

## Educator Resource Sheet

Based on: *Max Speed Max* - part of the *On the Reef* series of books  
By Melanie Atkinson - published by PerthLight.com.au November 2025

### Disclaimer

These educator notes are not official EYLF or EYFS guidelines. They are an informal discussion resource designed to support reflection and conversation when using the *On the Reef* books with children. Educators should always refer to the current EYLF and EYFS documents for accurate and authoritative guidance and use these notes only as a supplementary tool.

### About the author

Melanie Atkinson is an early years educator based in Perth, Western Australia. She earned degrees in teaching and developmental psychology in the 1990s and has worked exclusively in the early learning sector ever since. Her work is based on the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF Version 2.0) and is grounded in a practical understanding of how young children develop emotional regulation, identity, empathy, and social awareness through relationships, play, and everyday interactions.

### Overview

This gentle read-along picture book is designed for children aged 2–5 years. It explores impulsivity, self-regulation, and learning to think before acting. Max Tuna loves to move quickly and race ahead, but his fast choices affect the people around him. Through everyday social situations, the story helps children begin to recognise how excitement and impulsive behaviour can impact friendships, emotions, and group play.

The book supports early learning outcomes aligned with both the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF Version 2.0) and the UK Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). It also reflects current Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approaches commonly used in the United States. In particular, the story provides opportunities to explore self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making through familiar preschool situations and gentle classroom-style guidance.

Rather than presenting behaviour as “good” or “bad,” the story approaches impulsivity as part of normal early childhood development. Max is not trying to upset his friends. He is learning that slowing down for a moment can help him notice what other people need and make more thoughtful choices during play.

## Theoretical Context

Max Speed Max reflects well-established understandings of child development and self-regulation in the early years. Piaget described children aged 2–7 as being in the preoperational stage, where thinking is strongly influenced by immediate feelings, excitement, and personal perspective. Young children often act quickly before fully considering consequences. Max’s behaviour reflects this developmental stage, particularly his difficulty noticing how his actions affect others while he is focused on movement, speed, and excitement.

Vygotsky emphasised that children develop self-regulation through social interaction with peers and trusted adults. In the story, Miss Coral supports Max through calm questioning rather than punishment or shame. This reflects the idea that emotional growth develops through guided interaction and co-regulation within supportive relationships.

Contemporary research into executive functioning also supports the themes in the story. Skills such as impulse control, emotional regulation, waiting, flexible thinking, and noticing social cues are still developing rapidly during the preschool years. Max’s experiences show how children gradually learn to pause, reflect, repair mistakes, and make more thoughtful decisions over time.

Bandura’s social learning theory is also visible throughout the story. Children learn by observing others, and Max begins to recognise the value of Quinn’s slower and more careful approach. The story also reflects current SEL frameworks, including CASEL’s core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

These ideas align closely with both the EYLF and EYFS, which emphasise emotional wellbeing, identity, relationships, communication, and learning through responsive adult support and play-based experiences.

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## **About the EYLF (Australia)**

*Max Speed Max* connects especially well with:

### **Outcome 1.1**

Children feel safe, secure, and supported.

### **Outcome 1.2**

Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience, and agency.

### **Outcome 3.1**

Children become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing.

### **Outcome 3.2**

Children become aware of their own feelings and the feelings of others.

### **Outcome 3.3**

Children are aware of and develop strategies to support their own mental and physical health and personal safety.

These outcomes are reflected through *Max* learning to notice how his actions affect others, practising repair after mistakes, and beginning to develop early self-regulation strategies.

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## **About the EYFS (UK)**

This story supports development across two of the prime areas of learning:

### **Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED)**

Children explore emotional regulation, social awareness, empathy, and learning to manage impulsive behaviour during play and peer interactions.

### **Communication and Language**

The story encourages children to reflect on feelings, discuss behaviour, and use simple language to repair social situations and express care for others.

The book also supports early understanding of cooperation, friendship, turn-taking, and noticing emotional cues within group settings.

