

Self-Reg Strategies in the 5 Domains

Below are strategies for improving self-regulation in each of the 5 Domains of Shanker Self-Reg®. Identify the strategies in each domain that you are already doing, and all the strategies that you can improve on or try for the first time. Of this list, start by picking one or two in each domain to work on this week. Every week after that, select another one or two strategies to work on, until you have accomplished the whole list.

Biological Domain

- Declutter, declutter, declutter.
- Do a **spring cleaning** and bring in tricks of the “home-makeover” world: use bins to tuck away, sheets to conceal the bins, etc.
- Conduct a ‘**visual noise**’ scan of classroom. Look for bright colors, busy walls, busy carpets, more clutter that you missed.
- Consider every item on **the wall**: why is it there, who uses it, and how?
- Ensure all content intended for learners is at their **eye level**.
- Clear away** the content in the upper part of the wall in a classroom.
- Remove hanging items** from ceilings.
- Replace laminated posters with **content co-created with students**.
- Change harsh **lighting** to natural lighting options where possible.
- Identify other **elements of distraction** (from yourself as a teacher): such as scents, sparkly and dangly jewelry, visually distracting clothes, where you stand when you talk.
- Replace laminated posters with **content co-created with students**.
- Do a **noise audit**. What are the “background” noises or brain alarm triggering noises, and can they be removed, replaced, or minimized. Think of bells, humming electrical equipment, squeaky chairs, student’s voices.
- Observe your own **voice** and how you use it.
- Have **earbuds and noise reducing headphones** available.
- Bring nature into your space**. Plants, rocks, sticks, foliage – if it’s from nature you really can’t go wrong.
- Use **natural colors** in your classroom. Choose and use the primary colors, especially yellow, very carefully – it goes where you want their attention to go.
- Have a **variety of seating** options and allow students to choose what fits them best.
- Consider non-limbic alarm triggering **transition sound** sources like rain sticks.
- Set up a **hydration station** and plan and, if accessible, a **healthy snack program**.
- Create “**micro-environments**” so students can pick-and-choose, move from one to another as needs require. Include areas with regulating materials like: rocking chairs, beanbag chairs, bins of sensory materials, silent bikes, camps couches.

Emotion Domain

- Adopt a **“Self-Reg First” philosophy**. We all want to get on to the curriculum: prioritize having “learning brain” on and a student that is calm, focused, and alert first.
- Recognize that Self-Reg in the emotion domain is **infused** throughout the school day: in the everyday routines; through relationships; problems that emerge, are worked through, and resolved; and, the growth that happens over time.
- Use a preventative model wherever possible with your support team. Think **upstream** (preventative) vs. downstream (crisis).
- In your predictable routines include consideration for **transition time**.
- Take students outside** whenever you can.
- Scan your classroom** for the ‘Self-Reg friendly’ places student’s can choose to go.
- Create a **microenvironment plan** for your classroom that moves beyond the general whole class “rethink” suggested in the bio domain strategies and considers individual needs.
- Apply a “necessary for some, good for all” as a strategy to guide the planning for your space to support the Self-Reg needs of students processing strong emotions:
 - **Squirrel-away areas; caves, cubbies**
 - **Tents, tipis,**
 - **Provide materials for camp-building**
 - **Weighted items like blankets, rice-filled socks**
 - **Have the whole class make personal pillows or weighted snakes**
 - **Knitting zone, puzzle area, personal “stuffies” zone for younger children**
- Consider the expectations around the use of microenvironments**. Does the student have the option to self-select when to use a microenvironment and for how long?
- Build all students’ awareness of the **Physical/Emotion Nexus**: help the students become aware of the connection between their physical state and the emotions they experience.
- Teach students that **tears are “cortisol cleansers”** and serve a purpose.
- Amplify experiences of **positive emotions**.
- Nurture a “positive bias”**.
- Allow **“space” for the emotions** – whatever they are. If our model was self-control we would expect students to suppress strong emotions or move through them quickly, but it’s Self-Reg and so we know that even if they want to they can’t just suppress.
- Allow **Face-timing with caregiver** as needed. Check in on your belief systems around this practice and a student’s Self-Reg needs – these beliefs are as crucial to it’s success as the strategy itself.
- Have parents, grandparents or siblings make **personal video clips**, write letters or make pictures that students can “visit” for comfort when needed.
- Watch for the signs of where students naturally go** when given the opportunity to choose, look for the Self-Reg within that choice.
- Allow choice to opt out** if you use whole class calming strategies. Many of these are actually exacerbating the dysregulation in students. To each what they need. Students who are always moving, need to move. That’s how they self-regulate.

