



THE PARENT LED

Self Regulation Journal

BY THE FRIENDLY FOLKS AT **Children in Motion**



This journal belongs to



*empowering the
next generation to
thrive*

Hey there! I'm Michaelene, the founder of Children In Motion. I just wanted to take the opportunity to introduce ourselves & share what we are passionate about.

Children In Motion is a community of occupational therapists focused on building a better future for uniquely wired children because we believe every child is worthy of acceptance and deserves the opportunity to live a successful life. We are passionate about creating safe environments where children can explore their unique wiring, understand what their individual needs are, and ultimately advocate for themselves.

We help children who have an array of unique challenges - fine motor & handwriting, motor coordination & balance, and core stability to name a few - but our specialty lies in sensory processing & self regulation.

Our goal is to build a community that understands the power of sensory and is equipped to create environments where children with sensory challenges can feel safe & thrive. We know we can't accomplish this goal alone, which is why we love working with parents just like you! Teamwork makes the dream work baby!

When we aren't working on things for Children In Motion you can find us outside, spending time with our families, or eating chocolate chip cookies with a glass of wine.

What is self regulation?

Self regulation plays a vital role in your ability to find success on a daily basis. Difficulties with self regulation can affect your ability to transition in & out of differing environments, communicate effectively with peers, be a team player, learn new skills, or accept unexpected changes with ease.

So what is self regulation?

Self regulation refers to your level of alertness and your ability to adjust that level depending on the current situation.

When we talk about your level of alertness, we are describing *the energy you feel*, or how awake you are. Are you moving slowly, sleepy, in your own world? Are you content, composed, frazzled, or struggling to focus?

When I educate my families about self regulation, I use the Alert Program®. In their program they have identified 3 levels of alertness - **low**, **just right**, & **high**.

When your **level of alertness is low** you could be sleepy or tired, moving slowly, have poor posture, feel spacey, have trouble making decisions, unmotivated, or struggle to get 'unstuck'.

When your **level of alertness is high** you could be moving too fast, unable to control your body, have trouble following directions, use a loud voice, make unsafe choices, or have a tense body posture.

When your **level of alertness is just right** you are able to make good choices, be a good listener, be flexible & work as a team, learn new skills, & have control of your body.

It's expected that you will experience differing levels of alertness throughout the day, the important thing is that you (or your child) is able to match your level of alertness

with the situation. For example, you need a just right level of alertness to be able to do homework, or learn, but at recess it's completely acceptable to have a high level of alertness. On the flip side - you need a low level of alertness to fall asleep at night, but during the day when you are at work, having a low level of alertness can interfere with your productivity.

A HIGH LEVEL OF ALERTNESS CAN LOOK LIKE..

making unsafe choices
moving too fast

having trouble controlling body
using a loud voice

tense body posture
not following directions

A LOW LEVEL OF ALERTNESS CAN LOOK LIKE..

sleepy, tired
moving slow

feel spacey, can't get unstuck
trouble making decisions

slouched body posture
unmotivated

A JUST RIGHT LEVEL OF ALERTNESS CAN LOOK LIKE..

making good choices
being a good listener

can be flexible
able to work as a team

able to learn new skills
in control of body

HOW DO OUR EMOTIONS AFFECT SELF REGULATION?

Although it may seem natural to associate a high level of alertness with emotions such as anger or excitement, and feelings of sadness or worry with a low level of alertness, it is important to keep emotions separate from the state of our nervous system.

Our emotions can affect or influence our level of alertness, however, our level of alertness & emotional state are two separate entities.

For example, let's take a look at the emotional state of anger.

When we are mad we could have a hard time listening or struggle to make good decisions, which would look like a high level of alertness.

At the same time we could be mad and withdraw into ourselves, shut down, or even leave the situation entirely, which would look like a low level of alertness.

Lastly, if we have access to good sensory strategies (like counting to ten or deep breathing exercise) we could be mad but still be able to communicate our feelings clearly, which would look like a just right level of alertness.

The same could be said for other feelings such as excitement, happiness, loneliness, or frustration. The important thing to remember here is that emotions do not depict a specific level of alertness. We could experience varying degrees of all sorts of emotions at any level of alertness depending on how we process sensory information.

Now that you have a basic understanding of self regulation yourself, I would like you to read pages 4 - 10 to your child (it might be helpful to read through the section by your self first).

Depending on your child, you might need to break it up over several days. Take as much time as you need. There is no rush.