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## **Suggested Discussion Prompts**

Use these questions to encourage reflection and conversation:

- Why did Larry get lost in the seagrass?
  - How do you think Meemie felt when Mr Clam blamed her?
  - Why did Quinn's shell stack stay up?
  - What did Max learn by the end of the story?
  - What can we do if we get too excited during play?
  - How can we check if our friends are okay?
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## **Extension Activities**

### **Activity 1: Slow and Fast Sorting Game**

Theme: Self-regulation and body awareness

Create picture cards showing different actions such as running, waiting, shouting, breathing, helping, rushing, and resting. Invite children to sort them into “fast choices” and “slow choices.” Discuss when each type of movement might be helpful or unsafe.

### **Activity 2: Bubble Breath Pause**

Theme: Pausing before acting

Practise stopping and taking one slow breath before beginning a game, race, or transition activity. Encourage children to notice how their body feels before and after the breath.

Prompt:

“Can we pause before we zoom?”

### **Activity 3: Shell Stack Challenge**

Theme: Patience and persistence

Invite children to stack shells, blocks, or stones slowly and carefully. Compare rushing with slowing down and noticing balance. Discuss how different approaches affect the result.

Connection:

“Quinn wanted his stack to stay up.”

### **Activity 4: Repair and Reconnect Role-play**

Theme: Making amends

Role-play simple classroom situations where someone gets left out, interrupted, bumped, or upset during play. Practise gentle repair language such as:

- “Are you okay?”
- “Can we try again?”
- “Do you want to play together?”
- “I’ll try to slow down next time.”

## **Parent and Carer Summary: Supporting Children with Impulsivity and Self-Regulation**

This story explores impulsivity, self-regulation, and learning to think before acting. Young children often move through their world with excitement, curiosity, and big bursts of energy. They are still learning how to pause, notice what is happening around them, and understand how their actions affect others.

Support strategies:

Use everyday moments to help children practise pausing and checking in. You might say:

- “Let’s stop and think first.”
- “Can we check what everyone is doing?”
- “Does your friend look ready?”

Support children to notice what their bodies are doing:

- “Your body is moving very fast.”
- “Your body looks calm now.”

Model thoughtful decision-making during play and routines. Reinforce moments where children wait, notice others, or repair mistakes:

- “You slowed down and that helped.”
- “You noticed your friend needed space.”

When mistakes happen, support children to make simple repairs using language such as:

- “I am sorry.”
- “Are you okay?”
- “Can we try again?”

Helping children develop these early self-regulation skills supports emotional wellbeing, empathy, social awareness, and positive peer relationships.

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# Emotional Learning Activities for the Early Years Classroom

## Activity 1: Reef Pause Practice

Theme: Pausing and checking in

During transitions or energetic games, practise stopping when the educator says: “Reef pause.”

Children freeze, take one slow breath, and look around to notice others before continuing.

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## Activity 2: Fast Fish, Slow Fish

Theme: Body regulation

Move around the room pretending to be different sea creatures:

- fast tuna
- slow sunfish
- floating jellyfish
- careful crab

Discuss how each movement feels in the body.

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## Activity 3: What Happened Next?

Theme: Cause and effect

Use picture cards from the story and ask children:

- “What happened after Max zoomed past?”
- “What happened when Larry could not keep up?”
- “What helped at the end?”

This supports sequencing, reflection, and social understanding.

## **Activity 4: Thoughtful Choices Reef**

Theme: Decision-making

Create a classroom display where children add drawings or examples of thoughtful choices they made during the week:

- waiting
  - helping
  - checking in
  - slowing down
  - apologising
  - noticing others
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## **Educator Tips**

- Avoid framing impulsive behaviour as “naughty” or intentional.
- Support co-regulation before expecting self-regulation.
- Use calm, reflective language instead of punishment-based responses.
- Reinforce repair and reconnection after mistakes.
- Model pausing and checking in during everyday routines.
- Use open-ended reflection prompts such as:
  - “What happened when Max zoomed ahead?”
  - “How did Larry feel?”
  - “What helped Quinn’s shells stay up?”

Miss Coral’s approach in the story models calm guidance, reflective questioning, and helping children recognise consequences without shame.

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