

Breathing Free Story

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Story Theme: "I can calm and relax myself."



- Ask the children to find the hidden hearts in this story.

Page Numbers after Stories and Activities:

In the Lesson Plans *In Action*, the Page Numbers refer to the original printing of the Beaming Bright, You're a Shining Light Lesson Plans. For example:

Breathing Free Story

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Physical Activity:

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Playful Activities:

During the following breathing awareness activities children are encouraged to play with their breathing in a variety of fun ways.

- **Eye contact, smiles, playfulness, and a caring attitude will build trust with the children.**
- **As children are playing and having fun resistance within them dissolves.**
- **If ever you have power struggles with children, turn your activities into fun, playful experiences. It will feel good for both of you as you connect in fun ways.**

A mom recently shared that she did this with her child, and she was amazed how quickly their interactions improved. They were now having a lot more fun together.

Breathing Awareness for Self-Regulation:



The first eight activities of the Breathing Free Story, pages 2 - 7 of the Lesson Plans offer the first step in creating a foundation of Breathing Awareness for children. As children have fun singing songs, blowing bubbles, making a flag, and blowing feathers in the air they are realizing they can have fun using their breath. Engaging children in fun breathing experiences is an important step before they begin learning to identify and express their feelings, which are the skills they will learn in the Emotional Awareness Activities.

Breathing Awareness Experience:

A mom was playing with her three-year-old son, showing him how to breathe in and out. Her son was smiling from ear to ear and said, "Look mom, I can breathe, I can breathe!" He was so excited when he realized he could breathe in and out!

A Creative Breathing Experience:

I visited a Strong Start Classroom and read the Breathing Free Story to the children. After the story the teacher put on some music and introduced a dancing with scarves activity. The children started to dance to the music with their scarves.

During the dancing one little boy created his own game. He held the scarf above his head, took a deep breath and blew his scarf up into the air. Within seconds all the children were taking deep breaths to blow their scarves up into the air, joining in on the fun.

Additional Breathing Awareness Activities:



- Blow light weight scarves up into the air.
- Blow at a pinwheel and notice how fast it spins.
- Look at a picture that you love and breathe softly.
- Look at a tree outside and breathe in and out slowly.
- Look up at the stars in the sky at night and breathe in and out slowly.
- Breathing through straws, drumming slowly or slowly opening and closing an expanding ball is a wonderful way to help children to breathe in and out with a slow breathing rhythm.

Be creative and think of additional fun breathing awareness activities you can enjoy with the children.

Using the Audiobook with Music:

Starting the day by listening to the Beaming Bright, You're a Shining Light audiobook in the morning offers light hearted music that helps children to calm and relax themselves while creating a positive tone for the day.



This audiobook will also set a positive tone for children who may not be feeling well or may not have had a good night's sleep. Other children may be experiencing challenges with their siblings, friends or even their parents.

- Teachers will often put the music on as the children come in from outside so the children can calm and center themselves before they start their daycare or classroom routine.
- If a child is upset, validate their feelings. Then provide them with earphones and have them listen to the audiobook until they feel calm and relaxed.

Alternatively, a child may want to imagine and create their very own journey as they listen to the instrumental version of the music.

The audiobook and instrumental version are available on the Free Downloads page.



- Adults and children can also create their own music by drumming, playing the guitar or using other instruments to accompany the stories.

Fun Glasses Exercise:

This Lesson Plans *In Action* program is all about seeing things from many different perspectives.

- “Let’s have fun and try on these glasses!”



When we look through the square glasses, we feel comfortable. It's about living with what we know and what we have learned so far in our life.

However, one day we put on the star glasses. Wow, we get stretched in so many different directions. We see things from so many new perspectives.

After experiencing the many different perspectives that the star glasses allowed us to see, we put on the heart glasses. Now we see and give love from our heart to everyone, including ourselves.

Learning Self-Awareness:

Other programs ask children to pay attention to the social cues of children around them. "What is their face telling you?" "What is their body language telling you?" However, many children can't figure out these social cues.

The Beaming Bright, You're a Shining Light Lesson Plans help children learn the skills to understand and acknowledge their own emotions and the many levels of self-regulation.

