

GAMES

that practice
**Self-
Regulation**



Impulse Control
Listening
Following Directions
Paying Attention

GAMES

that practice

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control and navigate one's feelings, impulses, and behaviors. When children are self-regulated, they can both stop or start doing something, even if they don't want to. They can delay gratification; think ahead; control impulses and consider options.

These 17 games focus on having to pay close attention to expectations, and override urges in order to make the most appropriate choice about one's actions. The children therefore practice paying attention and listening, following directions, and impulse control.

Games can be conducted with *small or large groups*, most require *no materials or prep* and it is noted whether they are appropriate to be played *indoors, outdoors* or in either setting. While simply playing these games helps to practice desired skills, **Reflection Tips** are provided if you choose to process the games verbally for deeper learning.

Games also target the following:

21st Century Skills - Life, Career skills, Learning and Innovation Skills

Developmental Assets - Social Competencies, Positive Identity

Multiple Intelligences: Linguistic, Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal

GAMES

that practice Self-Regulation Of Body and Actions

Processing games:

- Discuss how it can be hard to override our urges and have self-control. It's almost like our bodies are telling us to do something and our brains telling us to do something else. Ask for examples of situations at school and home where this is a challenge, help them identify situations where it's important to override our body/action urges (i.e. blurting things out in class, talking to your friend during quiet study time, wandering around the classroom at inappropriate times) and what strategies kids can use to help them have wise self-control.
- Most games also involve having to pay close attention to succeed at them. Discuss when this is important, when it's difficult, and strategies that help.

Geese Fly – Inside or Outside

Select someone to be "It" and ask him to stand in front of the group. You may want to play "It" first to set the example. This person calls out "Geese fly!, Seagulls fly! Ladybugs fly! Cows Fly!" Whenever "It" says an animal that flies, everyone flaps their wings in a flying motion. As soon as he says an animal that doesn't fly, then everyone should stop "flying" and put their arms down to their sides. Anyone who keeps "flying" when a non-flying animal is mentioned, becomes "It." The child who is "It" can say any animal characteristics they can think of, such as animals that crawl, jump, roar etc. and the participants all act out this motion...until another nonsensical combination is said. "Dolphins swim! Stingrays swim! Llamas swim!"

Freeze Run - Outside

This game is a great one for releasing energy while also practicing skills of listening/direction following and "shifting gears." Everyone hops, dances, skips backwards, jumps etc. until you say "Freeze!" at which point everyone is supposed to stop instantly. They have to hold that position until you say "Thaw!" To raise the level of difficulty, make sounds instead of words to represent "Freeze" and "Thaw" commands. You can also say words or make sounds with increasing softness.

Red Light, Green Light – Outside

Who knew this classic game helps develop self-regulation skills?! The children are cars, standing side by side at a starting line. One child is the stoplight and stands facing them several yards away. When the stoplight yells “Green light!” the children run towards the stoplight. When the stoplight yells “Red light!” all the children must stop. If a child doesn’t stop, they must go back to the starting line. You can include a “Yellow light!” where children must walk instead of run.



Red Light, Purple Light – Outside

This game follows the same concept as “red light, green light” but switches up things by using different colors as stop or go commands, so it could become “red light, purple light.” This requires children to have to think about their responses and adapt to the change. To increase challenge, once the children grow accustomed to the colors and their corresponding meaning, switch the colors up again so that they must once again regulate their responses. You can practice following visual cues by flashing pieces of colored construction paper in silence instead of calling out colors (Note: Be sure that no one is color blind if you use visuals).

Run Wild, Run Free – Outside

Explain that you are the chief and the children are members of your jungle village. You have a fun life together running free in the jungle except there is one danger – tigers. The way the children keep from getting eaten by the tigers is to watch the wise chief (because, like all chiefs, you have magic ears and hear the tiger before everyone else). When the chief sits down with hand over mouth, everyone else immediately sits down, too. This quietness fools the tiger, who goes away. The chief signals the all clear by yelling. “Run wild, run free!” Everyone (especially the chief) starts whooping, hollering, jumping, running, and having a good time. Then, plop, the chief suddenly sits down again. Instantly everyone else does too. You can remain the chief, or give children turns being chief.

