



Executive Functions in the Classroom

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

Emotional control is the capacity to align our emotions with our goals. Teaching is complex and highly emotional work, so teachers need to manage themselves.



Emotional control is measured with questions such as “I overreact emotionally” and “I have emotional outbursts for no reason.”

How to help students who struggle...

You can recognize kids with poor emotional control because they tend to be the ones that overreact. Young children may have a hard time accepting when things don't go their way. Crying or shouting are obvious signs of emotional dysregulation for elementary-aged children but remember that not everyone shows emotionality the same way. Be aware of the non-obvious signs of emotional dysregulation (becoming withdrawn, avoidant behaviours). Nearly everyone is affected by emotionally provoking situations, but being able to recover and redirect is an important skill to learn.

Direct Teaching. The good news is that emotional regulation can be taught. After an outburst in class, of course you should let the student calm down...but find time later to discuss the issue with them in a non-judgemental way. Using metacognitive questioning (“What did the emotions feel like? What else could you have tried instead?”). Be a problem-solving ally.

Helping Youngsters. Feeling charts help to put a face to a feeling. Teaching young kids to recognize facial expressions is important, but also teach students the physiological features of emotion (pounding heart, hot cheeks, dizzy feelings) so they can build an advance-notice system.

Strategies for Older students. Avoiding emotional outbursts is important for adolescents because emotionally volatile people tend to be excluded from their social circles. Teach them to recognize when they are having difficulty managing their emotions and establish a break-card system that allows them to visit a support person in moments of big feelings. Encourage them to reflect on the experience and consider what triggers and warning signs were in place. You should document the moment as well to see what the triggers may be.



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