

Model emotional literacy

Practice brief

The practice

Teachers nurture emotional literacy in students by modelling, recognising, and responding to students' expressed emotions.

How does it help?

As with reading and writing, the ability to identify, understand, and label emotions develops over time. It is critical, therefore, that teachers foster the development of emotional literacy, especially the vocabulary concerning emotions. Emotional literacy concerns the ability to identify the range of emotions experienced, to communicate that experience to others (parents, peers and teachers), and to recognise which experiences evoke these emotions. Emotional literacy also allows students to understand their needs, wants, likes, dislikes and personal preferences, and allows them to tell others how these affect their feelings.

What is it?

Emotional literacy is the ability to identify, understand, and respond to one's emotions.

How does it work?

Teachers play a key role in developing student ability to identify, understanding, and express emotions. Teachers can foster this ability by modelling how to express and regulate a variety of emotions. They can also label feelings, when and where appropriate. Over time, this modelling exposes students to a richer choice of vocabulary to use when expressing their feelings. It also assists students to understand the circumstances under which they can express their emotions. For example, a student who always plays with a certain toy cannot find it. The teacher intervenes and says, "You look frustrated by not being able to find your toy." The teacher is giving the student the word "frustrated" to label the feeling they are experiencing. They can then talk about how they deal with frustration, and model some positive coping strategies for the student.

How do I do it?

- Model responding to, and regulating emotions (i.e., taking deep breaths when frustrated).
- Label student's emotions, and identify strategies students could use to express how they feel.
- Play games, sing songs, and read stories that use a wide variety of feeling words.



It works better if:

- student communication skills are taken into account; where possible, consider using visual supports
- the teacher starts by teaching positive emotions (easier and less distressing) and universal primary emotions (e.g., happy, sad, angry) rather than secondary/self-conscious emotions (e.g., jealous, embarrassed)
- strategies for managing challenging feelings are taught while the student is calm.

It doesn't work if:

- strategies are taught during times of distress; we all have trouble learning when we are very stressed or upset
- the language of instruction is too complex or the student is not able to understand the emotion being taught.

How will I know if it's working?

- Students use feeling words as part of their everyday interactions.
- Students identify and express how they are feeling.

Where can I go to find out more?

- Kansas Inservice Training System Newsletter: "Fostering Emotional Literacy in Young Children: Labeling Emotions" http://kskits.dept.ku.edu/publications/NewslettersPDF/Vol17_2Spring2008.pdf
- The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning : "Enhancing Emotional Vocabulary in Young Children" <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/module2/handout6.pdf>

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)

Implementing this practice will meet the following Australian Professional Standards for Teachers:

- 1.1 - Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students
- 3.3 - Use teaching strategies
- 4.3 - Manage challenging behaviour