When children are experiencing challenges with others, they will be able to use strategies that work for them.

This program asks children to be self-aware by asking them, "What are you feeling?" It then becomes easier for children to understand what emotions others are feeling.

It is important to find lots of different ways to help children learn how to identify and express their feelings.

Emotional Awareness Activity:

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As parents, teachers and caregivers have used this activity, they have broken it into several additional activities to help children learn the concepts.

Children Learning to Identify and Express Feelings:

Ask the children:

- **"How are you feeling?"**
 - Children can point to a feeling face.



- Make feeling faces in a mirror.
- Take pictures of children making feeling faces.



- Play with age appropriate toys with feeling expressions.

Ask the children:

- **"Show me how you feel."**



- Child smiles from ear to ear as they cuddle their pet.
- Child stamps their feet or makes an angry face.
- **Once children have learned how to identify their feelings, they can express their feelings by saying:**
 - "I feel happy."
 - "I feel sad."
 - "I feel angry."

Listen to and acknowledge all their feelings.

Shalini established a Talking Circle. She introduced a talking stick and created talking stick guidelines. The children learned to listen to the child that was holding the talking stick and speaking.



She taught children to be patient and respect each other by not interrupting or talking to the other children in the class while someone else is holding the talking stick and speaking.

Children who were restless or fidgety were given soft things to squeeze to help them to settle. She made sure even the quieter children had an opportunity to share their thoughts.

Children are encouraged to think how to verbally express how they are feeling and learn how to articulate and form sentences.

As children gain the language skills to answer a question, Shalini would pass around the talking stick and ask the children:

- **"Tell me about a time you felt happy."**
 - "When I sing a funny song."
 - "When I go to the park with my family."

Other children quickly connected with the child's happy feelings.

The next day she asked the children:

- **"Tell me about a time you felt sad."**
 - "I remember feeling sad when my cat ran away."

Other children quickly related to the child's feelings and supported the child with empathy and compassion.

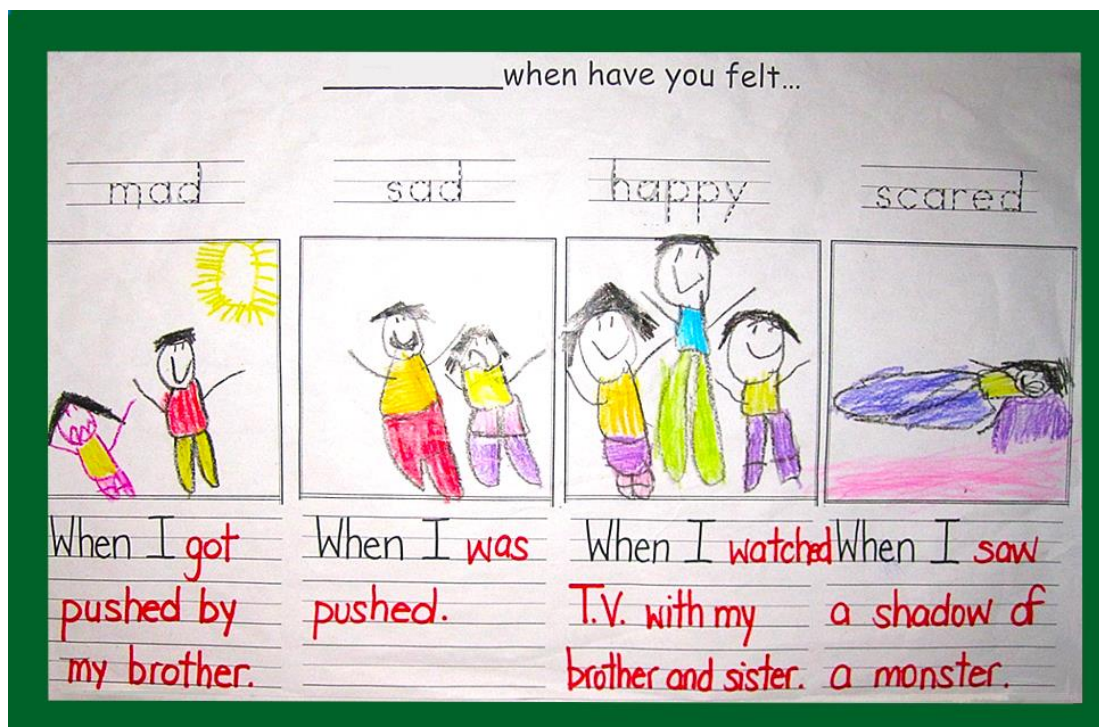
After the children expressed how they felt and formed a sentence about it, they turned to their partner and shared their sentence with each other.

Through constant reinforcement children are learning to connect words and pictures that match their feelings and experiences.

The children were then ready to draw a picture of their experience because they knew exactly what they were going to draw because they had talked about it with their partner.

Parents, teachers and caregivers write down whatever the children share when they are asked the question:

- "Can you tell me about your drawings?"



- When have you felt happy?



- Can you tell me about your drawings?

when have you felt...			
mad	sad	happy	scared
When I didn't get a slurpee.	When I didn't get a toy car.	When I went with Jacob to the movies.	When I saw a bee.

when have you felt...			
mad	sad	happy	scared
When I got locked by accident in the bathroom.	When my Papa went on vacation.	When I play Wii with dad.	When I turned a corner and saw a fake dog.

when have you felt...			
mad	sad	happy	scared
When I got a rash from my sister.	When I didn't get to have a slurpee.	When I got to stay up late and watch T.V.	When I saw a bear.

when have you felt...			
mad	sad	happy	scared
When I didn't get to eat what I wanted.	When I got sent to my room.	When I went to the movies.	When I tried to ride my bike.

when have you felt...			
mad	sad	happy	scared
When I was pushed and hit by my sister.	When I was pushed off my sister's bed.	When I went to the park with my sister.	When I was in the dark at night.

Read lots of stories that relate to the feelings the children are talking about. Expand the feeling list to include other feelings the children are experiencing.

It is All About Prevention:

- **We do these activities to help prepare children for any stressful situation that may happen in the future.**

Help children to understand how they feel physically.

- **"What does your body look like when you are upset?"**
- **"What does your voice sound like?"**
- **"Where is the feeling in your body?"**
 - "My tummy hurts."
 - "My shoulders and neck hurt."
 - "My head hurts."

It is important for the children to learn there is no right or wrong answer to these questions.

Children often feel they are bad whenever they experience feelings of being upset, mad or angry.

Reassure them that all feelings are OK. It's OK to feel whatever they are feeling inside.

Physical Activity:

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This activity included in the Breathing Awareness Activities can also help children become aware of themselves from an emotional awareness perspective.

- **Some children are naturally hypo aroused. In this state children may feel tired or withdrawn inside.**

Ask the children:

- **"How are you feeling inside right now? Are you feeling tired, normal or rushed?"**

If the children respond by saying they feel tired. Encourage them to do a quick physical activity to build up some energy.

- **"Let's do five jumping jacks."**
- **"How is your body feeling now? Are you feeling tired, normal or rushed?"**

Through this type of experience, they begin to become aware of their feelings and how to energize themselves whenever they are tired.

- **Other children are naturally hyper aroused. In this state children may feel rushed inside.**

As they learn to breathe deeply, they can calm and relax to self-soothe themselves.