- Test out all strategies** with individual students to find ones that work (each student is unique), e.g. 1-2-10 (1 awareness, 2 deep breaths, count to 10) or certain microenvironments. Ideally each student wants to figure out a “bag” of strategies that help them come back to being calm, alert, and focused.
- Start a **personal Self-Reg journal** and document your own Self-Reg, energy and tension, and/or experiences of Stressors in the 5 domains throughout the school day.

Cognitive Domain

- Use **predictable routines** and schedules that are consistent, not ever-changing, yet also with novelty – the “new”—every day.
- Co-create **visual schedules** and routines with students.
- Wherever you can, allow for learning to flow for **longer blocks of time** and without interrupters.
- Build **movement** breaks into your learning day, not just for the physical health activity, but also to support Self-Reg in the cognitive domain.
- Move the classroom outdoors, into the community, and in **authentic environments**.
- Do **meaningful work** – meaningful to the students.
- Play**, no matter the age, stage or grade: play and learning are interconnected.
- Tell **stories**, listen to stories, look for the story within the learning.
- Nurture interests**. Whenever you can bring the curriculum in to what the students’ are already deeply interested in.
- Use **flexible grouping**, allow for different choices of grouping including working on own. Make that choice a safe one.
- Use multi-modal approaches to **bootstrap** a “weaker” pattern recognition sense with a stronger one (e.g., number with tactile).
- Use questioning to **make the learning visible** and “see” inside a student or group of students’ thinking.
- Learn to **recognize the shift from “learning brain” to “survival brain”**: Students shift to “survival brain” when they don’t understand what they are experiencing, why people are acting the way they are, or when there’s just too much for them to take in.
- Remember **“boring” and “bored”** are actually stress responses. The stressors can be coming from the cognitive domain. When you see or hear “bored” ask yourself why and why now and look for the hidden stressors.
- Allow for lots of **practice** to aid cognition.
- Design learning for the multiple brain pathways**.
- Elaborate, expand, build on** whatever it is you are learning
- Look for multiple sources of evidence of learning**.
- Learn about working memory** and it’s connection to anxiety, stress, and thus Self-Reg.
- Recognize that part of what makes a cognitive task difficult is **ignoring (or filtering)** distracting information, from our perceptual system, but also our memory. This can make even simple cognitive tasks more difficult and leads to errors.

