Supporting Emotional Regulation in Elementary School (Lipsett, 2011)

Emotional regulation can be defined as how people control which emotions they experience, how and when they feel emotions, and how they express emotions, both consciously and subconsciously. Emotional regulation determines how a person expresses emotions, navigates through the day, what stimulus s/he will attend to, how one interprets a situation, and how one responds to a situation.

Brain Regions Associated with Emotional Processing

<table>
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<th>Brain Region</th>
<th>Functions</th>
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| Prefrontal Cortex   | • controls emotional recovery time  
                      • can override or inhibit amygdala response to stimuli 
                      • anticipates future outcomes to plan emotional responses 
                      • training and practice gives logical response to stimuli as opposed to biological responses 
                      • key factor in self-control and self-regulation 
                      • prolonged maturation into second decade of life |
| Amygdala            | • responds to stimuli perceived as threatening 
                      • triggers automatic response of increased heart rate and blood pressure 
                      • triggers automatic behavioral responses based on previous experiences (conditioned responses) |
| Hippocampus         | • triggers a memory system response, telling the amygdala to react based on previously taught/learned information 
                      • determines reaction based on past associations stored in child’s memory 
                      • associated with context-dependent emotional learning |

In academic settings poor emotional regulation can affect a child’s ability to learn and retain information, interact with peers and adults, begin and complete tasks, and focus on task at hand. In the classroom this behavior manifests itself in impulsive behavior, procrastination, and difficulty with flexible thinking.

Primary teachers can support the development of emotional regulation by simply talking about emotions, labeling them, and discussing and modeling strategies for coping with these emotions.

### Strategies for Teaching Emotional Regulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| Teach children to label their emotions and the emotions of others. | • encourage children to label their emotions as a way to understand their role in responding to the environment  
• observe and discuss the emotional reactions of others; discuss why people react in different ways  
• identify your own emotions, the emotions of characters in books, and the emotions of the children in the classroom  
• identify the stimulus that leads to an emotion  
• identify and discuss physical reactions when experiencing a particular emotion (e.g., tightening muscles, difficulty concentrating, changes in breathing)  
• create a hierarchy of emotions and discuss the differences between being a little upset/angry and very upset/angry  
• identify, model, and role-play appropriate reactions to stimuli |
| Promote emotional self-regulation.                   | • when a child is upset, use simple direct language such as, “it is time to calm down” or “ask him if you can have the next turn”  
• avoid trying to distract students from their emotional experience by offering a sticker or short-term solution  
• teach strategies for calming emotions such as tightening and releasing muscles, doing wall pushups, using deep or mindful breathing exercises; teach strategies when child is calm and reasonable and practice when the child is upset |
| Offer calm, emotional support that matches the child’s temperament | • use non-threatening, simple language, your physical presence, and eye contact to help calm the child  
• acknowledge their emotion and offer strategies for self-regulation while maintaining a respectful distance  
• monitor your own tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions |