

CORE SKILL: REGULATE

Managing Emotions I



What You Need to Know

Just like adults, all children feel strong emotions at times, especially when things don't go the way that they expect. Feelings like anger, frustration, and sadness are a normal part of life, and as we grow, we develop skills to regulate these emotions (i.e., self-regulation skills to bring our emotions back in check). Infants and toddlers regularly have strong feelings but have not yet learned the skills to manage them, so they often end up expressing themselves by yelling, throwing tantrums, or hitting.

Sometimes adults misinterpret children's emotional expressions as purposeful 'acting out.' Rather, children are expressing their feelings the only way they know how. They need your help to learn how to manage their emotions so that they can get the most of their time in the classroom. You can do this by preparing them **beforehand** and by providing the support and comfort **in the moment** that lets them know that strong emotions are important and overwhelming but *can* be tamed.

Things to Consider

Focus on preparing and supporting children **before** their strong emotions peak. We cannot expect that toddlers will be taught a self-regulation strategy and use that strategy independently the next time they are upset. However, with the guidance and support of a trusting adult, a young child can practice these strategies and begin to use them with less support over time.

Development of Ability to Manage Emotions

Between 9 and 18 months, children may:	Between 16 and 36 months, children may:
Express a variety of emotions and modify their expression according to the reactions of familiar adults, based on the child's cultural background.	Express a range of emotions.
Look to familiar adults for help with strong emotions.	Show developing ability to cope with stress of strong emotions by using strategies, such as getting a familiar toy or blanket, or seeking contact with a familiar adult.
Try to calm self by sucking on fingers or thumb when overly excited or distressed.	Use various strategies to help manage strong emotions, such as removing oneself from the situation, covering eyes or ears, or seeking support from a familiar adult.

Setting the Stage

Children are best prepared to handle strong emotions when they feel safe, secure, and cared for. It's important that you cultivate a classroom environment that is supportive, consistent (yet flexible), and enjoyable to be in. Refer to "Relate: Teacher-Child Relationship" for more on laying the foundation that will help children see you as a resource, feel connected, and feel safe so that they can express and recover from strong emotions.



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Managing Emotions I

Monday OBSERVE	OBSERVE Carefully observe the children in your classroom. All children are unique. Each has their own temperament – their approach and initial reaction to what happens in their world. How do your children differ in their emotional reactions? Are there some children who mostly “go with the flow,” or do some children have a hard time when something unexpected arises? What do children typically do when they experience a strong emotion? Do some children automatically come to you for reassurance?
Tuesday FOCUS	Acknowledge and Accept Strong Emotions Focus on labeling, accepting, and understanding that everyone feels strong emotions at times. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Reading a book, “Why do you think they’re so angry? I think they are upset because...”◆ “Sometimes we all feel frustrated or angry. I felt frustrated when...”◆ “It can be frustrating when someone doesn’t understand what you said.”◆ “You felt upset when your hands got wet. Sometimes we don’t like how things feel on our hands. I feel upset when I get glue on my fingers.”
Wednesday SCAFFOLD I	Use Calm-Down Strategies Introduce and practice strategies for calming down your bodies. Teaching children strategies for calming their bodies before they are feeling strong emotions gives them the tools that they will need in the moment when they <i>are</i> upset. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Practice taking deep breaths (e.g., count to 3, or see Activity Card – Breathing: Lion’s Breath).◆ Tense and loosen muscles.◆ Shake it out to music (or without).◆ Introduce and visit a calm-down spot in the room (e.g., a quiet, soft place to relax and calm down). Pair visuals with calm-down strategies to help teach and prompt children to use them in-the-moment. For example, provide a visual of a flower (smell the flowers) and candle (blow out the candle) to support calming breaths.
Thursday SCAFFOLD II	Connect to Children Focus on connecting emotionally with children. Let them know that you understand them and are there to help them. Tune in to how they feel in different situations and/or what is difficult for them and triggers their emotions. <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “Can I help you with that?”◆ “I’m so glad to see you this morning! I think you are happy too!”◆ “I see you are breathing fast and heavy. I think you are feeling a lot of emotions right now. Let’s talk through them together.”
Friday KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Write a few sentences about each of your children; describe how they tend to react emotionally and what the best way to help each child manage their emotions may be. This observation will help you to individualize your responsiveness to each child’s regulatory needs.

CORE SKILL: REGULATE

Managing Emotions II



What You Need to Know

Last week you focused on using Intentional Teaching Practices (ITPs) to prepare and support children **before** their strong emotions occur. This week you will focus on pulling those practices together to help children manage their emotions **in the moment** when children are very upset. By supporting them in the moment, you provide children with the safety, comfort, and confidence that they need when dealing with feelings that may be overwhelming.

Things to Consider

- ◆ Temper tantrums are a normal part of a toddler’s development. When young children become really frustrated and they don’t know what to do or how to communicate, a tantrum can be the result. Children have very little control over themselves in the middle of tantrum, so this is **not** the time to address misbehavior, discuss problems or solutions, or teach a skill. In fact, doing so may actually make the situation worse! Rather, focus on helping the child calm down. Once calm, you can work with the child to figure out what happened and how to address it together.
 - In moments when tantrums evolve into meltdowns, children may struggle to regulate their emotions and may require additional support to calm down. Meltdowns often result from intense tantrums or sensory overload, requiring a sensory cure. Some calming strategies may include calming music, a tight squeeze in a blanket/hug, a crunchy snack, a sip of cold water, or engaging in a preferred activity. Employ the ITPs you focused on in the previous week once the child is calm.
- ◆ It’s important to step in and support children before emotions escalate, but be careful not to “save the day” too soon. Research shows that a little bit of frustration or anxiety is good – it helps us persist, explore, and take on new challenges. In such instances, you can acknowledge their hard work and let them know that you are available for support if needed (e.g., “You are working hard to get that bucket open. I bet you can figure it out. I wonder what you can try next to get it open?”).

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Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Managing Emotions II

OBSERVE	
Monday OBSERVE	Revisit the notes that you took/descriptions you wrote about how children tend to react emotionally. Check in throughout the week to be sure that you are tuned into children's reactions and triggers.
Use All ITPs In-the-Moment	
Tuesday Wednesday Thursday SCAFFOLD	<p>When strong emotions occur...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Connect to Children: notice as children begin to experience negative emotions; you can often prevent a temper tantrum or meltdown by intervening before the emotion gets too big for the child to handle.◆ Acknowledge and Accept Strong Emotions: "I see you are feeling sad that your mom left." Avoid asking too many questions as this may overwhelm the child even more. Rather, label and narrate their strong emotions.◆ Prompt children to Use Calm-Down Techniques: "We need to calm your body. Can you take a deep breath like we practiced? Now, blow it out like a lion, well done. Let's do it again." Or, model taking deep breaths while holding the child.◆ Connect to Children: provide comfort through your presence with genuine concern through the words, "I'm right here," and/or with a hug or pat on the back.
Friday KEEP IT GOING	<p>Consider what you learn from observing children this week. Check in and ask yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ How did they react to your support? What worked best?◆ What times of day or contexts were hardest for children? How can you change them?◆ Are there other things that you might change in your classroom to avoid unnecessary negative emotions (e.g., there might be a toy that makes children really upset and you realize that toy is really a toy for older children)?