

Social Skills

Guide: Supporting Emotion Regulation – Pre-Kindergarten

What is it?

Working Through Emotions is a collection of techniques that teachers can use to support children to regulate their strong feelings in the moment. These strategies guide children through the process of recognizing their emotions, describing these emotions, and choosing how to respond.

What does it look like?

A child has been becoming frustrated and is hitting classmates during stations. The teacher introduces the Turtle Technique so that the child has a strategy to calm down and manage their emotions. Their teacher then keeps an eye out during stations to catch the child *before* they get too upset. When the teacher notices the child appears frustrated, the teacher labels and validates the emotion, saying “It looks like you’re feeling frustrated” and gives the child the option of using the Turtle Technique calm-down steps.

Why is it important?

Preschoolers are learning how to regulate their emotions and often need additional support to cope with strong feelings (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness, fear, excitement). When teachers help children develop the skills to recognize *what* they are feeling and strategies to *work through* these emotions, children are empowered to regulate their behavior independently and are more likely to remain engaged in the classroom community and learning activities.

The Working Through Emotions strategies are useful for all children, but teachers might need to provide additional scaffolding and practice opportunities for children who need them the most.

Building Blocks for Working Through Emotions

1. Recognize the emotion

To understand and work through their emotions, children need to know what to call them. When teachers encourage children to be aware of what they are feeling and connect it to language, they support children to build the skills needed to recognize and communicate about their own and others’ emotions. Allow children with limited language skills to point to a visual of the emotion they are feeling.

2. Describe the emotion

After naming the emotion, being able to describe its intensity is an important next step. The ability for children to recognize and label when they are starting to feel a “big emotion” can help them “own” or manage the emotion, preventing it from building further in the moment.

3. Regulate the emotion

After recognizing what it is that they are feeling, children need to know what to *do* with the feelings. It is important for children to know that they have problem solving strategies or ways to calm their bodies if an emotion becomes “too big,” or they are feeling overwhelmed. Children may need support to make the connection between an emotion and what caused it.

Tips for Helping Students Handle Emotions

1. Prepare children to handle strong emotions

- Teach how to recognize emotions.
 - Read stories, sing songs, and play games that incorporate a full range of emotions.
 - Emphasize that *all* feelings are valid (e.g., we all feel angry, sad, etc. at times).
 - Help children recognize the physical signs when they are feeling frustrated or upset.
 - Recognize and acknowledge that there are differences in how emotions are described and expressed across cultures and within different families.
 - Reference the *Emotional Vocabulary* handout for tips labeling emotions.
 - Introduce a classroom “Feelings Faces” or “Feelings Wheel” (see resources below).
 - Visit NCPMI’s website for practical strategies for teaching social emotional skills:
 - “Scripted Stories for Social Situations”
 - “Book Nook” activities
- Teach how to describe emotions.
 - Introduce the *Feelings Faces*, *Feeling Wheel*, and *Relaxation Thermometer* as a way to guide children through describing the intensity of an emotion (see NCPMI resources below).
- Teach how to regulate emotions.
 - Use social stories and modeling to teach children how to regulate their emotions.
 - Read stories that incorporate calm down and problem-solving strategies.
 - Introduce and practice the “Turtle Technique” (see ECE Hub and NCPMI resources).

2. Guide students through strong emotions in-the-moment.

- Anticipate and plan for situations that might bring up strong feelings for particular children.
 - Get to know and look for each child's warning signs (e.g., tensing, zoning out, fidgeting).
 - Reflect and validate the child's feelings using a calm and soft voice.
 - Offer the child the opportunity to use a self-regulation technique.
 - Reinforce the child's use of the technique.
 - Once calm, think of ways to better anticipate triggers and plan for next time.
 - Make sure to do this as soon as possible! The more recent the situation, the better able children are to connect what you are saying with their behavior.
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Resources that Support Emotion Regulation

- [Introduction to the Feeling Faces and Feeling Wheel](#) - VKRP ©
- [Feeling Wheel](#) (English and Spanish) - NCPMI ©
- [Feeling Faces](#) (English and Spanish) - NCPMI ©
- [Introduction to Relaxation Thermometer](#) - VKRP ©
- [Relaxation Thermometer printable](#) - NCPMI ©
- [Introduction to the Turtle Technique](#) - NCPMI ©
- [Tucker Turtle printable](#) - NCPMI ©
- [Tucker Turtle story](#) - NCPMI ©
- [Book Nook: Glad Monster, Sad Monster](#) - CSFEL ©
- [Book Nook: Hands Are Not For Hitting](#) - CSFEL ©
- [Book Nook: On Monday When It Rained](#) - CSFEL ©
- [Book Nook: Sometimes I'm a Bombaloo](#) - CSFEL ©
- [Emotional Vocabulary](#) - NCPMI ©
- [Helping Young Children Control Anger and Handle Disappointment](#) - NCPMI ©