Social Domain

- The practice of Self-Reg in the social domain is infused throughout the school day:
 - In the everyday routines; through relationships; problems that emerge, are worked through, and resolved.
- Model respectful dialogue even in challenging situations where another is not showing respect.
 - Think 'out loud' where possible/appropriate to describe your inner dialogue (during or afterwards).
- Normalize ruptures in relationships between students. Friends, even adult friends, have disagreements.
- Apologize when you notice in retrospect that you would respond differently.
- Intentionally-design activities and experiences that promote relationship building**, starting simple (to keep it "safe), with, e.g. a bridge-building or balloon tower challenge.
- Frame 'success' as meeting the challenge, not a race or competition.
- Invite **adults into your classroom LOTS**
 - parents, community members, principal, other teachers, assistants, custodian) during student working time (play centers, inquiry or collaborative project work etc.).
 - If needed, provide adult(s) with a few questions (open ended) and have them circulate asking these questions.
 - Teach the students in advance how to introduce themselves.
 - Model for the students how to engage with the adults in two-way conversation
- Use circles for problem solving class challenges** that emerge or just as a general settling practice.
- During class circles / meetings pass the rock or "talking" stick.**
 - Allow 'passing' (not forcing a response) as an option (goes to safety) as the rock moves around the circle.
 - Begin with 'safe' questions that everyone can answer such as: What is your favorite color or animal? Or for older students, maybe your favorite band for example.
 - Frame hearing the same answer more than once as celebration of something in common.
- Play drama games such as mirror opposites (in partners).**
 - Assign the leads (say: *A's put up your hands, you lead first and then B's follow*) Then vice versa.
 - Then, when you see they are ready encourage students to move the leadership of the mirror back and forth –without words).
- Play 'vote with your feet' games such as four corners:**
 - For example: Today's four corners is the season you were born – winter front left etc. or favorite ice cream and name four.
 - Allow the groups once they vote 'with their feet' to connect around whatever is common to the corner they chose.
- Include a dramatic play center or zone** (not just for little ones)
- Create classroom products that everyone contributes to:**

- Class books with collections of poetry, stories, art...
- Math word problems with all the students in the class included,
- I wonder questions
- Collections of lyrics to favorite songs. favourite family recipes book
- Travel log of a “Class Creature” or Special Book
- Anything that can collectively feel celebrated.
- Ensure that those who need scaffolding have it.
- Create a **parent “cafe” event** as one of the parent visits to the classroom.
 - Design together the classroom to look like a café
 - Design the menus, create the food and drinks
 - Provide the service.
- **Take field trips to a variety of settings with different social expectations.**
 - Recognize the stressors
 - new unknown context
 - sense that others know the rules and you don't
 - hyperarousal from the ‘excitement’ and the drain on energy that results in HT/LE

Prosocial Domain

- Design your environment with **student belonging** in mind. Ask, what more can I do to have each and every student know/feel:
 - *I am invited in;*
 - *I am welcome here;*
 - *I have a place;*
 - *I fit;*
 - *This is my space too;*
 - *I am not a tourist or temporary here;*
 - *My family is welcomed;*
- Create a **family feeling** in your classroom.
 - No family is perfect, but everyone belongs.
 - Take a picture of the whole class and print a large version of it to put on the door of the classroom.
 - If the students’ have cubbies or spaces for their things mark these with a name and picture.
 - Have student created materials and designed spaces in the classroom to communicate this is “our” space.
- **Build, build, build relationships** with children, families and communities.
 - Where the feeling of healthy relationship building is not yet reciprocated, be kind, be patient and be available when the door opens for more.
- Bring in **debates** in the older grades. Start to slowly and gradually release the responsibility.
 - The ‘me-we-you’ model can help scaffold it.

- “Me” teachers debate and/or watch debates on the web.
- “We” – teacher led with students, then when ready:
- “You” – Student-led.
- Celebrate diversity of perspectives and the debating skills of thinking critically, challenging others’ ideas, yet always respectfully.
- Honor the non-debaters, there are many roles to play in a debate. One student can write a news article from the debate, another moderate the debate, others play the roles of reporters, artists, researchers.

Explore community issues:

- Whole class role dramas exploring complex social issues that affect the local community, such as the proposal of a new shopping plaza or a pipeline in the community.
- Research a current news item from different perspectives, analyze the news coverage of it from different magazines, papers, broadcasters and compare and contrast the differences.

Do something meaningful and positive **for your community:**

- Plan “we” oriented activism with the students around issues they care about.
- Start a school-community garden.
- Become involved in community-driven initiatives
- Start events like *Pay-it-Forward* and *Random Acts of Kindness*.

Care for animals or plants.

Use age appropriate literature to **explore identities:** self and others.

Explore hero figures in their complexity – and humanness (imperfections included).

Allow for the discomfort of students “not knowing” an answer (their discomfort, but also yours in the prosocial domain).