



## Four Developmental Stages of Self-Control

### Why it's important

Early childhood is one of the ideal times to teach concepts of self-control.

Self-control is important to young children because it means they are able to manage their own emotions and empathize with others around them.

Self-control is one predictor of academic success later in life so it is critical to develop this skill in young children.

Use the Four Developmental Stages of Self-Control by Family Communications and Fred Rogers Company to help young children develop self-control skills.

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer, committed to achieving excellence through a diverse workforce and inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status.

### 1. Establishing a sense of self and body boundaries

Learning to recognize where their bodies begin and end.

**How you can help:** Nursery rhyme 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

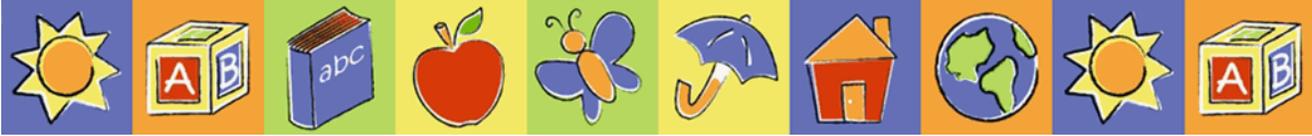
**How you can help:** Young children are just beginning to learn that there is a connection between their behavior and the results of their behavior. You can help by modeling cause and effect through your own words, activities and stories. Read, *"No David"* by David Shannon.

### 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 or 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."



#### 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 feelings 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

- [Michigan State University Extension](#): Research-based information and articles to help families improve their lives.
- [RELAX: Alternatives to Anger](#) : Youth, parents and caregivers will learn to better manage their anger and stress at home and in the workplace.
- 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.
- Vanderbilt University Center for Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning, (CSEFEL). [www.csefel.vanderbilt.edu](http://www.csefel.vanderbilt.edu). Focused on promoting the social emotional development and school readiness of young children birth to age 5.
- 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.

For more information or additional resources from MSU Extension visit:  
[http://msue.msu.edu/topic/info/early\\_childhood\\_development](http://msue.msu.edu/topic/info/early_childhood_development)

