



Self-Control Skills for Children

A Handout for Teachers

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Overview

Normally, children will learn self-control as they progress from kindergarten through high school. Learning when to sit, when to stand, when to talk, when to keep silent, and how to handle situations with peers is a big part of growing up. For some children these lessons will come easily; others may not learn self-control without planned intervention from teachers and parents.

What is self-control? Self-control is a skill which enables the child to suppress undesirable, inappropriate behaviors, and act in a socially approved way. It enables him or her to “decide” how to behave, and choose a good course of action. Children are not born with self-control; it is an acquired skill.

How do children learn self-control? Many children learn self-control by watching other children. Through observation and practice, they learn how to behave. They are often eager to behave well and earn the approval of teachers and peers. However, there are a significant number of children who do not learn self-control readily by observing others. They will learn more effectively through direct teaching with the use of rewards and consequences.

Teaching Self Control

It is important to select age-appropriate goals for the child to whom you wish to teach self-control. Engage the student's cooperation by discussing goal area(s) with the student. Encourage him/her to join you in a project to improve his/her behavior in specific ways. Try one simple goal at first, where the probability of success is high. Then other goals can be added. Some examples:

First Grade	Third Grade	Fifth Grade
stay in seat	do not talk while others are talking	ignore those who are teasing
raise your hand to speak	stay out of fights	listen to directions

What strategies will work? Once behavioral goals have been identified, a strategy for teaching self-control should be selected. Some classroom management ideas for children to help develop a sense of control are listed below:

- **Use prompts:** seat the student near the front of the class where prompting can be carried out unobtrusively; remind the student of the new goal by using a pre-arranged signal — a touch on the shoulder or a hand signal
- **Review student progress frequently:** let him/her know how he/she is doing
- **Enlist the cooperation of parents**
- **Reduce distractions:** keep manipulative materials away from the learner unless he/she needs them for a specific learning activity
- **Help students make transitions:** always follow a stimulating activity with a quiet time (resting head on desk, for example) to help students learn how to shift gears