Additional Reflection Questions:

- Who was giving directions in this game and how were they giving them? Discuss body language vs verbal language.
- Are there any ways that your teachers or your parents give you directions without speaking (i.e. pointing, a “shhh” with finger on lips, “quiet coyote” sign, a rhythmic clap or bell to get class quiet)?
- What do you need to do to be able to follow directions people give with body language?

Do This, Not That – Inside or Out

In this variation on Simon Says, the leader makes various motions directing the group to “Do this” or “Do that” and the group is only supposed to move when the leader says “Do this.”

Simon Says - Inside or Out

We all know this classic game which helps kids pay close attention, and discern when to act and when not to. The leader faces the rest of the group and says "Simon says..." followed by verbal directions of a physical action which the leader also acts out (e.g. "Simon says...flap like a bird" while flapping her own arms). The rest of the group then mimics the action she's making. The leader repeats several actions this way with the group following and *then* gives a direction and makes a motion without preceding it with "Simon Says." The group is supposed to ignore directions and freeze if they're not told "Simon Says..." If you play elimination style, anyone who moves anyway is "out" (it's fun to watch a couple people in high speed rounds), you could ask them to keep points for "outs" or successful rounds, or have each child take a small step forward when they get it "right." A new "Simon" can be chosen from who just got "out," or invite volunteers from the kids. The leader continues on like this, randomly dispersing non Simon Says directions to throw the kids off and keep them fine tuning their attention skills. Kids find it especially fun to keep their own names when they get to be "Simon." "Lilly says..."



Do What I Say, Not What I Do - Inside or Out

This game is another Simon Says variation that requires the players to override an automatic response, and choose to heighten one sense while tuning out another. Have children line up next to each other. Tell them to do what you say and not what you do. Face them as the leader several yards away. Give some verbal directions that match your motions (as in "Simon Says"), and some that don't, i.e., "Touch your nose" while touching your mouth, or "Stamp your foot" while jumping. Kids who mimic your *verbal* directions get it right and move forward one small step. The first child to get there gets awarded "Best listener!" Older students can get turns at being the leader, if age-appropriate.

Additional Reflection Questions:

- *What was difficult about this game? (Explain that people's **body language** usually matches their words. For example, when someone says "Go right" they usually point to the right, or if they're sad they have a sad face. Explain the miscommunication and upset feelings that can arise from not having body language match your feelings. Use my childhood example of how I used to laugh when I was wrestling with my brother, even though it was hurting me, and he got confused and angry at me when I'd go cry to mom afterwards and he'd get in trouble! Kids love to demonstrate being congruent and incongruent with body language – let them act it out)*
- *Do you have anyone in your family that does things, but tells you not to do it – for example, smoking cigarettes, or cursing? That can be confusing, but your parents usually know what the best choices are even if they have a hard time with them themselves. Just like in the game, it's more important to follow what they're telling you with their words.*

Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders Mix-up – Inside or Outside



This activity also requires that students pay extra attention and override an automatic response. Begin by having students point to their head, shoulders, knees and toes (as a leader you give directions and DON'T act out motions on this one). Have students touch each body part in a variety of sequences to get accustomed to the game. Then explain you're going to keep using the words "head-shoulder-knees-toes" in various order as you've been doing BUT now whenever you say "toes" (or any of the other 3 parts), you want them to touch their elbow (or any other incongruent body part). Make this as challenging as the kids can handle, replacing two, three, or four of the words with incongruent parts.

Musical Statues - Inside

This game requires music! Play music and when you suddenly shut it off, the children must freeze and be still as statues in whatever position they froze in. After a few rounds, add the direction that they must dance energetically to upbeat songs, and dance slowly and gracefully to the slow songs in between their freezes, and you mix up the music styles unpredictably. Once they've gotten the hang of that, switch it up and have them dance slowly to the fast songs and quickly to the slow songs.

