

Self regulation fact sheet and activity ideas

What is self regulation?

Self-regulation is the ability to appropriately respond to and manage one's emotions, feelings, and behaviors. Foundational to self-regulation is the ability to maintain an ideal sensory arousal level in the setting of various forms of stimuli, both internal and external.

What are the building blocks of self regulation?

There are 5 primary domains that contribute to self-regulation. In occupational therapy, our primary focus is in the biological and cognitive domains. The biological domain is specifically focused on sensory modulation and processing. Please consult with your child's counselor and/or speech language pathologist for additional support around self-regulation regarding emotional, social, and prosocial areas.

1. **Biological Domain:** Maintaining and changing arousal level, or the level of alertness required to attend to a task, to match the context and activity
 - o **Sensory Modulation:** A neurological process that organizes sensory input from the body and the environment for functional use. Typically, the nervous system can "filter out" unnecessary or less important input, though some people may be over or under responsive to stimuli.

- **Over Responsive:** Someone who has a low threshold for sensory input, meaning that small amounts of input can result in distraction, dysregulation, or aversion to sensory stimuli.
- **Under Responsive:** Someone who has a high threshold for sensory input, meaning that they require intense or higher levels of sensory stimuli, and may not notice certain stimuli.

Sensory input comes from all the sensory systems. See Sensory Exploration Fact Sheet for more information and definitions of each system.

2. **Cognitive Domain:** Executive function abilities (see Executive Function Factsheet for more information).
3. **Emotional Domain:** Feelings, mood, and the ability to monitor and modify emotion.
4. **Social Domain:** Understanding and functioning in social situations, reading social cues.
5. **Prosocial Domain:** Developing self-reflective skills and empathy.

Self regulation activity ideas

With safety as the priority, individuals should follow the guidance of their own occupational therapist regarding participation in sensory activities. Certain activities are not appropriate for individuals with seizure disorders, shunts, or other medical conditions.

Seizure Precautions:	Signs of Shunt Malfunction:	STOP Activity if:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No spinning, no flashing lights • Avoid known student specific triggers (vibration, loud noises, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache, vomiting, drowsiness, reduced vision, or neck stiffness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of skin tone, including flushing or blanching skin • Dizziness or nausea • Temperature fluctuation

The following are *typically* alerting and *typically* calming sensory activities. It is important to note that these activities impact every individual differently. These activities can be completed on an as-needed basis, or as a part of an individualized program designed by an occupational therapist that provides and regulates the duration and intensity of sensory input required to “organize” an individual’s sensory system.

Alerting Activities: *Increase activation of the nervous system*

1. **Balancing:** Roll up 2 towels to create a balance beam. Try walking while holding/not holding someone's hand.
2. **Bouncing:** Use a yoga ball or trampoline. Experiment with big and small bounces.
3. **Jumping:** Try out a trampoline or test out different floor surfaces, including outdoors.
4. **Hanging/Being Upside Down:** Hang off the side of the couch or try out some monkey bars.
5. **Rolling:** Roll up in a blanket, or roll down a hill.
6. **Spinning:** Try standing and spinning, or spin on a swing.
7. **Swinging:** Use a playground, rope, or tire swing to swing quickly back and forth.

Calming Activities: *Decrease activation of the nervous system*

1. **Deep Breathing:** Pretend to blow out candles, blow bubbles through a wand, or blow up balloons.
2. **Hugs/Squeezes:** Hug yourself, try light compression clothing, or squeeze a pillow.

3. **Jumping:** Use a trampoline or different floor surfaces. Count it out and control your body.
4. **Rocking:** Use a rocking chair or glider to move slowly and smoothly.
5. **Swinging:** Move slowly and controlled, back and forth on a swing.
6. **Pushing/Pulling:** Pull against a resistance band, or push your feet against a wall.
7. **Weighted Blanket/Lap Pad*:** Try out a weighted blanket or lap pad while sitting or rocking.
*Should not exceed 10% of body weight (i.e. 100lb student, blanket should be less than or equal to 10lbs).
8. **Workout (Weightbearing):** Try push ups, wall sits, or planks. Can you do 3 of each?
9. **Yoga:** Try poses that are weight bearing through the arms and legs. Make up your own animal or nature poses.

Alerting and calming activities in daily routines:

General Considerations

- Timing:
 - Consider time of day as it relates to level of fatigue
 - Consider how much time there is to practice the skill to avoid feeling rushed
- Physical Environment:
 - Consider level of light and noise can make a big impact
 - In general, more light and upbeat music will be alerting, and less light and soft music/white noise will be calming
- Internal Cues and Sensations:
 - Consider physical needs such as hunger, thirst, and bathroom
- Routine and Predictability

Bathroom:

Alerting

- Morning shower
- Bright lights or upbeat/loud music
- Wiping hands and face with a damp towel
- Minty toothpaste

Calming

- Evening shower or bath
- Dim lighting, low noise or soft music
- Massage to hands or arms with lotion
- Lavender or other soothing scent
- Wrapping self tightly in towel to dry

Kitchen:

Alerting

- Cold, spicy or crunchy foods
- Washing dishes or loading dishwasher
- Bright lights and/or upbeat/loud music

Calming

- Warm drinks
- Chewy foods
- Putting away “heavy” items/dishes
- Stirring or kneading a thick mixture

Bedroom:

Alerting

- Opening shades, curtains or windows
- Getting dressed
- A diffuser or air freshener with citrus or other alerting scent

Calming

- Dim lighting
- Soft clothing
- Noise reducing headphones
- Heavy/weighted blankets