A Teacher’s Guide to Emotional Regulation

What is emotional regulation?

The process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions. It is organized around specific emotions (e.g., sadness, fear, anger) and includes efforts to up- or down-regulate both positive and negative emotions (Compas et al., 2013).

Why is emotional regulation important within the classroom?

Appropriate emotional regulation skills allow students to effectively respond in pressing situations within a classroom environment (AOTA, 2014). Without frequent and effective regulation of emotions, children and their peers may experience lower occupational performance throughout the school day.

Tips for teaching students about their emotions

Use of an emotional scavenger hunt

Students work through a simple scavenger hunt that is focused on identifying objects that elicit specific feelings

For example,

Find an item that helps you calm down when you are upset

Find an item that makes you feel safe when you are scared

Find an item that makes you feel better when you are sick

Find something that might scare someone else

Find an item that you are proud of

Find something that makes you really happy

Find something that makes you excited

Find something that makes you mad or that you do not like

Find something that you use when you feel lonely

FInd something that you enjoy playing with an another person

Find something you use when you are tired

Use of an emotions story

Students focus on a specific object and elaborate on how it makes them feel

For example,

Start off the story with: Once upon a time….

One of the sentences tells what the item looks like

One must tell how it feels when you hold it or touch it

One must describe what it smells like

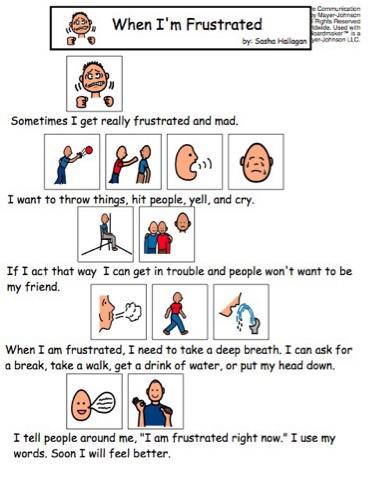
One must say what kind of sounds it makes

One sentence tells why that item makes you feel \_\_\_\_\_.

Use of social stories

Students work with a teacher or OT to identify a difficult situation and describe the most appropriate way to respond.

For example,



How to help students self-reflect on their emotions

Recognizing how important the problem is

Students can utilize a visual aid to properly identify and work through or identify the severity of a problem

For example,

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **EMERGENCY** | I need to get an adult right away  *Someone is in danger, needs to go to the hospital, or there is a fire* |
| **GIGANTIC PROBLEM** | I will need help from an adult to solve the problem  *Bullying, fighting, people being unsafe* |
| **BIG PROBLEM** | I need to calm down and ask for a break  *Not listening, distracting others, yelling while in the classroom* |
| **MEDIUM PROBLEM** | I need to try to solve my problem first  I need to tell others how I am feeling in a calm voice  I need to take responsibility when I forget things  *Not feeling well, being tired, someone is bothering you, you forgot to do something* |
| **LITTLE PROBLEM** | I need to use my words if I need to take time to solve my problem  I need to use my words to make my needs known  *Bathroom break, being hungry or thirsty* |
| **NOT A BIG DEAL** | I am okay  *Losing a game, not being first, losing a turn* |

Use of a personal checklist

Students can use a self-monitoring behaviors checklist to increase regulation when they feel emotionally imbalanced

For example,

**Self Monitoring Behaviors Checklist**

Did I listen?

Did I pause and reflect before I acted?

Did I use patience during this task?

Did I use kind words?

Did I lie?

Did I get frustrated?

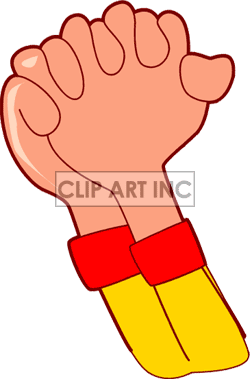
Did I yell, cry or argue?

