

HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP SELF-REGULATION SKILLS

Summary

Self-regulation means taking control of one's own learning through planning, monitoring and evaluating. It helps us to continue to work towards a goal despite setbacks and to reflect on how we could improve next time. This advice sheet is based on information from the University of Connecticut's Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development. It is aimed at parents and carers of children with high learning potential.

Introduction

Having a sense of who they are is really important for children's development as well as for their success academically. Without good self-understanding, high learning potential children are at risk of being too hard on themselves, not performing to their potential and of giving up too easily.

So that they can gain greater self-understanding, these children need to be stretched and challenged so that they can develop good self-regulation skills. Tasks that encourage self-regulation are ones that enable children to:

- estimate what they can do before they start a particular task;
- review their performance afterwards.

Naturally, sometimes high learning potential children will fall short of performing perfectly in the chosen task and they need to be supported in analysing why this is and problem solving what they could do better next time.

To help children with this, they need to have a clear understanding of what they can do and an accurate measure of what they are capable of achieving that is realistic, as well as an understanding of what they are doing and the criteria which is expected of them. It is sometimes useful to have examples of other children's work at this level. However, ultimately, it is judging them against their own performance and capabilities that will be important.

Some Basic Principles of Self-Regulation

- Self-regulation skills can be taught, learned, and controlled.
- In order to self-regulate, children must learn to self-compare their performance (rather than comparing their performance to their peers) and become proactive learners.
- There are three phases of self-regulation: planning, monitoring and reflecting.
- Some of the important self-regulation skills for high learning potential children are goal-setting, time management and organisation, study and learning strategies, and exam strategies.

What Parents and Carers Can Do to Promote Self-Regulation in their Learning

Below is a structure to help high learning potential children to learn how to self-regulate. The exact nature will depend on the stage and age of the child.

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1. Helping children to plan

- Check the child understands the requirements of the task – **what** are they being asked to do?
- Check the child knows **how** the task is being assessed: 'out of 10', levels, grades.
- Encourage the child to look at their past achievement, e.g. completed homework, and what they have learnt from it.
- Be aware of any prior perceptions the child might have of themselves. If they are not keen to take risks or are excessively self-critical, this may reduce the expectations they have of themselves and their assessment of how well they might perform. Or if they are overly confident they could over assess how well they will perform. They may need more practice and guidance to self-regulate their learning.
- Encourage the child to ask themselves some of the following (start with just a couple and build up over time):
 - What is the task?
 - What do I want to achieve?
 - What is the timescale?
 - What are my goals?
 - What feedback have I received that will help me improve my performance?
 - What are my realistic expectations? By when?
 - How will I approach the task?
 - What resources do I need?
 - When will I start?
 - How will I start?
 - Where will I be able to work best on this task?
 - What will help or hinder me?

All of this can also be applied to tasks at home e.g. planning for a day trip or picnic – what to put in the back pack; building a den or rocket.

2. Helping children to monitor

- Dependent on the task and the length of time anticipated for its completion, encourage the child to monitor their progress and share this with you.
- Encourage them to ask themselves some of the following (start with just a couple and build up over time – ideally they will follow on from their questions during the planning phase):
 - Am I approaching the task as I had planned?
 - Am I staying focused?
 - Is anything distracting me from reaching my goals?
 - Am I developing any bad habits?
 - Is my strategy still working or do I need to adapt it?

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- Do I have all the resources I need?
- Am I accomplishing what I had hoped in the timescales I set?
- Is it taking more time than I thought?
- Am I demonstrating resilience?
- When and where do I work best?
- How can I encourage myself to stick with it?

Again this can be practised with tasks at home as well.

3. Helping children to reflect

- Encourage the child to see everything as a learning opportunity. This will help them child to reflect on how well they did at the task.
- Ensure that the child is given prompt and explicit feedback. This will help them to reflect whilst the task is still fresh in their minds. If this isn't happening at school or with their tutor or teacher, it might be appropriate for you (or them, depending on their age) to have a diplomatic chat with the teacher/tutor to explain that you understand that they have a busy work load, but the child would really appreciate their feedback and this also helps you to support the child at home – talking through the teacher's comments, ensuring the child understands what has been fed back and how they might learn from the teacher's comments.
- Encourage the child to ask themselves questions relating to 'what worked well' and 'even better if'. Use prompts such as:
 - In what ways did the planning and monitoring help achieve the goals?
 - Did I set goals which were challenging yet realistic?
 - Which self-monitoring strategies were most helpful and why?
 - When and where did I work most effectively?
 - How well did I manage the timescale?
 - What have I learnt about the way I learn?
 - What strategies did I use when I felt stuck or demotivated?
 - What would I do differently next time?

