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# Introduction

How you stand here is important. How you listen  
for the next things to happen. How you breathe.

William Stafford, "Being a Person"

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## Background

Research in interpersonal neurobiology suggests psychological trauma physically changes the brain. Furthermore, these changes are linked to long-term psychological vulnerabilities related to physical and emotional regulatory processes. How can healthy maturational processes that strengthen a child's capacity for self-regulation be restored? How can children learn to cultivate calm in the storm?

One caring adult who can remain calm and attentive to an at-risk child—even in the worst of circumstances—can make a profound difference in the developing mind of that child. The presence of a relationship characterized by care, calm, and reflection can grow the capacity for self-regulation and emotional intelligence in the child—ingredients needed for success both in school and in life.

From the field of interpersonal neurobiology comes the discovery of the powerful influence of the brain on an individual's capacity for regulating arousal and emotion. The strategies necessary for cultivating self-regulation emerge from these findings and focus on the development of skills that calm the mind and behavior. These strategies cultivate pathways to improvement through somatic awareness and relational connection. Perhaps one of the most fascinating recent findings is the phenomenon of regulation within the attachment bond. A calm individual has a calming influence. Our children are better able to become regulated when we ourselves are calm and regulated. The best way to help children find their calm in the storm is to first find our own calm.

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## How to Use This Book

*Self-Regulation for Kids K–12: Strategies for Calming Minds and Behavior* describes a process for helping children and adolescents who experience difficulties with self-regulation.

In Chapters 1 through 3, we provide research-based information regarding the connection between emotional intelligence, somatic experience, emotional regulation, and the ability to self-regulate. In Chapter 4, we address the source of dysregulation and teach a set of skills to help students make the connection between their somatic experience and their ability to decide how to act. In Chapter 5, we link the concepts of solution-focused therapeutic approaches to the emotional/somatic concepts. In Chapter 6, we integrate theory and literature into a model for school and clinic use. Vignettes and case

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examples have been used throughout the chapters to illustrate typical experiences kids with self-regulation difficulties might face. Summaries of important points follow at the end of each chapter.

We provide several other features to assist mental health practitioners in developing their programs. They include the following:

- **Appendix A: Tools** includes an array of reproducible tools. It includes tools for assessment, individual counseling, group counseling, and crisis response. These reproducible items are included in the print version of Appendix A and are also available as pdfs on the enclosed CD.
- **Appendix B: Activities** includes lesson plans for use in individual and group settings. The activities in these plans teach skills to the caregiver and to the student in self-regulation (grounding, mindfulness, and tracking sensations), along with the CASEL skills areas (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills). Lessons are available for students from 5 to 18 years old. Many of the lessons include reproducible handouts for student use. All of the lessons and the student handouts are included in the print version of Appendix B. The reproducible items are also available as pdfs on the enclosed CD. Icons designate the items in the print version that are available as pdfs.
- **A Glossary** is included in the back of the book following Appendix B. The Glossary includes definitions of many of the terms used in the discussions in Chapters 1 through 6. Terms are shown in italic the first time they are used in the text. All terms in italic are defined in the Glossary.

It is our intention to provide both information about self-regulation and a step-by-step guide for developing a program to help children and adolescents. We have strived to integrate the theoretical material and focus it on practical applications for schools and clinics. We hope this book will be a helpful resource.