

## PROMOTING SELF-REGULATION THROUGH GAMES – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE

---

### **Definition of Self-Regulation:**

Self-regulation is the conscious attempt to control, change, or inhibit thoughts, behaviors, and/or emotions. (McClelland, 2010)

---

### **Skills Needed for Self-Regulation:**

#### **1. Inhibitory Control**

- Controlling impulses
- Stopping one behavior and choosing another more appropriate action
- Calming down when upset
- Taking turns
- Waiting/delaying gratification

#### **2. Working Memory**

- Using short-term memory
- Remembering single and multi-step directions
- Recalling and recognizing facts, lessons, or instructions

#### **3. Attention/Cognitive Flexibility**

- Paying Attention
- Listening to and following directions
- Waiting for a turn
- Switching focus from one task to another
- Ignoring distractions

### **Example:**

When a child is playing a game, they have to wait/stop until it is their turn (inhibitory control). Then when it is their turn, they have to remember what it is they're supposed to do (working memory). Then when they have to wait their turn again, their friends might do something different so when it's the child's turn again, they might have to adjust to the new thing that they have to do (cognitive flexibility).

<sup>1</sup> McClelland, M. M., Ponitz, C. C., Messersmith, E. & Tominey, S. (2010). *Self-regulation: The integration of cognition and emotion*. In R. Lerner (Series Ed.) & W. Overton (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of lifespan human development*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons.

## Steps for Supporting Self-Regulation Through Games:

### 1. Model self-regulation

- Play games along with the children
- Talk about what it is you're doing/feeling to regulate yourself (e.g. Say, "I want to play the game now, but I'm waiting my turn." Say, "Even though I'm so excited, I'm using my inside voice.")

### 2. Increase complexity over time

- Start out simple with basic directions
- Make more complex over time by:
  - Encourage cognitive flexibility (e.g. do the opposite)
  - Build working memory (e.g. give multi-step directions)
  - Make it harder for children to inhibit behavior (e.g. stopping impulse for something children would really enjoy doing)

### 3. Provide opportunities to be successful

- Practice initial level several times
- Increase complexity by changing one step/direction at a time
- Challenge children in encouraging and fun ways
- Repeat games 1-on-1 for children who are struggling – decreasing complexity as needed

### 4. Give supportive feedback

- Provide feedback that focuses on effort rather than praise
- Talk about what the children are doing and how well they are doing it (e.g. Say, "You all are waiting patiently for your turn." Say, "You're listening and following directions! You know what to do!" Say, "I see you stopping when the music stops. You're controlling your body!")

---

## Following the Baton Video

### Notes: