

Activities that Promote Self-Regulation and Resiliency

The following activities and ideas are brief outlines and can be adjusted to account for the ages and developmental levels of young children. Sometimes only a slight adjustment to existing activities is all that is needed to increase emotional content.

Attunement (the ability to accurately read cues)

- Feelings Charades - Basic: Adult acts out a feeling and children guess the feeling. Then switch and have a child act out a feeling for others to guess.
- Charades - Reverse: Adult acts out how the child looks in a particular feeling state and the child guesses the feeling. Then switch.
- Charades - Triggers: Pick a feeling and have the adult act out a situation that might elicit that feeling. The child guesses the situation.
- The adult acts out a certain situation and the child guesses potential emotional responses to the situation. Reverse roles.
- Charades - Identify the Person: Pick a feeling. The adult acts out someone in the family expressing the feeling and the child guesses. Reverse roles.
- Follow the Leader - Music: Using hands, drums or other instruments; beat out a rhythm and have the children follow. Or, tap parts of the body and have children follow. Alternate - have each person build on the original rhythm.
- Follow the Leader - Movement: One person creates a physical movement and others follow the movement. For example, walk across the room like a cat or a turtle. Alternate - have each person build on the original movement.
- Follow the Leader - Classic: Simon Says, Red Light/Green Light, Freeze, Mother May I
- Move what I touch: Similar to a freeze game. The child must freeze as one by one you touch a part of the body so that it can move.

Mirroring: Two partners face each other. One does slow movements and the other tries to follow. Children may also follow the slow movements of an adult.

All About Us-Book: Create a book about a certain group event or activity. Include everyone's pictures, feelings, favorite parts, least favorite parts, etc.

Routines and Rituals: Checking In and Out

Feeling Faces: Check in: Point to faces on a poster or picture that shows your current feeling. Or, draw a picture of how you feel right now.

Check-out: Point to faces on a poster or picture that shows your current feeling. What has changed?

Ball Toss: Check-in: Roll or toss a ball around a circle and take turns telling others something new about you or something you did recently.

Check-out: Roll or toss a ball around a circle and take turns telling others something you liked or disliked about the day.

Today's News: Check-in: Have each child say something good and not-so-good that happened recently.

Check-out: Have each child tell others about something she did today that they are proud of.

More Routines and Rituals

Greeting: Greet a child by shaking his hand and stating, "Hello, I'm glad to see you". Then proceed to shake other parts of the child and greet each part.

Drop off: The parent (caregiver) gives the child an "All day kiss" on her hand that she can place on her cheek at any time during the day. A parent and child can create a special drop off handshake. Or, a child may be asked by a parent to safeguard

something special of theirs for the day that the parent will take back at pick-up time.

What did you bring to school (home) today:

"Oh I see you brought your feet, and you brought your ears! Oh, and here's some pointer fingers, (etc)". Touch each part as you welcome the child.

Check the child's batteries: (Useful when a child isn't listening well) Check to see if the listening ears are turned on, try adjust the volume. Use multiple sound effects and check with the child if the ears are working yet. Finally change the battery in the center of his back. Repeat until the ears are functioning properly.

Special handshake: Create a special handshake by starting with a movement and then letting the child add another movement. Keep going until you have about 4 parts to your special handshake.

Talking Stick: During circle only the person holding the talking stick can talk. Pass the stick around.

Tough Transitions: Add playfulness to difficult transitions. For example, give instructions to body parts instead of to the child: "Please tell your feet that they can't walk in puddles today". Attempt to include sensory stimuli to down-regulate for transitions that require quiet bodies and minds. Use all 5 senses if possible. Consider environmental stimulation.

Nap Transition: Use dream catchers and fairy dust to bring good dreams. Make dream pillow with the children and mist them with lavender before sleeping.

First Day of the Month: The first day of the month have a crazy food day, backwards day, pajama day, indoor picnic day, silly hat day, wear mom or dad's clothes day, bring a special adult to school for breakfast day, Spanish day, etc.

