

ALCDSB MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

November 2016

As an educator, you work hard every day to regulate your students' emotions.

It takes a lot of effort to get and keep the students in the classroom interested. At an organizational level, such as school, the challenge comes when you try to bring in self-regulation, but there does not appear to be a behavioural strategy to address these challenges. If only the "how" were something simple and straightforward that we could package and share. That would be fantastic, as you can imagine.

I hear these questions: "Where do I start?" "Can you just tell me the strategies and give me some tools?" Self-Regulation is an ongoing process of learning why students act and react in certain ways; what they are feeling, and why; what they are communicating, intentionally or unintentionally; what helps them stay or return to being calm, focus and alert. Our students are unique individuals created in the image and likeness of God, and each are constantly changing. So Self-Regulation is a never-ending process of getting to know a student, and helping them to recognize and realize their potential. Equally, it is a process of unlearning, removing cognitive blinders that shape our attitudes and perceptions of student behaviour. It is a process of learning about ourselves, why we act and react in certain ways, how do we manage stress.

When teaching children with challenging behaviours, it is important to understand that their behaviour is typically a result of underlying feelings of shame, terror/fear, rage and reflects a fight, flight or freeze response to their perceived stress. Following are some behaviours that as parents/professionals we find hard to understand and manage.



Aggression/Anger/Violence

Anger is not the same as aggression or violence. Anger is an emotion, aggression is the acting on the angry feelings.

Anger is a natural response to threat and is adaptive since it primes for the fight or flight response.

Kids may appear impulsive, throw frequent, prolonged and/or intense tantrums, be destructive, oppositional, engage in self-harm or bully others.

Others may be afraid of an angry child and power struggles often ensue in the child's attempt to gain control. With acting out kids we often lose our tempers (perhaps because fear activates our own fight response) and respond hurtfully and irrationally. Our loss of control confirms for the child that we are dangerous and to be feared, and as a result, distorted beliefs are perpetuated. It is important to remember that each student is a child of God, and as such, should be treated with mercy.

Behind the Behaviour:

-for many hurt children, if they were not "fighters" they would not have survived. The best defense is offense.

-control may have been the only viable coping response in a family marked by chaos and abuse

-negative attributional biases: kids who have grown up with a lot of threat learn to expect it everywhere. Often misinterpret others actions as harmful and respond accordingly.

-anger often becomes the default for other feelings: hurt kids often have difficulty recognizing and differentiating feelings

-anger often a defense for vulnerability and fear

-early stress sets up neurological deficits that are associated with antisocial responses

-response is often at the implicit level, child knows what they are supposed to do, but can't respond appropriately at the time.

-aggression may be a reenactment of the initial trauma: reenactment of victimization is a major source of violence.

We are in the midst of a revolution in education thinking and practice (Dr. Stuart Shanker). Scientific advances in a number of fields point to a similar argument, that student achievement can be determined by how well students are able to self-regulate. **So what is Self-regulation and what does it look like in your classroom?** One of the best sources of research on the foundational aspects of self-regulation is Roy Baumeister and Kathleen Vohs's Handbook of Self-Regulation. They describe self-regulation as the ability to

1. Attain, maintain, and change one's level of energy to match the demands of a task or situation
2. Monitor, evaluate, and modify one's emotions
3. Sustain and shift one's attention when necessary and ignore distractions
4. Understand both the meaning of a variety of social interactions and how to engage in them in a sustained way
5. Connect with and care about what others are thinking and feeling, to empathize and act accordingly

Bullying Awareness & Prevention Week
November 20-26, 2016

This is a great opportunity for our school leaders, staff, students, and parents to learn more about bullying and its impact on student learning, their sense of belonging, and well-being.

Caring and Safe Catholic School Teams in each school are encouraged to plan unique activities to promote awareness. Please share your initiatives, stories, pictures, and samples of your student's work with Kaveh, Jim Reilly and Jessica Salmon, and we will celebrate and highlight each school's wonderful efforts on the Board's Mental Health and Well-Being website.

For additional information and resources, please visit:

<http://ishare.alcde.on.ca/reledu/Antibullying%20Awareness/Forms/Homepage.aspx>

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/prevention.html>

EMPATHIZE: it often makes sense that a child is angry if you know what lies behind the behaviour. Although it may seem that they are deliberately out to get you they are not.

Try “I think that when you heard “No” right then you might have thought that I didn’t care enough about what you wanted to do and that made you angry.” Connect, then redirect (Dan Siegel’s new book, 2011)

COLLABORATE: “how shall we manage that it is my job to sometimes say NO. Is there a way that we can remember that I haven’t stopped loving you?”

PLAYFULNESS: “Boy you are mad! Lets go running around the garden shouting at the top of our voices.

HIT & RUN: often children don’t know what they are feeling. Offer a suggestion and leave it. Don’t try and talk it out when your child is too highly aroused: they are operating from their emotion center and have no cognitive resources to apply. Wait until they have calmed down.

USE HUMOUR: get lots of support, anger is toxic and it is easy to take it on as yours

Contact Us

Contact your school for more information from the school’s Child and Youth Worker or school principal.

For more information from ALCDSB Mental Health Lead, contact Kaveh Khanverdi

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**Self-regulation also links to the Catholic Graduate Expectations:
An effective communicator, who speaks, writes and listens honestly and sensitively, responding critically in light of Gospel values.**