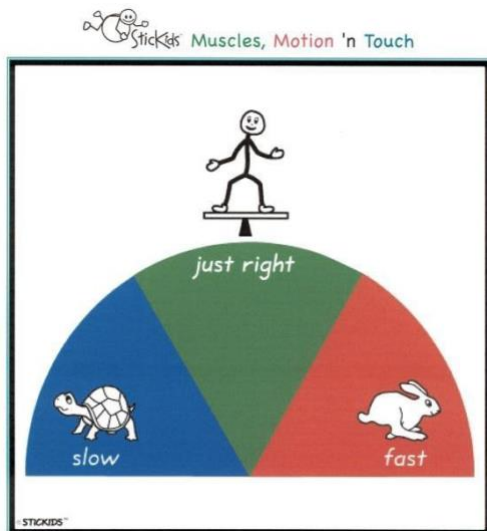


Learning to Wait: Strategies for Self-Regulation

‘Self-regulation’ is the ability to manage our energy states, emotions, behaviour, and attention. It’s the ability to return to a balanced, calm and constant state to be able to participate in daily activities. It involves all sensory systems and many connections in the brain.



Children begin to develop their self-regulation skills as infants (e.g. looking away from a stimulus, sucking hand/thumb) and continue to develop these abilities as they get older. As children develop, they become more skilled in their ability to choose, use, and refine these strategies (e.g. seeking out a hug from Mom, slowing down their bodies to sit and play).

Many children learn to self-regulate without much thought. However, some children need

extra support to learn and use these strategies effectively in a variety of settings.

Learning to Wait:

Waiting for a turn in line or in a group can be extremely difficult for some children. Being told to “settle down,” “stay in line,” etc. is not enough for some to manage the urge to move or wiggle. Holding children physically can cause a negative reaction that is often counter-productive.

One useful approach is to teach children some “tricks” that they can use with a good-natured, playful reminder.

1. SQUEEZE & WAIT:

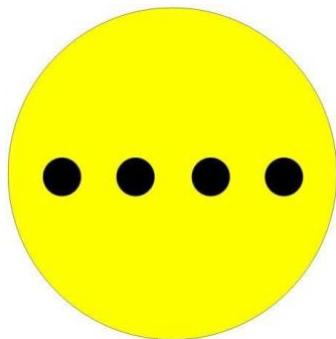
This helps children to take a little control over their impatience and reduces reprimands from adults. Demonstrate and ask the child to imitate you or do it hand-over-hand.

- a) Squeeze your hands together in a prayer position or with your fingers interlaced and press your palms together. Add the words “wait... wait... wait... wait...” to help extend the calm.
- b) Say “It’s hard to wait. I ‘squeeze and wait’. It helps me wait.”

Some children find it easier to squeeze their arms in front of their chest in a self-hug, or to hang their arms down their sides while pressing their fists against their legs.

2. WAIT MAT or BRACELET:

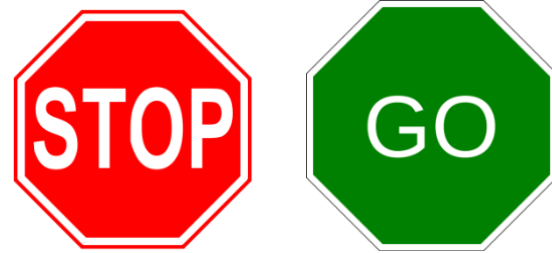
The 'wait' mat or bracelet is used for standing (or sitting) in one place while waiting a turn. It is especially useful when a child is excited to have their turn.



Use a placemat, thin foam, etc. and make four large dots on it with marker or black electrical tape. Introduce this as the 'wait mat'. Demonstrate. Make a small 'wait' circle to wear on a bracelet and take anywhere!

3. STOP/GO SIGN or BRACELET:

Even if children understand the words, it can be hard to 'stop' when excited. These signs prevent frequent verbal reprimands if a child doesn't stop - you can keep pointing to the sign instead of talking.



Make a red 'STOP' sign approximately 6 inches diameter. On the reverse, paste a green circle with the word 'GO'. Laminate for durability. This can be attached to a paint stick or a ruler.

Use this sign in games and activities: trampoline, running, jumping, scribbling, parachute, etc. It is important to teach it as a game to get the children to "buy in" and be willing to do multiple practices of stop/go on request. The visual cues are very helpful for some children.

If children are bored, it can be used as a game to increase alertness when fading at circle time or in class.

Have children take turns leading the group using the sign in a game. Alternatively, use it with a partner -- one child cues to the other child in a stop/go game.

Play a game of raising the sign without words and see if children can respond just by looking.

Make a small stop/go sign to put on a bracelet, in a purse, or in a pocket for use anywhere!

Based on 'Three Useful Strategies for Self Regulation' and used with the permission of the Brockville 'Tumbling Together' Program.