



The TOOLBOX

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS



HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL REGULATION DIFFICULTIES?

TOOL: Prevention | Intervention

TARGET AUDIENCE: Preschool | Elementary

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals | Parents

DESIGN

Line Massé
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– Details: Teachers, psychoeducators, special education technicians, psychologists, educational consultants, parents.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

– Preschool and elementary school children who have difficulty managing their emotions, particularly children who are stressed, impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive, oppositional, aggressive, anxious, depressed or those with autism spectrum disorder.

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

- Difficulty recognizing their emotions or those of others.
- Difficulty managing emotional states that can lead to emotional escalation.
- Difficulty regaining a state of calm and well-being after experiencing an intense state.
- Difficulty appropriately expressing negative emotions.

SPECIFIC GOALS

– To help people around children (parents, professionals, teachers, etc.) recognize their emotional regulation difficulties.

DESIGN

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HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL REGULATION DIFFICULTIES?

Emotional regulation is a skill that develops from childhood. It means that children are able to identify, modulate and appropriately express their emotions if necessary.

EMOTION IDENTIFICATION refers to recognizing and understanding the emotions felt in yourself or others. Children must be able to make connections with the incidents and contexts that give rise to these emotions.

EMOTION MODULATION refers to managing various emotional states (including sensations, thoughts, intensity of emotions and responses) in order to avoid an emotional escalation or regain a state of well-being after experiencing intense emotions. To achieve a state of well-being, an individual must be able to manage both their negative and positive emotions, either by decreasing them (for example, anger, anxiety or excitement), or by increasing them (for example, the feeling of pleasure if the person is depressed).

Lastly, **EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION** involves appropriately communicating emotions to those involved (for example, during conflicts) or to significant people around them (for example, confiding their sadness to their parents). It also implies being able to express them in a different way (for example, artistic expression) in order to regain a state of well-being.

To help children better manage their emotions, we first have to help them identify the difficulties they are experiencing. The following table shows children's main emotional regulation difficulties according to specific skills. It should be noted that these mechanisms are in their infancy in children from preschool to early elementary school.

SKILLS	DIFFICULTIES
Emotion identification NOTE: Before the age of 8, it's normal for children to have difficulty identifying their emotions or considering the other person's viewpoint.	Identifying their own emotions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have difficulty perceiving internal emotional cues (for example, increased heartbeat) or seem to be disconnected from their emotions.• Have difficulty naming the emotion due to a limited emotional vocabulary.• Under-estimate their own aggression.• Repress negative emotions.• Have difficulty making connections between their emotional states and situations that cause them.• Have unhelpful thoughts that increase the intensity of negative emotions. Identifying others' emotions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of sensitivity to others' non-verbal emotional cues.• Show a high sensitivity to what other people are going through.• Have difficulty understanding others' perspectives, emotions, thoughts, intentions and desires.• Show little empathy for others.• Hypervigilant to danger signs.• Think that other people have hostile intentions towards them when it's not the case.



SKILLS	DIFFICULTIES
<p>Emotion modulation</p> <p>NOTE: In preschool and early elementary school, modulation of intense emotions is still difficult and children often need external support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek immediate gratification: find it difficult to wait for needs to be met or to accept constraints. • Have a relatively low frustration threshold (get angry more easily). • Make less effort during boring tasks. • Become easily excitable. • Have more difficulty staying calm in a frustrating or anxiety-provoking situation. • Emotionally overreact. • Overreact to changes. • Feel more quickly overwhelmed by or overreact to emotions. • More easily experience an escalation of emotions. • Have difficulty redirecting their attention to something positive when they are disturbed. • Trouble calming down when emotionally disturbed; remain emotional or upset longer. • Have emotional outbursts (for example, laugh very loudly when they are happy). • Have difficulty reasoning when they are emotional. • Have difficulty objectively assessing situations when they are experiencing intense emotion.
SKILLS	DIFFICULTIES
<p>Emotional expression</p> <p>NOTE: In preschool and early elementary school, it's normal for adults to encourage children to express their emotions and not to do so spontaneously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refuse to communicate how they feel. • Have difficulty expressing their emotions with words. • Communicate their emotions through externalized behaviours (for example, move more, swing, hit or throw objects).

Impulsive children, who are easily frustrated or have difficulty waiting for their needs to be met, have more difficulty managing their emotions. The same is true for children who face various sources of stress (for example, self-esteem wounds, illness, learning difficulties or family conflicts). We need to be more sensitive to these vulnerable children who need more support to help them better manage their emotions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Massé, L. & Verret, C. (In press). Aider les jeunes à mieux gérer leurs émotions difficiles. Dans N. Gaudreau (dir.), *Les conduites agressives à l'école*. Presses de l'Université du Québec.

