to wait!"





Name Feelings

What

Name the child's
feelings by reading:

Facial Expressions

Body Language

Tone of Voice



Why

Feelings Vocabulary

Co-Regulation

Experienced in Body

**Describe Play and Frame
as a Choice or Decision**

How?

Describe play,
frame actions
as a choice or
decision, avoid
questions



Why?

- Attunement
- Empowering
- Speech and language modeling
- Extends play
- Agency / locus of control

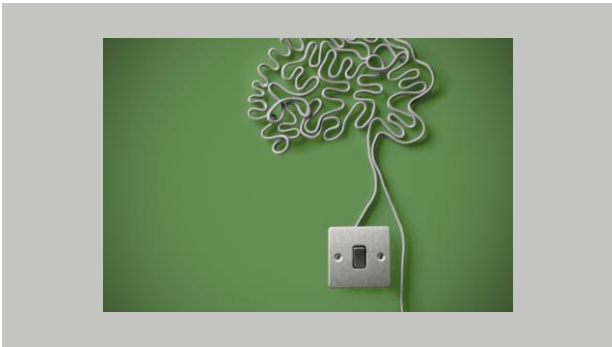
**Frame Play as a Choice and Generalize:
Give Choices throughout the day**

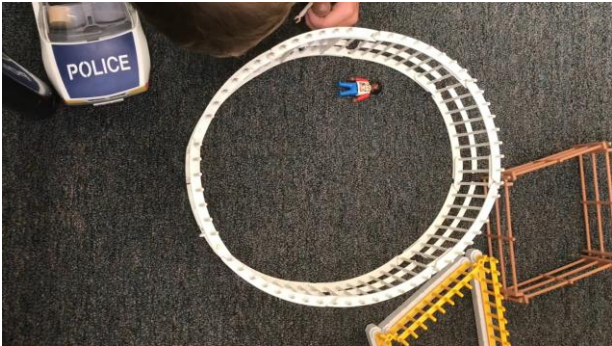


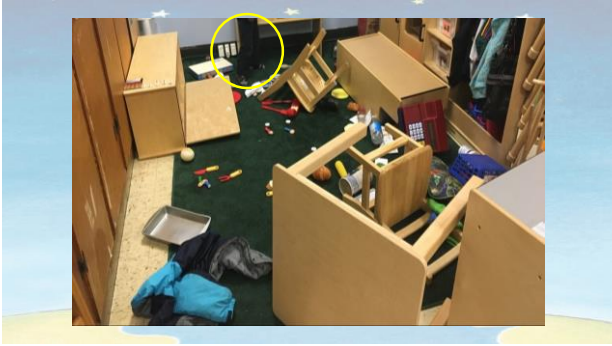



**Adversity,
Control, and
Challenging
Behavior**











Ilm Christian Somutch

"For our physiology to calm down, heal, and grow, children need a feeling of safety."

No doctor can write a prescription for love."


Bessel VanDer Kolk, MD

Limit Setting: The Basics

Identify child's intent or describe behavior

Teach New Skills

Set the limit as a choice



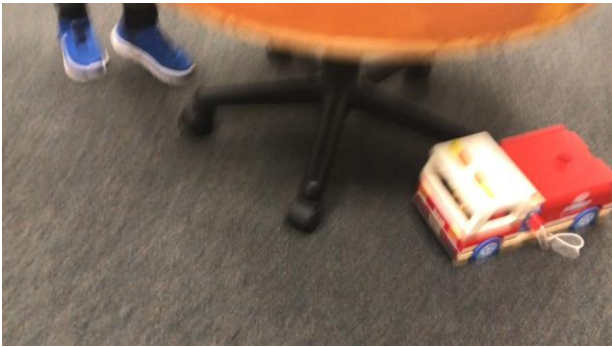
See: ACT Model in: Landreth, G. L. (2012). Play Therapy: The Art of the Relationship. (3rd ed.). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.





