

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From ***What's the Buzz?*** A social skills enrichment programme for primary students



Lesson 9: feelings, ideas to create wellbeing

The purpose of this lesson was to alert your child that there are things they can do to take care of their emotional health. The lesson offered them a collection of ideas to manage the stresses within their lives more effectively so they feel calmer, happier and more resilient. Be sure to follow up on your child's selection of 'calm-down' ideas because as children become actively involved in managing their wellbeing the risk of them storing frustrations and exploding when least expected is minimised. Here are a few useful ideas to support your child's wellbeing.

Accept that this is hard

The truth is that learning to manage our emotions is probably one of the hardest things we ever have to learn. Do you doubt this? Think about a time when you have felt angry, upset or hurt. Were you able to stop, count to ten and think through a logical plan of action? If honest, most admit to having had a moment or two when rational thinking went out the window. At times the strength of our emotion has driven each of us to do things we have later regretted. When looking at the management of feelings in this context it is not reasonable to expect a child, with only a few years of experience, to do what has taken us many years to refine. Then, add to the equation your child's poor social awareness, social awkwardness, low confidence, impulsiveness or a hostile peer environment, and a considered coping style is very difficult for them to manufacture. When something goes wrong they will not naturally stop and think first - they react!



Model what you want

One of the best things we can do is to consistently show our children how to handle their feelings by handling ours as well as we can. When we feel upset and say nasty things about others or play the righteous role our children watch, and over the years, they learn to do the same. Never under estimate your influence.

Read the signs and prepare!

Try to interpret your child's frustration as a genuine emotion that should be dealt with respectfully. Set up ways, whether it is a signal or phrase, that permits them to escape a situation with dignity before their emotion boils over. For example, when you see your child becoming agitated at a family gathering you might say, "Hey, Slade, can you help me get those things from the car?" This prearranged question allows your child to leave the group with dignity and take a few moments with you to find their composure.

Teach the 'Sunshine shower'

Try this approach ...

"There will be times when you need to stop, gather your thoughts and calm down. This is the moment to let the sunshine rescue you. Move to a spot where you can be alone for a few moments. Sit, close your eyes and be still. Turn your back so you can feel the warmth of the sun on it, and enjoy! Now recall something you like; a favourite story, a great movie, a place you enjoyed visiting, a good time you had with friends, or think about something you are looking forward to. Spend a few moments thinking about one of these so your happy thoughts help you to feel calmer. Then, return to what you were doing with a plan to make things better."

Build a guided meditation into the day

Just as adults do, children can find improved emotional steadiness by spending ten to fifteen minutes each day immersed in a guided meditation or similar. Experiment with the meditation below and if your child finds it appealing try your local library, CD outlet or the web for more. Here are a few of our favourites;

Donna Attard. Meditation for Children. <http://www.newworldmusic.com>

Michelle Robertson-Jones. Faerie Guided Meditations for Children. <http://www.paradisemusic.co.uk>

Michelle Robertson-Jones. Bedtime Meditations for Children. <http://www.paradisemusic.co.uk>

Elizabeth Bayer and Toni Carmine Salenio. Meditations for Children. <http://www.tonicarminesalenio.com>

Crystal Rainbow Pty Ltd. Joy – imagination journey for kids. <http://www.crystalrainbow.com.au>

Crystal Rainbow Pty Ltd. Making Rainbows – imagination journey for kids. <http://www.crystalrainbow.com.au>

Julie Pappas. Peaceful Journeys for Little Souls. <http://www.childrensmeditations.net>

Indigo Kids Publishing. Meditations for Children. <http://www.joshuabooks.com>

Try this relaxation exercise with your child.

Turn off the lights and partly draw the curtains. Ambience is important. Have your child lay on their back on the floor or bed. Begin reading to your child when ready.

Wriggle a bit to get comfortable.

Get ready to recharge your batteries.

Begin by thinking about something that has been hard or unfair for you today. Something that made you feel disappointed, angry or annoyed.

(Wait for a few moments)

What we are about to do will help you let go of any bad feelings you might be carrying.

Be still.

Feel your body relaxing into the bed/floor.

