



12–36 Months

Self-Regulation: Self-Control, Concentration, Executive Function

WHEN INTRODUCED: Block 1

BEHAVIORS TO OBSERVE

- Self-control
 - Shows a sign(s) of calming down¹ with caregiver support²
- Concentration
 - Pays attention to caregiver requests
 - Pays attention to how objects or pictures are the same or different
- Executive function
 - Shifts focus as requested during an activity
 - Focuses on an object and remembers its location

EXAMPLES OF OBSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

This *Guide* uses 12–24 months and 24–36 months age designations in relation to when specific types of emerging skills often can be observed. The age parameters are not firm; the timing of developmental pathways and milestones varies considerably across children.

Behaviors may be observed during a care routine, playtime, or guided activity. Pertinent ELM activities (Self-Regulation) are cited in parentheses. The activities pertain to the age group indicated in the example. Examples without an age identification pertain to any age of toddler (12–36 months).

Self-control

Shows a sign(s) of calming down with caregiver support³

- after exciting/stimulating participation in a playtime activity
- 12–24 months: after engaging in an exciting/stimulating activity with a caregiver
 - a rhyme with hand motions (Block 2, Options 1–3) or a song with arm/body movements (Block 14, Options 1 and 2)
 - manipulating a sound-making object, such as a bell (Block 5, Options 1–3) or xylophone (Block 17, Options 1 and 2)



- 24–36 months: after participating in a guided self-control activity
 - breathing deeply and slowly (Block 2, Options 2 and 3; Block 5, Options 2 and 3)
 - a yoga pose (Block 11, Options 2 and 3; Block 14, Options 2 and 3)
 - pretending to be a cornstalk (Block 17, Options 2 and 3) or tree (Block 22, Options 2 and 3) moving in the wind, or seaweed moving in water (Block 20, Options 2 and 3)

Concentration

Pays attention to caregiver requests

- 12–24 months: while practicing go and stop requests, such as making a toy fish swim and then stop (Block 1, Options 2 and 3) or “driving” and then stopping a toy car (Block 13, Option 1)
- 24–36 months: while practicing actions described in a song, such as “Wheels on the Bus” (Block 1, Options 2 and 3) or “Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, Turn Around” (Block 13, Option 2)

Pays attention to how objects or pictures are the same or different

- 12–24 months: finding items that are the same (Block 4, Options 1–3), including the same color (Block 25, Options 1 and 2)
- 24–36 months: looking at and/or putting together two picture cards that are the same (Block 4, Option 1); exploring how two randomly-selected picture cards are the same or different (Block 4, Options 2 and 3)

Executive function

Shifts focus as requested during an activity

- 12–24 months: practices how to freeze body when music stops (Block 9, Options 2 and 3); stops moving body, relaxes arms, and lowers head when music stops (Block 18, Option 2)
- 24–36 months: moves and freezes body as music plays and stops (Block 9, Options 2 and 3); pretends to sleep and “wake up” as an animal named by a caregiver (Block 24, Option 2)

Focuses on an object and remembers its location

- 12–24 months: watches and remembers the location of a hopping toy rabbit (Block 3, Options 1–3); watches and remembers the location of a moving toy car (Block 12, Option 1)
- 24–36 months: looks closely at puzzle pieces, including putting together a puzzle (Block 6, Options 1–3; Block 15, Option 2); watches and remembers the location of a hopping toy frog (Block 3, Options 1 and 2)



EXAMPLES OF FOLLOW-UP LEARNING SUPPORTS

Reintroduce

Self-control

Shows a sign(s) of calming down with caregiver support

- 12–24 months: Repeat Block 2. Offer a demonstration (Option 1) or combine a demonstration and practice opportunity (Options 1 and 2). Offer Block 8 as a one-to-one experience rather than as an informal gathering as suggested in the activity plan.
- 24–36 months: Offer an activity focused on slow and deep breathing, such as Block 5, as a one-to-one experience rather than an informal gathering. Offer a small toy that is of interest to the toddler for placing on his/her tummy during the activity. Also, offer a mindfulness activity, such as Block 17 or 20, as a one-to-one activity.

Concentration

Pays attention to caregiver requests

- 12–24 months: Offer Block 1 or 7 as a one-to-one experience. Provide time for exploratory play with the object (fish or toy frog) prior to engaging the toddler in manipulating the toy. Describe and then use a short phrase, such as “time to eat” or “getting hungry,” that indicates it is time to stop moving the toy. Use a toy of interest to the toddler if the suggested item has limited appeal.
- 24–36 months: Offer Block 1 as a one-to-one experience. Unpack the song’s actions by focusing on 1–3 actions only. Engage the toddler in making each targeted action, such as “round and round,” while you demonstrate and sing or say the pertinent part of the song several times.

Pays attention to how objects or pictures are the same or different

- 12–24 months: Adapt Block 4, Option 1 or 2 by using two rather than the suggested four pairs of identical items. Emphasize characteristics of each item as you encourage the toddler to hold or feel the item. Introduce a third and/or fourth pair of identical items if the toddler readily identifies the same toy in a first or second round.
- 24–36 months: Adapt Block 4, Option 1 by using a smaller number of picture card pairs than the six pairs (12 cards) suggested in the activity description. Offer paired pictures of animals of interest to the toddler. Avoid offering both cat and dog cards because the animals are lying in similar positions.



Executive function

Shifts focus as requested during an activity

- 12–24 months: Offer Block 9, Options 1 and 2 as one-to-one experiences. You may wish to combine the demonstration (Option 1) and practice (Option 2) activities if the toddler readily freezes his/her body upon request.
- 24–36 months: Offer Block 9, Option 2 as a one-to-one experience. Engage the toddler in a simple action of his/her interest, such as walking in a circle or along a path, that enables the toddler to focus more on the cue (music stops) than the action. Dancing, as suggested in the activity description, may distract or overstimulate some toddlers.