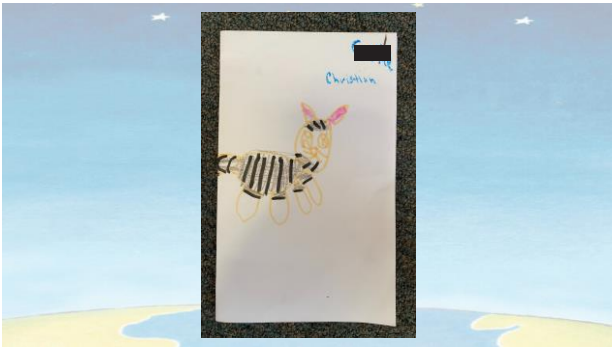


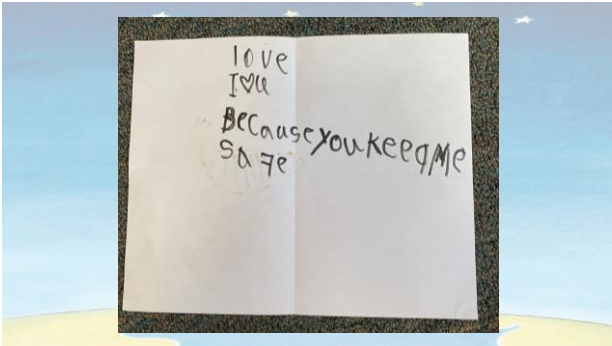




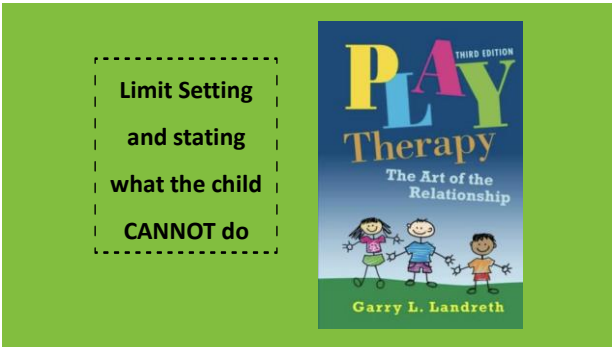





















Limit Setting Tips



Limit Setting Tip

**At
Child's
Level**

Limit Setting Tip

It's not personal!



Limit Setting Tip

Be Consistent



Limit Setting Tip

Co-Regulate don't
escalate!

Calm, supportive
voice



Limit Setting Tip

Regulate before
Reasoning!

Cortex is closed
when child is
dysregulated



Limit Setting Tip

Timing Matters!

Too Late! →



Limit Setting Tip

Natural
Consequences:
Toy/Activity

Time Limited:
AM/PM
Current Day



Limit Setting Tip



Give Developmentally Appropriate Choices

Limit Setting Tip

"You"
instead of
"We"



Limit Setting Tip

Avoid
"Can you?"
and
"OK?"



Limit Setting Tip

Say no to
"No thank you."



Limit Setting Tip

"That's not nice."
Isn't nice!
Avoid Judgements



Limit Setting Tip

Teach empathy
instead of
forced apologies



Limit Setting Tip

Teach new skills





Limit Setting Tip

Build the Relationship!







Self-Regulation: What is it?



Impulse Control



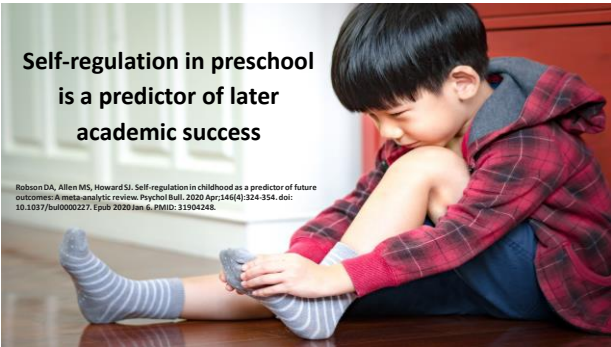
Frustration Tolerance



Delayed Gratification

**Self-regulation in preschool
is a predictor of later
academic success**

Robson DA, Allen MS, Howard SJ. Self-regulation in childhood as a predictor of future outcomes: A meta-analytic review. Psychol Bull. 2020 Apr;146(4):324-354. doi: 10.1037/bul0000227. Epub 2020 Jan 6. PMID: 31504248.



Self-Regulation: What does it look like?



Self-Regulation: What does it look like?



Self-Regulation: What does it look like?



Self-Regulation: What does it look like?





Self-Regulation: Let's Practice!

In the following slides,
name the *color* of the word
as fast as you can!

Orange
























Self-Regulation: How does it develop?



Adulthood

Self-Regulation: How does it develop?

Self-Regulation
Planning
Problem Solving
Consequences




Impulsivity
Inattention
Frustration
Delayed
Gratification

Childhood

Executive Function: What does it look like?



Executive Function: What does it look like?



Executive Function: What does it look like?



Executive Function: What does it look like?



**Executive Function:
What does it look like?**





**Early
Adversity**













Assess the child's Self-Regulation

When confronted with a challenging task:

- Persevere?
- Give up easily?
- Ask for help?
- Avoid the task?
- Rely on others?
- Easily frustrated?
- Tantrum?


