



Foster Emotional Skills

Learning to manage emotions is part of normal development. Emotional skills are important life skills and classroom-survival skills.

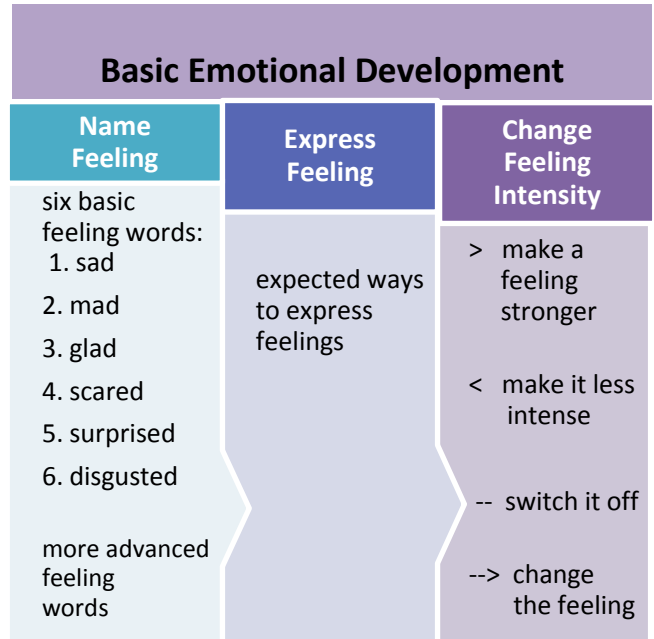
Many behavioral issues in classrooms are the result of limited emotional skill development. Students whose normal development has been interrupted may not have had the chance to learn how to manage intense feelings.

Teachers can assist students to

- develop basic skills of naming feelings, expressing feelings and changing intensity
- develop techniques to “getting to calm”
- develop strategies for managing conflict.

Teachers were asked how they:

- include English emotional words in their classroom?
- encourage appropriate emotional expression in their classroom?
- offer ways to calm down?



| Feeling Words and Expressions in the Classroom | Tips from Teachers |
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| | We watched movies as feelings are portrayed even without the language and then we talked about the emotion and made word walls with the words in English and in their languages. Often, movies about animals seemed easier for them to relate to and removed the element of personal trauma that could trigger behavior. |
| | We used vocabulary lists to teach expanded the vocabulary and descriptive language associated with feelings and relationships. |
| | Feeling faces depicted emotions in a visual way and were posted in our classroom calming area. |
| | Once a relationship was established, I always shared my own feelings with the students, sometimes through photographs. If a child was upset or excited, we talked about what was happening and empathized or celebrated with them. |

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| | I think the social greetings that we use on a daily basis give them some of the language they need to express how they are feeling. Once students can name their feelings and are taught how to name them, they feel a lot stronger. |
| | Emotional expressions for students from refugee backgrounds is often one of the biggest dilemmas we have. Students coming to us have a whole different set of ways to express their emotions which they believe are acceptable (e.g., hitting, pushing, and standing too close). |
| | We had so much classroom conflict at the beginning of the year that we developed a “friendship” poster. It identified different ways of being friends to one another. We took photos of various students doing each of the ways of being a friend. One of the ways was stating how you felt. Another was apologizing. After that the classroom was calmer. |
| | Teaching appropriate emotional expressions goes hand in hand with teaching emotional vocabulary. Teaching students the words they need to use instead of hitting or pushing is important. |
| | When we line up we have an action that cues students to give others personal space. |
| | Often appropriate emotional expression is a behaviour that takes the longest time to learn. |
| | We have feeling words and feeling faces to match those words. Once we used photos of the students themselves showing different feelings. |
| | Working with feelings seemed to go hand in hand with working out conflicts in the classroom. Students sometimes had challenges discovering how they felt. We used an exercise where we coloured feelings on life size body tracings of the students, to show where they felt the feeling of happy, anger, sad, etc. That seemed to help with naming the feeling. We also built a personal book of how to turn happiness up, turn sad down, etc. |