Effective and appropriate coping skills for children

Redirecting children to understand their emotions and effectively cope with what they are feeling may reduce problem behaviors in the classroom, while increasing self-management skills

For example,

* Squeeze hands together
* Ask for a break
* Breathe in for 4 seconds and out for 6 seconds
* Take a drink
* Carry books
* Count to 10 in your head
* Tell an adult your emotions
* Calm your body

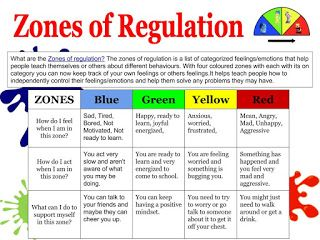
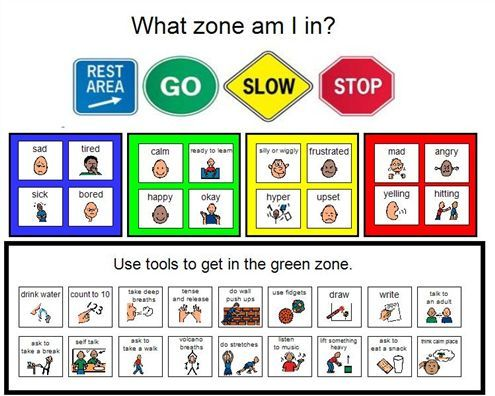
  

Useful classroom strategies to implement

Utilizing a “zone of regulation”

A visual aid can allow children to identify their emotions, while offering strategies to problem solve and manage these feelings

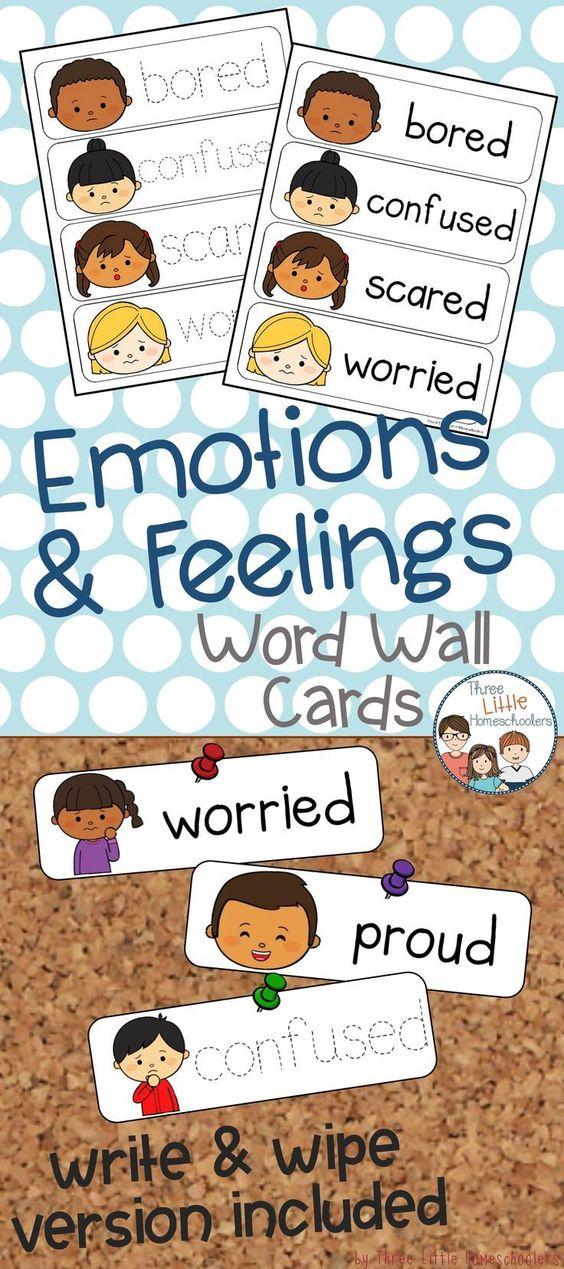
For example,



Create a “word wall”

Displaying pictures of emotions with appropriate feelings words can allow students to effectively communicate how they are feeling during a difficult situation

For example,



Include journaling during the school day

Providing children with a journal to keep in the classroom offers space for expression about how they are feeling. This outlet allows for a comfortable and private way to process daily emotions and ask for specific changes in the classroom

For example,

* Free-write about their day
* Use prompts, such as “How I felt today” or “What I need in the classroom”
* Journaling about a time where they felt a specific way

References

American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA]. Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (3rd Edition). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*  2017;68(Supplement\_1):S1-S48. doi: 10.5014/ajot.2014.682006.

Compas, B. E., Jaser, S. S., Dunbar, J. P., Watson, K. H., Bettis, A. H., Gruhn, M. A., & Williams, E. K. (2013). Coping and emotion regulation from childhood to early adulthood: Points of convergence and divergence. *Australian Journal of Psychology,* *66*(2), 71-81. doi:10.1111/ajpy.12043