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“**Play, Learn, & Enjoy**” is a socio-emotional learning curriculum for elementary school children that bridges self-regulation skills with socio-emotional competencies. The curriculum is designed in a thematic, game-like format where children, together with stories characters, go on imaginary adventures into the wilderness. For example, they travel to mountains, a desert, rainforest, and the Arctic; they take a riverboat trip, go ocean sailing and snorkeling. There are 16 one-hour sessions designed for the group of 3-6 children. The curriculum activities are contextual, meaningful for children, imaginative, experiential and collaborative. “**Play, Learn, & Enjoy**” can be implemented in group counseling, after-school programs, and summer camps.

## **Objectives**

The curriculum promotes the following skills:

- Inhibition control, working memory and executive attention
- Planning
- Self-awareness and self-control
- Emotional literacy and emotion regulation
- Regulation of motivation
- Cooperation and collaboration with others
- Perspective taking
- Conversation skills

## **Rationale**

The significance of self-regulation and social competence for child adjustment and school success is well-documented (Riggs et al., 2006). Many intervention and prevention programs exist to teach children social-emotional competence (Zins et al., 2000); however, self-regulation skills are rarely incorporated in those programs. A growing body of research indicates intrinsic relations between self-regulation and social-emotional competence, which call for their integration in intervention and prevention programs (Riggs et al., 2006). The curriculum bridges neurocognitive perspective on self-regulation with the Vygotskian

framework. The neurocognitive perspective was used to identify discrete self-regulation skills; while Vygotskian theory about socio-cultural origin of self-regulation was used to design curriculum activities. More specifically, the following Vygotskian ideas guided curriculum development:

1. Higher mental functions such as self-regulation and socio-emotional skills originate in social interaction and activity (Vygotsky, 1997).
2. Self-regulation develops through the acquisition of cultural tools such as language, symbols, drawings, schemas, etc. (Vygotsky, 1997). Using psychological tools transforms mental functions into deliberate and voluntary and allows children to master their own behavior.
3. Children develop verbal self-regulation through the internalization of dialog shared with more skilled partners during a collaborative activity (Ferryhough, 2010).
4. Games with rules is a developmentally appropriate context to facilitate self-regulation skills in elementary school children.

## **Core Activities**

### **❖ Social stories**

Social stories are used to introduce the context, facilitate children's imagination and engagement. They provide children with affective vocabulary, introduce problem situations to practice problem-solving skills, and teach children socio-emotional and self-regulation scripts.

### **❖ Collaborative Projects**

Children participate in collaborative projects in which they co-construct mutual goals, learn collaborative planning, decision-making, and perspective taking skills. The group leader supports children's learning through joint participation. To promote self-regulation, the responsibility for planning, monitoring, implementing, and evaluating is gradually transferred from the group leader to the children. Children are encouraged to think aloud, plan among themselves, and negotiate differences in their perspectives.

### **❖ Conversational Games**

Conversational activities are designed to facilitate conversation skills such as listening, asking questions, taking turns, and maintaining conversation. Self-regulation of verbal exchanges is promoted through using external mediators such as speaking only after specific cues are provided.

### **❖ Self-regulation games**

These games are developed to practice voluntary auditory and visual attention, working memory, and inhibition skills.

### **❖ Motor activities**

Motor activities help children with body awareness, voluntary regulation of movement, coordination, and visual-motor integration.

### **For further questions, please contact:**

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