## **Teaching and modelling impulse control- Activities for young people**

## Almost everyone can think of situations when they’ve had trouble controlling their impulses. Sometimes we want to spend a few extra dollars on something fun online, or maybe eat just eat another piece of chocolate. These habits may seem harmless, but to young people who lack impulse control, it can be a real problem in their everyday lives. And the same holds true for all those around them. By the time we are adults, most people have the necessary impulse control skills for everyday situations.

Young people are naturally curious individuals with an appetite to explore their environment using their senses. Young people will often act on their impulses to fulfill their needs and indulge in their sensory seeking behaviors.

## **Impulse control**

Definition of Impulse Control:

Impulse Control is the ability to resist an impulse, desire, or temptation and to regulate its translation into action.

So, impulsivity is a tendency to act hurriedly and without adequate reflection on the possible consequences.

Why is the student so Impulsive?

Impulsivity in young people may be a natural stage of growth and development.

There are lots of reasons why the student may act impulsively, like:

* Excitement
* Frustration
* Fatigue
* Lack of skills / Immaturity

In some cases, though, there are other underlying problems.

One of the common causes of impulsive behavior is ADHD (Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder). Other developmental disorders and mental health issues may also lead to impulsive behaviors. When a student lacks impulse control it affects their daily life, and the whole family too.

Underpinning reasons for poor impulse control

* Young people have big feelings they often don’t know what to do with.
* Young young people act on their big feelings using their bodies rather than words due to their limited vocabulary.
* Without knowing the right words to express themselves, their bodies will act and do the talking by acting on impulses.
* Young people don’t mean to be impulsive.
* Young people often don’t realize they are acting impulsively.
* Young people can’t control the actual feeling of impulsiveness.
* Young people don’t realize it’s too late until after they act on their impulsiveness.
* Young people may hurt themselves and others by acting on their impulses.
* Self-control methods for young people can be learned and eventually self-regulated.
* Young people need the help of disciplined adults to learn proper self-control.

Related Reading:

[Impulse Control Strategies for Young people](https://veryspecialtales.com/impulse-control-strategies-kids/)

[How to Teach Young people to Wait Patiently](https://veryspecialtales.com/teaching-waiting-skills/)

What are the Signs of Impulsiveness in Young people?

There are several forms of impulsiveness that can be identified in young people:

* Impatience and inability to wait their turn, interruption in classroom and discussions
* Having a short-fused temper, crying, and screaming for long periods
* Taking risks that are potentially harmful and dangerous
* Quitting games, activities and play due to uncontrollable frustration
* Hitting and biting other young people and adults
* Lying, stealing, and running away

## **Why is it Important to Teach Impulse Control to our Young people and How?**

We need to teach our young people to think before they act.

Proper impulse control is mostly taught to young people by their parents and other adult figures.

Young people also learn self-control from their siblings and friends and by living their own everyday lives. The trait of proper impulse control will boost their potential to construct better decisions as they develop as teenagers and grow through adulthood.

When teaching our young people about impulsivity, they not only will have a greater awareness of how their actions will affect those around them, but will also recognize that, like them, other young people may also lack self-control. Empathy is a powerful tool when teaching our young people valuable life skills, such as pausing to think before they act.

Young people with ADHD commonly struggle with impulsivity as a daily occurrence at home, at school, and in social interactions. When a student doesn’t stop to think before they act, it can lead them to trouble and potentially dangerous situations. The act of stopping to think about our actions is a learned trait that needs practice in order to turn into a regular habit.

## **Fun impulse control activities to test your student’s self-control**

Now that we’ve covered the importance of self-control as a trait, here are some fun and rewarding impulse control activities for young people to practice.

*“Don’t Eat the Marshmallow”*

Otherwise known as “The Marshmallow Test”, this tried-and-true game was initially developed in the late 1960’sas an experiment to study gratification deferral in young people. It also works as a fun and rewarding impulse control activity for young people as young as 3.

In a room with little to no distractions (such as a TV, radio, books, etc.), sit the young people at a table and give them a clean plate with a single marshmallow (or other small treats).

Tell your young people that you’ll be leaving the room to finish a task while they wait for you to finish. They have two choices; they can eat the marshmallow now, or they can wait to eat it. If they wait, you will give them another marshmallow to eat when you come back.

Once you leave the room to finish your chore, your young people will have the time to contemplate the choices you gave them. This will test their ability to think over the pros and cons of acting on their initial desire. After all, good things (and more marshmallows) will come to those who wait.

**Red Light, Yellow Light, Green Light**

This game is well-known as a classic in class or recess.

Just a little reminder in case it was not part of your childhood games: When your young people hear the words “Green light” they can move forward, but when they hear “Red light” they must freeze. You can play this game and once your young people are familiar with it, you can turn it into a useful impulse control activity or self-control tool.

You can tell your young people to envision a traffic light over their head and check the light before they act on an impulse. This traffic light is *their* light, and *theirs only*.

Explain to your young people that they can make better decisions by paying close attention to their imaginary traffic light.

Role-play situations. What is your traffic light telling you?

If the light turns red, this means that their brain is telling them to STOP, and for a good reason; to avoid them getting hurt or in trouble. If their light turns yellow, it means to slow down and think carefully about their next choice, and maybe ask a parent or teacher for help. If the light turns green, they have determined that their decision is a positive one, and they can proceed while feeling good about their choice.

**No Talking Game- Attuned listening skills**

Who knew that this game would be a favorite for both young people and parents?

This activity is great to practice in groups of multiple young people, such as in classrooms, library, organized sport and at play. The goal of this game is to not only have young people practice withholding their impulse to break the silence with their voices, but to focus on their awareness of their overall environment.

This game is best to start when the class is regulated. Start by telling your young people that the “No Talking Game” is starting and they have a few goals to achieve during the game, including:

1. To go as long as possible without talking or moving out of their seat
2. To listen to their environment and use a pencil and paper to take notes (or draw pictures, if they prefer) of all the sounds, sights, smells, textures, and emotions they feel during quiet time.

If the person has the urge to say something, they should write it down or draw it instead of blurting it out loud, with the promise that it will be discussed after the game is over

When someone else is talking, everyone else should carefully listen and not talk until it is their turn to talk.

Providing them a pencil, paper, and a long moment of silence, start the game. You can continue to work on class projects or join your young people to make it even more fun!

When someone caves into their impulse to start talking, pause the game.

Ask the person who started to speak what they needed to say.

Was it important enough to say before the game ended? Could it have waited until the game was over? Why do they feel it was important enough to say out loud before the end of the game?

If what was said is found not to be urgent, gently remind them that they could write it down to talk about after the game, and you will talk about their writings/drawings once the game is over.

When the quiet time is officially done, each person takes turns to talk about what they wrote or drew on their paper.

This will teach your young people that if they are patient and wait their turn, they can comfortably talk, knowing all eyes and ears are on them with little to no communication issues.

**Dance/Move/Freeze Game”**

This quick and easy game will help young people dance and move their way to practicing better impulse control skills. Use a bouncy song or a song the young people pick that they like dancing to, use Cha Cha slide dance, any of the Wiggle’s songs with activities as these fun songs instructs young people to move, slide, dance, hop, skip, and twirl until the you say, “Freeze”! You can add an extra dimension by getting them to hold a piece of A3 paper or a piece of newspaper above their head and when the music stops, they have to get it to the ground, step on it and then freeze.