

Self-Regulation:

Is it consistent? Is it productive? Is it moving them along the path?

Look at your child and think about them as they grow. It is not always helpful to compare exceptional children to norms based on typically developing children. Look for them to grow compared to themselves. They are often their own best benchmark. The stress of having an uneven cognitive profile (with a mix of highs and lows and average skills) can contribute significantly to challenges with self-regulation.

A useful analogy is Lizard Brain or Wizard Brain (brainstem and amygdala or pre-frontal cortex). Both parts of our brain evolved for important reasons and have a role to play in our success. That said, survival brain (lizard brain) is best at managing our sleep, hunger, thirst, need for play, need for safety. When it tries to manage our homework, need to do chores, need to participate with other people (even though we don't feel like it), or problem solving, Lizard Brain just does not have the skills. By "Taking care of our lizard brain" with breaks, a snack, water, movement, humor, music, something surprising, we can then access our "Wizard brain," which has evolved for complex learning, persistence, planning, long-term goals, negotiation, etc.

Goal Directed Persistence:

Help your child visualize "done" with "future picture" thinking. Try to help them develop a clear picture of the "end" of the goal (i.e. assignment, task...) by using examples of finished work, pictures of a finished project (tidy room, organized binder, kid ready for soccer, etc.) and use phrases like, "Make it look like this," or, "How will yours be same, but different?"

This gestalt experience promotes wholistic thinking and can begin to develop mimetic ideation (mind miming), which is the ability to

quickly visualize oneself completing a task in future (e.g., planning what to wear when showering, planning the route to take to get to the destination quickly while avoiding obstacles).

Also spend time on “how will you feel” when visualizing an endpoint – the emotional component is key to successful planning. Example: when we look at a menu, we quickly imagine how each potential dish might make us feel and that leads to our choice.

Flexibility/Shift:

We all love being in a state of “flow” – my UW psych professor called this the state of “making mud pies.” Getting out of “flow” requires us to use our pre-frontal cortex, which children need until age 22-32 to fully develop! Things that can help get us ready to think receptively/reflectively/actively (Wizard Brain thinking) include: movement, humor, music, surprise, making a prediction, expectation of achieving a desirable challenge, socialization with peers, stories, identification with a role or script (Job talk), and/or novelty (e.g., wear a silly hat during homework time, turn it sideways 5 minutes before homework time is over).

We can use “job talk” to get kids thinking about how to do the things we need them to do (i.e. instead of saying, “Stop reading and get in the car,” Try, “It’s time for you to be a ‘passenger’ instead of a “reader,” once you are buckled in, you can be a ‘reader’ again.”)

Organization:

Provide examples and/or pictures of areas that are already organized to model for our kids how they can have a system for maintaining their things. Post pictures inside cabinet doors or on the front of dresser drawers and say “make it look like this.”

Kids worry you only love them when they are smart so they don't want to do things they can't because they fear being unlovable.

We need to help our kids create a menu of what makes them feel good and safe to do the challenging tasks we ask of them.