

Teaching Emotion Awareness Skills to Learners



**COGNITIVE
BEHAVIORAL /
INSTRUCTIONAL
STRATEGIES
RESOURCE SERIES**

Emotion awareness skills fall under the evidence-based practice of Cognitive Behavioral/Instructional Strategies (CBIS). For an overview of CBIS interventions, please see [“Overview of Cognitive Behavioral / Instructional Strategies \(CBIS\).”](#)

Emotion regulation skills are key components of overall self-regulation. Self-regulation skills are fostered across development and can be explicitly taught and improved at later ages through effective, evidence-based interventions (Murray, Rosanbalm, Christopoulos, & Hamoudi, 2014; Frei & Herman-Stahl, 2021). Moreover, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are impacted by emotion dysregulation concerns like their peers, which can lead to behavioral and adaptive functioning concerns across contexts. Cognitive behavioral approaches implemented with modifications are appropriate and effective for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (What Issues Connected to I/DD, 2022).

<p>HOW DO EMOTION AWARENESS SKILLS CONNECT TO TN SOCIAL & PERSONAL COMPETENCIES (SPCs)</p>	<p>Emotion awareness skills are aimed at teaching learners why we have emotions/feelings, the benefits and challenges of emotions, and how to identify different types and levels of emotional expression in oneself and others.</p> <p>According to the TN SPC standards, “self-awareness is the ability to accurately recognize one’s emotions, thoughts, and values and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations and possessing a grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a ‘growth mindset’” (TN SPC Resource Guide, 2017).</p>
<p>STUDENT OUTCOMES OF LEARNING EMOTION AWARENESS SKILLS</p>	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> understand what emotions are and what they tell us about a situation, <input type="checkbox"/> identify comfortable and uncomfortable emotions in ourselves, and <input type="checkbox"/> understand how emotions influence behavior.
<p>WHEN TO TEACH EMOTION AWARENESS SKILLS</p>	<p>Emotion awareness skills are taught similarly to other academic skills. Specifically, emotion awareness skills should be introduced when the student is in a ready-to-learn mindset at their baseline level of calm and cognitive engagement. Foundational emotion awareness skills are not taught when a student is dysregulated and avoidant. Once learned, emotion awareness skills are practiced gradually from baseline calm situations to lower levels of emotion and up to medium and higher levels of in-the-moment emotion.</p>
<p>HOW TO TEACH EMOTION AWARENESS SKILLS</p>	<p>Emotions must be understood as important, adaptive, and even interesting experiences within the brain and body. Emotions give information about a situation, one’s thoughts, and one’s personal values. Students benefit from understanding the adaptive purpose of each emotion.</p> <p>Students also benefit from learning to label emotions within themselves and others. Emotion identification should include specifically what emotions feel like in the body and look like to other people. Students also need an understanding of emotional intensity for given situations.</p> <p>Students must also understand the bidirectional relationships shared among emotions, thoughts, physical body sensations, and behaviors. This awareness creates space for interventions targeting thoughts (e.g., problem solving, challenging unhelpful thoughts), behaviors (e.g., identifying choices students can make when having an emotion), and body sensations (e.g., coping with body relaxation strategies). How a student responds to certain emotions, in turn, influences those emotions. We have developed lesson plans to teach students the purpose of emotions and the connection between their thoughts, feelings, sensations, and actions.</p>

**TEACHING
EMOTION
AWARENESS
SKILLS IN ACTION**

Please review our **Lesson Plan Examples** for educators to use with students, with additional guidance on presenting topic information in an explicit instruction format (I do, We do, You do). Lesson plans will also include guidance for skill practice. Lesson plans associated with teaching emotion awareness skills include:

- ❑ introducing the purpose of emotions and
- ❑ introducing the Cognitive Triangle; see video and online resources through National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine and *Nixie and Nimbo* video series (links below in “Considerations for teaching emotion awareness skills.”)

Please review our associated **Intervention Planning Guide** for specific guidance on implementing and monitoring intervention(s) associated with teaching emotion awareness skills to students. Intervention Planning Guides on this topic include 5-Point Emotion Scale; also see OCALI Autism Center online materials related to Incredible 5-Point Scale: www.ocali.org/project/resource_gallery_of_interventions/page/5_point_scale

**CONSIDERATIONS
FOR TEACHING
EMOTION
AWARENESS
SKILLS**

Emotions are abstract concepts that are difficult for autistic youth to recognize, conceptualize, and express in ways non-autistic students do. All students, including those with disabilities and students with emotional and behavioral challenges, will benefit from multiple, diverse examples of emotions in isolation and in context (of favorite shows, books, popular celebrity icons/examples).

Youth with disabilities and emotional and behavioral challenges also benefit from visual supports to help make emotions more tangible and concrete, including visual representations of emotions (with increasing realism depending on developmental abilities of the student), sorting tasks with visual representations, supporting engagement with forced-choice prompts, and multimedia presentations of emotion regulation skills.

Educators may find it helpful to use the following external resources with multimedia presentation of mental health topics:

- ❑ The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine’s *Introduction to Tools for Supporting Emotional Wellbeing in Children and Youth* (https://youtu.be/Agy_nn54xC8)
 - » Check out additional Tools for Supporting Emotional Wellbeing in Children and Youth: <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/resource/other/dbase/wellbeing-tools/interactive/>.
 - » Videos illustrating cognitive behavioral concepts and interventions

<p>CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING EMOTION AWARENESS SKILLS</p> <p>(CONTINUED)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ The <i>Nixie And Nimbo</i> video series and resources available through the Child Mind Institute: https://childmind.org/nixieandnimbo/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Age: upper elementary school » Free downloaded resource guide for adults supporting child’s emotion learning » YouTube video links teaching emotion awareness skills and connecting to specific cognitive behavioral relaxation skills ❑ Visit <i>AnxietyCanada</i> (www.anxietycanada.com/) for information about childhood anxiety and tutorials for cognitive behavioral relaxation skills ❑ GoNoodle is a popular resource for promoting health and wellness. On GoNoodle-Flow (www.gonoodle.com/tags/Wwjzlw/flow?tab=videos) they also provide soothing video resources to teach cognitive behavioral relaxation skills. ❑ <i>The Incredible 5-Point Scale</i> by Buron and Curtis (2012)
<p>TRIAD RESOURCES</p>	<p>There are specific complexities when implementing CBIS, depending on student needs and behaviors. Consider attending a TRIAD webinar, workshop, or enrolling in a TRIAD consultation and coaching service line to support implementation. Learn more at Triad.vumc.org/schools.</p>

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