

SELF-REGULATION

What is this developmental skill?

Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, thoughts, and behaviors independently. It includes calming oneself, thinking before acting, and responding appropriately to challenges.

How does this normally develop?

Self-regulation develops gradually over many years through repeated experiences of co-regulation. Children first depend on adults, then begin using strategies with support, and eventually regulate themselves more consistently.

How can neglect interfere?

Neglect often delays self-regulation because children did not receive enough opportunities to practice regulation with a responsive caregiver. Their brains may remain highly sensitive to stress, making emotional control much more difficult.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Act impulsively when upset.
- Struggle to calm without adult support.
- Have frequent emotional outbursts.
- Give up quickly when frustrated.
- Show emotional reactions that seem younger than their age.
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Parenting Implications

Expect self-regulation to develop gradually. Continue offering support while slowly encouraging independence. Celebrate small improvements rather than expecting immediate self-control.

From Understanding to Attunement

When your child depends on you to regain control, it is not a sign of failure. It is an opportunity to provide the experiences that help build lifelong emotional regulation.