Information Note

Self-Regulation

- **Regulation** is essentially the ability to stay calm.
- When we are regulated we can think, focus and learn.
- **Dysregulation** is when we can't find calm. It happens when we are pushed beyond our ability to cope with stressors.
- **Self regulation** refers to a person's ability to monitor and control their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. And if we start to lose our calm then it's the ability to use personal strategies to return to a calm state.
- In the context of an education this means being able to regulate our own behaviour, so that we can deliberately act in a way that is consistent with the learning communities expectations.
- Self-regulation is not simply self-control. Self-control is about inhibiting strong impulses whereas self-regulation is about reducing the frequency and intensity of strong impulses by managing stress and improving our ability to recover. In fact, self-regulation is what makes self-control possible, or, in many cases, unnecessary (see Self-regulation vs Self-control)
- Self-regulation is vital for managing life's normal ups-and-downs: for concentration, social relationships and learning.
- It is a major task for some learners to regulate their feelings and behaviour consistently.
- Learning to self-regulate begins at birth and continues through-out our lives.

Steps to Developing Self-Regulation

1. Being able to identify and reduce stressors
2. Being self-aware
3. Discovering how to calm agitation
- However if stress is trauma induced we will need to feel safe and secure before we will be able to self-regulate
- Children often need to be helped to be more aware of, and able to express, their emotions before they can really develop self-awareness

Factors that contribute to stress:

- Sensory issues
- Social environment
- Physical environment
- Psychological factors such as safety, sense of belonging, ..
- Learning factors such as readiness, support needs, ...
- Family & community factors
- Remember – stress, often presenting as worry or agitation, can come from more than one source

Some strategies to support self-regulation

- Name it to tame it – naming the emotions to help manage the emotions
- Using calming items or places, scaling feelings, using self-talk scripts

Factors that have an impact on self-regulation

- The attachment bond between a child and their primary care giver influences brain development and contributes to a person's ability to regulate their emotions which may impact on their capacity to build and maintain relationships.
- Exposure to adversity and trauma in childhood also plays a role in brain development, coping skills, and resilience.
- Both of these factors relate to our Window of Tolerance and our capacity to cope with everyday life.

Information Note

Nurture and Nurture Principles are important

Nurture is the care and attention that children are given as they develop. Nurture principles are the guidelines that explain how social environments affect children's wellbeing and learning. Although all the nurture principles are important in the context of self-regulation the following principles are particularly relevant.

- **Children's learning is understood developmentally**: children of any age, particularly those who are insecurely attached or who have experienced trauma, may not have developed self-regulation and may need support with this. In responding to dysregulated behaviour we need to ensure that our interactions are developmentally matched to were the child or young person 'is' and not where we think they should be because of their chronological age.
- **The learning setting offers a safe base**: a safe predictable environment and caring adults will help learners who are insecurely attached or who have experienced trauma to develop both regulation skills and healthier supportive relationships.
- **All behaviour is communication**: supporting adults should seek the 'needs' behind negative behaviours or patterns of behaviours and try to address these needs. Without addressing underlying needs the likelihood is that the dysregulated behaviour will recur or even escalate. Often identifying needs requires a collegiate approach where several adults work together to come to a holistic understanding of a child or young persons' behaviour and what 'need' the behaviour may be communicating. Furthermore it will be necessary for this information to be shared with everyone who works with the child or young person so that a whole-setting approach can be taken to addressing their needs.

Things to think about:

- Learning self-regulation is a natural part of the development process.
- Every child develops at their own pace so we can expect children of the same age to differ in their ability to self-regulate
- Some children, for a range of reason, will struggle to self-regulate. We may need to **co-regulate** with them first and then over time help them develop self-regulation skills (see module on Co-regulation)
- If we are to respond to distress, in a way that is sympathetic to how the brain works, we first need to help a child or young person regulate before we can reason with them (see module Regulate, Relate, Reason, & Restore)

Additional helpful resources and information

- Related Modules: The Brain & Emotional Regulation, Regulate, Relate, Reason and Restore, Window of Tolerance, & Attunement
- Strong Self-regulation: https://youtu.be/m4UGDaCgo_sv
- Self-regulation -Helping children cope with stress: https://youtu.be/gYPYbnzIkXc
- Dan Siegel - Name it to tame it: https://youtu.be/ZcDLzppD4Jc
- Calm Boxes: https://youtu.be/fuymZJcRghk
- Self- Regulation vs Self Control https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/self-reg/201607/self-reg-self-regulation-vs-self-control
- Attachment Bond https://mi-psych.com.au/how-attachment-affects-your-emotion-regulation-relationships/
- Exposure to Adversity https://mi-psych.com.au/the-impact-of-adverse-childhood-experiences-aces-on-brain-body-behaviour/
- Window of Tolerance https://mi-psych.com.au/understanding-your-window-of-tolerance/
- Nurture Principles https://www.nurtureuk.org/the-six-principles-of-nurture/