

Promoting diversity and inclusion through understandings of Self-Regulation

**Dr Sharon Davies
Child Australia**

**Sarah Thomas
Child Australia**

Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia (Child Australia) is a not for profit organisation dedicated to improving developmental outcomes for children through education, early childhood services, family support and advocacy. Child Australia holds the role of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) provider in Western Australia. Child Australia's vision is to ensure that all children are able to be part of an inclusive environment where their needs are met in all developmental domains.

In early 2014, the majority of requests for support received by Child Australia were related to children with behavioural issues. Educators were responding to children with behavioural challenges by requesting funding to employ additional workers. Often these requests for support were not related to a child with an identified condition. In March 2014, Child Australia conducted a survey aimed to identify the professional development and support needs of Educators employed in early childhood education settings working with children age birth to 12 years. The results of the survey identified the need to assist early childhood educators working with children from birth to age 12, to better understand children's behaviour and respond appropriately (Davies, 2014). Through observations of practice and consultation interviews with education providers Child Australia's Quality Inclusion Consultants, who support Educators in early childhood settings, also recognised this need.

Child Australia developed a strategy to increase educator knowledge of 'Self Regulation'. This required Child Australia to establish a positive attitude in educators towards responding to children's behaviours. 'Self Regulation' is directly linked to behaviour, it involves the ability to respond to and recover from individual stressors, bringing the body and mind back to a calm and alert state (Shanker, 2013). Stressors are an occurrence that triggers a response from the body in the five domains; biological, emotional, cognitive, social and prosocial (Shanker, 2013). Educators can reduce the stressors in a child's environment. This responsive practice then reduces the amount of energy children are expending on regulating their body. This results in more energy being made available to the child. The child can then use this energy to retain attention and focus for the learning experiences they are part of in their education setting, while displaying appropriate behaviours. The more we can reduce the energy spent on regulation – the more learning can happen. The harder a child is working to block out the stressors occurring to help them stay engaged and part of

the interactions, the less energy they have left for learning and managing their own behaviours. This impacts all domains of learning.

The better understanding educators have of the self regulation needs of the child the more effective they can be in adapting the learning environments and programming for them, therefore minimising and appropriately managing apparent behavioural issues. Catering for each child's strengths, abilities and needs then allows for continued learning and development of skills. Self-regulation is the foundation for later skills (Shanker, 2013). To support a child in developing the skills that will allow them to reach a state of calmness and focus, gives them the opportunity to thrive. Educators can prepare children for their later years of education. For Educators to embrace this new understanding, they require the skills to implement incidental and intentional teaching which can be used to develop the self regulation skills of a child.

Understanding and appropriately responding to children's behaviour requires educators to be aware of the different states of arousal that child can be at during the day. These states of arousal range from asleep, drowsy, hypo-alert, calm, alert and focused, hyper-alert through to flooded (see Figure I). The educator aims to help a child to up or down regulate to the calm, alert and focused stated of arousal.