Focuses on an object and remembers its location

- 12–24 months: Repeat Block 3, Option 1 while watching the toddler's gaze. Pause in having the rabbit hop if the toddler looks elsewhere; resume the hopping when the toddler is again looking at the toy held in your fingers. Encourage the toddler to lift the basket where the rabbit is hiding.
- 24–36 months: Offer Block 3, Option 1 as a one-to-one activity.

Reinforce

Self-control

Shows a sign(s) of calming down with caregiver support

- 12–24 months: Invite the toddler to take part in an activity in a small gathering that includes moving hands (Block 8, Options 1–3) and/or arms (Block 20, Options 1 and 2) to a familiar rhyme or song. At the end of the activity remind the toddler of actions to take to transition to a calmer state. Encourage the toddler to practice calming down by watching a caregiver or peer that is putting his/her hands in his/her lap and/or relaxing his/her arms.
- 24–36 months: Demonstrate slow and deep breathing and invite a toddler to say what you are doing. After engaging in an active playtime or care routine with the toddler, review ways to calm down in Block 18, Option 1 and deep and slow breathing in Block 18, Option 2.
- 24–36 months: Repeat a yoga pose activity such as tree (Block 8, Options 2 and 3), then extend by encouraging the toddler to pretend to be a tree moving in the wind (Block 22, Options 2 and 3; Block 25, Options 2 and 3).



Concentration

Pays attention to caregiver requests

- 12–24 months: Adapt Block 7, Option 2 for an individual toddler. Introduce and explain the words you will offer for hiding the hopping frog, such as “time to hide!” Incorporate word use by inviting the toddler to say “hop” or “up” and “down” with you as he/she helps the toy frog hop. Encourage the toddler to repeat “time to hide” after you offer the request. Offer a similar approach with Block 19.
- 24–36 months: Adapt the approach of Block 7 by using a different nursery rhyme that includes actions, such as “Itsy Bitsy Spider.” Also, consider constructing a road with blocks or play mats and provide the toddler with a toy vehicle of his/her choice. Say “go” and “stop” as the toddler moves his/her toy vehicle along the road.
- Offer a sound-making object that is appropriate for the toddler’s fine motor skill, such as a rattle for a younger toddler and a rain stick for an older toddler. Encourage the toddler to listen to and follow your requests to move the object slower, faster, and to a stop. The stop request could involve the toddler putting the object in his/her lap.

Pays attention to how objects or pictures are the same or different

- 12–24 months: Adapt Block 15, Option 1 by offering the puzzle with the pieces removed from the puzzle board. Point to and describe the pictures on the puzzle board. Then show and describe each puzzle piece while the toddler holds the piece. Encourage the toddler to find the place on the puzzle where the piece goes.
- 24–36 months: Take pictures of 2–4 small familiar objects in your room. Invite the toddler to match the picture and actual object.

Executive function

Shifts focus as requested during an activity

- 12–24 months: Support a toddler’s understanding and use of the word “freeze” by offering an adaptation of Block 9, Option 1 without music. Invite the toddler to say “freeze” when you stop dancing or moving your body. After several rounds, add a little challenge by inviting the toddler to say “freeze” when he/she wishes for you to stop moving your body. Then transition into Option 2 with music.
- 24–36 months: Offer a simple game of *Simon Says*, with a focus on actions (point to, put hands on) and body parts (head, nose, knees) that are familiar to the toddler. Demonstrate each request.



Focuses on an object and remembers its location

- 12–24 months: Offer Block 3, Option 2 or 3 with three identical baskets (hiding places). Offer Block 12, Option 1 as a one-to-one experience with three boxes (garages).
- 24–36 months: Offer Block 3, Option 2 or 3 with three different types of baskets (hiding places). Offer Block 12, Option 1 as a one-to-one activity with three different types of boxes (garages) stacked on top of each other.

EXAMPLES OF PORTFOLIO ENTRIES

Twice this week I have played a simple memory game with Campbell. I help a toy rabbit hop around and then hide under one of two baskets while Campbell watches. The first time Campbell picked a basket where the rabbit was not hiding. But the second time we played the game, Campbell remembered where the rabbit was hiding. The rabbit hopped and then hid three times. Each time, Campbell remembered where the rabbit was hiding. I will continue to help Campbell strengthen her short-term memory skills by offering other types of memory games.

We are helping children in our room learn how to breathe slowly and deeply as a way to calm their bodies and minds. Trevor is responding well to the breathing practices we offer on a regular basis. He looks straight ahead or sometimes closes his eyes. He follows my requests for breathing in and breathing out. Sometimes he puts his hands in his lap. I will continue to offer Trevor support for gaining good self-control.

Endnotes

- 1 Signs of calming down include: (1) breathing slower; (2) relaxing muscles; (3) briefly closing eyes; (4) reducing the frequency or amount of body movements, such as putting hands in lap; and (5) reducing the frequency and/or volume of excited sounds and talk.
- 2 Caregiver support for a 12 to 24-month-old toddler may include a demonstration or verbal description of the signs of calming down listed in Endnote 1 plus patting or rubbing the toddler's back, holding the toddler, humming or quietly singing a calming song, or using a soothing voice to tell the toddler it is time to calm down. In addition to offering these types of supports, a caregiver may offer a 24 to 36-month-old toddler a demonstration and verbal guidance for breathing deeply and slowly, a yoga pose, or a mindfulness activity, such as pretending to be a cornstalk moving in the wind.
- 3 Toddlers are not expected to calm down on their own.