Emotional Dysregulation

What is Emotional Dysregulation?

Emotional dysregulation is the significant and often quick changes in a person's mood, in which they struggle to control or regulate their emotional responses. Individuals with emotional dysregulation experience intense emotions more frequently which can last for a longer duration ((NIMH » Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder, 2021)

Individuals who experience emotional dysregulation have difficulty managing their emotional responses which can lead to maladaptive coping strategies such

Causes of Emotional Dysregulation

Emotional dysregulation is thought to be linked childhood interpersonal trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD) also stem from trauma and also can present with some similar features do present differently (van Dijke, Ford, van Son, Frank, & van der Hart, 2013).

Attachment disorders are also associated with emotion dysregulation as children learn emotion regulation skills from parents/caregivers. Thus it is important for the child and caregiver to have a nurturing relationship for the healthy emotional development of the child.

Co-morbidity

Emotional dysregulation can be present in individuals with psychological and/or neurodevelopmental conditions such as:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder/Condition (ASD/ASC)
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Self-Harm
- Eating Disorders
- Bipolar Disorder
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders
- Reactive Attachment Disorder
- Sleep Problems

Symptoms

Emotional dysregulation can manifest itself in many different ways. Some of the common signs include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts and in some cases suicidal attempts
- Strained interpersonal relationships
- Sudden outbursts of anger
- Exaggerated or hysterical crying
- Perceptual differences
- Extensive grudge holding
- Mood swings (can change rapidly (sometimes minutes)from being happy to being low in mood)
- Impulsive and/or risky behaviour
- Substance abuse
- Disordered eating
- High levels of shame and anger

Early Childhood

Research has found that emotional dysregulation may be linked to the display of acting out, externalizing disorders or behaviour problems. Calkins and Dedmon (2000) found that when faced with difficult and challenging tasks, children with emotional dysregulation spent less time attending to tasks and more time throwing tantrums or fretting compared to children without emotional regulation difficulties. Children with emotional dysregulation have difficulty with self-regulation have difficulty fulfilling request from caregivers. Emotional dysregulation in early childhood may look like:

- Isolation
- Throwing things
- Screaming
- Lack of eye contact
- Refusing to speak
- Rocking
- Running away
- Crying
- Dissociating
- High levels of anxiety
- Inability to be flexible

Internalizing Behaviours

Emotional dysregulation in children and young people can be associated with internalizing behaviours, including:

- Displaying emotions too intense for a situation
- Difficulty calming down when upset
- Difficulty decreasing negative emotions
- Not being able to calm themselves

- Difficulty understanding emotional experiences
- Becoming avoidant or aggressive when dealing with negative emotions
- Experiencing more negative emotions

Externalizing Behaviours

Emotional dysregulation in children and young people can be associated with externalizing behaviours including:

- Difficulty identifying emotional cues
- Difficulty recognising own emotions
- Exhibiting more extreme emotions

- Focusing on the negative
- Difficulty controlling their attention
- Impulsivity
- Difficulty calming down when upset
- Difficulty decreasing negative emotions

How to help

Supporting Children with Emotional Dysregulation

While conceptual models of effective emotional regulation are still being established (Weems & Plna, 2010), adaptive emotional regulation appears to be structured on at least three components:

- Recognition and naming of emotions
- Association between bodily sensation and emotions
- Appropriate and safe emotional expression/regulation.

Children who have experienced maltreatment can have difficulty in these areas. Research evident in the literature indicates the importance of putting strategies and interventions in place to support maltreated children in improving emotional literacy and appropriate regulation and expression of emotions.

Supporting Children to Recognise and Name Emotions

Children who have difficulty identifying and naming emotions may need help to learn to recognise and label feelings correctly (McLean, 2018). It is vital that the person giving support to the child has a vocabulary of terms about feelings, and thus is able to identify emotions themselves. It is critical that this is a prerequisite for support givers who are talking to children about emotion management techniques. This will mean helping children to learn to understand and identify basic feelings in most cases. Children who have witnessed trauma may have a small emotional vocabulary, restricted to only negative emotions, or may regularly "miss-recognize" emotions (e.g., mislabelling "surprise" as "fear"), (McLean, 2018).

