

Activities to Teach Children Impulse Control

Be Active

Any opportunity children have to be active can help them with impulse control. Not only does exercise boost the brain chemicals that help with impulse control, it also improves concentration, memory and self-control, according to myhealthnewsdaily.com. Ensuring that children are active through organized sports, recess or even just dancing around the living room is an effective way to teaching impulse control.

Memory Games

Scholastic.com reports that memory games help children with impulse control by enhancing memory, which allows the brain's frontal cortex to focus more on impulse control. Play the traditional Memory game in which people take turns flipping two cards up as they try to find matches. Another game for improving memory is what PBS Kids calls "Stare Detective." Every player gets 15 seconds to stare at a tray full of objects, then the tray is covered with a towel. Next players have 20 seconds to write down as many of the objects as they can remember. Whoever has the most correct objects written is the winner.

Control Building Games

Physical self-control is an excellent starting point for teaching mental self-control. Plus, games that involve physical impulse control are more developmentally appropriate for children. The traditional games such as Simon Says and Red Light/Green Light are effective for teaching self-control but may not be so exciting for your elementary school student. So another option is to play, Freeze. With Freeze, children dance to music while the teacher holds up a picture of a stick figure in a certain position. The children are supposed to observe the figure while dancing their own way; it is only when the music stops that they should get into the position. So not only do the work on their self-control by following challenging directions, they also work on memory skills by remembering the position after the music stops and the picture is taken down.

Creative Play

Some researchers, according to a 2008 National Public Radio report, suggest that children today don't learn to self-regulate as well because they spend most of their time in adult-directed activities. Free play with peers used to be when many children learned impulse control, but without that time, children don't develop their executive function skills. So providing the time and the context for free imaginary play is an important activity for teaching impulse control. Children need to make up stories and songs, draft playmates as characters and turn sticks into magic wands.

Playgroup Games

Children can practice inhibitory control by starting and stopping to different cues (oral and visual), performing specific behaviors in response to cues, and performing opposite behaviors:

Red Light/Purple Light

The teacher holds up specific colors to indicate stop and go (ex purple is stop, and orange is go), then switch the colors (ex. orange is stop and purple is go.) Shapes can also represent stop and go (ex. any color circle is stop, and any color square is go.)

The Freeze Game

Children dance when the music is on, and stop when the music stops. They danced slowly to slow songs and quickly to fast songs, alternating between slow and fast songs. Children can then respond to opposite cues: dancing quickly to slow songs and slowly to fast songs.

Color Matching Freeze

Like the Freeze game, children danced when the music started and stopped when the music ended. However, they were asked to perform an additional step before freezing. Teachers taped different-colored paper on the ground. They had to find a specified color and stand on it when the music stopped.

Sleeping, Sleeping, All the Children Are Sleeping

Children pretend to sleep when the teacher sings “Sleeping, sleeping, all the children are sleeping.” While children pretend to sleep, give an additional instruction for the children to wake up and act like a specific animal (e.g. “And when they woke up....they were monkeys!”)

Drum Beats

Children can respond to drum cues with body movements. For instance, they can walk quickly with fast drumming, and slowly with slow drumming, then reverse the cues.

Conducting an Orchestra

Provide the children with instruments (maracas, shakers, etc.) When the teacher waves the baton, the children play the instruments. When the baton stops, they stop playing. They can also practice fast and slow playing in response to the baton....then reverse the cues (e.g. play fast with a slow-moving baton.)

Simon Says

Mirror Movements

Partner Obstacle Course - The children have to go over, under and through obstacles holding a partner's hand. If they let go, they have to start over, or wait for another turn.