

Helping Parents Support Children's Self-Regulation at Home may be Essential for School Success

Cassandra L. Simons and Susan Sonnenschein, Ph.D.

To succeed academically in kindergarten and beyond, children must be able to pay attention, follow instructions, and ignore distractions. All of these skills require self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to consciously control attentional, emotional, and behavioral impulses in order to meet one's goals or standards (Duckworth & Carlson, 2013). Research shows that parents' home-based practices, such as warmth, routines, and home-reading and mathematics activities are related to children's self-regulation, as well as their reading and mathematics scores (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000; Morrison & Coney, 2002). Much research has examined how parenting may directly influence children's mathematics and reading. But, we do not know whether parenting is related to mathematics and reading because of its direct influence on academics or because parents are helping children to develop self-regulation skills that help them learn more at home and at school.

In order to answer this question we conducted a study using data from a nationally representative study of U.S. kindergarteners (Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort 2011). Based on evidence from past literature, we hypothesized that parents' home-based practices influence children's self-regulation, which in turn, influences children's reading and mathematics scores. We used parent and teacher interview data, as well as children's reading and math scores at the end of kindergarten, to construct variables representing parent's home-based practices, children's self-regulation, and their mathematics and reading outcomes in kindergarten. The home-based practices variable was

composed of parent interview questions regarding parent-reported warmth, family routines, and home reading and mathematics activities. Children's self-regulation was assessed using teacher and parent reports, and mathematics and reading were assessed via computerized testing. Results showed that parents' home-based practices influence children's self-regulation, which in turn, influences children's reading and mathematics scores. In other words, parenting influences children's academic outcomes, in part, through its associations with children's self-regulation skills.

This information is valuable for school psychologists because helping children to develop self-regulation skills, such as being able to sit still and pay attention, may help children succeed in school. The results of this study support previous evidence that parents and caregivers play the primary role in shaping children's early self-regulatory abilities through their daily interactions (Collins et al., 2000; Morrison & Coney, 2002). Thus, in order to help children better manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; we need to inform parents about ways they can foster their children's self-regulation. This study showed that creating consistent routines including regular sleep and wake times, and mealtimes, having a warm parent-child relationship, and engaging in mathematics and reading activities at home are all important aspects of improving both self-regulatory and academic outcomes.

School psychologists should relay this information to teachers and parents in order to help parents understand ways to foster self-regulation at home. However, they should

keep in mind that not all families will feel comfortable using the same parenting strategies. School psychologists can provide literature on what works for specific families and present these practices as options rather than a list of correct practices. Through educating parents, we can increase the family engagement necessary to ensure that children develop the self-regulatory skills they need before entering school. Some recommendations for parents may include:

1. Warm & Responsive Interactions:

When parents are responsive and supportive of children's emotions and actions, children learn that their actions have an effect on the world and that they can come to parents for help with regulating themselves. This fosters self-regulation by helping children internalizing positive coping mechanisms to deal with emotions and impulses.

2. Consistent & Predictable Routines:

Having consistent routines like regular bedtimes and mealtimes helps children adjust to the demands of their environment. It is easier for children to regulate their own thoughts, impulses, and emotions if they know what is coming next and have time to prepare for transitions.

3. Mathematics & Reading Activities:

Practicing skills that require critical thinking may enhance children's cognitive self-regulation. When parents read to children and guide them through mathematics problems at home, they are engaging the same cognitive skills that are needed for self-regulation.

References

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