In pre-school-aged children, emotional awareness can be developed by controlled play strategies that include opportunities to identify emotions (e.g., "scary" animals such as spiders and snakes; "angry" animals such as lions; and "love" animals such as bunnies or cats), (McLean, 2018). In developing emotional literacy, it is important to start with simple words of feelings such as sad, happy, angry, scared; to slowly develop and expand the vocabulary of a child's feelings by using more complex words of feelings. Story books, cartoon characters and feeling cards are also valuable resources to build a child's emotional literacy (McLean, 2018).

Supporting Children to Understand How Emotions are expressed in the Body

Children may have difficulty understanding emotions entirely and making a connection between their body's feelings and sensations. Children may have difficulty relating feelings to bodily stimuli (i.e., knowing how their body experiences emotions). They are likely to need help in recognising how their bodies are influenced by feelings; both in ways common to others, and in ways special to them.

For instance, although many children's bodies are hypersensitive to emotional stimuli; some may not perceive emotions in their bodies as well as others; for instance, if they've "cut off" intense feelings previously felt as overwhelming. Children would undoubtedly need help linking what they experience in their bodies with the feelings they are feeling. The following methods can be used as part of family support research by practitioners (psychologists, mental health social workers and behavioural specialists) working with children (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010).

Psycho-Education

Provide psycho-education on the signs of physical distress and symptoms. A child with low emotional literacy and self-reflection cannot link a dry mouth, pounding pulse, wobbly tummy, and anxiety, fear, or discomfort feelings. An effective way to normalise their interactions and develop emotional control is to educate a child about their own particular body signals. If significant adults model or "speak aloud" about their own body signs of fear or rage, the relation between feelings and bodily experiences may be normalised (McLean, 2018).

Structured Exercises to Teach Children Body-Mind Connection

Structured exercises such as "Emotions Face" and "Body Paint" activities will help children of primary and secondary school age develop their awareness about how they feel emotions in their bodies. These exercises use face or body models to help children document how their face and body feelings look; and how their face or body shifts in response to feelings. It can be used in a conversation based on feelings; for instance, "What does this feeling do to your face?" or "What do the angry eyes look like? "Such exercises can also be helpful when addressing traumatic incidents (e.g., a moment when the child was angry; and asking questions like" What did your tummy then feel like? ").) Let children draw and display their "happy," "sad" and "angry" faces; these can be used as prompts for discussion later on. Such exercises can also be helpful in normalising the link between intense feelings and bodily signals that everybody feels (McLean, 2018).

Teach Children How Their Body Communicates To Them

Some children are profoundly detached from their thoughts, and suffer regular somatic symptoms including headaches or stomach aches. Somatic symptoms including headaches or stomach aches are normal in children who are unable to adequately identify, name and express emotions. Supporting these children can be helpful in treating their somatic symptoms as valuable pieces of knowledge telling them whether they feel healthy or not. Thinking of their physical discomfort as an important and useful connection of health over time helps children recognise these symptoms, which may help relieve these symptoms. It is critical that somatic symptoms are not ignored but recognised as real manifestations of emotional pain (Blaustein and Kinniburgh, 2010; McLean, 2018).