Special Days: Toast with cider or juice on New Year's and birthdays. Wear red, eat red, learn about red, do red projects on Valentines Day. Plant a tree on Arbor Day. Plant flowers on the first day of Spring. Have a "Happy Birthday America" party on the 4th of July. On Thanksgiving create a "thankful box" or "helping

others jar". On Thanksgiving plan a "feast for the animals" and put out bird feeders, etc.

Leaving childcare: Create ribbons of love. Give each child a ribbon to decorate for the child that is leaving. Help them write something special about the child on the ribbon. At the end of the day tie the ribbons to a short pole and plan a special time to read the messages and present the pole to the child.

Affect Identification

Feeling Flashcards: Create flashcards using drawings, magazine/book pictures that include a range of emotional expressions. Help children to create a story about the picture, identify possible reasons for the feeling, and/or talk about personal experiences that elicit the feeling.

Feelings Charades: See Charades options under "Attunement". Also, consider using puppets, dolls or stuffed animals to act out feelings and situations.

Word Play: Pick a neutral word, such as "Oh" or "Really". Say the word in different feeling states. How does "Oh" sound angry, scared or excited? Help children observe changes in voice tone and volume, body language, eye contact, facial expression, muscle tension.

Feelings Detective: Connecting feelings, thoughts and behaviors by having kids teach adults about kids. Pick a feeling and ask kids to share ideas about how we can tell when someone is feeling that way. What do they do with their bodies? What are they thinking about? What might make someone feel that way?

Body Awareness: Feelings are sometimes stored inside our bodies. Do a body trace on a large piece of paper or use an outline of a body on a standard paper. Help children to locate feelings in their bodies using a color key. For example, "mad" may show up in a hot face and in clenched fists, scared and excited may both make you breathe faster. Acting out the feeling may give the children clues in their own bodies.

- Feelings Head:** Draw a silhouette of a large head and use your emotions color key. Teach children that we often have many feelings and thoughts going on in our heads; some take a little space and some take a lot of space. Help children think of how they are feeling and things that making them feel that way. Color in parts of the head with the different feelings they are having. Bigger feelings take up more space than not-so-much feelings.
- Feelings Book:** Each child can create an on-going feelings book. Each week add something new -drawings of feelings, photos of the child demonstrating feelings, the child's Feeling Head, magazine pictures that the child finds soothing or makes him happy, writing about feelings, etc.
- Books:** Read books about feelings or have children guess the feelings of characters in everyday books. For example, how is the little pig feeling in the Three Little Pigs? Happy, scared, proud, excited, etc.
- TV:** Tune into the feelings expressed by characters in TV shows and discuss their emotional experiences.
- Modified Games:** Incorporate feelings into a board game (i.e. the different colors in Candy Land represent different feelings that can be acted out or linked to situations). Create a deck of cards with four feelings instead of suits. Use numbers to indicate the intensity of the feelings. Choose a card and act out a situation that would elicit the feeling.

Understanding Degrees of Feeling

- Thermometer:** Draw the outline of a thermometer and make marks to indicate low, middle and high degrees of feeling. Have the children color in how much of a feeling they have.
- Circle/Pie Chart:** Modeled after a pie chart. Have children think of some feelings they are having and using your feelings color key, they can make big and little slices of pie for each feeling.

Poker Chips: Have the child select the number of chips that show how much she is feeling something.

Feeling Beads: Using beads (sorted according to your color key), have children pick the colors and quantities that represent how they are feeling. String the beads on a pipe-cleaner. Do this again on another day and compare.

Number Scales: Create a scale from 1 to 10 or 1 to 100. Create markers to indicate what a 0, 1, 2... or 10 might look like or feel like.

Down-Regulation (for calming)

Breathing: Bubble-Breathing: Real or imaginary. Teach children to blow bubbles slowly so they don't pop.

Pillow-Breathing: Children lie on the floor with a pillow or stuffed animal on their stomachs. Teach them to breathe so that the pillow/animal goes up and down.

London Bridge: Stand in a circle holding hands. As hands go up, breathe in and as hands go down to the floor, breathe out. How slow can you go?

Imagery: Take a deep breath and blow out lots of candles, use breath to blow paint on the wall, or smell imaginary flowers and blow dandelions.

Diaphragmatic breathing can be taught to older children. Combine with visual imagery.

