

WHAT'S ALL THIS TALK ABOUT ENGINES?

Have you heard children talking about their “engines” going up into high gear (hyper) or into low gear (lethargic) or in a “just right” gear (attentive and focused)? If you haven't yet, you probably will soon. We're introducing the *“How Does Your Engine Run?”[®] The Alert Program[®] for Self-Regulation* developed by two internationally known occupational therapists, Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenberger.

By using the engine analogy to teach self-regulation (changing how alert we feel), we are helping children learn what to do if they are in a non-optimal state of alertness. We teach children that there are five ways to change how alert we feel: put something in the mouth, move, touch, look, or listen.

We all self-regulate throughout our day, but rarely do any of us talk about it. For example, think about what you did for your engine this morning to get up and get going. To start your day, did you drink a hot cup of coffee or drink a cold fruit smoothie (mouth category)? Before work, did you go for a jog or walk the dog (move category)? To wake up, did you take a steamy hot shower or pet your cat (touch category)? Did you watch TV (look category) or turn on the radio (listen category)?

We teach children how to expand the use of these types of engine strategies at school and at home to be in an optimal state for learning, playing, or interacting with their friends, family, and peers. We empower children to know what to do if their engines are in low gear and need to focus on learning a new math skill or, if their engines are in high gear, what they can do to get ready to sleep at night.

You can help teach self-regulation by talking about your own engine. If your engine is in a low speed when you are trying to read a book, or if it goes up into a high speed when rushing to get to an appointment, share that with children. Don't be surprised if children who are learning about the Alert Program[®] concepts suggest an engine strategy such as taking a deep breath (mouth category), stretching (move category), squeezing a stress ball (touch category), watching the sunset (look category), or listening to music (listen category). Encourage the use of engine strategies to support self-regulation so your engine and your children's engines can run just right!

To read more about the Alert Program[®], go to www.AlertProgram.com.

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