STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIORS: Supporting Emotion Regulation

WHAT IT IS:
Supporting Emotion Regulation is a collection of techniques to help children learn self-control of their strong emotions (for example, anger, frustration, and disappointment). These techniques help a child learn to recognize his or her emotions, calm down, and rejoin classroom activities, and make a positive behavior choice. Methods include using books, feelings charts, a feelings thermometer, songs and games, and the “Tucker Turtle” technique.

WHY IT WORKS:
Young children are in the early stages of learning how to manage their tough feelings. When young children don’t know how to handle normal feelings like anger, frustration, sadness, fear or worry, they may show aggression (yelling, temper tantrums, or hitting) without fully realizing what they are feeling and why, or how to handle these strong emotions. Teachers can purposefully draw awareness to children’s emotions and teach them skills to control their emotions. This support allows children to more independently control their emotions and behavior and engage positively in the classroom.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:
April has been getting very frustrated and has been frequently hitting her classmates during centers. April’s teacher decides that April, and many of her peers, would benefit from learning emotion regulation skills. The teacher uses the Tucker Turtle system (with story book and cue cards) to teach them these skills. After teaching the steps to the children, the teacher carefully observes April during center time to catch April before she gets too mad and hits a peer. April controls her emotions in her Calm Down space, with the teacher using pictures to remind her of the calm down steps (like saying what she’s feeling and breathing). Over time, April is getting along much better with peers; she’s calmer, happier and is working hard to manage her anger. Now that she is getting her Tucker Turtle skills down, she needs less help from the teacher.

WHEN IT MAY BE USED:
Supporting Emotion Regulation should be used for a child or children who tend to display strong negative emotions in the classroom. For example, for children who tend to get upset very easily when things do not go their way, those who tend to be aggressive if they get mad or frustrated, or those who might easily blame others when things do not go the “right” way. These strategies are often used for individual children but are great techniques for all children to learn.
WHAT ARE THE STEPS/TO-DO’S:


**Preparing children to regulate strong emotions.**

1. Teach children how to recognize and describe emotions.
   - Read books about feelings and encourage children to identify the feelings they see in the book, consider why the character may be feeling that way, and share a time they felt the same emotion.
   - Encourage children to consider what dolls, stuffed animals or puppets may be feeling.
   - Use a Feelings Chart or Wheel. For example, as children enter the classroom ask them to point to the face on the feelings chart that shows how they are feeling and discuss “why”.
   - Sing songs about feelings.
   - Play games about feelings. For example, present a problem or scenario and ask children “How would you feel?” or roll a Feelings Cube and make faces to match the emotion.

2. Teach and practice self-regulation techniques.
     - Discuss with students and practice techniques for calming down: (1) Recognize what they are feeling (2) Think “Stop” (3) Go inside their “shell”. Take 3 deep breaths and think calming thoughts. (4) Come out when they are calm and find a solution to the problem.
   - Read books that highlight ways to calm down or positive replacement behaviors. Ask children to discuss how the characters are feeling and how they handled their emotions.
     - For example, a book describing what to do instead of hitting or a book showing a child getting angry and finding a way to calm down (going to a quiet place, giving a hug).
   - Use a Relaxation Thermometer to help children relax when they feel mad, stressed, tense=red by taking 3 deep breaths to move from red to yellow to green to blue=relaxed.
   - Practice how to use self-regulation techniques in different situations (What will you do...?).

**Scaffolding children’s regulation when strong emotions occur.**

1. Monitor child(ren)’s early signs of escalation (facial expression, body language, voice).
2. Reflect the child’s feelings using a calm and soft voice, for example, “You are feeling mad”.
3. Cue the child to use a self-regulation technique, for example, Tucker Turtle, deep breathing, or giving self a hug.
4. Reinforce the child’s use of the technique.
5. De-brief with the child, co-teachers, and parents to better anticipate triggers and plan how to use techniques next time.

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- You should wait if the child is already having a full-blown tantrum. It is best to keep them safe and wait until they are calm before talking about emotions.