Co-Regulation in Practice

STRATEGIES FOR PRACTITIONERS WHO SERVE YOUTH AGED 14-24:

WELCOMING

Self-Regulation is a central ingredient in lifelong success, predicting healthy relationships, economic self-sufficiency, and physical and emotional well-being. Adolescence involves rapid change in youths' brains and bodies, and is therefore an important time to foster self-regulation development. Adults play a significant role in this development.

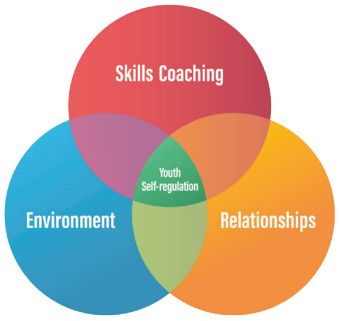
Adults can enhance youth self-regulation by providing **co-regulation** support. Through co-regulation, adults form relationships where youth feel cared for and known; co-create safe and nuturing environments; and give youth opportunities to practice self-regulation skills and reflect on how to apply them in their lives.

Self-regulation
/self reg je' lei sh(a)n/ noun
the act of managing thoughts and feelings to enable goal-directed behavior. Examples include calling a time out in an argument for the good of the relationship, or avoiding an impulse purchase to save money for something of greater value to you in the future.

Co-regulation
/co reg je' lei sh(a)n/ noun
the supportive process between adults and youth that integrates three key types of support: 1) providing warm, responsive relationships, 2) creating supportive environments, and 3) coaching and modeling self-regulation skills.

Practitioners can use strategies like the one in this handout to provide co-regulation support for youth.

Co-Regulation



The complete Co-Regulation in Practice Series offers six strategies to foster self-regulation, each targeting one part of Co-Regulation.

- **Relationship Strategies** — Welcoming, Positive Praise
- **Environment Strategies** — Group Agreement, Rest and Return
- **Self-Regulation Skills** — Breath to Refocus, Take Note

WELCOMING

Youth are highly attuned to relationships, social cues, and the emotional expressions of others. During adolescence, youth are especially aware of how others perceive them and whether or not they belong. It is important for practitioners to understand these normal developmental experiences, and to foster inclusion and acceptance. In youth-serving programs, performance or programmatic benchmarks can sometimes shift the focus away from the socio-emotional needs of youth. Additionally, keeping up with paperwork and materials may distract us from thoughtfully checking in with participants, or we may unintentionally interact more with some youth than others. The welcoming strategy brings us back to simple, yet meaningful ways to build authentic relationships with youth through warm, responsive engagement practices that communicate caring and help youth feel known.

The Strategy:

This welcoming strategy involves three parts.

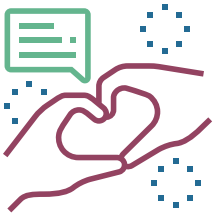
We expect regular use of these approaches will promote positive relationships between participants and practitioners, enhance workshop climate, improve student motivation, and model the use of prosocial interpersonal skills.

1 SHEET

Youth complete a worksheet that helps them feel known.

2 GREET

Warmly welcome each youth to create a sense of belonging.



3 MEET

Connect with youth, and follow up to form an authentic, responsive connection.

Before you begin:

- Prepare for your lesson in advance so you can free up the time at the beginning of the workshops, during breaks, and in individual activities to connect with participants one-on-one.
- Keep a list of the participants in your cohort so you can track your efforts and be sure you are connecting with everyone in the program, not just the easy-to-reach or extroverted participants.
- Arrive early enough that you are focused and calm as youth enter.

Sheet:
Provide a handout for each student

- **Consider** asking youth to answer the 3-question survey about how they would like to be known (see handout), if you are fortunate enough to have the time and capacity. This can be turned in at the end of class and may inform your interactions with youth throughout the program.

Greet:
Personalized Warm Greeting

- **Stand** at the door or the part of the program space where participants arrive.
- **Smile.**
- **Make** eye contact with each person.
- **Greet** each person, and use names whenever possible (nametags can help with this).
- **Include** a friendly gesture, if permitted (e.g., high-five, fist bump, touch on the shoulder).

Meet:
Individual Connection with Follow-Up

- **Find** a few minutes during each workshop to connect one-on-one with different participants to ask relevant, personalized questions about how they are doing and the skills they are trying out.

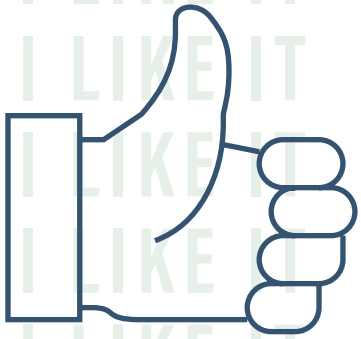
  "I heard your grandma was sick, how is she doing?"

- **Prioritize** connecting with youth who are quieter or less engaged.
- **Keep** track of those with whom you connect, so you are sure to connect with everyone in the first few workshops. Make notes about important events so you can follow up as appropriate.

NAME

I'd like you to call me:

Something I'd like you to know about me is...



In class, I like it when you...

Suggested Citation

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Self-Regulation Training Approaches and Resources to Improve Staff Capacity for Implementing Healthy Marriage Programs for Youth (SARHM)

The SARHM project was a study that aimed to increase the capacity of practitioners in youth-serving Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) programs to promote self-regulation development among participants. It is funded through a collaboration between the federal Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and the Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE) with the aim of further advancing relationship health and self-sufficiency by applying a developmental frame to human services. SARHM translated theory about co-regulation—the interactive process of adult support for youth self-regulation—into practice by developing a set of strategies that aligned with an evidence-informed co-regulation framework. The strategies were developed based on theory and evidence, but have not yet been tested for effectiveness.

As part of a nationwide initiative to promote healthy relationships in adult individuals, couples, and youth, OFA funds comprehensive healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) services. The SARHM project team partnered with two youth-serving HMRE programs to conduct formative, rapid-cycle evaluations to develop and refine co-regulation strategies by pilot testing them, providing data about their implementation, and refining them in the field without changing their curricula. Visit OPRE's website for a detailed final report on SARHM (Baumgartner et al., 2021). A list of additional products, including a guide for practitioners (Frei et al., 2021), a brief describing a preliminary draft co-regulation measure (Alamillo et al., 2021), and additional resources are available on OPRE's website under SARHM.

OPRE HMRF Healthy Marriage & Responsible Fatherhood Public Strategies Mathematica Progress Together