



EMOTIONAL RECOGNITION & BEHAVIOURAL REGULATION

Activities to support Development

SUMMARY

Below are some suggestions on ways to develop emotional understanding and self-regulation. Generally only complete one activity at a time. The activities are always adult led. Complete the activities together. Ensure that the child can engage in some calm or relaxed time after the activity to ensure they regulate their behaviour.

1. Initially aim to identify the child's level of emotional understanding.
 - Draw around the child on a large piece of paper.
 - Using different colours ask the child to identify body parts and their purpose (e.g. ears for listening, fingers for playing with Lego etc.)
 - After body parts have been covered, offer suitable colours to let the child name, write or draw (depending on their preference) any feelings/emotions that they can identify, asking them how they would know if they are experiencing that emotion.
 - Jot down what the child is saying onto the piece of paper. Follow the child's lead, this activity is to ascertain *their* understanding.
2. Activities to explore the physical experiences of these emotions within a safe environment. After each activity it might be helpful to refer to the child's drawing from step one and explore what emotion the physical feeling most relates to. Is the emotion already named or is this a new one (that is not already on the sheet). Makes notes on the how each activity went, observing the child's response.
 - Running on the spot for 30 secs, measuring heart rate before and after the physical activity. If possible use a stethoscope or hand to physically feel the heart beating. Explore how that can be slowed down.
 - Making each other 'jump'. The child/adult closes their eyes whilst the other makes a noise in the background or shouts 'boo'. Take in turns and explore the feeling together, if necessary re-enact the 'jumping' sensation, feel heart beating, re-enact facial expressions etc. Explore how we can feel calm from this.
 - Going into warmer environment or engaging in physical activity for short bursts, this time taking temperature before and after the activity. Explore how we can 'cool' down.





- Holding an eye cube in your hand for 1 minute. Explore this experience with the child; what was their initial reaction, what do they feel in their hand? How do they feel? What did they want to do/what were their urges and how did they control this? Was it easier or harder knowing you had it for 1 minute?
 - Telling jokes or making each other laugh/watching a funny film etc. possibly using video recording (with parent permission) to explore what impact laughter has on our body. What does it look like? How do we feel before/after (rating scale with happy/sad faces could be helpful).
3. Start-stopping activities to encourage self-regulation (review physiological changes after each activity, phrases such as 'what can we feel?' may be helpful)
- Popping bubbles with specific parts of the body only when instructed to start and stop i.e. fingers, elbow, shoes
 - Balancing items i.e. on their head round a small obstacle course – start /stop
 - What's the time Mr Wolf – starting and stopping
 - Blowing bubbles – with fast breathing small and generally pop – with slow calming breathing big as possible
4. Activities to support mindfulness
- 5-5 breath – breath in for a count of 5 and out for a count of 5
 - Sitting or lying with your eyes closed. Notice three places where your body makes contact with the world. Obvious ones include, feet, legs and arms but others could include skin meeting the air or touching the fabric of your clothes.
 - Body scan – lying or sitting with your eyes closed, mentally scan the body starting from the head all the way down to toes. It may be helpful if adults and child name/share experiences back and forth. It is likely that young people feel 'nothing' during this. It could be helpful to start with contrasts in feeling hot or cold, dryness or moisture, and/or different textures/surfaces e.g. chair, carpet, grass, cushion etc.
 - Sensory scan – similar to body scan but focusing on what you can see, feel, hear, taste

Reference: Willard, C. (2016). *Growing up Mindful*. CO, USA: Sounds True.