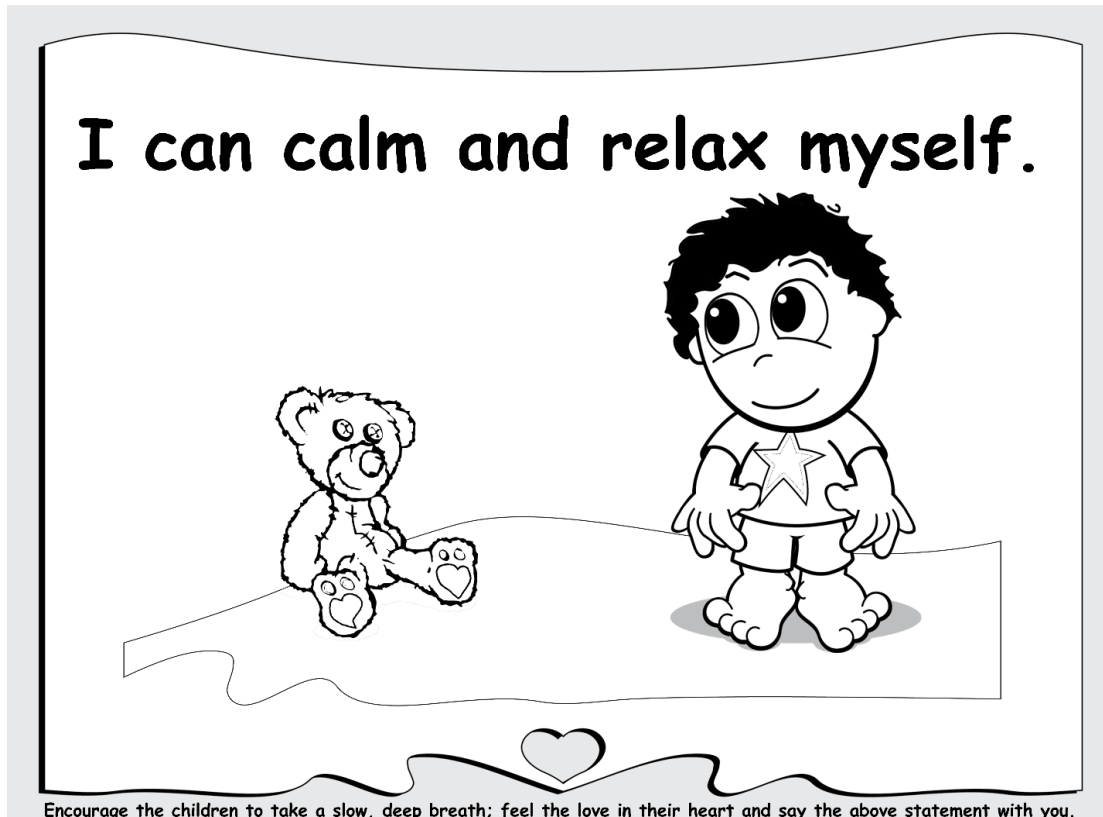
As parents, teachers and caregivers take the time to model calming and relaxing moments with children, they are creating positive and powerful learning experiences for children.

As children calm and relax themselves, they feel good.



I Can Calm & Relax Myself Activity:

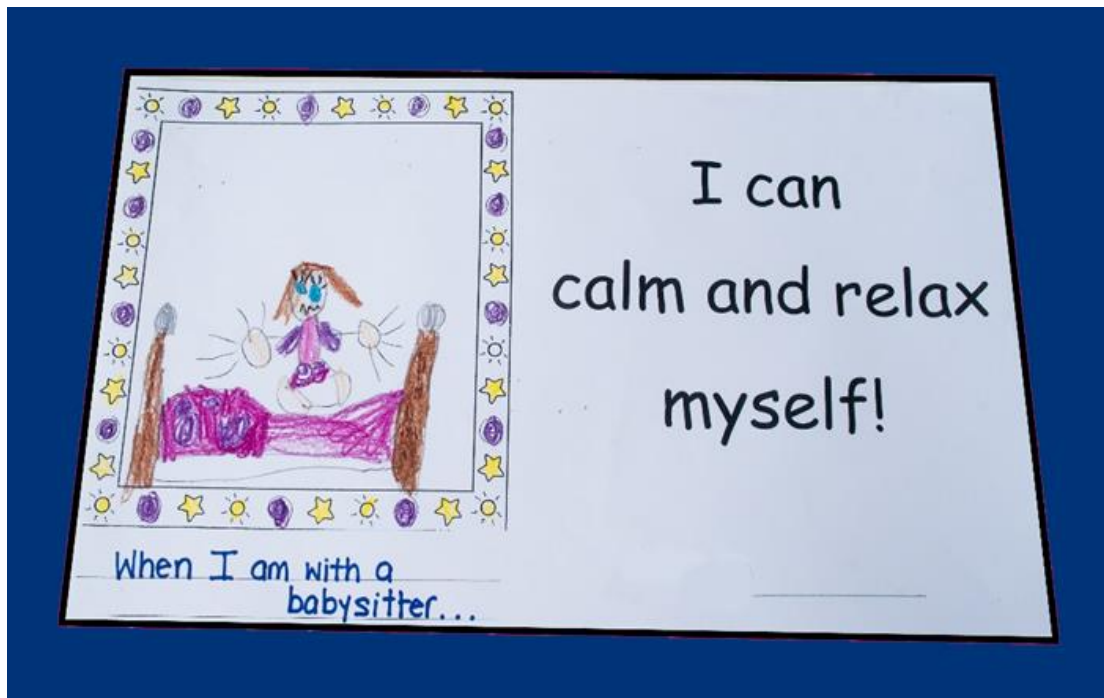
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Encourage the children to take a slow, deep breath; feel the love in their heart and say the above statement with you.

