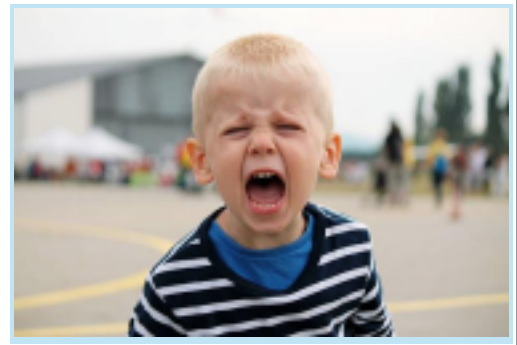


## EY Southwest Stronger Practice Hub blog: Managing Challenging Behaviour.

*Helping young children to regulate their behaviour – Part 2*



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Heidi Price is the CEO for the IDEAL Alliance which includes a primary school, two nursery schools, two PVI daycare provisions & the Early Years Southwest Stronger Practice Hub. Here, she explores how the Alliance has used sensory tools to help children to manage their self-regulation.

**Blog: 4-minute read, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

In my first blog about helping children to self-regulate, I recognised the huge impact that the pandemic has had on many young people's ability to self-regulate their emotions. This is unsurprising as their first few years took place whilst the key adult in their lives was possibly experiencing anxiety and feelings of loss of control. The impact of this on child development is only now being researched and evaluated.

Firstly, please do not feel that you are managing these challenges alone. Many young children who have not been able to socialise and attend nurseries or mother and baby groups during the pandemic still need to develop the characteristics of effective learning related to self-regulation and managing feelings. This is a challenge across the country that we are all working on. It's very important that children experience high quality support so that they can develop these skills before they are ready to begin school. In many areas of the country young children are being put onto part time timetables due to the level of their needs related to behaviour – sometimes for a mere thirty minutes a day. The trouble with this solution is that it doesn't allow the child to learn and develop their skills in managing their behaviour and means they are missing vital education.

## **Personal, Social and emotional Development**

The [EEF Evidence Store](#) describes how important it is for us to explicitly teach children how to manage their feelings through the provocations we provide by scaffolding children's thinking around events that provoke strong feelings. For example, this might involve the practitioner providing a dialogue to share the thinking of the group and model the correct response; 'Sam wants to share the ball, let's have five bounces each!'

## The Sensory Toolkit

Added to this, having a range of sensory tools to meet a child's sensory needs can be very helpful in enabling them to self-regulate their behaviour. [Corinna Lorie](#), a lead occupational therapist, has written a really helpful guide to describe some of the behaviours children with sensory needs might display and what kinds of activities we can provide to help children develop their sensory regulation. There are other guides and helpful suggestions of the [autism aware centre website](#)

Following this guidance, we have created sensory backpacks for each setting and sometimes specifically for each child with these needs. For example, one child who has proprioception needs is encouraged to pull the truck with the bricks in the morning; another who is very tactile is encouraged to use the kinetic sand to help him to regulate. Another child responds well to having the weighted blanket on his shoulders during the story time. Calm meditative music in the background creates a soothing effect and using scents like lavender and jasmine also add to designing the environment. Children who like to put things into their mouths can respond well to the chewy toys that can help avoid the biting other children.

The sensory toolkits have the effect of helping the practitioner to feel they have a choice of activities to support them in the setting too. It has raised their awareness of the children's sensory needs and enabled them to have a better sense of the reasons some behaviours may have developed. We also run a system where practitioners can swap in half hourly with particularly challenging behaviour and have group supervision with a [solution focused therapy](#).

Despite the challenges we face we are fully committed to supporting and helping our children to learn to develop their self-regulation skills as we know that without them, they will be unable to access mainstream primary provision in our school system. Following the pandemic, this is a national crisis for young children and we need to ensure the [ordinarily available provision](#) in nurseries and child minder settings enables self-regulation skills to thrive.

This blog can be found on the Early Years Southwest Stronger Practice website [here](#).