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Enhancing self-regulation in young children

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Enhancing Self-Regulation in Young Children

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Enhancing Self-Regulation (Solving for X)

Susceptibility to change

- research suggests EFs can be improved via training
- may have positive impacts on SR

Evidence that:
- EF training can help stem impulsive drinking (Houben et al., 2005)
- Inhibitory improvements can reduce problematic eating, drinking, smoking behaviours (Houben et al., 2011; Houben & Jansen, 2011)
EF & SR Interventions

- Tend to be:
  - Computerised ‘brain training’ programs
  - Expensive
  - Non-routine
  - Individually completed
  - Not tailored for the early years…

…however, suggestion that intervention in the early years could lead to more stable and lasting change.
Our Approach:
Quincey Quokka’s Quest

Through the swamp, now halfway,
When Quincey heard someone say,
“Keep on going on this track,
Play my game or be my snack.

If it’s snake, say it’s frog,
As you cross this musky bog,
And if it’s frog, you say snake;
Do it backwards for your sake!”

Instructions: For this activity, select a path across the swamp and tell the child they will need to follow this path playing the “opposite game.” You can also choose whether you want the child to name each animal (i.e., frog, snake) or make their sound (i.e., ribbles, hiss). To play, point to each frog and snake along the path, one-by-one, having the child say either the opposite name (if you are playing the name game, e.g., for a snake say “frog”), or the opposite sound (if you are playing the sound game, e.g., for a frog say “hiss”). To increase the difficulty, have the child name the animals faster and faster.
Method

Participants
- 88 preschool-aged children (3.00-5.76 years of age)

Groups
1. Typical reading ($n = 23$)
2. One-on-one reading with cognitive activities ($n = 20$)
3. Group reading ($n = 25$) with cognitive activities

Duration
- Twice per week for 5 weeks
Results:

- **Shifting**: Significant increase after individual reading and group reading, compared to control.

- **Working Memory**: Significant increase for all groups, including control (development + benefits of reading).

- **Inhibition**: Significant increase after individual reading and group reading, compared to control.

- **Self-Regulation**: Individual reading appeared to be a significant protective factor in ratings of conduct and externalising problems.

Howard, Johnstone, & Melhuish, in preparation
Thank you for your attention