Support Children to Regulate and Express Emotions Safely

Children who have experienced adversity may also need help in managing and communicating their emotions in a healthy, safe, and socially acceptable manner (Brumariu, 2015). The following concepts are theoretically useful:

Determine the child's style of emotional expression

Children who are over-controlled emotionally can have trouble expressing feelings-they view themselves as internalised and emotionally constrained (have difficulty expressing emotions, or show only a small range of emotions). Emotionally over-reactive children have the opposite problem; with violent and intense emotional outbursts they respond on daily to slight frustrations (McLean, 2018). Both of these forms of emotional behaviour create difficulties for adolescents, but the over-reactive form is much more likely to lead to school suspensions and dysfunction in placement. Knowing the prevailing emotional style of a child is a significant step in recognising the emotional needs of a child. With the co-regulation and healthy communication of emotions, an under-expressive child would definitely require help. Throughout finding emotional causes and developing independent self-regulation skills, an emotionally reactive child would possibly need help (McLean, 2018).

Teach Self-Regulation and Coping Skills

Explicit instruction of relaxing and regulating skills is useful. Children can vary in their preference for strategies to calm down. Some enjoy listening to music, talking to a friend or spending time alone in a "chill out" zone. Some enjoy doing something active to relieve tension in their bodies. It can be helpful for these kids to involve them in physical activity which uses large muscle groups. Examples can include trampoline, stair welling, push-ups, war shooting, or "squat and throw" ball exercises (e.g. shooting hoops).

Communicate Coping Strategies Using Positive Language

Supporting parents or carers to manage children's emotional expression can also be beneficial. Assist families when a child is dysregulated to continue using constructive words. Parents can use brief, clear, and action-oriented language, concentrating on understanding the emotion of the child and presenting a constructive response. For instance, "I can see that you're frustrated ... go for a run." Remind parents to appreciate the steps made by a child towards safe expression.

Asking parents to practise calming techniques with children in advance may be effective when they feel relaxed, and it becomes a more natural activity under stress.

Asking families to monitor everyday emotions may also be useful; using thermometers of thoughts, feeling expressions, or colour cards. These games allow both the children and parents to understand the emotions of each other.

Encourage Positive Role Models for Emotional Tolerance and Emotional Regulation

Positive role modelling is also an important method by which children can learn socially appropriate ways of expressing emotions, including feeling unsafe. If caregivers can prove that they can handle a full spectrum of emotions, then children can understand that displaying those emotions over time is safe.

Practical Strategies for Classroom

- **Gratitude Journal**

  For this activity students need to think about things they are grateful for each morning (and night if possible). The morning is most important as it sets us up on a more positive mind-set for the day ahead. It can be anything, from the weather, being alive, liking their nice warm duvet etc.

- **5-4-3-2-1 Senses**

This exercise is a great go-to for children. All they need for this exercise is their senses! Have students practice identifying:

- 5 things they see
- 4 things you hear
- 3 things you smell
- 2 things you can touch
- 1 thing you taste
- **Deep Breathing**

This exercise can be used really effectively for deep breathing which calms he solar plexus and nervous system and helps us to regain control and calmness.

- Breathe in (filling your lungs with air and feeling your shoulders rise – producing a picture for the mind, which helps the young person to focus and the mind do as requested) and hold for 1 second, use fingers to count too. Slowly exhale on a count of 2.
- Breathe in (as above) and hold for 2 seconds and exhale on a count of 3
- Breathe in and hold for 3 seconds and exhale slowly on a count of 4
- Breathe in and hold for 4 seconds and slowly exhale on a count of 5
- Repeat the process as many times as required.

- **I am Here Hand Trace**

For this exercise, you'll need paper and a pencil, marker, or crayon. Students will trace a hand on the paper. You can take this a few different directions. Students can simply press the hand into the space on the paper and feel the connection between hand and table. Or they can use the space inside the hand to write things they see or describe the room.

- **Reorientation**

To re-orient to the moment, just have students name facts about the moment. You can give them a card to keep with them to remind them of facts they can state and practice practice practice! It might sound like:

•My name is…
•I am in…
•Today is…
•The season is…
•The weather is…
•I am wearing…

- **Safe places**

What is needed in classrooms and schools is a safe place that is free from questioning and exploration of what happened, and why, by authority figures. Quite safe zones, where someone is available to simply 'be there' when students have become very angry or distressed, provide an important whole-school intervention. It is very important that arrangements for withdrawing students from classrooms do not place them in 'confrontational' situations immediately after an outburst or episode of very 'difficult' behaviour. Staff asked to work in such situations need to be selected because they are less likely to adopt confrontational attitudes and behaviour themselves.

