

ASD-EAST



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Module 2
**Emotional
regulation**

Special schools



Learning objectives

- To identify and understand emotional regulation and understanding difficulties for children with ASD.
- To understand how to support students to identify and communicate changing emotional states.
- To identify and implement strategies to support students when experiencing uncomfortable emotions.

Children with ASD often find it hard to:

- recognise facial expressions and the emotions behind them
- copy or use emotional expressions
- understand and control their own emotions
- understand and interpret emotions – they might lack, or seem to lack, empathy with others
- share emotions with others
- look toward others (tend to look at the mouth of the speaker not the whole face)
- see broader picture (tend to focus on details)
- predict actions and initiate engagement

Signs of dysregulation include:

- Mouthing or chewing on objects or fingers
- Holding or hoarding familiar and comforting objects
- Toe walking and rocking/ hand flapping
- Humming or vocalising
- Avoiding eye contact
- Turning away, bolting, or removing oneself from a distressful situation
- Use of scripted language, delayed echolalia & repetitive questions (e.g. “what’s next,” “don’t touch me”)
- Emotions expressed through echolalia, as opposed to emotional words
- Preoccupation with specific topics or areas of interest
- Adherence to sameness, rigidity in following rules, inflexibility

Explicit teaching needs to...

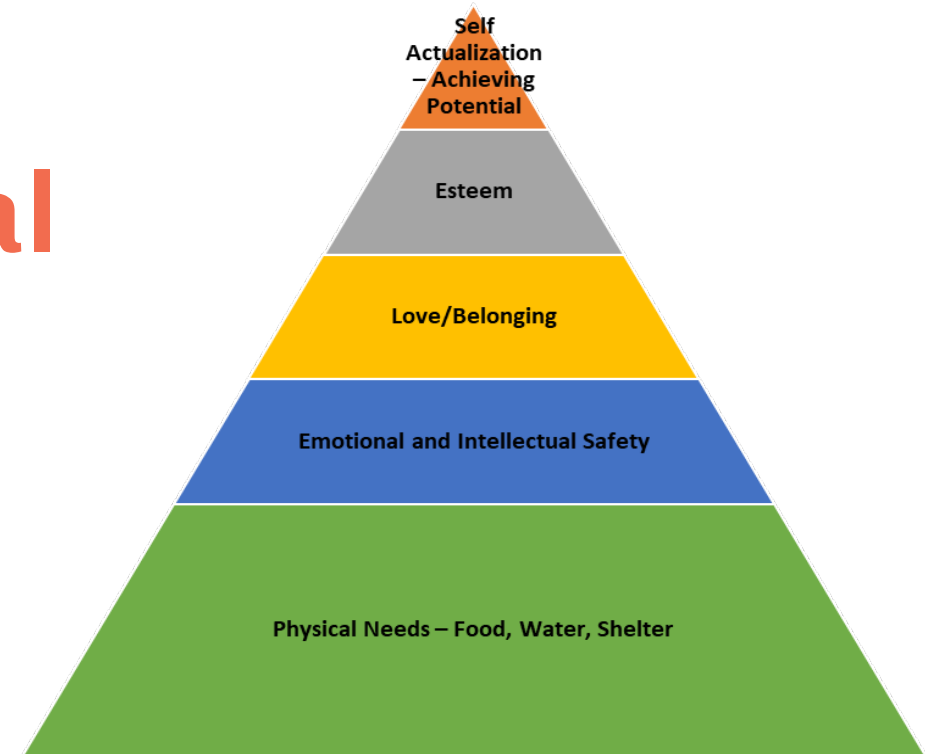
- Never assume any level of emotional understanding.
- Be individualised, working in a way that engages the young person.
- Develop a way to allow the young person to communicate emotional changes in a concrete, non-verbal way especially when stressed.
- Use protective language (uncomfortable feelings, not “bad” feelings).
- Identify strategies that can be used independently by the young person and others around them when they are stressed.
- Ideally be shared with home too, so that common language and resources can be used across both settings.

What is emotional regulation?

- The process of recognising and controlling feelings or reactions to feelings

Why do we teach emotional regulation?