Key Points

Challenging task is self-initiated

Supporting child in regulated state

Supporting skills for learning

Ensure success



Supporting Self-Regulation Through Challenging Tasks



How

Through attunement, respond in a manner that ensures success with the least amount of support

Why

Supports the development of self-regulation, self-confidence, independence



Supporting Self-Regulation through Challenging Tasks:
Procedure



- Allow Struggle
- Return Responsibility
- Describe Play
- Acknowledge Effort
- Name Feeling
- Help Just Enough
- Descriptive Praise

Allow the Child to Struggle

Why is it important?

Opportunity for growth

How do you do it?

Through attunement, notice when the child is challenged by a task and react in response to the child





Why is it important?

Empowering


Fosters independence and autonomy

How do you do it?

If the child asks:
"Can you help me?"
"Can you do it?"

Your response:
"That's something you can try to do."
"I know you can do it if you try."

Return Responsibility







Describe the Child's Play

What

Describe play while avoiding questions

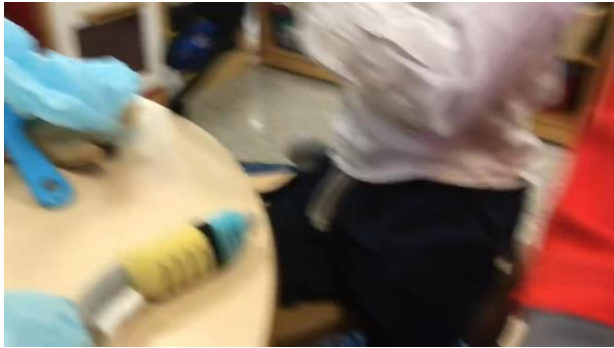
A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white shirt, sitting on the floor and smiling as she plays with a young child. The child is wearing a white shirt and is focused on stacking colorful wooden blocks. There are several blocks of different colors (red, green, blue, yellow) scattered around them. The background shows a white shelf with some toys.

Why

Fosters Attunement

Extends play

Speech and Language Modeling



Attunement

Focus on the child's non-verbal cues





Acknowledge the Child's Effort



Why is it important?

Fosters resilience


Reinforces the importance of effort

How do you do it?

Verbally acknowledge the child's effort:
"You're trying so hard!"



Physical Behavior and Body Language

What	At child's level, monitor distance	
	Attachment and Connection	
Why	Boundaries	

Name Feelings

What		Why
Name the child's feelings by reading:		Feelings Vocabulary
Facial Expressions		Co-Regulation
Body Language		Experienced in Body
Tone of Voice		

Why is it important?

builds frustration tolerance and impulse control

keeps child committed to the task without giving up or getting overwhelmed


How do you do it?

provide just enough support

can be physical or verbal

ensure success

Help Just Enough







Offer Descriptive Praise



Why is it important?

Reinforces the child's effort

Empowers the child to attempt challenging tasks in the future

How do you do it?

Describe the task the child completed with enthusiasm





Practice

Small groups


Alphabetical order by first name

A: Create the first letter in your name using three pipe cleaners using **ONE HAND ONLY!**

B: Support self-regulation

C/D: Observe

Rotate every two minutes until everyone has practiced



**Supporting Self-Regulation Through Challenging Tasks:
How to Generalize**



Encourage child to attempt challenging tasks (self-help skills)

Support just enough to ensure success

Tip: do not complete a task the child is capable of performing independently!

Play Simon Says!



Through natural, organic, unscripted interactions...



skills are internalized...

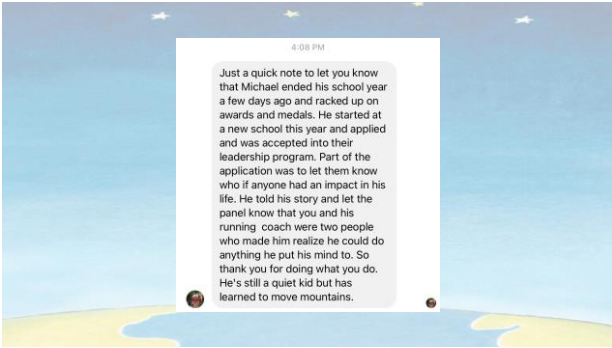








Michael



4:08 PM

Just a quick note to let you know that Michael ended his school year a few days ago and racked up on awards and medals. He started at a new school this year and applied and was accepted into their leadership program. Part of the application was to let them know who if anyone had an impact in his life. He told his story and let the panel know that you and his running coach were two people who made him realize he could do anything he put his mind to. So thank you for doing what you do. He's still a quiet kid but has learned to move mountains.