- **Calming techniques**

Calming measures rather than problem-solving ones are required in the early stages of high arousal. The calming, relaxation and stress reduction techniques described below could be taught to all students within their class setting.

- **Coping with the triggers and the outcomes**

Consequences for the behaviour arising from the emotional outbursts should not be discussed or imposed until the student has returned to their baseline physiological levels. Until these levels are reached, the response of the staff should be to calm students and to reassure them that they are being listened to and that their intense emotions are acknowledged by not condemned. Although, eventually, it is important that the student faces the reality of his or her behaviour during an explosive incident, when this is being discussed it should be done in a non-emotional matter-of-fact way. The consequences should be presented as the natural or logical outcome of unacceptable behaviour. The problem-solving phase focuses on how the triggers for anger or anxiety can be coped with through less emotionally strong reactions in the future.

- **Controlling angry feelings**

Distraction techniques (such as exercise or doing another activity), visualising a peaceful enjoyable 'safe place' and meditation techniques can be discussed, demonstrated, practised and monitored.

- **Prompts to calm down**

The teacher may set up a system of prompts to remind students to use the techniques practised to achieve calming. The prompt might be a verbal signal or card placed unobtrusively or given to the student with an outline (either visually or verbally) of the agreed procedures.

- **Therapeutic stories**

Therapeutic stories can be written to demonstrate internal cognitive processes that are sometimes difficult to model externally.

- **Clear instructions**

It is helpful if teachers try to adopt the viewpoint that they have the responsibility for communicating what the task is about and how to do it. Then, if students do not achieve, it is because the teacher has not been successful in communicating rather than the students' 'fault' for not understanding. This fundamentally non-judgemental response to failure sometimes needs to be expressed quite explicitly by the teacher: 'I'm sorry, I don't think I explained that to you very well'.

- **Positive self-talk**

For the student who cries easily in the face of failure, it is important not to belittle or 'attack' the crying as childish. Instead, try to emphasise that it is strength to be able to express feelings and to be sensitive, and then focus on ways of coping with the difficulty. The teacher should encourage positive self-talk: 'I had difficulty with this, but I can do better next time'. Provide scenarios where students have negative thoughts about situations of difficulty and help them to generate alternative more positive ways of coping and what they could say to themselves as coping statements: 'I can see he is trying to wind me up, but I am big enough to keep calm and not fall into the trap of losing my temper'; 'Even if I didn't do very well on that activity, I am still a decent person'.

The use of cards as self-esteem enhancers with a list of positive self-statements can be useful. In a small group situation, students could be asked to devise such cards for each other. Exampled of such self-statements might be: 'I am strong enough to cope with this' and 'If I plan this out, I am more likely to get the right answer'.

- **Classroom culture**

The teacher needs to try to establish a classroom culture which does not promote the notion of students being ranked in terms of value and importance that is linked to success, whether in academic matters or in practical activities or games. The general ethos should be that activities are primarily there to be enjoyed as challenges to developing skills and talents. If value and dignity are linked in students' minds to always winning and being better than someone else, then some individuals, especially those who are unsure of their value and sense of belonging, will react not to winning as an 'attack'. They may then feel that the

only way to defend themselves against such an attack is to become aggressive and blame other people, or to preserve their sense of self-esteem by aggressively refusing to take any further part. It is therefore important for the teacher to stress that our worth and value does not depend on winning and to continually focus on the real purpose of competition, which comes from the Latin 'to seek together'. It is primarily an enjoyable challenge to see how well we can do.