Reflection can be practised with tasks at home: Did I have the best materials to build my den? Did planning what materials I needed help me to build a better/bigger/stronger den? Did I build it in the afternoon as I had thought or did it take longer or less time? What did I do when I couldn't get it to stand up straight? How could I build a bigger/stronger den next time?

The Skills High Learning Potential Children Need to Develop

Good self-regulation skills include goal-setting, time management and organisation, study and learning strategies, and exam strategies. Some of these can be practised at home in fun ways!

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• **Organising and interpreting information**

Encourage the child to engage in tasks/activities/games that include: summarising, rearranging information, flashcards, mind maps, Plus-Minus-Interesting charts, sequencing, time management, making notes, building a portfolio, mnemonics (visual and verbal), mental imagery, teaching parents the information.

• **Developing ‘Plan Bs’**

Encourage the child to develop a ‘Plan B’ or alternative for things they do to help them problem solve in future. Questions like “What will you do if this doesn’t happen?”, or “What is your Plan B?” often helps.

• **Maintaining motivation through tasks**

Work with the child to find out what motivates them (and you – do it together!). What helps the child stay on a task when things become more difficult or it needs longer than anticipated? Practise breaking larger tasks into smaller parts, with small goals built in (small rewards might be included – they need to make sense with regard to what motivates the child and don’t need to be large e.g. 5 minutes on the Xbox, an extra story at bed time, pizza for dinner, a trip to the park). Help the child reflect on the small goals they have achieved and use that to help them maintain their motivation for the larger goal. Model this behaviour! Show how you organise your time, break up large chores into smaller activities and reflect on your successes and where you could improve.

• **Seeking assistance**

Encourage and aid the child to seek information that helps them with the task, adding depth and thereby enriching their learning experience. This might be through the library, internet, text books, museums, galleries, peers, teachers, or other experts.

Conclusion

These are all good skills that will help children to better understand where their learning currently is and what they need to do to get to the next level. However, it is essential that there is the opportunity for them, on a regular basis, to go to the next level.

Further Information

PA310 The Low-Down on Enrichment	Enrichment is an essential part of good provision for children with high learning potential and is an educational strategy that can work well for them. This advice sheet is aimed at parents of high learning potential children and explores what enrichment is, why it can be good for high learning potential children, how schools approach it and how to enrich a child’s learning.
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PA320 Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Thinking Skills)	High learning potential children benefit greatly from practising higher order thinking skills on a regular basis as these require more cognitive processing. They generate more interest from high potential learners and will challenge their thinking more. Educational tasks can be designed to take account of higher order thinking skills to make them more challenging. Bloom's Taxonomy is a well-known way of explaining thinking skills. This advice sheet is aimed at parents of children with high learning potential to explain about higher order thinking skills and to give guidance about how tasks can be made more challenging using the framework.
Home Neag Center for Creativity, Gifted Education, and Talent Development	US website with more information and examples of self-regulated learning
Self-Regulated Learning Literature Review	A research document from the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning from the Institute of Education, University of London, published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2009
<i>Self-Regulation in the Classroom: Helping Students Learn How to Learn</i> by Richard Cash	To succeed in school, students need more than subject area knowledge—they must learn how to learn. Self-regulation, an executive functioning skill, describes the ways that students focus attention on achieving success. Self-regulated learners find personal value in learning, develop effective study habits, welcome challenges, seek help, and use failure as a learning tool. This user-friendly guide makes the process of developing self-regulation as easy as ABC : A ffect (how you feel), B ehaviour (what you do), and C ognition (how you think).
<i>Self-Regulation and the Underachieving Gifted Learner</i> by Alicia Welch	This NAGC (USA) Select explores self-regulation and how achievement for gifted students can suffer without it. Case studies are used to explore improving achievement through self-regulation learning interventions.

Potential Plus UK Date of Issue: February 2017

Potential Plus UK Planned Review Date: February 2020

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