Start by feeling your breathing.

Place your hands on your tummy and get ready to feel it rise as you breathe in.

Take a deep breath in as I count to three.

One, two, three. Hold it in.

Begin to let it out as I count to three. One, two, three.

Feel your tummy gradually sink as you breathe out.

Slowly breathe in again. One, two, three, and hold the new air and its energy (wait).

Breathe out slowly as I count to three. Out go the angry or unfair feelings.

Wait for a bit.

Breathe in counting to three.

Wait.

Breathe out counting to three.

Keep breathing, in and out. I'll let you know when to stop (continue for a minute or two and gently place your hands on your child's hands).

Little by little parts of your body will begin to relax.

Stretch out, keeping your back and legs on the floor.

Make yourself as long as you can. Hold the stretch (pause). Let it go and relax.

Now do the same with your right leg. Tense the muscles. Hold them tight (pause). Let the muscles relax.

Do the same to the left leg now. Stretch and tighten the leg, hold it (pause). Let go.

Go to your feet. Right foot first. Wiggle your toes. Now push your toes wide apart. Hold the stretch (pause).

Now relax them.

Let's do the left foot ... wiggle your toes and push them wide apart. Hold the stretch (pause). Then relax them.

Stop for a moment and check on your breathing. Keep to the rhythm. Breathing in one, two, three. Holding it for a moment. Slowly breathing out one, two, three.

Let the feeling of relaxation gently move from your legs, up your back and arms, and down into your fingers.

Place your arms by your side.

Stretch your fingers wide apart, and hold them apart while you count ... one, two, three ... relax them.

Do the same for your shoulders. Move your thoughts to your face. Close your eyes. Squeeze them tight. Let them relax. Do it again if you want.

Relax your facial muscles because they've been talking and smiling all day. Then tighten your face again. Keep it tight to the count of three. Relax your face again.

Now tell your mind to relax (pause). You can use what we have just done whenever you want to slow down and clear your mind.

Keep your eyes closed if you want and I'll read a short story to you.

The groundwork counts

Find time to discuss your child's selection of 'calm-down' ideas with them. By spending a small part of most afternoons or evenings on one of the calming ideas presented in this lesson, children are far more likely to feel and act more resiliently. When the 'groundwork' of daily stress management is in place children tend to cope better with the stresses and strains of life. This really is when their investment pays off!

Dealing with anger

Sometimes, children become stuck at becoming angry to get their way. They become expert at exploding and threatening because they believe it works for them. Gradually, over time, defuse anger as their favoured way to manage frustration. In happier times, discuss why they choose to explode. Most children say how terrible they feel after their angry explosion. It is not what they want and having an audience, even a caring one, can intensify the outburst.

Build practical strategies for them to cope with anger, and when they use them, praise your child! A good idea is to find a way they can transfer the angry emotional surge into the physical. Depending on the temperament and age of your child you might suggest they:

- go somewhere quiet
- punch a punching bag
- punch or twist an old cushion or pillow
- take a deep breath
- walk away
- take a shower
- twist a towel tightly
- bounce on the trampoline
- bite into an apple (and eat it)
- take a walk
- go for a jog or a run
- go to a friend's house
- sit outside and look at the sky
- lie under a tree and watch the leaves move in the breeze
- draw a picture of the person who made them annoyed with and tear it into little bits
- write an angry letter then rip it up
- rip up a newspaper or magazine
- rip up a kitchen sponge into a thousand pieces
- run up and down a staircase
- throw a ball at a target over and over again
- go and kick a ball
- listen to music
- go to the bedroom and scream into the pillow
- phone a friend, anyone trustworthy, and complain

The best outcomes occur when children latch on to a particular strategy, and routinely use it. Getting into a habit embeds the new behaviour and soon it becomes automatic.

A golden rule

When your child becomes upset or angry always offer a sensible way they can calm themselves. When their feelings are out of control and it is too difficult for them to think clearly or talk rationally make it a rule to not participate. Quietly move away and give them time to recover. Wait for them to gather some emotional control before trying to problem solve with them.



"A friend is a gift you give yourself." Robert Louis Stevenson