Children can draw pictures of their feelings or role play as they act out their feelings.

- "Show me how you feel when you are"



- This child is very clear about her feelings.
- Her babysitter is not her favorite person.

Ask the child:

- "What would you tell yourself next time you are upset?"
- "What would you do different next time?"

Parents and teachers can ask the child:

- "Can you tell me about your babysitter?"

Neural Network Connections in the Brain:

Dr. Fred Muench, Clinical Psychologist, Columbia University.

"Deep breathing reduces the sympathetic nervous system, the fight and flight feelings of over arousal. The slow out breath increases the parasympathetic nervous system activity that calms and relaxes, recuperates and regenerates the nervous system."

This type of research demonstrates a calm and relaxed body releases oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine, offering feelings of wellbeing and happiness.

The stories and activities in the Lesson Plans are examples of ways to help children become self-aware of their upsetting, angry or stressful feelings. They are learning to stop, then self-soothe themselves by breathing to calm and relax.

As children consistently breathe deeply to self-soothe themselves during upsetting moments, they will learn and experience the difference between feeling upset and feeling calm. Children will recognize how their breath brings them back into balance with themselves. Deep breathing will also help children with decision making as it gives children the time to make better choices.

Over time, deep breathing will become an automatic response whenever children feel upset, angry or stressed. As they self-soothe themselves, they will be creating new neural connections within their brain.



Dr. John Gottman, PHD.

"... by coaching children emotionally, talking to children about their feelings and how to understand them, not being critical and judgmental, problem solving about emotional predicaments and coaching them on what to do. Children were better able to suppress the vagal activity (in the brain) that keeps the amygdala priming the body with fight and flight hormones and were better behaved."

Experience a Variety of Different Feelings:

Children learn they have many feelings throughout their day. Peaceful, calm feelings; happy feelings and sometimes thunderstorm feelings that come and go. They are also learning they are not the only ones who experience of different feelings.

As children learn to self-soothe themselves, they are also creating an "I Can" attitude." As in "I can calm and relax myself."



As parents and teachers encourage children to breathe through straws or slowly open and close an expanding ball when children are deep breathing, it helps children to breathe slower and create a slow breathing rhythm so they can calm and relax.

- **Soft stress balls and squeeze toys help children to self-soothe themselves and can benefit them in the following ways.**
 - Helps children to calm down.
 - Heightens children's concentration.
 - Reduces impulsivity and anxiety levels.
 - Sends calming sensory signals to their brain.
 - Children may be able to listen and focus longer.
 - Distracts them in an overstimulating environment.

Create a Fun Breathing Practice Routine:

Encourage children to practice breathing to calm and relax. Since children learn through repetition, this fun routine will help children create a habit of breathing deeply.

Over time, once the breathing habit has been established it will be easier for children to stop and breathe deeply before they react negatively. It can also prepare them to breathe deeply whenever they experience situations when they are upset.



- Put lots of fun items into a bag.
 - A drum, an expanding ball, a rain stick, a triangle, a shaker, a castanet, a tambourine, a bell, a mustache, a wig, a silly hat, or a red nose. Add new items to the bag as you find them.