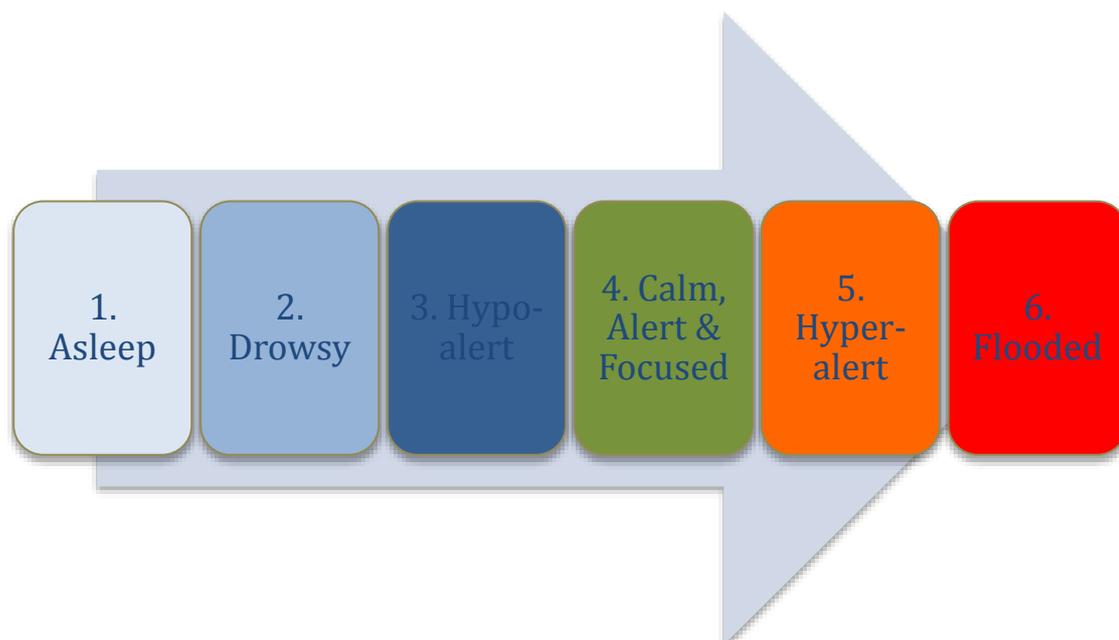


Fig I. States of Arousal (Shanker, 2013).

Educators have the responsibility to:

- Recognise states of arousal in children.
- Support in regulating these states of arousal levels.
- Teach children to understand their states of alertness.
- Teach children to recognise their own states of alertness.
- Progress children towards SELF-regulation. This is where they independently regulate their energy levels.

Developing these skills in children allows them to monitor and moderate their behaviours as needed throughout the day, therefore resulting in reduced behavioural issues. The development of self-regulating skills comes through appropriate modeling, guidance, clear and positive communication and a highly supportive environment.

Educators need to support and guide children to return to a calm and alert state, this begins the development of self-regulation. There is then a gradual progression towards the children being able to recognise their body's responses to stressors and regulating themselves. Self-regulation involves a number of abilities. Some examples of these abilities include:

- 1. Being able to modify your level of energy and state of arousal to suit the activity you are taking part in.** For example, a child being able to adapt their energy and arousal levels to suit the activity. This may be from the high end arousal state needed for running outside, shifting to the calmer arousal state needed to move inside to sit and eat a meal.
- 2. Effective management of emotions.** For example, a child being able to calm themselves down after something has upset them and move forward after this emotion. Children can be supported to develop their ability to communicate and appropriately express their emotions to suit the environment they are in.
- 3. Being able to maintain attention to complete what is required of them.** For example, children focusing on the task at hand and then being able to move this attention to the next set task when the time arises.
- 4. To be able to participate in a range of different social interactions.** For example, using appropriate interactions within a conversation with a peer, being both a listener and a speaker. Children can be supported to develop problem-solving skills that allow them to deal effectively with issues that arise.
- 5. To show empathy.** For example, children develop an awareness of others around them. Appropriate actions can be learnt which allow children to respond to and comfort others when they show particular emotions.

(Shanker, 2013).

When these above skills combine, they provide an *optimal state of alertness*. Children are calm and ready for learning. By being in this state, children have an improved opportunity to become confident and active learners. This optimal state also enables learnt skills to be used to demonstrate developmentally appropriate behaviours. A child's mind is able to think rationally when they are calm. In this calm state they are able to demonstrate learnt skills and understandings. This helps them deal with events occurring and learning taking place. The ability to self-regulate allows children to engage and build relationships with their peers. Self-regulation also allows them to interact effectively with their environment, ready for learning. With support in developing the ability to self-regulate, children are then left with

more energy that can then be used to actively construct their own understandings and contribute to other's learning using appropriate behaviours.

The activities to develop these understandings about Self Regulation involve the training of three groups; Child Australia Staff, Educators across a range of services and families from these services. Training practices include a series of professional development opportunities. These incorporate face-to-face workshops, which are designed specifically for different educational settings, together with online learning courses. National conference presentations are also a key part of the approach ensuring that educators from across Australia are able to gain understanding in the area of Self Regulation. Child Australia staff are engaged in ongoing professional development to review and reflect on current consultancy practices, aiming for an overarching approach to support given to services, building knowledge and skills to cater for every child through inclusive environments.

The Australian representative for The Mehrit Centre (TMC) has reviewed Child Australia's Self Regulation online course. The 6-week course is specifically designed to raise awareness and understandings in the area of Self Regulation for educators working with children in the Early Development sector. The learners are guided through the content by a trained tutor, supporting growth of understandings and developing individual child-centred strategies.