- Emotional regulation is vital for learning and focusing in the classroom



Emotional regulation includes

- Self regulation – strategies used by the child to self regulate (self-initiated and self-directed by the child)
- Mutual regulation – the child’s ability to respond to others or to seek support from others to help them regulate

| Factors that influence emotional regulation | Our role |
|--|--|
| <p>Developmental abilities</p> <p>The ability to understand and use language</p> <p>Cognitive strengths</p> | <p>Identify when the child's behaviours are under/over aroused and respond appropriately</p> |
| <p>Behaviour of others</p> <p>Predictability of others actions</p> <p>Trusting relationships</p> | <p>Identify the strategies the child uses to help themselves concentrate and stay calm</p> |
| <p>Environmental factors</p> <p>A clear predictable environment</p> <p>Developmentally appropriate activities</p> <p>Visual and auditory input at just the right level</p> <p>Planned and supported transitions</p> | <p>Assist the child to be in an optimal state of arousal</p> |
| <p>Positive emotional memory</p> <p>Previous social and learning experiences impact on expectations of what might happen</p> | <p>Introduce strategies to help the child to recover from extreme dysregulation</p> |
| <p>The child's health</p> <p>Good health, sleeps well, eats well, allergies</p> | <p>Identify when a child is simply not yet ready for a specific setting or activity even with modifications and/or support</p> |
| <p>Sensory challenges – tolerance and processing of sensory input, such as being distracted by sound or flickering light</p> | |

Steps to develop emotional understanding and regulation

Step 1: Emotional recognition in self

Step 2: Recognition of emotions in others

Step 3: Self-regulation

Step one: Emotional recognition in self

Use visual strategies to work on identifying, understanding and communicating about one's own emotions.

Start Simple...

- ✓ Happy and Sad
- ✓ OK and not OK

...with one emotion at a time!

Recognise and label the emotional state, modelling and reflecting it back to the student.

Remember...

These should all be taught at the same time, and not in isolation.

They are all useful in recognising the differences in emotions.

- The Voice
- Body Language
- AND the facial expression

How?

- ❑ Use drawings to represent what changes in the body with different emotions.
- ❑ Try to use photos or video clips if you can find some to demonstrate.
- ❑ Use drama to try and act out situations...make a game of it, if you can.



For example – *When we are mad, irritated, afraid, or worried, our brain thinks we are in a dangerous situation and our body changes to address this potential danger. Some of these changes include:*

- Rapid heartbeat or breathing
- Redness in face
- Clenched teeth
- Clenched fists
- Raised voice
- Tight muscles
- Upset stomach
- Headache
- Feel fidgety

Recognising & labeling feelings

- Teach facial expression and body cues of emotions and feelings using symbols, drawings, photos, cartoons, videos, demonstration...
- Some children react better to real photos.
- Sometimes the best models are other children or their peers.

Grading and scaling

Teach child to grade and to scale feelings using visuals (pictures, drawings, symbols, Feelings charts, Feelings thermometers)

“Grading” of emotions: identify salient cues for a particular level of emotion (tone of voice, body language, facial expression, muscle tension, breathing)