- **Pick one item out of the bag and surprise the children by using the item in a fun way.**
- **Then take a minute to practice taking 3 slow deep breaths together. Use the same language:**
 - Breathe in slowly.
 - Breathe out slowly.
- **You can even make animal sounds as you breathe in and breathe out. Anything to keep it fun.**

Once the breathing routine is well established, create another surprise items bag specifically for the children to use.

Empower the children by giving each child an opportunity to choose an item from the bag and lead the breathing activity. This helps the children to go beyond their comfort zone, build leadership skills and inner confidence.

- **Breathing practice routine time suggestions:**
 - First thing in the morning.
 - Before story time.
 - After lunch.
 - After a field trip.
 - Whenever a challenge arises.

A New Student in the Classroom:

A new student joined Shalini's class halfway through the school year. During a gym session the new child's finger got stepped on, by accident. The injured child began screaming and crying.

Shalini said:

- **"Breathe with me."**
- **"Breathe in and breathe out."**

Shalini always modelled and used the same language in these situations.

One child said to the injured child:

- **"This is how Miss Mehra helps us."**
- **"We will help you breathe."**
- **"We will show you how to breathe."**
- **The whole class began breathing in and out.**

At this point the child stopped crying and looked around at all the children in her class breathing with her. The children smiled at her, and she began to smile back.

The child who accidentally stepped on her finger said:

- **"I am sorry, I didn't mean to step on your finger."**
- **Other children ask, "Will you play with us?"**

This is a dynamic way to encourage children to support one another.

- **This example demonstrates that when children express their feelings and their feelings are acknowledged and validated, they move away from a problem quickly.**

I recently shared this story with another kindergarten teacher. She said it gave her a whole new perspective to work from. To encourage the children to be kind with one another by asking the children to support the upset child and breathe with them.

Field Trip – Child Locked in a Port a Potty:

During a field trip with Shalini's class a child got stuck in a port a potty. The clear roof had leaves on the top and very little light was coming into the port a potty.

A panicked, terrified child was banging on the door crying.

- **"I can't get out!" "I am locked in the bathroom!"**



Shalini said:

- "I need you to listen to me."
- "Stop and think. Say with me."
- "I can calm and relax myself."
- "Breathe with me slowly."
- "Breathe in, breathe out."

After a few deep breaths the child did her best to follow Shalini's instructions.

- **"Do you see the lever. Turn the lever one way."**

The child begins crying again and says:

- **"It did not open!"**

Shalini replies:

- **"It's OK, I am here with you."**
- **"Breathe in, breathe out. Turn the lever the other way."**

The door opened immediately, and the child ran into Shalini's arms.

A Teachable Moment:

All the children on the field trip gathered around Shalini and the child. Shalini took a moment to say to the class:

- **"Class, now you can see why we practice breathing every day?"**
- **"In an emergency you can get panicked or scared."**

The children were all wide eyed and shook their heads in acknowledgement.

- **When challenges happen, it is important to:**
 - Stop.
 - Breathe.
 - Calm and relax.
 - Think more clearly.
 - Follow instructions.
 - Solve the problem.

Through this process children learn to believe in their ability to calm and relax themselves and find solutions to their challenges.

Dealing with Challenging Feelings:

Challenging feelings are like an inner call for help. Children are encouraged to pay attention and ask themselves:

- **What is happening? How am I feeling?**

Children are learning to understand themselves.

- **What is upsetting me? How do I feel and react?**

As children learn to understand themselves, they gain the clarity to recognize what they are choosing and doing, and brainstorm what they can do differently next time.



Painful Feelings Are To Be Felt:

**Acknowledge, accept and love
all your feelings.**



I Can Think Clearly Activity:

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This new activity has been created into Problem Solving Steps to make it easier for children to solve problems. Parents, teachers and caregivers can follow these problem solving steps with children in one on one sessions or in a group setting.

Problem Solving Steps Activity:

- **Step 1- What is the problem?**
 - "Someone grabbed my toy!"
- **Step 2 - Let's support (child's name).**
 - "We will all breathe with you."
 - "Breathe in slowly."
 - "Breathe out slowly." 3 times.
- **Step 3 - How do you feel?**
 - "I feel angry."
 - "I keep thinking about what happened."
 - Younger children can point to a picture of a feeling face.
- **Step 4 - Repeat the calming statements.**
 - Repeat together. "I can think clearly."



