

# Impulse Control for Parents



## What is Impulse Control?

Does your child have trouble sitting still or interrupting? Have a hard time waiting? If you said yes, don't worry. This is normal for young children. They are just starting to learn an important new skill. This skill is *impulse control* or inhibitory control. This skill helps children resist impulses and ignore distractions. [1]

Think about the game *Simon Says*. The goal is to do what Simon says to do, but only when "Simon says" comes before the instructions. Impulse control is what helps children resist the urge to act when the instruction is given without the "Simon says". Young children don't always have good self-control in real life situations. That's okay. This skill is still developing [1].

## Impulse Control, Learning, & Social Skills

Impulse control helps children pay attention at school so they can learn, control their emotions, and get along with others [1,2,3,4,5,6]. Children with strong impulse control tend to have good social skills and lots of friends [5,7]. This skill also helps children have good behavior. It helps them resist their impulses [1,8]. This lets children *choose how to act*, rather than react. [1] For example, a child uses impulse control when he or she resists throwing a fit.

Other examples are:

- Not hitting back when hit by another child
- Taking turns with a toy
- Staying focused in spite of distractions
- Not saying mean things to others when angry

## Build Impulse Control with Games

Poor impulse control is linked to attention problems and behavior problems [8,9,10]. Luckily, children can learn this skill with practice and using games can make it fun. Any activity where you build your child's ability to wait can help. *Simon Says* and *Red Light, Green Light* are great ways for kids to practice impulse control. [11] In *Red Light, Green Light* children move when "green light" is called and freeze in place when "red light" is called. Keep your child guessing by changing the order of colors and your tone of voice. Always start where your child's skill is and build to longer waits or more complex games. Try it with your child today and have fun!

Citations:

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