Muscle Relaxation: Consider techniques such as yoga, tai chi, massage, etc.

Robot/Ragdoll: Teach children to walk stiff like a robot or floppy like a ragdoll.

Spaghetti: Move like uncooked spaghetti and then like cooked spaghetti.

Caterpillar/Butterfly: Creep like a caterpillar, go into a cocoon, crawl out and then fly like a butterfly.

Turtle/Giraffe: Be a turtle hiding in its shell and then a giraffe reaching for a high leaf.

Curl and Release: Curl up like a spring in a jack-in-the-box or a football player, then pop up and stretch into the air to catch a long pass. Do it in slow motion for instant replay.

Tense and release: Teach the technique of tensing and then releasing different muscle groups. Tune into the different sensations.

Doorway stretch: Have the child push against a door way or wall, or another's hands. Hold for 7 seconds and then release. Tune into the different sensations.

Grounding:

Create sensory tool boxes. Attempt to accommodate all 5 senses. Include: clay, pieces of different fabrics and ribbon, stones, squishy balls, feathers, cedar blocks, sachets, lotion, bells, chimes, pictures, postcards.

Safe Place Imagery:

Draw a picture of a safe place from the child's imagination or cut out pictures from magazines and make a safe place collage.

Identify a real safe place in the home, office or school.

Identify favorite TV characters or super heroes that the child can visualize being friends with.

Adolescents can visualize healing light or protective force field around them. Adolescents can also imagine a positive future self, the qualities that they have, the feelings of calm and strength.

Good-Fer-Me's

Identify things that are soothing or calming. Help children and adults create a "good-fer-me" list and routinely engage in self-care activities.

Up-Regulation (for reconnecting or joining)

Grounding:

See sensory tool boxes from Down-regulation. In addition:

- Play "I Spy" to help tune into the environment.
- Have child rub hands with glitter cream
- Have child tune into the feeling of a feather being run up and down her arm.
- Pretend the floor is sand and have child dig his toes in.
- Have child describe her favorite book or movie.
- Squeeze a stress ball
- An adolescent can describe current physical sensations or how to do something step by step

Movement:

Any kind of movement is up-regulating. Consider:

- Hopping like frogs across the floor
- Sing (and play) "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes"
- Sing (and play) "The Hokey Pokey"
- Jumping Jacks challenge
- Music and dancing - start slow and speed up
- Play garbage can basketball
- Go for a walk

Mutual Engagement:

Play games that require 2 people. See Attunement activities and consider:

- Play "Pat-a-cake"
- Play Follow the Leader, including using music and rhythm
- Play "Simon Says"
- Toss a ball back and forth
- Play cat's cradle
- Repeat tongue twisters
- Play a board game
- Do an art project
- Talk about an interest of the child

Alternating States Regulation

Turn Up the Volume:

This exercise uses music to cue faster or slower movement. As the volume increases the movements speed up, if the volume decreases the movements slow down. Physical cues, such as raising or lowering arms, can also be used to control speed

- Slo-Mo:** Teach children to move in slow motion (practice walking around the room, eating snack or making a tower in slow motion). Use the cue "slow motion" when you need to help a child or the whole room to slow down.
- Stop-Start:** Red-Light/Green Light is a classic Stop-Start game. Use music, lights on and off, claps, or other cues to start and stop movement.
- Big-Small:** Connecting parts of self through movement (big, medium and small) and identifying appropriate situations for each style. Experiment with movements (giant steps, walking, and tip toeing), vocal volume, speed, and posture. Have children share ideas about when its okay to be big, medium and small.
- Drumming:** Use drums or knees to help modulate between softer/louder and faster/slower. Use Follow the Leader and mix it up.
- Feelings Toolbox:** Each child may create their own by decorating a shoe box and gradually adding items given to them and created by them. Focus individually on each feeling and attempt to include sensory items.
Include: clay, pieces of different fabrics and ribbon, stones, squishy balls, feathers, cedar blocks, sachets, lotion, bells, chimes, postcards, photos of supportive loved ones, paper to draw on or rip up, pictures of safe/soothing places, bubbles, pencil and paper, stress ball, clay, journal, stuffed animal, index cards, markers, transition objects, etc.

