

Self-managing learners are able to make choices, persist, solve problems for themselves, access resources for their play ideas, and use social skills to get others to help them. The aim of self-management is for children to be self-regulated rather than teacher-regulated, that is, to be able to determine the best course of action for themselves rather than following rules set by a teacher. Self-management skills require cognitive abilities such as planning, thinking, decision-making, problem-solving and managing attention.

Children may struggle with self-management because the areas of the brain responsible for **executive function skills** are not fully developed in early childhood. This means that children may be impulsive, distractible, and poor at planning, and require high levels of support.

Self-management skills are supported by:

- **Clear boundaries and consistent rules and routines** so that children can understand behavioural expectations. Memory aids or visuals can be helpful, or you might try checklists that children use to monitor their own progress.
- **Strong relationships** characterised by warmth, so that children feel safe to explore, make choices and try out new things.
- **Discussions with whānau** to ensure that expectations for self-management are culturally appropriate.
- **Expectations for positive outcomes** from using self-managing behaviours, visualising and planning for success. This can be reinforced by specific feedback about useful self-managing behaviours that highlight the relationship between children's self-managing behaviours and positive outcomes.
- **Clear teaching of particular routines for self-management**, such as routines for washing hands, and support for children until they can apply rules or routines without direction.
- **Children taking responsibility for managing their own activities**. Encourage children to determine and monitor rules for a game or activity for each other. Resist supplying children with ideas, but instead present the decision about what to do as a problem they can solve for themselves by making interesting choices.
- **Reassurance and support** when children's initiated ideas and attempts at self-management don't work out.

Further reading

Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. J. (2008). Developing self-regulation in kindergarten: Can we keep all the crickets in the basket? *Young Children*, 63(2), 56-58.

Ministry of Education (2019). *He māpuna te tamaiti: Supporting social and emotional competence in early learning*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.

Thompson, R. A. (2009). Doing what doesn't come naturally: The development of self-regulation. *Zero to Three*, November 2009, 33-39.

PREPARED FOR THE EDUCATION HUB BY



Dr Vicki Hargraves

Vicki is a teacher, mother, writer, and researcher. She recently completed her PhD using philosophy to explore creative approaches to understanding early childhood education. She is inspired by the wealth of educational research that is available and is passionate about making this available and useful for teachers.