- **Assertiveness**

The skills of assertiveness, which are crucial to living in a community, we need to be modelled, demonstrated and practised in a variety of classroom settings and activities. It is not without significance that 'Assertive Discipline' was chosen as the title for an approach to classroom management (Canter & Canter, 1997). Whatever the merits and demerits of this particular programme, the title is a good one as the word 'assertive' emphasises the protection and enhancement of both the teachers' rights to have their needs fulfilled at the same time as recognising that students also have rights for their needs to be met.

The teacher therefore needs to model fundamental respect in the way classroom rules are negotiated on the basis of agreed principles and enforced with a primary focus on praise. Any negative consequences being imposed are done without accompanying negative emotions on the part of the teacher, with opportunities and encouragement for reparation rather than an emphasis on 'punishment'.

- **Conflict resolution through the curriculum**

Although conflicts are often seen as destructive, there can also be positive aspects. Conflicts can make us more aware of our own and other people's needs and should prompt us to find constructive ways to meet these needs. The taught curriculum should deal explicitly with conflict resolution, focusing on positive aspects of conflict and giving students opportunities to learn the techniques of conflict resolution.

Faced with greater problems of violence, educators in the USA have developed curriculum approaches to teaching conflict-resolution skills, some of which have been designed specifically for secondary-phase students. Some of these materials (for example, Conflict Busters) are available from www.incentiveplus.co.uk. It is very important that real-life conflicts in the classroom and in the school grounds become the main opportunities for applying conflict-resolution techniques.

- **Conflict resolution skills**

Students can be asked to generate a list of contexts in which conflicts might occur (for instance, home, classroom, sports field, shops, clubs, etc.) and the people who might be involved (for example, family members, good friends, teachers, students, employers, etc.). They can then write down as many methods as they can think of that people use to try to solve the conflict, identifying those that improve relationships between people and those that often do not solve the problem and leave people feeling angry and devalued.

- **Distinguishing assertive, aggressive and passive responses**

Students need to be taught to distinguish between assertive, aggressive and passive responses in conflict situations. This can be done using newspaper and magazine pictures, video, role-play, etc. and asking the students to identify the type of response. Positive scripts for handling a variety of typical or personal sources of irritations, annoyances or being on the end of aggressive behaviour can be devised and practised in individual counselling or small group situations. Examples of aggressive and overly passive scripts or role-plays can be used to explore and identify these responses and learn how to replace them with assertive methods.

- **Assertiveness techniques**

Assertion can be taught by the teacher directly modelling and getting the student to practise I- messages and other assertiveness techniques (such as the 'broken record', where a request or statement is repeated several times), and how to be assertive in body posture (see Wainwright, 1993).

The 'broken record' method is especially useful if somebody is trying to manipulate or put pressure on you to do something that you really do not want to do. There are three steps to this technique: first, clarify what the other person is trying to get you to do; second, acknowledge the truth of what they are saying or at least their right to that opinion; third, state quite clearly that you do not want to do what is being asked of you.

An example of a teacher modelling the broken record technique might be if a student were to ask, 'can't we have some fun in this lesson?' Having clarified what that student might classify as 'fun', the teacher could say, 'Yes, I can see that would be fun, but I have other plans for this lesson and I want to do that today'. The students might respond with, 'But we worked so hard yesterday!' to which the teacher might reply, 'Yes, you did work well last time, but I want to get on and do

this today'. Eventually, people give up. However, because we have shown that we were listening by acknowledging the truth of what the other person has said and because we have been assertive rather than aggressive and have not been 'pushed around', personal relationships have been preserved. The technique clearly has applications to students in handling peer pressure to engage in anti-social or health-damaging behaviour.

- **Language Skills**

It is often true that the loss of temper and control in conflict situations is because students have not learned alternative strategies to protect their self-esteem. Frequently these alternative strategies require the use of language rather than physical engagement. These pragmatic language skills may need to be taught directly to enable the student to use assertive techniques. The interventions related to labelling, recognising and distinguishing between emotions are relevant here.