A detailed training schedule has been developed to monitor and progress the understandings of Self Regulation and the impact this changed approach is making in the Early Childhood sector. The training schedule involves the delivery of training to Child Australia Staff, Educators and progressing to the inclusion of families of the children in the education settings.

Establishing a framework for Child Australia Staff to deliver information and guidance to individual educators and whole services was essential. This framework aimed to address the needs of educators through supporting their development of knowledge in the area of Self Regulation. The first step taken was to train the Quality Inclusion Consultants and the Professional Learning Facilitators at Child Australia. The Quality Inclusion Consultant staffing group liaises directly with the Educators and services in a consultancy capacity. The Professional Learning Facilitators deliver small and large group professional development sessions at both a state and national level. Through training these groups of staff on how they can change their practices to include the understandings of Self Regulation they are able to provide specific one to one support within their interactions with educators and whole services.

At a National level, conference presentations which link Self Regulation to a range of sub strands have been developed. Links have been made to the importance of play, children with special needs, mental health, transitions to future education settings as well as adult self regulation.

In Western Australia, Child Australia has online courses, face-to-face workshops and conference keynotes and breakout sessions. These cater for educators from Long Daycare, Family Daycare, Out of School Hours Care, Pre-Kindy as well as school based services. Delivery is to large and small groups depending on the needs of the Educators.

The inclusion of family based workshops is within Child Australia's overall community based approach. Sharing insights and perspectives about each child will enable families to support the development of self regulation in their children. Educators are supported to value the knowledge families have about their child and engage in decision-making with them. Families can contribute valuable information about their child, supporting their development of self regulation skills, ensuring that learning experiences are meaningful (EYLF, 2009).

Child Australia's overall objectives are to provide knowledge in the area of Self Regulation, improve abilities of educators to support children in their development, promote this understanding at a National Level and to continue developing courses based on the ongoing needs of the educators and services in the Early Childhood sector. The child is the centre of this model, which has been developed around the need to cater for their individual needs.

For an effective change to take place in the practices of staff within Child Australia, as well as the practices of the Educators who are supported by the organisation, a clear definition of change management was needed. When defining what is change management there are a number of models available for review. Basic frameworks such as the ADKAR model, Kotter's 8 stage Model for Change Management and Kaizen's Change Management – PDCA Model can be adapted to suit the organisation depending on the culture, pressures and reasons for change (Asiya Zenab Kazmi & Naarananoja, 2014). Considerations of the people the changes impact must be made when designing an appropriate approach.

The KAIZEN change management model involves the implementation of small changes over time until the changes are simply part of the daily practices with a focus on practice rather than outcome (Asiya Zenab Kazmi & Naarananoja, 2014). The change environment must be one where people are enthusiastic about identifying areas of improvement and a team approach is taken to make these (Asiya Zenab Kazmi & Naarananoja, 2014).

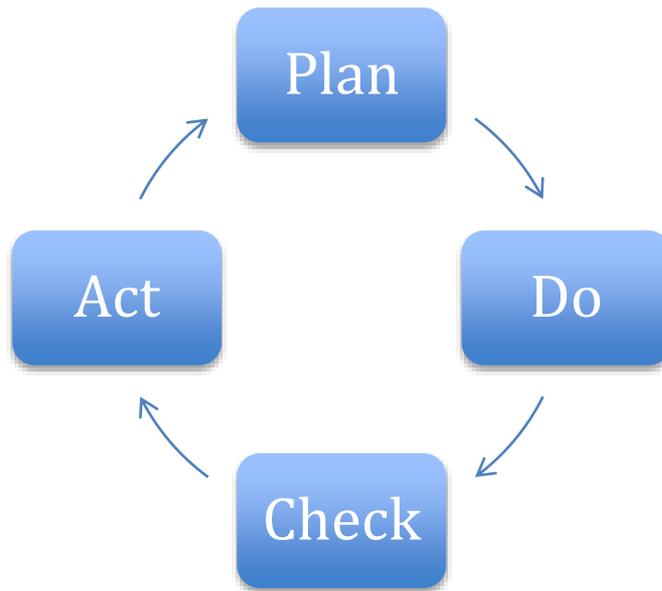


Fig II. KAIZEN Change Management – PDCA Model

The ADKAR model name is an acronym for:

A – Awareness – making employees aware of the need for change

D – Desire – creating the desire in the employees to change

K – Knowledge – supporting employees with the required knowledge base

A – Ability – enhancing employee’s skill level

R – Reinforcement – rewarding employees for displaying required behaviour so it may last longer

(Asiya Zenab Kazmi & Naarananoja, 2014; Hiatt, 2006).

