Métis Nation of Ontario Early Learning & Child Care

ELCC ADVISORS' NEWSLETTER

July 2026

Self- Regulation through Land-Based Learning

"Self-regulation refers to how a child can deal with stressors, then recover and return to a calm, alert state." (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013)

Summer offers meaningful opportunities for children to build self-regulation through connection with the land and through co-regulation with caring adults. Self-regulation develops over time as children experience responsive relationships that help them understand feelings, recover from challenges, and care for their bodies. Ontario's early years pedagogy recognizes self-regulation and well-being as foundational to learning and healthy development.

Outdoor environments are more than settings for planned experiences. In land-based learning, the environment becomes an active part of children's learning. Wind, shade, seasonal changes, plants, and living creatures offer opportunities for inquiry, self-regulation, and connection.Open areas invite movement and active play. Quiet spaces under trees can offer calm and rest. Daily summer routines such as drinking water, applying sunscreen, resting, and preparing for the weather help children build independence while learning to notice their own needs.

When an educator sits beside a child in the shade, helps them take a calming breath, supports turn-taking at water play, or guides a peaceful transition indoors, they are co-regulating. These everyday moments are meaningful. Over time, children begin to use these strategies more independently.

A Métis-focused approach reminds us that learning often happens through relationship with the land, seasonal change, observation, and shared responsibility. Children learn by helping, noticing, caring, and participating in everyday experiences. Summer invites children to slow down, watch what is changing around them, and build respect for the natural world.

Self-regulation grows through relationships, practice and environments that support children's needs. Summer outdoor spaces provide natural opportunities to move, reset, and reconnect. When educators stay present and responsive, children learn strategies that they can carry into everyday life.

"All living things are connected and must be treated with respect." (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2020)

A land-based approach reminds us that the environment is not simply where learning happens, but part of how learning happens. Time spent outdoors can strengthen children's overall well-being and sense of belonging. Self-regulation develops through connection: connection to caring adults, to their bodies, and to the land.

Activity Ideas to support self-regulation on the land

"Play and inquiry are the primary ways children learn." (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014)

Nature Sounds Pause

Invite children to sit quietly outdoors and listen closely. What can they hear nearby? What sounds

Activity Ideas to support self-regulation on the land continued ...

are farther away? Can they hear birds, wind, insects or leaves moving? Model slow breathing together.

Sun and Shade Check-In

Explore sunny and shaded spaces, and notice where it feels warm and where it feels cool. Ask children where their bodies feel most comfortable and why. Talk to them about where they like to be when they need a break, whether somewhere cool or somewhere hot.

Watering with Care

Provide watering cans or cups for garden or plant care. Carrying water and completing purposeful tasks supports focus, responsibility and care for living things.

Colour Hunt

Look for natural summer colours outdoors, such as red, blue, purple, green and yellow. This can connect to gardening and summer harvesting traditions. This can also help the children be aware of their surroundings.

Texture Walk (barefoot where appropriate and safe)

Invite children to explore grass, sand, smooth stones, or soil with their feet and hands. Discuss with the children the different textures. This can help the children identify sensory preferences by noticing which textures feel comfortable and which they may not enjoy.

Calm Transitions Walk

Before going indoors, walk slowly together and encourage the children to match their breathing to their footsteps. This can help the children shift from active play to indoor routines.

Nature Sit Spot

Choose a quiet place outdoors where children can sit. Encourage the children to find a special space where they can regularly go outside and label it their sit spot. Returning to the same space allows the children to observe and notice what has changed since the last time they sat in that spot. This can also be a time of self-reflection, thinking about how their bodies are feeling and where they sit quietly in their sit spot.

Water Break Reminder

Pause together for a hydration break. Help children notice when they may feel thirsty and practice caring for their bodies.

Métis Languages Initiatives

Supporting the reclamation, revitalization, and strengthening of Métis languages, including Michif - Fransè, through community programs and resources.

Become a co-Learner with the children in your early learning environments using the Michif-Fransè app.

Download

MNO Learn Michif- Fransè

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ELCC Infrastructure And Partnership Advisor Team

The ELCC Advisor Team at the Métis Nation of Ontario is dedicated to enhancing relationships with existing early learning centers/programs across Ontario and strengthening ties with regional municipalities.

Jennifer Boston
JenniferB@metisnation.org

Ashley Gour
AshleyG@metisnation.org

Courtney Scott
CourtneySc@metisnation.org

Sylvie Hebbard-Langille
SylvieH@metisnation.org

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