It is also vital to remember to be mindful of the language we use both when communicating to others and ourselves. Not only to be clear, but to listen to understand not to answer. To use reflective listening when to ensure your understanding is correct and to show you are being attentive.

Furthermore, our mind will do what it thinks we want it to do. So there is the upmost need to ensure we speak positively to ourselves and others. Because the more we speak negatively of our selves or listen to others, the more familiar it will become and therefore the mind will believe it. So feed your mind with kindness, positive self talk and gratitude.

- **Friendly and unfriendly statements**

In individual or very small group sessions with students who appear to lack sensitivity to the feelings of others, the following activity can be useful. Assertiveness is about being able to express both your positive and negative feelings without being aggressive.

This activity can help students to become more sensitive to the feelings of others by being able to identify what is friendly and unfriendly and by learning to replace unfriendly aggressive statements with friendly assertive ones.

- **Avoid accusatory language**

The language we use can often be subtly accusatory. In this respect it is better for the teacher to avoid using the phrase 'why did you?' It is instructive to consider when other people have used this phrase to us - usually we are not asked this question when we have done something good, only when somebody thinks we

have done something wrong. And the people asking the question have usually been people such as our parents, teachers or those who have authority over us. These are people whose judgements matter to us and so this can have consequences.

- **Non-judgemental approaches**

There is also the fact that, even as adults, we are usually not really able to answer the question about why we have done something, so we can hardly expect students to have such knowledge and understanding. It is a good general principle to only ask questions from which you can expect to get information.

A much more fruitful approach is to try to understand what legitimate needs students are trying to meet by their poor behaviour. This is fundamentally a non-judgemental or non-accusatory approach and, because it is non-threatening, the student is much less likely to need to defend his or her self-esteem by denying any responsibility or blaming others.

- **Focus on good behaviour**

Most denials and shifting the blame are students' strategies to save face, particularly with peers. As a general rule, do not use students' bad behaviour as an exemplar to be held up of how you will handle rule violation. Instead the focus should be on the model behaviour of students as exemplars of how you would like to see them behave. Praising students who tell the truth and admit responsibility for its own sake rather than simply to avoid a more severe punishment is also a useful tactic.

- **Teaching about emotions**

The reasons why people become angry and the types of triggers that often lead to anger could form part of the taught curriculum. The 'Firework Model' (Feindler & Ecton, 1986; Faupel et al., 1998) is particularly useful in helping students understand the functions of anger and the kinds of triggers that tend to provoke anger. For a firework to explode, three things are necessary. The 'match' represents the event that sparks off the outburst (that is, what somebody does - for example, calling the student a name). The 'fuse' stands for the thoughts and interpretations that the student puts on the event. (For example, the same remark made by a best friend might be interpreted very differently.) The 'dynamite or explosive' represents the person's aroused state. If the 'dynamite' is damp, the firework will not be ignited properly - the student gets into a physiologically non-aroused state, for example by slowing down the rate of breathing to about six breaths per minute.

The curriculum should explicitly deal with the physiological changes that we notice as we become more and more emotional. The body is preparing itself either to fight or to flee, both of which demand strenuous exertion. These physiological changes include faster and shallower breathing to obtain the oxygen necessary to enable the release of energy by burning glucose which is stored in the muscles. The heart beats faster to take the oxygen in the blood quickly to the muscles. 'Butterflies' in the stomach and uncomfortable knotted feelings in the stomach occur when the blood moves from the digestive system to the muscles. This movement of the blood to the muscles also accounts for the person becoming 'white with anger'. The fact that we tend to perspire and sweat is the body's way of providing a cooling mechanism by using evaporation. The tense, fidgety knees-knocking feelings are the muscles getting ready to spring into action, rather like a cat twitches just before it springs.