The order of the ADKAR elements falls into the natural progression of how a person experiences change as one element can only occur after it’s previous element has been experienced (Hiatt, 2006). Desire cannot be built without an awareness of the need to change, just as ability and knowledge are not developed without the desire to learn this.



Fig III. ADKAR Model

Kotter's Model for Change Management involves 8 stages to assist in managing disruptive change (Asiya Zenab Kazmi & Naarananoja, 2014). The stages include:

1. Instill a Sense of Urgency (IASOU)
2. Build a Guiding Coalition (BAGC)
3. Create a Vision and Supporting Strategies (CAVASS)
4. Communicate (C)
5. Remove Obstacles (RO)
6. Create Some Quick Wins (CSQW)
7. Keep On Changing (KOC)
8. Make Change Stick (MCS)

There are similarities and differences between each of these models as well as ways in which they can be adapted to the educational sector, specifically the community-based approach Child Australia has implemented to develop understandings of Self Regulation. The building of the understanding of the need for change is included in the ADKAR's Awareness and Desire steps as well as Kotter's stage of Instill a Sense of Urgency (IASOU).

The concept of continued growth after the initial change takes place can be seen in the ADKAR's Reinforcement step as well as Kotter's stage of Keep On Changing (KOC). The cyclic nature of the KAIZEN Change Management – PDCA Model infers that development is continual and does not have an end point.

The stage of Change Approach for quality improvement in early education is a research-based framework, drawing on the Transtheoretical Model and Motivational Interviewing, for recognizing and responding to early childhood educators' readiness to change their attitudes with young children. Child Australia chose this Stage of Change Approach because it increases the effectiveness of early childhood change initiatives by providing people in the early stages of change with the necessary supports to increase *awareness, internal motivation, self-efficacy, and commitment to change* (Peterson & Cairns, 2012).

Building the awareness and desire to change is crucial to a change management approach in the education sector. Educators come to the profession with a pedagogy that drives their practice. The change management team at Child Australia undertook strategies that formed a desire in the educators to want to implement the changes needed. Child Australia's Quality Inclusion Consultants and Professional Learning Facilitators engage in interactions with individual educators and services. These facilitator roles involve building the awareness and desire to change in these key stakeholders. The awareness of the need to change needed to be built using a non-confrontational approach. Through reflections on current practices, survey data and observations, all groups can identify areas of possible improvement. Being guided through this reflective practice builds ownership of the awareness and desire to engage in change.

Child Australia's impact indicator includes a reduction in requests for funding for children with behavioural issues as well as an increased awareness in understanding

of Self Regulation seen in consultancy interviews held between the Quality Inclusion Consultants and educators. Process indicators include more requests for Self Regulation professional development services and an increased number of attendees at these.

As a result of the community-based approach to these changes in practices, Child Australia has seen an increased understanding in Educator knowledge of Self Regulation. Educators have been proactive in taking knowledge and understandings back to their services from the professional development sessions. Specific service and educator based goals are being set in liaison with the Quality Inclusion Consultants and Professional Learning Facilitators, which are changing practices to become more inclusive of the individual needs of the children in the Early Childhood sector. Funding allocations for children with behavioural issues has lowered with a reduction in requests related to behavioural issues. Rather than responding to these behavioural issues with an additional staff member, educators are instead responding by understanding where these behaviours stem from.

Through recognising the need to change practices based on the collected data and evidence, Child Australia has implemented an effective community-based approach to changing understandings about behaviour through the development of Self Regulation knowledge and practices. Child Australia has increased Educator knowledge about 'Self Regulation', as well as decreased requests for funding related to children experiencing behavioural issues, through establishing a positive attitude towards responding to children's behaviours. Educators are more able to recognise children's behaviours and respond appropriately. The research and community-based approach developed by Child Australia advocates for children's individual needs, highlighting the importance of Early Childhood Development practices.

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