

Self-Regulation

To support children's ability to self-regulate and talk about their feelings we took on training and developed our own model to aid self-regulation using 'feelings characters'.

Our aim is to help the children better recognise and regulate their emotions with the aim that in the future they will be able to do this more independently and also support their peers. This uses the 'catch and match' approach to:

Attune: Catch 'n' match the feeling
I can see/hear you are feeling...

Validate: Stop the behaviour, validate the feeling

Contain: Make the unbearable survivable

Regulate: Meet the intensity then calm soothe

Following the development of our own self-regulation 'feelings characters' (based on Inside Out and Primary Behaviour Service guidance, including training for effective use), we introduced the characters to the children over time and developed a school wide policy for use.

To support daily use adults have a visual lanyard, each classroom has an interactive display and each playground has the same resource, where children can communicate their feelings. This is used as a reference point for adults to support children's emotional needs through a shared language around feelings and emotions. This resource is used both in teaching (PSHE lessons) and teachable moments to support children in identifying their feelings and subsequent self-regulation.

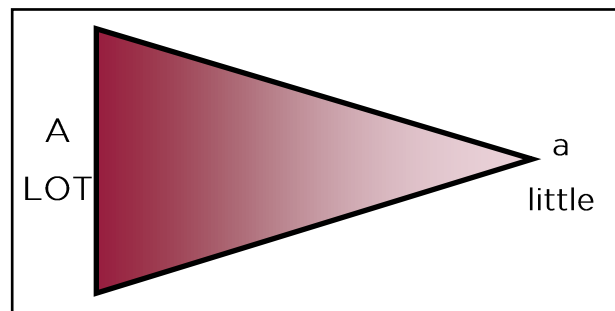
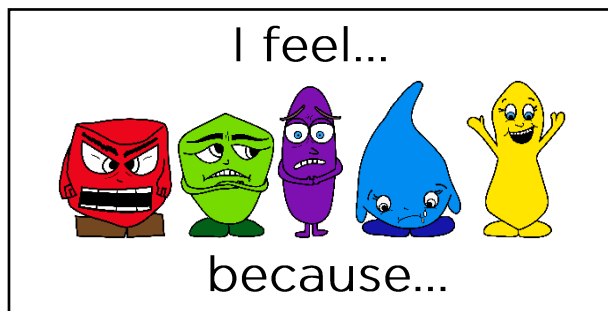
If children require additional support, beyond the curriculum offer and this approach, the same language and characters are used within Emotional Literacy Support sessions.

How we use the self-regulation 'feelings characters'

We use and reference the characters to aid self-regulation through all resources types.

Each resource includes the 'feelings characters'. These are broad emotions that may encompass a range of feelings and are not labelled. Children in the Early Years are directed more regarding associating the character with a specific feeling e.g. the red character represents anger, and the yellow happiness. From Year One upwards, there is more freedom in the expression of what each character represents to the child at the time of using the resource e.g. the green character could represent feeling ill, being annoyed or grumpy. PSHE lessons and a yearly refresher, enables children to explore their interpretation and name feelings/emotions they see each character representing.

The resources also include a scale to aid children identifying the strength of each feeling when talking about their emotions. The scale starts from 'a lot' with the large end of the triangle and goes to 'a little' at the other end.



How to use the self-regulation 'feelings characters':

When using this approach, it is important to come down to the child's level (height). It is important to model this approach to children and use it regularly for it to have the best impact e.g. effective use will not just be when children are dysregulated (struggling emotionally).

In any situation, use is more effective when the adult comes alongside the child and begins discussion around how they are feeling (as opposed to stating the behaviour being demonstrated).

Use when a child is regulated (feeling content)

- Come alongside them
- Comment on their activity or current presentation (catch)
- Match their behaviour using your tone (voice) and body language
- Validate the child's feelings, 'I can see that you are...' (refer to feelings characters using your own words)
- 'Can you show/tell me how you are feeling?' (show them characters)
- Listen to the response and validate how the child says they are feeling 'I can see you are feeling...'

Use when a child is dysregulated (struggling emotionally)

If a child is showing emotion or behaviour that shows they are struggling, a similar approach is used.

- Come alongside them
- Comment on their activity or current presentation (catch)
- Match their behaviour using your tone (voice) and body language
E.g. Child is crying and shouting angrily (talk in a tone to match the child)
- Validate the child's feelings, 'I can see that you are...' (refer to feelings characters using your own words)
'I can see that you are shouting and crying at the moment. I notice that your hands are clenched. I can see that you look very angry.'
- 'Can you show/tell me how you are feeling?' (show them characters)
- Listen to the response and validate how the child says they are feeling
- Ask about their feeling, 'What has made you feel this angry?'
- Repeat back your understanding of their feelings: 'You didn't get a turn with the ball, that's so annoying isn't it, I bet you are frustrated by that.' (contain and validate)
- After feelings have been expressed, try to redirect the child either by dealing/addressing the cause, or changing the subject

If a matter requires discussion to teach the child about the emotion or behaviour presented, then this can be addressed after the process has taken place and they are regulated again.

This process will need to be repeated and used regularly to support children self-regulating. It may not be automatic for them to respond. During the child's heightened state, any attempt to reason, discipline or discuss will not be effective.

Ways to support your child's emotional expression:

1. Narrate your own feelings: 'Thank you for drawing me that picture. I feel so happy and loved.'
2. Talk about the emotions of characters in books: 'Look at his face. What do you think he's feeling? Oh, you think he looks cross. Yes, he could be mad, cross, or even furious. His face is red and his hands are in fists!'
3. Label your child's feelings during positive times: 'You look so proud right now!'
We often label uncomfortable feelings but forget to label and capture the neutral or positive emotions.