- **Identifying emotions**

Teachers can model the processes by which they read how students are feeling. For example, you may notice changes in their breathing patterns, facial expressions, clenched fists and other body postures and can express this openly: 'I can see that you might be feeling cross, because I notice .. . '.
The physiological and behavioural signs of various emotions can be illustrated and explored using drama and role-play focusing on body language - for example, in how people start to show they are angry.
Students could be asked to produce a video to show facial expressions in different emotions or use computer graphics to demonstrate how different parts of the face appear in different emotions.

- **Recognising emotions (1)**

The teacher can set up a system to communicate to an individual when he or she notices the first signs of the student becoming angry. It could be a card or some gesture explained previously to the student.

- **Recognising emotions (2)**

Work with an individual student can develop and extend the environmental interventions outlined above. For example, the system set up for the teacher to convey when he or she first notices the student becoming angry can move to the next step whereby the students have a system for showing the teacher that they have noticed themselves becoming angry or upset.

- **Using a mirror**

A mirror can be used to help the student try to express different emotional states, particularly irritation, annoyance, frustration and anger. These expressions can be modelled by adults or peers.

- **Recording emotions**

A framework for identifying and recording on a daily basis the kinds of situations or triggers that spark off anger can be developed. This could be done by adapting a 'feelings graph' to plot levels of anger throughout the day and answering the questions such as 'What happened? What was I thinking/feeling? What happened next?'

- **Feelings diaries**

Students can be asked to keep feelings diaries. Students can be asked to draw in their own personalised representations of the emotions if preferred. Computerised diaries can be compiled, if preferred. Feelings diaries are designed to help students identify and label their feelings, but also to give them an understanding of the relationship between how they feel at any one moment and the context and triggers which 'provoke' that emotion . This can help students to think about ways they could control their negative feelings by avoiding these triggers where possible, but also by changing the way they think about them in the first place.

- **Feelings graphs**

This type of graph is usually used in individual counselling sessions but can be used in a class setting also. The student is asked to review a period of time, usually a week or day (if using the time period of a day, photocopy the worksheet and then replace the days of the week with timings or events). Annotations are made on the graph by the student. For example, the first event might be 'waking up' and the student is asked to mark a cross on the graph to indicate how happy (use positive wording) he or she was feeling at that time. The next events might be 'catching the bus's and 'arriving at school', and so on. The crosses on the graph are then joined up to give a visual representation of the student's mood throughout the day. This can be used in a variety of ways to explore perceptions, possibilities of changes and even as a pre- and post-intervention tool.

- **Identifying worries**

For students showing anxiety about their inadequacies, it is firstly important for teachers to identify the issues that cause the worry and anxiety. Circle time and other class discussions can address the things students typically worry about and also which individuals within the group have these worries. This helps the teacher to look closely at the environment and attempt to make it less threatening by the way in which tasks are presented and how feedback and evaluation are given.

- **Supportive and inclusive environments**

Many aspects of classroom life are inherently threatening, but how much anxiety is actually experienced depends on how much support and help students feel is available. It is by encouraging supportive and inclusive classrooms that it is acknowledged that we all have strengths and weaknesses. Bullying and peer pressure are the antithesis of the supportive and inclusive classroom, so the constant refrain that we help each other and care for each other is probably the best antidote to anxiety and worry. Buddy systems for support can be invaluable.

Further Reading

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https://bristolchildparentsupport.co.uk/is-your-child-emotionally-dysregulated/

Further Help

ChildLine

Comforts, advises and protects children 24 hours a day and offers free confidential counselling.

Phone 0800 1111 (24 hours)

The Mix

Information, support and listening for people under 25.

Phone 0808 808 4994 (24 hours)

Youth Access

Get connected with the right support services and organisations in your area. For anyone aged 11-25.

Visit their website to find your local service.

Samaritans

24-hour confidential listening and support for anyone who needs it. (Adults included.)

jo@samaritans.org

Phone 116 123 (24 hours)

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