Emotional Self-Expression

- Picture of the Day:** Use picture as metaphors for feelings (volcano, cactus, balloons, rain, flowers). Different colored ribbons are also useful metaphors.
- Collages:** Create a soothing collage or an All-About-Me collage. Or, divide a large piece of paper into sections and in each section have the children glue magazine pictures that evoke a specific feeling (mad, happy, sad, excited).

- Masks:** Help children create and decorate masks with different feeling faces.
- Movement:** Dance or move different feelings.
- Feelings and Energy:** Make a chart with three columns - high energy, medium energy and low energy feelings. Have children categorize feelings according to energy levels. Particularly explore ways in that high energy feelings like anger can be safely expressed.
- Throw clay at a target on a wall, throw ice cubes at a tree
 - Make a slammit sock - decorate a tube sock and stuff it with pillow stuffing. Help identify what is safe to whack.
 - Pound pillows
 - Walk, run or shoot hoops
 - Drum, etc.
- Music:** Drum different feelings. Or listen to different pieces of classical music and talk about what the music feels like. Adolescents may have a favorite song or CD that speaks to their feelings.
- Writing:** Consider multiple forms of writing including poetry, journaling, fiction/stories, lyrics, etc. Have writing materials readily available.
- Writing Rituals:** Write down hard feelings and... crumple them up, tie them to a balloon and let them fly away, rip them up, bury them and plant a healing garden (or flower) over them, flush them down the toilet, fill a bag with them and burn them. Write them on rocks and throw them in the lake.
- Identify Resources:** Make a collage or art project with pictures of safe people to talk to.
- Create a comfort tree. On a large piece of paper or felt draw a tree trunk and branches. Cut out leaves and on each leaf have the child write down ways in which they calm down or things that help them feel better. Add leaves over time as more coping skills are discovered.
- Circles of Intimacy:** Write the child's name in the center of a piece of paper. Draw a series of circles around the child's name. Help the child

write names in each circle showing increasing intimacy toward the center of the circle. What information is okay to share with the different people in the different circles.

Initiating Communication: Make a chart of good and not-so-good times to ask for attention or time. How do you know when an adult is busy?

Create different ways to ask for attention or time to talk - consider a secret hand signal, a written note or picture/story card, and practice using words.

Vocal Qualities: Create a volume gauge with written or visual cues for different volumes of voice. Include 1) quiet, whispering voice, 2) conversational, "circle" voice, 3) inside play voice, and 4) outside voice. Use the gauge to help children tune in to their voices.

Act out a situation in loud voices, soft voices and then in conversational voices. Explore how they feel different.

Personal Space: Personal Bubble - Have children create circles with their arms or with a hula hoop. Have them practice walking around without bumping into other's personal bubble. Practice asking permission to enter another's space.

Know your Zone - Have the child stand still and have another person start walking toward the child from the other side of the room. The child decides when the other person is comfortably close and says stop. Measure the distance. Try it with different emotions. How does comfortable space change?

Eye Contact: Ball Toss - Children sit in a circle and toss a ball around. They must say the person's name and make eye contact before tossing the ball.

Tell a story - Have one child tell a brief story to another child who is not looking at him. Do it again with eye contact. How did it feel different?

Pick a scenario that requires two people, such as asking for help or explaining how to do something. Act out the scenario

two times, once without eye contact and again with eye contact. How did it feel different?

I Statements:

What I need - Help children make a list of what helps them when they are trying to express emotional experience (i.e. a hug, silence, eye contact, ideas for feeling better). Practice using "I statements" to communicate these needs.

Problem Solving

Problem-Solving - Puppets: Puppets act out a typical childhood problem. The child or children help the puppet to find a solution. Adults ask sequential questions based on problem solving technique.

1. How is each puppet feeling?
2. What does each puppet want?
3. Let's think of ways that they can work it out?
4. Lot's of good ideas, which one shall we try?
(The puppets try it)
5. How did it go?

Problem-Solving - Adults: The same scenario as above, but the adults act out the problem and ask the children for help finding a solution.

