

ALERT AND ENGAGED

What is the quality “Alert and Engaged”?

Being alert and engaged is the ability to manage and direct one’s own feelings, thoughts and emotions. In general, it is the ability to be ‘present’ and to exercise self-control. For children to optimally learn and grow, they need to be able to have a variety of experiences in which they can really ‘be in the moment’. Being alert and engaged involves the ability to manage your attention and to hold yourself back and control your impulses, especially when you don’t want to.

When scholars and researchers look at this quality they often view it through the lens of self-regulation. Self-regulation is defined as the ability to manage your own energy states (hyper energy, high energy, low energy), emotions, behaviours and attention, in ways that are socially acceptable and help achieve positive goals, such as maintaining good relationships, achieving and maintaining well-being.

What does being alert and engaged look like?

Some of the things children are usually able to do when they are alert and engaged include planning activities, sticking with activities for more than a few moments, listening attentively, working independently, reflecting and evaluating after an activity and thinking before action.

What does it look like when this quality is diminished?

Typical behaviour patterns for children who have challenges with being alert and engaged include difficulty with settling down and a hard time taking turns. A child might demonstrate impulsiveness, distractibility and have difficulty following rules.

Being alert and engaged is a skill and ability that matures over time. This quality develops in each child differently depending on their temperament and on the nature of their interactions with family members, especially throughout the first years of life. Self-regulation improves significantly during the preschool years as children get ready to attend school and to learn in a classroom setting.

Why is it useful/helpful to have this quality?

Successful self-regulation in preschool age children is an indicator of healthy emotional development, and it is a critical foundation for children’s present and future social and emotional development, and academic success. Indeed, teachers and researchers have named self-regulation as the most important aspect for being ready to attend school.



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8 ACTIONS THAT HELP CHILDREN BE ALERT AND ENGAGED

<p>Promote Promote well-being and prevent stress.</p>	<p>Prevention is ALWAYS the best way to promote the quality of alert and engaged. Prevent stress in adults and children with the basics – healthy food, adequate sleep, as well as relationships full of love, attention, listening and respect.</p>
<p>Scaffold Support and deepen moments when children are captivated in their play.</p>	<p>Foundational social and emotional skills are developed during play. Model being alert and engaged, ask questions while the child is trying out a new skill, and when the child approaches mastery, allow him or her to be independent. Since an important aspect of developing these skills is having a constant challenge, it's important to choose games that are demanding but not too hard for each child. As the child players become familiar with these games, try to decrease the adult role as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Self-regulate Understand a child's natural tendencies to self-regulate their stress and energy.</p>	<p>What are the self-regulation strategies that your child is already demonstrating to successfully revv up or revv down energy levels? Try modifying a child's environment to decrease their stress (eg. reduce distractions, provide a "fidget toy," take a stretch break) alongside teaching them how to handle stress better.</p>
<p>Be Active Enhance a child's ability to remain alert and engaged.</p>	<p>Yoga cultivates self-regulation by focusing on controlled movements combined with breathing awareness. Martial arts and other active sports strengthen the brain's activity by improving fitness, requiring sustained attention and using disciplined action. Plus they are social and fun!</p>
<p>Breathe Breathing helps the brain!</p>	<p>There are both physical and psychological benefits from deep, calm breaths. They can slow heart rate, lower blood pressure and sharpen focus. Breathing as part of an intentional strategy to be mindful improves impulse control by giving time and space for a perspective check.</p>
<p>Read There is nothing like a story to engage the heart and still the mind.</p>	<p>Reading books together provides a great opportunity to talk about and identify emotions. Pause along the way and encourage children to predict the characters' emotions and to discuss the vocabulary and any connections the students have. Ask children to share any connections they may have about times when they felt frustrated, embarrassed, excited, etc.</p>
<p>Chunk it up Consider small steps to reach a bigger goal.</p>	<p>Break up big and overwhelming goals into smaller, manageable chunks. When asking children to do a task - consider how you frame the challenge so that they can see and participate in the little successes that build up to a larger achievement.</p>
<p>Expect Adjust your expectations.</p>	<p>It is important to select developmentally appropriate tasks when helping children foster self-control competencies. Even though self-control improves over time, there can be quite some differences in children of the same age. Additionally, the brain regions that are involved in self-control are not fully mature until late adolescence.</p>

