



Trends is published regularly throughout the school year by **Cornerstone Day School** as a service to New Jersey school professionals. Each issue highlights one important topic with practical applications for those working with students with emotional and behavioral problems.

TRENDS



"Integrating state of the art psychiatric treatment and outstanding academics within a dynamic school environment."

"Self-regulation is critical for academic and social success..."

To learn more:

- **Take Charge:**
Teaching students to problem solve. College of Education, University of Florida - education.ufl.edu
- **The Zones of Regulation:**
A curriculum designed to foster self-regulation and emotional control - zonesofregulation.com

TEACHING EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION

Emotional regulation is the ability to handle distressing feelings effectively and the ability to control impulses, aggression, and self-destructive behaviors. Being able to soothe oneself and delay gratification are also part of self-regulation. Self-regulation involves a person's ability to express and experience emotion in a manner that is appropriate and proportionate to the situation and circumstances. Researchers and mental health professionals point to the importance of social relationships in the development of self-regulation and agree that the development of self-regulation skills is essential in preparing our students for life.

Self-regulation is critical for academic and social success, and addressing the self-regulation needs of children within a school context is not only logical, but necessary. Students with poor emotional self-regulation skills typically display the following characteristics and difficulties:

1. Emotional knowledge of self and others is limited.
2. Difficulties with communication about feelings.
3. Misperception of facial/social cues from others, including children and school staff.
4. High levels of anxiety in relationship to academic and/or social performance.
5. Physiological arousal problems that significantly impact the student's ability to function in the classroom and more unstructured settings.
6. Misinterpretation of other's behavior - a frequent source of the student's elevated arousal.

Developing Self-awareness Skills

Self-awareness, is an essential building block for developing emotional self-regulation. Self-awareness is defined as knowing our moods, our feelings, and our thoughts and then understanding the reason for these feelings. An important step in the development of self-regulation is to teach students to identify signals inside their body that indicate they are becoming aroused. Most students with self-regulation difficulties have limited knowledge of emotions in themselves and others, developing this self-awareness is the most important step in this process, and is a prelude to mastering all of the other components. Without knowledge of emotion and the signals in their body, students cannot self-regulate.

The following steps may be used in self-awareness instruction:

1. Instruct students to identify the four feelings associated with increased arousal, these include angry, upset, frustrated, and anxious. →

TEACHING EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION - CONTINUED

2. Assist students to identify body signals, including facial expressions that are associated with the targeted emotions above. Instructional activities include; mapping of body signals on a paper person, role-plays, and discussion of real life events, which occur in the school setting, and relating these to how students feel inside.
 3. Students can use rating scales or visual aides like thermometers or color codes to indicate the intensity of a feeling they experience. The goal here is to help students recognize the early warning signs so they may effectively use the strategies for calming down and problem solving.
 4. Assist students to explore triggers for different emotions as well as the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Positive and negative thinking patterns may be explored along with instruction in techniques for controlling their negative thoughts.
 5. For students on medications, the building of self-awareness includes gaining an understanding of how the brain and medication work together in the self-regulation process.
 6. Instruct students in positive self-talk strategies as a tool for calming down. They can be assisted to explore different things they can say to themselves when aroused to feel better and stay in control. For example, "It's ok to make a mistake" when anxious about their performance in the classroom. All or nothing thinking and exaggerating the negative should also be explored and counteracted with positive thoughts.
 7. An important step in the process of self-regulation is developing competence in solving problems as this improves confidence as well as reduces anxiety. Instruction should explore various ways to solve problems after they have calmed down.
- Problem solving skills**
- It is important to regularly teach problem solving skills to children and youth. There are many developmentally appropriate curricula and activities for teaching students with emotional regulation difficulties. Typically instruction involves these five steps:
1. Identify that a problem exists: teaching students to recognize that there is a problem that needs to be solved.
 2. Defining the problem: naming and describing the problem.
 3. Generating solutions: helping students brainstorm possible strategies for resolving the problem.
 4. Evaluating and enacting solutions: evaluating each possible solution and effectively carrying out their "best choice".
 5. Assessing the outcome: Determining whether the problem was solved or not.
- Researchers at the University of Florida developed the following acronym as part of their *Taking Charge* curriculum:
- Check** – see if you're angry
Hold on – calm down and think
Analyze – figure out the cause of your feelings
Reflect – think of possible solutions
Go for it – choose and use a solution
Evaluate – see what happened