Individuality

All-About-Me Books: Create the book over time, content can vary. Include pictures of the child and her family, magazine cut-outs related to interests, sports, hobbies, favorite foods and colors, pets, drawings, accomplishments, etc. Caregivers and family members can add positive thoughts and feelings about the child. Tailor the book to the child's developmental level.

All- About-Us Books: Similar to the above, but it focuses on the activities, accomplishments and strengths of a family or group.

Collages: Children make collages about themselves (things that they like or enjoy doing, things they are good at, include ideas about the future). Use photos, magazine pictures, small objects, etc.

- Artistic Expression:** Provide multiple and various materials. Consider drawing, writing, poetry, sculpture, music, lyrics, painting, etc. Give the child or adolescent the option of sharing their creation or not.
- Performances:** Have an art show, or music show to demonstrate children's talents. Children can help decorate, prepare snacks, set up chairs, etc.
- Try it Out:** Explore interests, hobbies, sports, and encourage children to try it out. Younger children can be encouraged to try out physical skills on an obstacle course, artistic skills with a new medium or try out a new role through dramatic play, etc. Take photos to memorialize the new experience.

Self-Esteem and Efficacy

- Power Book:** Create a power book that highlights the child's real and potential strengths, successes, positive experiences and internal and external resources. Resources do not need to be reality-based.
- Pride Wall:** Trace the child's body on a large sheet of paper (or the child's head and shoulders on a poster-size paper). All around and inside the outline write positive messages and feelings about the child. Encourage family participation.
- Superhero Self:** Help children define the qualities of a superhero (explore qualities beyond magical powers, like helping others). Help them imagine themselves as a superhero with those qualities. Decorate superhero T shirts that they children can wear. Act out superhero scenarios where the child can practice their superhero qualities.

Cohesive Self

- Masks:** Help children create and decorate masks with different feeling faces, inside feelings and outside feelings, different facets of themselves, how they see themselves versus how others see them.

- Personal Crest:** Look up information on crests or shields as a model. Help the child create her own personal crest. To get started consider dividing the crest into four parts. Include different aspects of the child's self in the crest.
- Ingredients of Me:** Using a shoe box and have the child collect items that symbolically represent multiple aspects of the self. Include small objects, pictures, words, poetry, etc.
- Building Blocks:** Write, draw or glue pictures on each side of wooden or foam blocks that represent different aspects of the child. Put the blocks together .
- Personal Puzzle:** Prior to meeting with the child cut out puzzle pieces from a large piece of thick posterboard. Have the child decorate the puzzles pieces with symbols, words, pictures, drawings that represent a facet of who they are. Put the puzzle together and look at the different ways the pieces intersect.
- Life Books:** Helps older children and adolescents create a coherent narrative of who they are. Create a time line, identify milestones and significant events both positive and negative, fill in the blanks. Go through the book and add feelings and thoughts about different events. Add pictures and drawings. Explore changes in feelings about an event as time has gone by. Explore how the past impacted the present, how did the child cope and adapt, who helped the child along the way, and how is the child the same and different than he/she was when certain events happened.

Future Orientation

- Story Cards:** Some magazine pictures evoke a story. Glue pictures to card stock and help the children create a story about the picture. Help them think about what might have happened before and what might happen next. Explore feelings.
- Future Self Drawing:** Prompt children to think about their future self. What will the look like, where will they live, what will they be doing, who will they be with them? Have them draw a picture of themselves in the future.

5, 10, 20 Year Plans: Divide a piece of paper into three parts - 5 years from now, 10 years and 20 years. Prompt the adolescent to imagine future goals: where would she like to be in 20 years? What steps will she need to take within 5 years and 10 years to reach her goal? Include external supports, people who can support her in reaching her goal. Draw or write about each goal.

Life Book Addendum: Add a "future" to the adolescent's life book. Help the adolescent to imagine himself in the future. What qualities from the past and present will help him reach his goals? How have his experiences prepared him for the future? What qualities or skills does he want to develop for the future?

Ideas are gathered from the ARC materials by Kinniburgh and Blaustein, from books The Joy of Family Rituals by Bizou and from The Book of New Family Traditions by Cox, as well as from our observations of other professionals and our own experimentation.