

# Movement games to increase self-regulation

## What is self-regulation?

Self-regulation allows children to control their emotions, behaviours, thoughts and body movements. It's about managing disruptive emotions and impulses, whilst staying calm and focussed. Emotional regulation is a skill that develops over time. When children develop the skill, they can be flexible when expectations change, they can calm themselves down (self-soothe) when they feel stressed and they can manage frustrating feelings without having an outburst. Managing to do all of these things is a hard task and sometimes, even as adults, we too become overwhelmed and don't quite respond to situations in the way that we would have chosen to if we were feeling regulated.

Scientists have shared a few ways that we can support a child to learn to control impulses, movement games being one of them. Including movement breaks into your daily schedule, where your child/ children can release excess energy and increase body awareness is a great place to start.

Keep reading to see a few of our favourite games alongside some of our top tips for setting up ready to play.



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## A few tips for setting up a safe playing space

**Tip one:** Before playing, ensure that your child/ children clearly understand the rules of the game. Further, ensure that your child/ children understand your boundaries, for example, no running in the house, and what happens if they break that rule. We often find that letting children know "if you choose to break the rules, I will gently let you know twice. If it happens a third time, you are choosing to end the game and that's okay, we will go and get a quick sip of water and a piece of fruit before we move onto the next activity of the day. "

**Tip two:** Some of the games are competitive. It's okay to let your child win, in fact, it can even boost their self-esteem to know they are really good at it. It is also a great opportunity for adults to model losing graciously.



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## Drum Beats

Adults, you are going to create a rhythm on a drum for your child/children to walk around to. Explain to your child/children that they are going to walk slowly to the slow beat and fast to the fast beat. When you make no rhythm they have to try to be still! If you don't have a drum, you can clap, bang a pan or use fast and slow music tracks.

Variation one: once they get the hang of it, ask them to respond to opposite beats. Walk fast to the slow beat and slow to the fast beat. This will also encourage them to focus

Variation two: associate movements to the drum beats (particularly helpful if you are in a small space with no access to a garden). The slow beat means stomp your feet. The fast beat means do jumping jacks.

## Animal walks

These silly walks make exercise fun for little ones, allowing them to be creative and burn off excess energy. There are lots of animals walks to do such as bear walks on all fours, kangaroo jumps as high as you can, penguin waddles, crab walks and donkey kicks putting all of your weight into your arms and shoulders. If you are stuck for ideas, type 'animal walks' into google to get inspiration.

# Movement games to increase self-regulation

## Up, Down, Stomp, Clap

(chair based and indoors!)

When you say

- "up" the children raise their arms in the air
- "down" they put their arms by their sides
- "stomp" they stomp both feet
- "clap" they clap both hands

Variation one: switch the cues! up means down, down means up etc.

## Red light, green light

Create a start line and a finish line. Your child / children (and any other adults joining in) begin on the start line. When you say "green light" everyone moves towards the finish line. When you say "red light" everyone has to stop. If any of the players move when you say "red light" they must go back to the start line. The aim is to be the first to cross the finish line.

Variation one: introduce new colours that represent different movements for example, purple light means crawling, orange light means skip, blue light means gallop.

Variation two: for those playing indoors or in a smaller space. Green light means walk with one foot in front of the other, amber light means slow motion, red light means freeze. If there are three or more children playing and there isn't enough space, designate a child to be the leader and call out the cues.