Scale examples

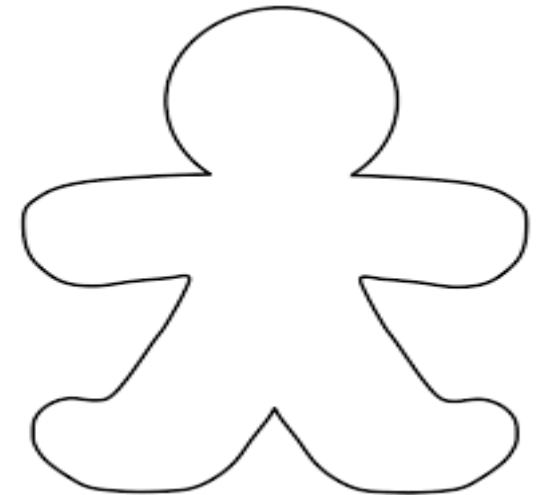


Thermometers

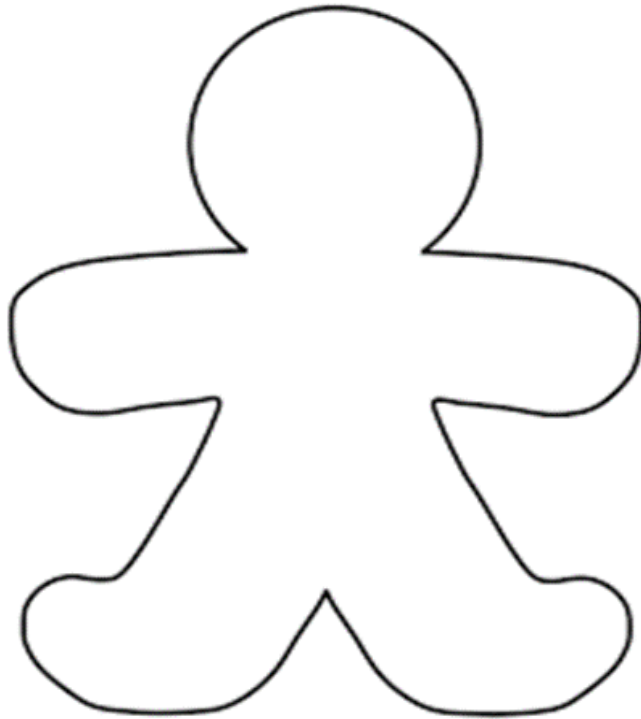


Step two: Recognition of emotions of others

- Label your own emotions in natural contexts:** Point out how are you feeling and why.
- Point out** your voice, face and body cues in connection to specific emotion.
- Use visuals** – you may have your own feelings scale!
- Use drawings and gingerbread men** in a similar way to identifying the person's own emotions.



Activity Gingerbread Man



Recognition of emotions of others

- **Label emotions in natural contexts:** point out to other people/children emotions and reactions connected with gestures or facial expressions. For example, you might say, 'Look – Sally's smiling. She's happy'.
- **Demonstrate** the relationship between behaviour and thoughts (a person who is sad may cry, have down-turned mouth, downcast eyes, little talking).

Step three: Self-regulation

- Recognising and identifying “Early Warning Signs”
- Identifying triggers
- Explore coping tools (sensory support, calming techniques, thinking strategies)
- Using identified strategies from an “Emotions Toolkit” or Pleasures Box

Emotions Toolkit or Pleasures Box (Attwood 2004)

- A form of cognitive distraction/redirection
- Refocuses student on calming things
- This may need a lot of prompting and rehearsing before the young person can use it independently

Emotional toolkit or pleasures strategies

- ✓ Pictures of favourite things (include all senses as well as TV programmes, video games etc.)
- ✓ Photos of pets
- ✓ Helping Hand Buddies
- ✓ Verbal or visual jokes
- ✓ Music tracks to listen to (can be TV theme tunes or game music)
- ✓ Colouring
- ✓ Magazines, catalogues linked to special interests
- ✓ Use shapes to practice deep breathing

Strategies for child's independent use

- ✓ Coping strategies pictures/symbols
- ✓ Positive self-help scripts
- ✓ The Calming Sequence Visual
- ✓ Relaxation strategies
- ✓ Physical activity (walking, jumping, swinging, sports...)
- ✓ Self-Management (calming strategies, focused breathing,...)
- ✓ Cognitive distraction/redirection (pleasures box...)
- ✓ Relinquishing worries (worry box, worry stones or catchers)

Relaxation

- ❑ Relaxation is something that many children don't find easy.
- ❑ Having a designated “relax time” (only needs to be a few minutes) and sharing short meditations, breathing exercises, affirmations and self massage ideas can help to introduce the concept of relaxation.

Free resources and lots of ideas are available from:

www.innerhealthstudio.com

www.relaxkids.com

Worry box ...

- Have a physical, visual way of 'parking' worries and anxious thoughts. These can be written and/or drawn by a child on designated worry notes.
- Ensure that you open box each day and take ownership of any worries placed in there.
- It may be helpful to answer the worries with the solutions in a different colour and return to the child to put in the rubbish bin.

Worry Stones or Catchers

- ❑ Having a small smooth stone or pebble or small fiddle toy that gives positive sensory feedback in a child's pocket to "catch" worries might help to reassure them when anxious.
- ❑ Connecting a breathing routine or positive thoughts to the object when stroked can act as physical prompt.

Remember...

- Understanding emotions can be very challenging for children and young people with social communication differences.
- Some children may adequately label emotions in others but are unable to recognise their own.
- They may not know the appropriate reaction to emotions in others (e.g. if someone is hurt).
- You are a role model – the teacher's underlying emotional attitude influences, involuntarily and unconsciously, the mood and behaviour of the child. *
- Feelings are always authentic and valid.
- There are no bad emotions only uncomfortable or unsafe; the way we express them or how we behave can be subject to change.

Reflection time

- 1) Write down at least three strategies or techniques or supports that you can start using or working on straight away with your students.
- 2) Write down what you would like to implement in the longer-term with your students.
- 3) What are the most important things you would like to share with colleagues straight away?

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The ASD-EAST partnership



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