- **Step 5 - Brainstorm ideas for a solution.**
 - "Next time, ask me before you take the toy."
 - "Next time, ask nicely for the toy."

Children are openly talking about their challenges and use strategies that work for them.

Children are encouraged to check in with each other and ask:

- "How are you feeling about what happened?"

Encourage children to listen to one another.

- **"What did you hear each other say?"**
- **"What solution did you each agree on?"**
- **"Play activities need to be fun for everyone."**
- **"Are you now able to play cooperatively with one another?"**

If the children need extra help resolving their issue, connect with them and work together as a team to help them to find a solution.

As children do the I Can Think Clearly Activity they have been learning to understand themselves. They learn what upsets them and how they react and feel in various situations.

Children may also become aware of upsetting situations that they are involved in frequently. As they work to find solutions for their problems, they have learned different ways of handling these situations. With continued practice children will feel more successful as they interact with one another.

The children's learning is reinforced by creating drawings and sentences of their challenges and their solutions.

I Can Think Clearly

The Problem



Someone can get
kicked or hit.

My Solution



We keep our hands
and feet to ourselves.

I Can Think Clearly

The Problem



Someone can get
scratched, bumped or hit.

My Solution



We use our words
to solve problems.

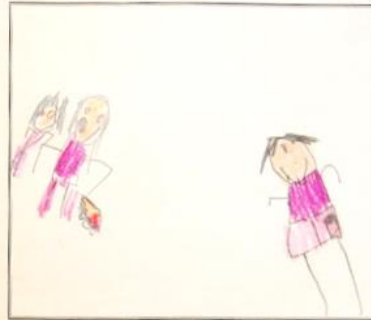
I Can Think Clearly

The Problem



Someone grabs a toy
from you.

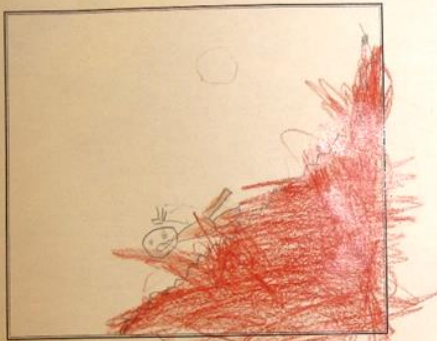
My Solution



We always ask nicely
for what we want.

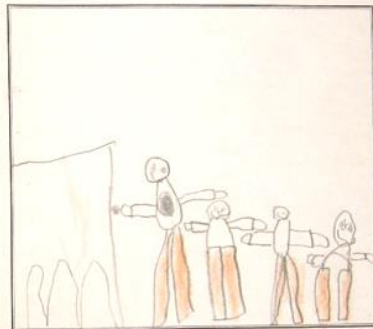
I Can Think Clearly

The Problem



Someone can fall or
trip when running.

My Solution



We walk everywhere.

I Can Think Clearly

The Problem



Someone can have
no one to play with.

My Solution



We include everyone.

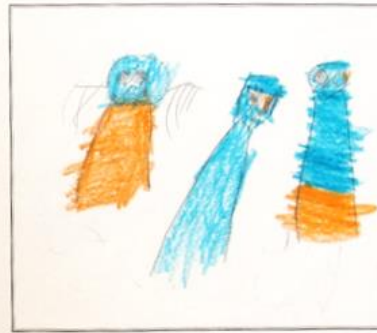
I Can Think Clearly

The Problem



Someone may not know
what to do.

My Solution



We listen to instructions
and pay attention.



Feelings in a Blanket of Love Activity:

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Encourage the children to take a slow, deep breath; feel the love in their heart and say the above statement with you.

A Blanket of Love:

Whenever the children are upset, they can be empowered to find their own blanket of love to self-soothe themselves.



Happy Feelings Activity:

Children's feelings are reflections of their inner thoughts, ideas and beliefs about themselves. These feelings are based on the children's moment to moment daily life experiences.

When children feel good inside, their good feelings will be felt by everyone around them.

