

PARENT INFORMATION

Travelling Along The Emotional Highway

Managing emotions is a constant throughout most situations – at home, in the playground and in the classroom too. The TOOLS required to recognise feelings as they come up and then to successfully manage them are important to the child faced with difficult personal, social and learning situations.

The 5 Emotional Highway lessons are:

- Feelings – Yours and Mine
- Calming Down Thinking
- Calming Down Breathing
- Bossyness The Bulldozer
- Sillyness The Speed Wobble



Feelings – Yours and Mine

Feelings – or emotions – are something everyone experiences. We feel feelings on the inside and express them on the outside. The different expressions of the core emotions of sad, happy, angry and worried/scared are described. Feelings are expressed in little bodies too – sore tummies, butterflies, tight muscles, headaches - and this internal physiological experience of emotions is identified. Feelings can be small and fleeting or big and overwhelming. Tolerance for others who are also experiencing different emotions – at varying intensities - in the same circumstances, is regarded as being expected and accepted.

Calming Down Supa Thinking

How children think about events determines their emotional arousal and then their behaviour. Calming Down is a skill that involves ‘de-catastrophising’ thinking such as, ‘It’s not that bad,’ or ‘I’ll be OK.’ That’s called Calming Down Supa Thinkin – positive and helpful thinking that soothes and settles a child (and an adult). At the completion of this lesson, children should have an awareness of one thought that helps them to feel calm.

Calming Down Bubble Breathing

Breathing is an important component of being able to feel calm. The difference between breathing that is shallow, panting and fast in character – and associated with more intense emotions – and that which is deep, slow and steady – and associated with calmer emotional states, is discussed and demonstrated.

Calming Down Bubble Breathing requires a child to become still, breathe in 1-2-3 and then out 1-2-3 – just like they’re blowing a bubble. A smooth steady airflow is required. This is a life skill and the earlier children master smooth and steady breathing when emotionally aroused, the more oxygen they send to their brain and body which kick starts the calming down process.

Bossyness The Bulldozer

Bossy behaviour is one that children and adults share a dislike of. Being on the receiving end of commands – that in the case of bossyness – are usually forceful and probably unsolicited, is not on anyone's bucket list. Bossyness can find its way into playgrounds readily, and many children may lack the awareness that their behaviour could be described this way. Being bossy implies a disregard for someone else's competence, individuality, independence and rights. It's also connected with being unaware of another's feelings and overall shows a lack of empathy. It's quite a normal part of childhood - trying out a stronger social role. However, if it persists or becomes established, it can cause all manner of social fall out. This lesson serves as an 'awareness-raiser' of all things to do with bossyness, with the metaphor of a bulldozer associating it with a strong, negative behaviour. Examples of bossy behaviour are brainstormed – with an embargo on attributing this behaviour to classmates – and reasons for bossyness being unpopular are discussed. Calming Down is the TOOL of choice for both someone who may be displaying bossy behaviour – and someone who is on the receiving end and being 'bulldozed.'

Sillyness The Speed Wobble

Sillyness The Speed Wobble is another emotionally driven behaviour – and one that is often misinterpreted as nastiness or defiance. It usually hangs around in any situation where children are together in groups – learning or playing. It is behaviour that exasperates and annoys adults, and children also tire of it. The child(ren) who continuously display it, will often become a target of bullying and may become scapegoats for the group's poor behaviour. Sillyness hangs around when there is excitement around, combined with perhaps some anxiety. It plays into the behaviour of the more impulsive child who has a fleeting thought about carrying out an action. Before passing it through the 'is this an appropriate thing to do in this situation at this time?' filter in the brain, the action is underway. Often escalating Sillyness, or chaos or at the very least disruption, occurs. Despite repeated warnings and aversive outcomes, the perpetrator of the Sillyness does not seem able to make safer – or more sensible – choices. All children are affected by Sillyness at some point – some more than others – and the key is training in greater emotional self-management – and yes, that does take time, bundles of patience and a different approach. The children are taught about 'spotting' Sillyness – that is recognising what this behaviour actually looks like, and being able to differentiate it from intentional nasty or negative actions. Once Sillyness has been 'spotted' it is 'tricked' by the witness – or in the ideal cases, also by the perpetrator – by being able to use Calming Down Thinking and Calming Down Breathing as TOOLS to emotionally reduce the level of intense arousal. Teaching tricking Sillyness requires lots of practice to get the skill on board... persistence is the answer.

Reflection Point: Does Sillyness hang around in your home sometimes? Sillyness loves company and usually, "Settle down" or "That's enough," indicate that Sillyness is about. Helping children to calm down is usually more effective than growling.