

SELF-REGULATION

Topic 1: Mind-Reading

To be successful infants and children must be able to “hold themselves together”. This capacity is usually referred to as self-regulation, though children are regulated not only by themselves, but also by others (eg, a mother soothing an infant). There are at least three overlapping cognitive functions that contribute to self regulation - managing emotional arousal; attention and mind-reading.

Mind-reading (theory of mind, mentalising) is the capacity to understand and predict other people’s behaviour on the basis of inferences about what they might be thinking and feeling. When you tread warily around an irritated colleague it is because you can read her mind sufficiently to predict that a careless remark will release an unduly hostile response. Many children get into trouble because of a relative deficiency in this area, most notably autistic children, where even those with normal intelligence cannot make sense of emotional cause-affect relationships. But many non-autistic children (for example those with behavioural problems) may also have lesser problems with mind reading.

For example, the child whose voluble nature is often entertaining, but who fails to recognise when others begin to become irritated with him. Sometimes apparently wilful, naughty behaviour can be better understood as manifesting some relative failure to be able to read others intentions and feelings.