| Getting to Calm | Tips from Teachers |
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| Calming Actions & Activities | |
| | I use a last call warning before an activity will change . |
| | I have a “calm down” box that students can use if they are unable to calm down using the “Stop, Take a deep breath And Relax” (STAR) method. The box has simple puzzles and sewing kits, toys to squeeze, etc. |
| | Once I had a student who would cry for seemingly no reason for the first couple of weeks of school. We worked to provide a predictable and calm classroom. I think she just needed to cry so a simple hand on her back and an atmosphere that told her it was okay to cry was enough. |
| | I also think that calming strategies must be applied on an individual basis. For example, I have a student who would cover his ears and hide under his desk whenever students would pull their chairs out so I put tennis balls on all the chairs. |
| | Allowing for choice of work blocks helped students to feel control and safety. The daily work was always posted on the whiteboard. For some students, order mattered and for others, I needed to be flexible. |

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| | We try never to miss our gym time. Exercise is such a vital element for these students. |
| | I give the student time to process emotions. |
| | For students who are chronically lethargic and tired we use a quiet activity to keep the student engaged. We also look at sleep patterns, breakfast patterns, etc., to see where else we can provide direction or assistance. |
| Calming Spaces | |
| | For students who seem to have trouble calming down, I create a “safe place to go”. Sometimes this is the office, sometimes it is the library. It depends on each student and requires support from other staff. We have great staff who support each other this way. |
| | We use a quiet, safe area within the classroom that was not a “time out,” but was welcoming and nurturing. I provide healthy snacks and baking. Sometimes sharing food is calming. |
| | I set up a calming centre in the classroom. We use music, books, and “comfy” chairs in the centre. Students can take a break until they are ready to come back. For students who want to hang out there for a long time we put other activities in place (e.g., art, structured games, walks, bringing notes to other teachers, etc.). |
| | We work with inside pictures. We help students identify a real or imaginary “calm and safe place”. Sometimes we draw it through art first, and then “bring it in”. This can be helpful for self-calming. |
| | I find a place for him to work that he or she can feel more successful (versus the desk) |
| | If the light is stark, I change the lighting (if I can) for those students who seem to be unsettled without natural light or with harsh lighting. |
| Calming Programs | |
| | We use variations of “How Does Your Engine Run” program. It looks at being “too slow” or “too fast” or “just right” around physical energy. This helps us get a moment to moment read, and helps the students understand themselves more. |
| | We plan a calming activity after an higher energy activity |
| | We introduce a visual chart for the student to express his or her feelings. |
| | We regularly do deep breathing exercises. |
| | We use a social learning buddy to help figure out some peer stressors and to get some better strategies in place. |
| | I use yoga, especially breathing, in our class. |
| | I use the STAR model (i.e., <u>S</u> top, <u>T</u> ake a breath, <u>A</u> nd <u>R</u> est). We practice this on a continual basis. |
| | I like the Zones of Regulation program |
| | Sometimes I find it best to model deep breathing in the midst of more stressful times. This gives students a chance to see that everyone works to get their feelings under their control. |
| | I use Brain Gym as part of my regular routine. After recess we do Brain Gym, and when the class seems to be getting anxious. |
| | I teach my students body breathing: hand on belly, finger under nose. |

