Self-Management Strategies

Twelve classroom strategies with routines, scripts and a weekly reflection sheet

For: K-12 teachers, counselors and advisory leaders

How to use this guide

Self-management is the ability to manage emotions, thoughts and behaviors to reach goals. It is taught the same way at every age: name the skill, model it, practice it in a daily routine, reflect on it. Choose one strategy for your grade band, run it every day for three weeks, then add another. Grade bands: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12.

Emotional regulation and stress

1. Feelings check-in

Routine: Start the day or class with a feelings chart (faces for K-2, words or a 1-5 scale for older students). Students point, mark or write. **Script:** "Find the word that fits how you feel right now. You don't have to share it. Just notice it." **Grade band:** All; 6-12 can use a private slip or digital form.

2. Calm-down routine

Routine: A designated space with a visual sequence: breathe five times, squeeze and release hands, count to ten, return. Teach and rehearse it when everyone is calm. **Script:** "When your body feels tight or hot, that's your signal. Go to the calm spot, do the four steps, and come back when you're ready." **Grade band:** K-5 physical space; 6-12 a seated version at the desk.

3. Stop-think-act

Routine: For frustration or conflict. Stop (hands down, one breath). Think (what are my options?). Act (choose one). Rehearse with scenarios before using it live. **Script:** "Stop. Breathe. What are two things you could do right now? Which one gets you closer to what you want?" **Grade band:** 3-8; 9-12 as a pre-exam or pre-performance reset.

4. Stress mapping

Routine: Students list current stressors and sort them into three columns: I can change this; I can change how I respond; I need help with this. One action per column. **Script:** "You can't control everything on this list. Let's find what you can control, and who can help with the rest." **Grade band:** 6-12.

Focus, impulse control and motivation

5. Visual schedule and first-then

Routine: Post the day's sequence with pictures or words. Use "First we..., then we..." for transitions. **Script:** "First we finish the three problems, then we have choice time." **Grade band:** K-2; also useful for any student who needs predictability.

6. Two-minute start

Routine: For procrastination. Students commit to two minutes of work on the avoided task, then decide whether to continue. Most continue. **Script:** "You don't have to finish it. Set a timer for two minutes and just start. Then decide." **Grade band:** 6-12.

7. Distraction audit

Routine: During a study block, students tally each interruption and its source (phone, talking, daydreaming, getting up). They set one rule to reduce the biggest one for next time. **Script:** "What pulled you off task most often? What's one rule that would cut that in half?" **Grade band:** 6-12.

8. Asking for help script

Routine: Post and practice a sentence for getting unstuck without giving up. **Script:** "I've tried ____ and ____, and I'm stuck on ____." Teacher response: "Good question. Show me where it stopped making sense." **Grade band:** 3-12.

Goals, planning and organization

9. Task breakdown

Routine: Model splitting an assignment into numbered steps on the board. Students do the same for their own work and check off steps as they go. **Script:** "Big tasks feel impossible because we try to hold them all at once. What's step one? Just step one." **Grade band:** 3-12.

10. Goal cards

Routine: Each student sets one specific goal for two weeks ("Turn in every assignment on time," "Read 20 minutes a night"), records progress daily, and reviews it with a partner at the end. **Script:** "A good goal is specific enough that you'll know on Friday whether you did it." **Grade band:** 3-12; 9-12 extend to semester goals with milestones.

11. Backward planning

Routine: From the due date, students set interim deadlines for each stage of a project and write them in a planner. Collect the plan and check it at each milestone. **Script:** "Start at the end. If it's due Friday the 20th, when does the draft need to exist? When does the research need to be done?" **Grade band:** 6-12; 3-5 with a teacher-provided template.

12. Planner routine

Routine: The last three minutes of class are for writing in the planner: homework, due dates, materials. Check planners daily for the first month, then weekly. **Script:** "Planners out. What are you doing for this class tonight, and when is the next due date?" **Grade band:** 3-12.

Teacher modeling

Students learn self-management by watching adults do it. Once a day, narrate your own regulation:

- "I'm frustrated the projector isn't working. I'm going to take a breath and use the backup plan."
- "I have three things to do before lunch. Let me write them down so I don't lose one."
- "I made a mistake on the board. Let's find it and fix it."

Weekly reflection sheet

Give five minutes every Friday. Students write or draw answers; K-2 can answer aloud with a partner.

Name: _____ Week of: _____

1. One thing I managed well this week (a feeling, a task, my time):
   _____
1. One moment that was hard to manage, and what I did:
   _____
1. A strategy I used (circle): check-in / calm-down / stop-think-act / two-minute start / task breakdown / planner / asking for help / other: _____
1. My goal for this week was: _____ I reached it: fully / partly / not yet
1. Next week I will try: _____
1. Something I need help with: _____

Teacher note (optional): _____

Observation tally for teachers

Track for one week before you begin and again after three weeks.

Behavior	Baseline	After 3 weeks
Students starting work within one minute		
Reminders needed per lesson		
Calm-down strategy used without prompting		
Assignments submitted on time		
Specific help requests (not "I don't get it")		

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