

## What is self-regulation?

**Self-regulation is the skill of being able to manage one's own emotions and the ability to focus and organize one's actions.** Self-regulation is perhaps one of the toughest things PreK teachers teach in their classrooms, but also one of the most important life skills. Have you ever had an angry driver honk their horn or scream at you because they felt you weren't driving fast enough? This driver lacked self-regulation. Can you imagine if adults at the supermarket shoved or hit each other each time someone took the last bag of chips or cut in line? So how do we learn that our actions have consequences and to think before we act? Here are some ways children practice self-regulation in the PreK classroom:

- Tatum bumps into the table causing Henry's tower to fall. She says "Sorry Henry, I'll help fix it." Tatum recognizes that her actions (bumping the table) have consequences (the tower falls) and takes responsibility for her actions.

- Aiden runs outside only to find that all the bikes are taken. He screams in another child's face "Give me that bike!" and turns and walks away. Previously, Aiden might have hit the child on the bike as he yelled in frustration but he is now able to control his physical actions. Eventually, with adult guidance, Aiden will learn to turn and walk away before screaming. This is all part of the continuum of self-

regulation.

- Hannah tells the teacher "Mr. Chris, there are 5 kids in blocks. It's supposed to be four! Tina can't stay!" By monitoring the actions of her peers and recognizing they are not following the class rules Hannah is regulating the behaviors of others. In time, she will learn to apply this skill to herself "I want to play in blocks but I can't because there are already four kids there."

## What teachers can do to help....

**\* Teach children that all emotions are acceptable but all actions are not.** Children have the right to be disappointed, sad, or mad; avoid phrases such as "Don't be sad, your mom will be back later." Or "You don't have any right to be mad; you put the truck down so now James gets to play with it." Instead acknowledge the child's feelings without judgment and help them find appropriate ways to manage their emotions. "I see you are crying. Are you sad because your mom left? Would you like to draw her picture to let her know you miss her?"

**\* Model taking time to calm down when you're feeling intense emotions.** Say what you are doing aloud so children can understand, "I am feeling really frustrated because I can't get this window to open and it is hot in here. I am taking deep breaths to calm down. I will ask Ms. Lauren to come help me with the window"

**\* Talk to children about cause and effect.** This will help them learn to connect their actions to consequences. "You mixed red and blue paint, and now the paint looks purple" "You wiped up that spill and now the table is clean again"

**\* Avoid leading children to believe that their behavior affects the feelings of others.** "Look at his face. How did you make him feel?" or "You are making me very frustrated." Instead relate feelings to events or actions, not people. "When you told Anna she can't play here, she felt sad." Or "When I say it is time to clean up and you dump out the legos, I feel very frustrated"