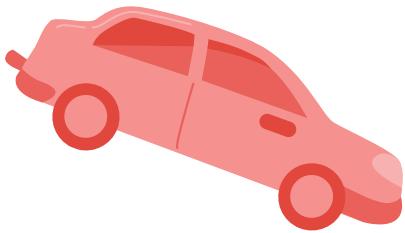
The goal here is to begin to educate your child about self regulation so that they can start to understand what their body needs, eventually enabling them to be successful in their daily lives & capable of advocating for themselves.

Alright, so go ahead and read through the next few pages and then when you are ready, go through the material with your child.

What is self regulation?

OK - I want you to close your eyes and imagine something with me. Ready?

Alright, pretend it's a regular school day, you walk out the door and hop into the car. Before we go anywhere I (or whoever is driving you to school) has to start the car. I turn the key, and before you know it, the engine is ready to roll.



Slowly we back out of our parking spot, then once the car is in the right direction, we gradually speed up to the speed limit. After a few stop signs, we turn onto the main road and accelerate to the new speed limit on that road.

Things are going smoothly, we are peacefully cruising along, when all of a sudden some traffic crops up - someone's car stalled in the middle of the street, causing a giant backup. We are forced to sit and wait for our turn to pass by the stalled car, which unfortunately takes a while.



Finally we get through the traffic, only to realize that we are now late for school! In an effort to get you to school as soon as possible, I drive 15 miles per hour over the speed limit. It feels like I'm out of control of the car as I dodge anything that might slow us down.

At last, we make it to school. I speed to the entrance and then slam on the breaks to park. As we get out of the car you notice the car making a high pitched screech over and over again, like it's stuck in high gear after racing through the streets to get to school.



You turn and walk away when suddenly the screeching stops, and the car stalls in the parking lot. Out of frustration, I take a deep breath, and tell you "It's ok, I'll just have to find some jumper cables to revive it." as you walk into school and start your day.

Just like the engine of the car in our story had to speed up and slow down to get you to school, so does your brain to help you be your best self at any given moment.

Self regulation helps us all the time. From waking up and getting ready for school on time, to winding down after an exciting school event. Self regulation is a big part of our lives.

Your engine, or brain, runs in three different gears - low, just right, & high.



Low

When your engine is running on low you could be sleepy or tired, moving slowly, have poor posture, feel spacey, have trouble making decisions, unmotivated, or struggle to get 'unstuck'.

High

When your engine is on high you could be moving too fast, not have control of your body, have trouble following directions, use a loud voice, make unsafe choices, or feel that your body is tense.



Just Right

When your engine is running just right you are able to make good choices, be a good listener, be flexible & work as a team, learn new skills, & have control of your body.

Now, let's take a moment and brainstorm together - what does it look like when your engine is running on high, low, & just right? *

WHEN MY ENGINE IS RUNNING LOW -

**Please take notes for your child here. They do the talking, you do the writing.*

WHEN MY ENGINE IS RUNNING HIGH -

WHEN MY ENGINE IS RUNNING JUST RIGHT -

Throughout your day, your engine will change gears multiple times - and that is perfectly fine. That's what it's supposed to do!

We just want to make sure your engine is able to switch gears when it needs to. We don't want it stalling like the car did in our story!

Sometimes our engine needs a little help switching gears. So let's talk about what we can do to support your engine to make sure it's running like it's meant to.

What can we do to support your engine?

When your engine is struggling to switch gears, you need to give your brain a special message so that it knows which gear to switch to. These messages are hidden in certain types of activities.

When your engine is running low, your brain needs messages from alerting activities.

When your engine is running high, your brain needs messages from calming & organizing activities.

low engine —→ *alerting activities*

high engine —→ *calming & organizing activities*

Examples of Alerting activities include..

- Snacking on something sour, spicy, or crunchy
- Moving your body - go on a walk, dance, stretch, jump on a trampoline
- Listening to fast, unpredictable music
- Drinking something cold, sour, or tart *through a straw*
- Using your muscles - do wall or chair push ups, jumping jacks, climb up a tree, army crawl through and obstacle course
- Swinging or spinning on a tire swing

Examples of Calming & Organizing activities include..