Popcorn – Outside

The children squat in a circle, pretending they are kernels of corn waiting to pop. You start counting slowly...and when they hear the number 10 they POP, going from a squat to a full jump. Then they get to jump all around, forwards and backwards (saying "pop pop pop") until you say "one," and the kids start a new batch of popcorn, dropping back into a silent squat. Repeat, and then start switching it up in different ways, requiring the kids to pay closer and closer attention: for example, change the number they "pop" at, count backwards, count in another language, or give kids different numbers to pop at in groups or individually.



Strike a Pose – Inside or Outside

Have 2 students stand and face each other. When you say "GO" they must individually strike a pose while still facing each other, and neither student may move, talk, make a sound or change facial expression. You can also come up with the poses yourself so that they have someone to mimic. It sounds easy, but the challenge is for them to control their urges to be silly, get distracted or laugh...which isn't easy while frozen in silly poses staring at each other! This is one that is actually made more fun (and educational) by how nearly impossible it is to do!

Additional Reflection Questions:

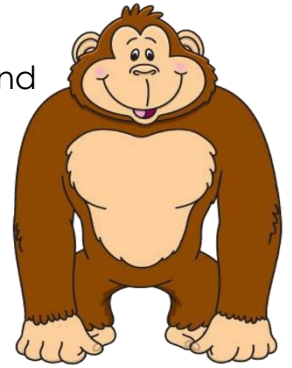
- When do you feel this way at school or home – that you're trying really hard to do the appropriate thing, but someone else is making it hard for you?
- What can you do in those situation when someone's trying to distract you?

The Color Matching Freeze Game – Inside (Materials: Construction paper)

This game is best for a smaller group. Choose 4 colors of construction paper, and tape the same four colors to the floor in a square by each student. Play music and instruct students to dance along. Stop the music, hold up one of the pieces of construction paper, and the students have to sit on the same color on the ground. This is made just a little bit more challenging by varying the configuration of papers around each child.

Ready, Set... Gorilla! – Outside

Students all line up on a starting line. Instructor says "Ready, Set...." and if you say "go" they run towards the finish line. BUT sometimes you will say another word that sounds like "go" OR starts with a "g" ("Gorilla! Crow! Snow! Blow! Grape! Goober!") and the students that make a false start will have to take a penalty step backwards from the starting line. The student who makes it to the finish line first is the King/Queen of Listening!



Shape Shifter – Inside or Outside

Have students get into a certain pattern (ex: line, circle, square, heart) and have them standing next to a certain person. Then, call out a different pattern, and require that the students must stand next to a different person. Repeat this exact sequence several times, then call out the shapes randomly and have them see how quickly they can get into the different shapes in their exact order. Increase the challenge further by going faster and faster, and/or by silently using hand signals for each pattern.

Movement Idol - Inside

Put on some fun music and start to dance. The students have to follow your routine exactly, no matter how wacky. After 30 seconds or so call out a student's name and have that student make up his own dance moves that the rest of the class must follow, and so on until all have had a turn. This can be done competitively, so that you become the "talent judge" and students who aren't following the moves exactly, sit down and become more judges.

Peanut Butter Jelly Game – Inside or Outside (Materials: 2 balls)



Have the children sit on the floor in a large circle. Choose one ball to be the peanut butter and the other ball will be the jelly. The object of the game is to always throw the peanut butter ball and roll the jelly ball. On start, the child holding the peanut butter ball throws it to anyone in the circle, and the child holding the jelly ball rolls it to anyone in the circle. Whoever receives the peanut butter ball must continue to throw it to

someone else, whereas the jelly ball must be rolled. If a player makes a mistake and rolls the peanut butter ball, or throws the jelly ball, then that player is either out of the game or play starts over.

CREDITS

Fonts

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