

Concrete Ways To Help Students Self-Regulate And Prioritize Work

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There are a lot of skills necessary to succeed in school that aren't directly about mastering content, including the ability to recognize, name and

control ones emotions. The school day often comes with lots of emotion, everything from elation to frustration, which makes it the perfect place to practice self-regulation.

"One of the most authentic ways for me to help them expand their own vocabulary is to use my personal experience with my own emotions in the classroom," said Lindsey Minder, a second grade teacher. She regularly [models describing how she's feeling and why](#) throughout the school day, as well as demonstrating simple practices like taking a deep breath to calm down.

"One of the critical features of learning is modeling," said Linda Darling-Hammond, president and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute in an [Edutopia series](#) on the science of learning. "We learn by watching others. In this classroom, we see the teacher modeling her recognition of her emotions and also modeling how she deals with them in productive ways. And that is the first step in helping children learn to manage their own emotions."

This type of modeling also helps students recognize that their teachers are people too, and that like students, they get frustrated when no one listens or follows directions. It builds empathy to know that all humans experience a range of emotions across a day and each person is doing their best to manage them productively.

Students must also learn and practice how to [prioritize and tackle tasks](#) for academic and life success. [Executive function](#) often develops in middle school when the skills become even more important as students juggle work from multiple classes with many deadlines. Learning how to prioritize work not only makes it feel more manageable, it also helps students use work time efficiently.

"Mark Twain said if you wake up every morning and eat a frog, everything else will taste great," said eighth grade teacher Catherine Paul. "So, I taught

them to take their frog from the list, which is the thing they want to do the least, and get it out of the way, because everything else will seem easy."

Paul guides her students through the process of creating a priority list together so they have a tool to do it on their own later.

"Then you can know what to do first and categorize it and get it done efficiently," said Arius, an eighth grader.

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