- Listening to soft, slow, rhythmic, predictable music
- Using a weighted blanket or vest
- Coloring in a coloring book, drawing, or painting
- Snacking on something chewy
- Practicing deep breathing
- Going to a favorite quiet space with soft or dim lighting
- Slow, rhythmic swinging
- Watching a lava lamp or visual calming jar
- Deep pressure activities like bear hugs or rolling up in a blanket

When your engine is having trouble switching gears, you can use one (or a few) of these activities to help your brain make the switch. It's helpful to know ahead of time what kind of activities work best for your brain, so let's write down a few activities that we know your brain likes so that in the heat of the moment we don't have to worry about making a decision - we just have to do! *

MY FAVORITE ALERTING ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

**Please take notes for your child here. They do the talking, you do the writing. If you are unsure of what activities work best yet, choose activities you would like to try.*

MY FAVORITE CALMING & ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES INCLUDE

Over the next few weeks we are going to use a special journal that will help us understand how your engine runs on a regular basis and how to keep it running smoothly.

Once we get to know your engine, we will understand how to support it (by giving your brain those special messages through the alerting, calming, & organizing activities we just talked about) so that it can perform at it's highest level.

FOR PARENTS -

To help you understand how your child's engine runs naturally on a daily basis, we've created a special tool for you to use every day that will identify when & where your child is having trouble.

Once you pinpoint these patterns you can strategically plug in the appropriate calming, organizing, or alerting input to promote effective self regulation. Directions can be found on the next page.

On the following pages you will find each day of the week to have it's own individual page for you to keep track of how your child's engine runs throughout different parts of their day.

The columns labeled time & activity have been left empty for you to fill out depending on your specific schedule. You can either type in the information or write it in. Use whatever colors, stickers, or shapes to represent each level of alertness you desire.

At the end of the day I would like you to sit down with your child and reflect on their day together. Gently ask them 'How was your engine running during (fill in the blank)?'. They might need some help remembering, so give them some time to think about it and if they still need help you can start giving them examples -

'Were you in control of your body? Was it easy to listen to directions or focus? Was it easy/hard to make a decision? Did you participate in any group games during recess? How did that go? Were you sleepy or did you feel you were bursting with energy?

Make sure that when you do this you don't come across as trying to point blame. You are simply looking for clues, gathering the data that will help you gain a greater understanding of your child.

There are also reflection questions you can ask them to help them (and you) process the day. Some days you won't get through all of the questions, and that is ok. We want this to be a positive, exploratory experience for you child so whatever you can get out of them without too much resistance is great.

As previously stated, after consistently using the daily journal you will start to notice patterns. At that point you can then start to strategically use calming and alerting strategies to help your child with their self regulation skills.

Remember, when your child's engine is low their brain needs alerting input & when your child's engine is in high they need organizing or calming input.

Alrighty, you now have everything you need to know to use this journal - cheers to your self regulation journey & please don't hesitate to reach out if you need support!

Monday

HIGH JUST RIGHT LOW

What went well today?

What was challenging today?

What strategies did you use?
Did they help?

What can you change next time?

	TIME	ACTIVITY	
BEFORE SCHOOL			
DURING SCHOOL			
AFTER SCHOOL			

Tuesday

HIGH JUST RIGHT LOW

What went well today?

What was challenging today?

What strategies did you use?
Did they help?

What can you change next time?

	TIME	ACTIVITY	
BEFORE SCHOOL			
DURING SCHOOL			
AFTER SCHOOL			

Wednesday

HIGH JUST RIGHT LOW

What went well today?

What was challenging today?

What strategies did you use?
Did they help?

What can you change next time?

	TIME	ACTIVITY	
BEFORE SCHOOL			
DURING SCHOOL			
AFTER SCHOOL			

Thursday

HIGH JUST RIGHT LOW

What went well today?

What was challenging today?

What strategies did you use?
Did they help?

What can you change next time?

	TIME	ACTIVITY	
BEFORE SCHOOL			
DURING SCHOOL			
AFTER SCHOOL			

Friday

HIGH JUST RIGHT LOW

What went well today?

What was challenging today?

What strategies did you use?
Did they help?

What can you change next time?

	TIME	ACTIVITY	
BEFORE SCHOOL			
DURING SCHOOL			
AFTER SCHOOL			

Saturday & Sunday

What went well this weekend?

What was challenging this weekend?

What strategies did you use? Did they help?

What strategies or activities are you going to use this upcoming week?

Monday

HIGH JUST RIGHT LOW

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What was challenging today?

What strategies did you use?
Did they help?

What can you change next time?

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