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| | We use variations of different social and emotional awareness programs (e.g., how does that make you feel), focusing on basic feelings and turning them up and down. |
| | Early in our daily routine we move into social greetings. The social greetings are a set of sentence frames with general social conversation (e.g., “Good morning. How are you feeling today? I am feeling _____, “ etc.). We have the same social greetings for the entire week which students practice in partners. The social greetings address problems they may be having during recess or lunch hour and gives them the vocabulary needed to successfully solve these problems. |
| | I practice safe unpredictable things in the day with students to help with future transitions. After the first month, I would add small changes or items to the classroom to spark curiosity. Students seemed to delight in this and had many questions about the poster or vocabulary words or mobiles, etc. |
| | I remove any articles or toys that set off dangerous interactions, inappropriate play, or unsettling feelings. |
| Calming Words and Sounds | |
| | I often will prompt: “Stop. Take a breath. Try again.” |
| | When a student wants to tell me about some very difficult or traumatic thing, especially at an inappropriate or inconvenient time, I always give a reassuring message and ensure safety but put off talk until later. |
| | I found out long ago that using a calm voice (regulate voice) makes it easier for my students to “catch the calm” |
| | Sometimes I just ask the student if they need time alone. |
| | I found that finding someone who can speak their language could help re-establish safety in crisis. |
| | When things just seem too out of hand I will ask for silence. Lack of noise can do wonders for calm. |
| | I debrief with students on “good” days, particularly those students who have more English language. This can help build on the positives, and celebrate their gains. |
| | We use all kinds of music in our classroom. I quickly get a sense of what music brings the students energy up, and what is calming. |
| | I give positive feedback. Some students are so aware of my face and I work to show appreciation, hope, and calm. |
| | I speak softly. |
| | We regularly place students with same language fellow students early on. The sounds of “home language” can be very comforting. We are careful not to overwhelm any older mentoring same language students. |
| | We use music, especially rhythmic chants and beats to start with. |
| | I am mindful of comments and how they can make a positive or negative difference |
| | Say, “What I like about you is ...” |
| | I listen as much as I can. It is a gift, I think, to take the time to let another express. |

| Calming Transitions Strategies | | |
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| | I use quiet music at the desk after recess. | |
| | We always began the day with a “hands on” craft type activity while we talked. Students needed time to settle in each morning and I found that something like rug hooking or beading seemed somewhat natural to students. Many issues and questions were dealt with at this time ... Students would then often choose these activities when they felt stressed and needed to calm themselves. | |
| | We stop for water breaks. We have a water bottle at each student’s desk for a quick rest break. | |
| | I am careful to plan a calming activity (e.g., art) after a high energy activity (e.g., gym, recess). | |
| | For a student who has difficulty with transitions, I give that student a job to do during the transitions (e.g., note to office, erasing board, organizing books, go to next class and tell the teacher that it is their turn for the gym, etc..) | |
| | One student did not begin the day well at all. We tracked it down to the challenges with too much echoing sound at the student entrance. The level of sound was too much for him to manage well. We got permission for the student to enter at the front door of the school. He could arrive a few minutes later to class, walk through quiet halls, and hang up his coat without commotion. That started his day much better. | |
| What to Avoid | | |
| | I try to avoid an authoritarian mannerism. Usually these students do not respond well to “Do it or else”. | |
| | I also try to avoid triggers for escalation. I had a student who would break down when we were doing writing activities so for the first little while I had him do other activities and eventually I would tell him if he wrote two words, he could do an activity of his choice. | |
| | I am careful around touching. Many cultures feel differently than we do around touch, so I am careful of these differences. | |
| Miscellaneous | | |
| | Breathe deeply together. | Take photos of transition places. |
| | Use modeling. | Send the student to get a drink of water. |
| | Send the student to do an errand. | Go for walks. |
| | Talk one-on-one. | Do activities together. |
| | Play music. | Use movement. |
| | Have students close their eyes (this may be threatening for some students). | Use concrete reminders (e.g., special stone, symbol, etc.) to the child of who the child is. |
| | Go to board to do work. | Run on the spot. |
| | Draw. | Give choice. |
| | Create space for humour. | Enjoy jokes. |

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| | Check in regularly with the student personally. | Use a hand on shoulder, a hand on the back. |
| | Showcase strengths. | Stay calm in crisis. |
| | Follow through. | Promote growth. |
| | Allow failure. | Push mastery limits. |
| | First find an external cause for joy/jubilation. | Use real emotions/responsiveness, validate feelings. |
| | Provide an environment where it is comfortable and safe to take risks. | |

Emotional skill development is also identified within in TeachingRefugees.com in [Learning Indicators, Survival and Cultural Skills](#).

