

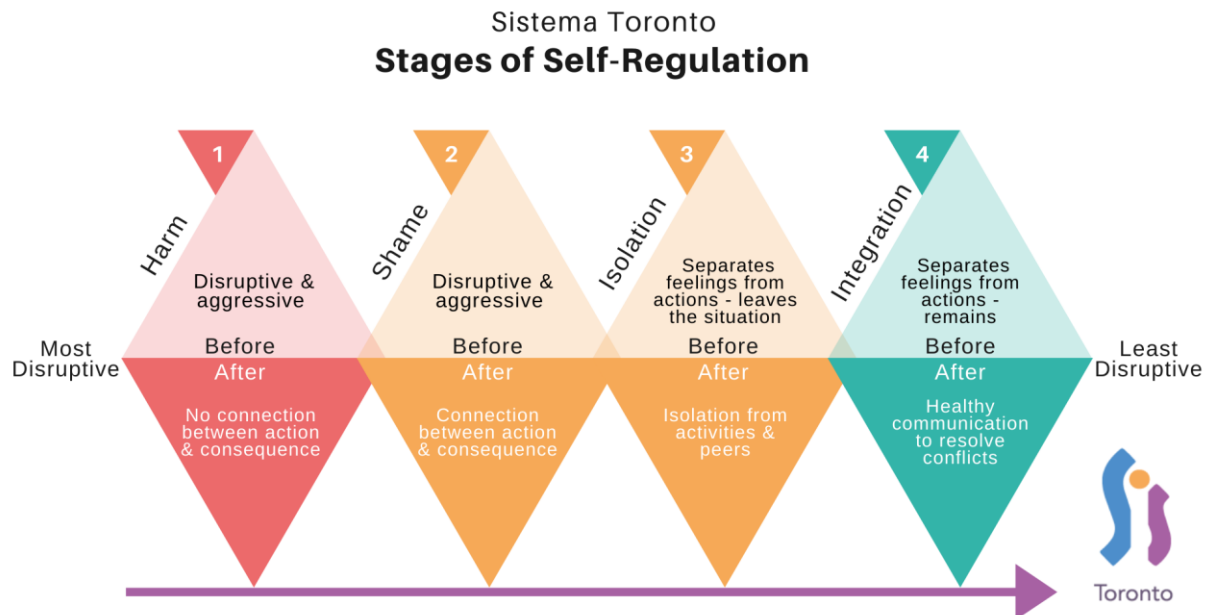
Focus on Social Learning
October: Responsibility Month

Each month at Sistema Toronto we discuss a specific social concept and explore that concept with our students through class discussions and activities. In October we discuss responsibility, an important subject for our students to explore. We ask our students to consider their responsibility in all aspects of their lives - as students, family members, musicians, and citizens.

Responsibility is an essential part of any child’s education and growth. At Sistema Toronto, we define a responsible citizen as someone who can be counted on to carry out their duties and obligations, to follow through on their commitments to others, and to act as a responsible steward of their community and environment. As children get older, they can be given increasing amounts of responsibility in the home, at school, and in the community. Through our Social Curriculum we aim to help our students understand and manage their responsibilities more effectively.

In order to act responsibly, we must learn to put the needs and desires of others above our own. For our students this means learning to manage their emotions and behaviour, learning **self-regulation** and **accountability**.

Self-regulation is the practice of managing our feelings and actions so that we can act responsibly towards others. Research has shown that self-regulation correlates strongly with academic success. Self-regulation differs from self-control, because it involves engaging with our emotions and finding ways to regulate them, rather than simply to over-ride our desires and urges.





Self-regulation is a skill. It must be learned and practiced, just like the musical skills we work on in at Sistema. When we encounter a student who frequently displays disruptive or aggressive behavior, for example, we work with that student to consider their actions and understand their feelings. The first step, and for many students the most difficult, is to recognise that they are angry. The next step is to suggest strategies that can help them address that anger. We may ask the student to take a short break, to verbalise their feelings, to practice slow breathing, or to write down what happened, so that they can process their emotions and prepare to act responsibly.

Eventually we work with students to channel their angry emotions into creative outputs. In this way we are helping the student to learn that feeling angry isn't "bad" or "wrong", but rather feeling angry is a normal human emotion that can lead us to solve problems or even help us in our creative work – expressing anger through performance or composition.

Teaching children to be accountable for their actions is an important aspect of teaching responsibility. In our approach to student discipline, Sistema Toronto has been drawing on ideas from the Restorative Justice movement, which views taking responsibility for one's actions as one of the key steps to conflict resolution and healing, rather than focusing on punishment and negative consequences¹. Being accountable means accepting responsibility for our actions, recognizing the consequences of those actions for ourselves and others, and taking action to put things right.

In Sistema Toronto's program, each student becomes increasingly responsible as they move through eight years of their time in our program. When they begin Sistema, our students are still working to self-regulate and learning to be responsible for their behaviour. As they progress in our program students take on increased responsibility, caring for their instruments and equipment and by taking on a more independent role in their ensembles. Senior students in our program are responsible for helping those around them, assisting with junior students, mentoring early learners, and taking on leadership roles in rehearsals and ensembles. By graduation, our goal is to teach our students to become active and thoughtful contributors in their community.

Our *Setup Helpers* activity is a great example of how we work on responsibility skills with our students. We ask our students to take responsibility for any task within their ability during setup and clean up for each class. *Setup Helpers* involves dividing the class into teams and assigning them specific responsibilities like arranging the chairs and stands before orchestra rehearsal begins. By working with each team the teacher is able to take time to teach students new skills (i.e. setting up a folding stand, understanding the orchestral sections, or adjusting a cello strap) while giving them the opportunity to take ownership over essential elements of setup/clean up in each Sistema class. By the



Senior level Sistema Toronto students are able to fully set up a room for an orchestra rehearsal or performance quickly and efficiently without conflicts with their fellow students, and with little need for reminders or direct supervision from their teachers.

By working with our students to understand and embrace their responsibilities, we hope to help them become excellent communicators who can manage their emotions and solve problems, mature and self-aware friends and family members, independent learners who are resilient and confident, and engaged and responsible citizens.

