



Indicator: All teachers are attentive to students' emotional states, guide students in managing their emotions, and arrange for supports and interventions when necessary. (5360)

Explanation: Learning to manage one's emotional states is one of the most important activities of early childhood. Emotional development is critical to social relationships and learning and is a predictor of later academic and social success in school. Teachers can help students learn to identify and understand their emotions and can teach students strategies for successfully managing their emotions.

Questions: Why is student emotional development important? How can teachers help students learn to manage their own emotional states?

Why is student emotional development important?

Emotions, both positive and negative, are important in children's lives. How well they express their emotions and understand the emotions of others is a critical aspect of early development, learning, and relationship building (Kostelnik, Gregory, Soderman, & Whiren, 2012). The ability to understand one's own emotions and those of others, manage emotional experiences, and appropriately express emotion is known as "emotional competence" (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Goleman, 2007); early childhood educators and researchers advocate for early childhood education that addresses this competency (Denham, 1998; Hyson, 2004).

Research findings suggest a relation between children's emotional and cognitive development (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). Negative or inappropriately managed emotions can adversely affect a child's attention, thinking and behavior. Positive or appropriately managed emotions can support children's attending to details, setting goals, planning, problem solving, and decision making (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004; Raver, Garner, & Smith-Donald, 2007). Children's emotional states also have a powerful impact on their social relationships (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006; Thompson, 2006). Children who better understand their own emotions, as well as those of others, are more likely to behave sympathetically, help others, and share. They also tend to be more liked by others and have more positive relationships (Katz & McClellan, 1997). In addition, they have better academic and social outcomes in later years (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Izard, Fine, Schulz, Mostow, Ackerman, & Youngstrom, 2001).

How can teachers help students learn to manage their own emotional states?

As Gallingane and Han (2015) report, researchers have identified several basic principles about emotions that children need to understand during their early childhood years and that teachers should help children learn. They recommend that teacher focus on the following principles:

1. First, children must understand that *everyone has emotions* and that their emotional experiences are not unique (Hyson, 2004; Saarni, 1990).

2. Next, children must know that *different emotions are prompted by different situations*. Young children (around age 3 years) develop emotional awareness about themselves and others, and most of them understand a simple distinction between how they feel and what caused them to feel that way (Berk, 2006). As they grow older and experience more and different situations, they need teachers to help them help understand more complex emotions and their causes. Ashiabi (2000) emphasizes the teacher's responsibility to explain to children the meaning of emotions, when they occur, in the context of the occasion. Ahn (2005a, 2005b) further advocates for teachers to provide instruction with specific examples and situations to help young children relate emotions with situational contexts beyond those that they themselves might experience naturally.
3. Third, children must know that *there are different ways to express emotions* and they must know how to use those different ways. Teachers need to model and guide children to express themselves in socially acceptable ways (Ashiabi, 2000). One way is for children to express their emotions with appropriate words (Joseph & Strain, 2010). Having a precise word to express an emotion can often be a substitute for physical action, thus providing the potential to avoid the occurrence of inappropriate or challenging student behaviors (Kostelnik et al., 2012).
4. Fourth, children must understand that *other people may not feel the same way that they do*. Fully understanding the perspectives of others can be difficult for many young children. However, they are capable of identifying emotional states of others and the context of a situation that may cause those emotional states. Garner and Waajid (2012) report that preschool-age children's situational knowledge, including the ability to understand others' emotions in a given circumstance, was the strongest predictor for later school success.
5. Finally, children must understand that *they can do things to affect how they feel and how others feel*. This kind of self-management of their own emotion and impact on the emotions of others is the goal of emotional learning during early childhood. According to Kostelnik et al. (2012), preschool-age children typically acquire such strategies as soothing oneself, seeking comfort, suppressing certain emotions, ignoring certain emotional events, and considering alternative interpretations of events. Teachers

can assist with this by providing children with safe environments in which they can discuss examples and practice their emotion management skills for different situations and for changing their emotional states.

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