- **Help children nurture happy feelings by encouraging them to make a list of all the times they remember feeling happy.**
 - Swinging on a swing.
 - Singing a song.
 - Playing ball.
 - Eating ice cream.
 - Discovering a new activity.
- Alternatively, younger children can cut pictures out of a magazine of happy children.
- **As children become aware of their good feelings, they can experience feeling more balanced and be themselves.**



Happy Feelings Are To Be Felt:

Acknowledge, accept and love
all your feelings.



The Beaming Bright, You're a Shining Light Lesson Plans are filled with activities that help children recognize their kind, caring, compassionate and loving selves.

When children are acknowledged for their kind, caring and compassionate behaviors, reinforce these behaviors with appreciative words, stickers or certificates. This strategy will help children to create positive beliefs about themselves.



Modeling Activity:

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The information below offers various options to help parents, teachers and caregivers handle stressful situations.

Calming Stress and Anxiety:

- When children are trying to deal with their feelings regarding challenging or stressful situations, they can't always hear what is being said because they are emotionally unavailable.
- Children sometimes find it difficult to concentrate on the task at hand. The tension within them can become overwhelming.

These strong emotions cause adrenalin and cortisol to flood their system.

- Children either hold onto these intense feelings within themselves or project their feelings onto others.

It is suggested that you listen intently to understand the child to discover what they want or need for each situation.

- What works for one child may not work for all children.
- Find unique ways to help calm and relax the child.

- **Sometimes children are willing to:**
 - Have a hug.
 - Breathe together with you.
 - Cuddle a blanket or their favorite toy.
 - Squeeze a soft ball or bounce a ball.
 - Talk, while you listen.
 - Count to 10 or sing a counting song.
 - Listen to soft music or ocean waves.
 - Quietly hum or sing together.
 - Do a visualization together.
 - Look at a calming picture.
 - Draw or paint a picture.
 - Make something creative.
 - Go together for a walk in nature.
 - Play on the playground equipment.
 - Do some physical activity.
 - Play in the sand box.

A Counsellor Dealing with Violent Emotions:

A counsellor who deals with violent emotions in three to six year old children told me she wraps the child in a big bear hug and rocks them back and forth singing, humming or using whatever activity works to calm the child down.

An Aggressive Child's Experience:

A teacher from a daycare came to see me about a child in her class. Throughout the day the child would have various spells of aggressive behavior, usually including hitting and screaming. After hearing all about the child's behavior the teacher happened to mention that he liked music.

- **I asked her to empower him. To set up a listening center with earphones for him to use.**
- **Give him permission to go to the listening center and listen to his music whenever he feels upset.**
- **He was given permission to listen as long as he wanted, or until he felt calm and could cooperate with the other children.**

After a couple of weeks, he was able to self-regulate his behavior by deciding on his own when he needed to go to the listening center to calm down. The daycare teacher couldn't believe how quickly he began to take responsibility for his behavior.

When his sister turned three and her aggressiveness increased, he tried to convince her to go to the listening center, however, what had worked for him did not work for her.

Adults Dealing with Conflict:

- How you speak, act and feel reflects your thoughts, ideas and beliefs.
- How others speak, act and feel reflects their thoughts, ideas and beliefs; not yours! However, always be aware of your reaction.

Whenever a conflict surfaces within a relationship many possible thoughts and feelings arise and at times result in disrespect towards one another due to quick reactions being spoken.

Since we all recognize that we deserve to be respected and are doing the best we can, this is an opportunity to self-regulate our emotions by stopping, breathing, self-reflecting and then responding.

- **Stop.**
- **Breathe,**
- **Feel, acknowledge, and accept all your feelings.**
- **Self-reflect and ask yourself, "What do I want or need, and why?"**
- **After being self-reflective, respond by communicating your feelings in a gentle, respectful way as you ask for what you want.**

The dictionary meaning of respect is to be kind, caring, show consideration, to recognize, value, appreciate, compliment, cherish and treasure.

Communication skills are improved with kind, caring, reflective responses, along with a deeper understanding of your own and other's thoughts, feelings, and emotions. With consistency, you will gain a sense of empathy, compassion, and a deeper bond with one another.

