



Background Information

Students' abilities to understand how emotions affect them and to manage challenging situations affect learning and test performance (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Kids often have no emotion vocabulary or have vocabulary that is limited to words such as *sad*, *mad*, and *glad*. Teaching kids to identify emotion and expand their descriptive vocabulary can help them let others know how they feel and what they need. Students who are able to name their emotions can acknowledge feeling those emotions and choose their behavior. Identifying emotions early on can allow kids (and others) to "apply the brakes" before the kid is overwhelmed, hyperaroused, or dysregulated (Rothschild, 2000).

Activities and Strategies

- Implement school-wide interventions that focus on language-enrichment activities and emphasize teaching social communication and emotional language skills, including emotional labeling, appropriate verbal expressions of emotion, and discussing the causes of one's feelings (Bray, Kehle, Caterino, & Grigerick, 2011).
- Have students list all of the words they can think of to describe emotions. List *sad*, *mad*, and *glad*, and then generate more terms to show extremes or variations of each. Keep a running list.
- Give the students cards with exotic emotion vocabulary, and have them match the cards to basic emotions they are familiar with (e.g., joy, surprise, pride, exasperation, sorrow, worry, delight, contentment).
- Give points for using other than the usual terms.
- Institute periodic emotion check-ins. Ask, "How are you feeling?" and give points for participation and extra points for new descriptors.
- Have kids collect data on emotions they experience during the day, either periodically or at potentially problematic times, such as during transitions, tests, or performance situations.
- Have kids identify times they had experienced strong emotions and had managed well. Help them explore how they were able to do that and how they might be able to do that again in the future.
- Teach students to make "I Statements." These statements help kids express the feeling and say what they need from others without blame or accusations.
- Help students build their emotion vocabulary so they have words to express the level of emotion they are feeling.
- Identify supports for coping that are available in the environment to help with a student's different levels of need.

SKILL UNIT

2

Leave the Bad Stuff by the Door

Targeted Skill:

Expresses emotions verbally.

Materials:

Leave the Bad Stuff by the Door checklist, Leave the Bad Stuff by the Door note

Why

Some students walk in the door upset or angry and ready to create a problem. Experienced educators can read these students' facial expressions and body language and can tell immediately, even before the student speaks, that something is wrong. Adults in a school setting cannot undo what happens to students at home, with friends, in the community, or on the way to school, but adults who recognize that a student is upset may be able to defuse the situation before something goes wrong. This type of preventive action is often more effective than responding *after* a student has lost control. The "Leave the Bad Stuff by the Door" strategy will help students identify things that are upsetting and keep them from becoming dysregulated and therefore able to stay in an instructional setting.

How

The person who implements the "Leave the Bad Stuff by the Door" strategy must have a calm and secure relationship with the student. If not, the student may take out his or her anger, hurt, resentment, sadness, or fear on that person, regardless of the purpose of the interaction. So, the first step is to find an adult who can communicate and interact positively and effectively with the student. The steps are not difficult if the student has a calm, secure relationship with the adult, but progress may take time.

1. First, the adult and student should work together to create a schedule stating where the student will go and what he or she will do at the beginning of each school day. The schedule should require the student to check in with the adult immediately after getting off the bus. (The procedure should be cleared in advance with the teacher or administrator in charge to prevent scheduling conflicts.)
2. Check-ins do not have to be formal or time-consuming. A simple "Hi. How are you today? Is everything okay?" type of conversation will allow the adult to assess the student's demeanor, attitude, and mood. As long as the student seems positive and ready to start the school day, the meeting can remain short. But, on days when the student is clearly agitated, upset, angry, fearful, or unhappy, the adult should discover the problem, find out why the student is upset, and figure out whether the student can leave those emotions behind and still have a good day. The adult could have a Leave the Bad Stuff

Here box, like the one shown in the illustration, and use the Leave the Bad Stuff by the Door card to help the student take these steps:

- ◆ Articulate what is wrong.
 - ◆ Ask for help to deal with the problem.
 - ◆ Calm down enough to start the day.
 - ◆ Put the *stuff* (the bad feelings from outside school) in the Bad Stuff box by the door.
3. If the student can complete these steps, and the adult is confident that the student is calm enough to go to class, then he or she can let the student go, though checking in on the student during the school day.
 4. After the check-in, if the student is still too upset to participate positively in class, additional calm-down procedures should be implemented (e.g., asking the student to begin his or her work in a quiet, calm setting).
 5. If possible, the student should return for an end-of-day check-in. If the student had a good day, despite the rough beginning, congratulations are in order!

Scaling Technique

Scaling can help the student think specifically about the present and also be used to send the message that measurable progress is expected. Scaling questions can be framed in a number of ways. The basic format is, “On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the worst this situation could be and 10 being the best the situation could be, what number describes where the situation is today?” During morning check-ins, ask the student to scale or assign a number denoting how he or she is feeling that day. This can effectively give you a quick idea of the student’s emotional state and enable you to measure day-to-day progress of the student’s ability to manage bad feelings.

Just in Case

Some students are so unaware of the feelings they bring with them to school that it takes them a long time to recognize the role that outside events or people play in affecting their moods. Once students recognize not only how they are feeling but also why they are feeling that way, they may be better able to modify their actions and reactions. Adults working with students who have very stressful home and community situations take on an important role by helping them as they learn how to put aside bad stuff and get through the school day.

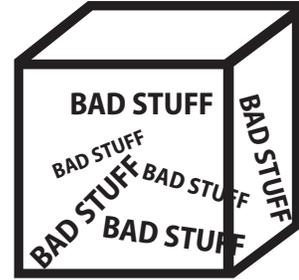


Name _____ Date _____

Leave Your Bad Stuff by the Door

What happened before school to make you feel bad? Was it...

- Trouble with a friend
- A problem with a family member
- A situation that happened on the way to school
- Feelings left over from last night
- Other: _____



Are you mainly feeling...

- Angry
- Hurt
- Sad
- Upset/Jumpy
- Afraid
- Other: _____

What help do you need, and who can help you? _____

To help you calm down, we will _____

After you are calm, I want you to write your bad feelings on the card and put them in the box by the door. When you walk out of here, the bad stuff needs to stay here so that you have a good day.

Student Name: _____ Adult Name: _____

Date: _____

Bad Stuff to Leave by the Door

These are the bad feelings I had when I came to school today:

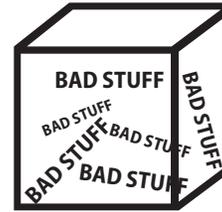
I felt _____

because _____.

I don't want to ruin my day because of bad stuff that happened outside of school, so I am leaving my bad feelings here, and I am going to try to have a good day.

Student Name: _____

Date: _____



Bad Stuff to Leave by the Door

These are the bad feelings I had when I came to school today:

I felt _____

because _____.

I don't want to ruin my day because of bad stuff that happened outside of school, so I am leaving my bad feelings here, and I am going to try to have a good day.

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

