

“How Does Your Engine Run?” – The Alert Program® for Self-Regulation

Have you ever heard children talking about their “engines” going up into high gear or down into low gear or reaching the “just right” gear? They are using the engine analogy of the *Alert Program® for Self-Regulation*, developed by two occupational therapists, Mary Sue Williams and Sherry Shellenberger.

The *Alert Program®* is a specific intervention program that consists of a series of lessons and activities that incorporate sensory integration techniques with cognitive approaches. The primary focus of the program is to help children to learn to monitor, maintain and adjust their level of alertness so that it is appropriate to a situation or task. To be able to attend, concentrate and perform tasks one must be in an optimal state of arousal for that task. When difficulties in self-regulation occur the individual have difficulty in changing their levels of alertness which compromises their ability to function. The program is designed to improve awareness of self-regulation through charts, worksheets and activities. Children, teachers and parents learn how to recognize arousal states as they relate to attention, learning and behaviour as it provides a framework and vocabulary to help understand it. “If your body is like a car engine, sometimes it runs on high, sometimes it runs of low, and sometimes it runs just right.” There are five ways to change how alert one feels: put something in the mouth; move; touch; look or listen.

The *Alert Program®* is a step by step method by which adults and children learn to determine which strategies they can use to support the their optimal performance and identify hyper-sensitivities which hamper performance. It helps parents and teachers understand that behaviour may reflect both on the current level of organization of the nervous system and the child’s best attempt to respond adaptively and efficiently to the demands of a situation or task.

The *Alert Program®* was developed for children with attention and learning difficulties, ages eight to twelve. At Jan Kriel School the *Alert Program®* is implemented by the occupational therapists in Grade 4. It can be used in a variety of settings including at home and in the classroom, individually and in group settings. The program can also be utilized in conjunction with other therapies as deemed appropriate, especially occupational therapy with a sensory integrative emphasis.

*Adapted from notes compiled by Ray Anne Cook (occupational therapist)