Four Developmental Stages of Self-Control

Early childhood is one of the ideal times to teach concepts of self-worth, self-control and seeing how our behaviors affect those around us. There are four developmental stages in a child’s ability for self-control as recognized by Family Communications and the Fred Rogers Company. www.fci.org

1. **Establishing a sense of self and body boundaries.** Learning to recognize where their bodies begin and end.
   
   **How you can help** – Nursery rhymes and finger plays can help even very young children learn about their bodies begin and end. Sing, “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.”

2. **Managing impulses and being able to stop.** Recognizing that they can stop and go and have some control.
   
   **How you can help** – Young children are just beginning to learn that there is a connection between their behavior and the results of their behavior. You can help by modeling cause and effect through your own words, activities and stories. Read, “No, David.” By David Shannon

3. **Finding alternative physical outlets.** Learning ways to channel anger and other strong emotions.
   
   **How you can help** – Think about the children you are close to who get stressed or angry routinely. The length of time that a child is under stress (in combination with the presence or absence of a supportive adult) makes a difference. A gentle hug and kind words can help calm a young child, so they can re-group and manage their emotions better. Show them appropriate ways to deal with strong emotions. Say, “I see you might be getting frustrated, how about we take a walk around the room for a minute to calm down, then we can talk about what you are feeling, and try to find some solutions.”

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4. **Channeling angry feelings in symbolic, constructive and organized ways.**
   Developing a vocabulary for their feelings.

   **How you can help** – Teach children about feelings and emotions by giving them a wide vocabulary of feeling words. Children also learn by example, they copy those who care for them, so be a model for appropriate expressions of emotions. Children are building emotional skills every day. You can also help by reading books about expressing feelings. Read, “My Mouth is a Volcano.” By Julia Cook.

**Resources on helping children develop emotional literacy:**

2. Child Care eXtension website. [www.extension.org/child_care](http://www.extension.org/child_care). Hands on activities for child care providers. Answers from experts, information and many more resources.
4. Fred Rogers Company. [www.fci.org](http://www.fci.org). Family Communications was founded by Fred Rogers in 1971 as the non-profit producer of Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood for PBS. Promoting children’s social, emotional, and behavioral health and supporting parents, caregivers, teachers and other professionals in their work with children.
5. RELAX: Alternatives to Anger Online Class, [www.campus.extension.org](http://www.campus.extension.org). Search by name or topic area by typing in ANGER. Click on the course title. Create a user name and password. You will then be sent a confirmation email. When you get the email, click on the link. You will be directed to a page where you pay the course fee of $20. This will give you the rest of the RELAX materials and you will receive 2 hours of professional development credit. Questions and contact person: Suzanne Pish, pishs@anr.msu.edu.