Social Foundations
Self-Control: Self Control Strategies

What: Self-control describes the ability to regulate one's emotions, feelings, behaviors, and words — and depends on the ability to identify emotions, feelings, behaviors, and words. It involves being aware of how one feels, considering other's emotions and actions, inhibiting impulses, and using strategies to modify emotions, feelings, behaviors, and words. Self-control is an active process, and should not be confused for sitting still or passively for long periods of time.

Why: Self-control is an important life skill that helps children understand others' perspectives and make decisions when things don’t go their way, or in a way they do not understand.

How:
1. Notice Emotions
   - Help children recognize changes in their emotions, and identify them. For example, if you see children pushing another child, talk with the child about what you see happening, ask questions about what they are feeling; help them identify their emotion (e.g., upset, angry, sad); reflect on whether their actions are safe and appropriate; and then guide them toward making a decision.
   - Record written observations of the situation, whether children were able to identify and label their emotions, if they understood the behavior was safe and appropriate, and what choice they made next. Look for patterns over time to identify when children need prompting or support.

2. Do Overs
   - Conflicts will arise. If children are unable to resolve them on their own, offer children an opportunity to try again. Say, for example, that a child becomes upset after his peer would not share a toy with him, and reacts by grabbing the toy and pinching his peer out of impulse. Bring the two children together and ask the child to think about how his peer felt. Encourage him to look at his peers' emotions and to review rules for the classroom. Guide the child to try a new approach that respects his peer and the rules.
   - Take notes about the situation, children's initial response, and what they chose to do when they tried again. If they needed your help, write down how you helped them. Look for patterns over time, as well as supports that seem to help children work through conflicts. Are they able to apply the strategies discussed? Do they manage their impulses better? What strategies do they try?

3. Delay Gratification
   - Providing children with opportunities to wait for short periods can help them learn impulse control. During the day, when children need to wait their turn (to ride the tricycle or stir the cookie dough, for example), encourage them to create and use “wait strategies” like singing a song, playing “I Spy,” or performing a finger play.
   - Make a list of different scenarios in which children may be waiting. Also write down wait strategies that you suggest to children and those that they create. Encourage children to refer or add to the list.

4. Red Light, Green Light
   - “Red Light, Green Light” is a movement game that helps children learn about fairness and how to follow rules, what can and cannot be done, and how to interact in the context of a game.
Observe children as they play, and pay attention to their behaviors and actions. Do they understand the rules but struggle to start and stop their bodies? Or are they able to start and stop movement but choose instead to challenge the rules? Look for patterns over time. Consider using visual cues, such as colors or hand motions, along with aural cues, such as music to help children understand the rules of movement (e.g., stopping for the red light, going with the green light).

5. Play Scenarios
   - Set up dramatic play for children to create and act out scenarios they see and experience in their lives, such as gardening, a pizza restaurant, the grocery store, or the bus stop. Based on what they see, children may create rules and assign roles. Post pictures and provide books that illustrate and describe these experiences.
   - Observe children’s play. Be available to guide children to reflect on their experiences and how they will bring their understanding of rules and roles into this play. For example, if children are playing grocery store, but everyone is shopping, ask them to think about who they will pay for their food, and how they will take turns doing so. Provide ample opportunity for free play, exploration, and discussion. How do they do establishing and following rules? How do they respond to peer requests? How do they contribute solutions to conflicts that arise?

6. Family Chat
   - Ask families how their children response to situations they do not understand or that are not going their way. Also have them think about whether their children understand their emotions and feelings, and what behaviors, actions, and words they use in these situations.