

Develop Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

1. Observe your classroom environment

Take a few moments each day and just observe your classroom environment. Which children appear relaxed and happy? Which children talk incessantly? Which children are shy and retiring? Get to know the patterns of behavior between your students and take notes on how they are relating to each other. These notes will be valuable clues to their learning style, approach to learning, and ability to manage their emotions and relationships.

2. Create stories that will become a part of the fabric of your classroom

The brain learns best through the context of stories. Stories stimulate multisensory integration and help the brain to order and orient the things it needs to know. Creating classroom stories fosters interdependence and a sense of “we” that builds emotional intelligence.

3. Give choice/Encourage connection

It is through the opportunity to make choices and evaluate the consequences of those choices in a safe environment that we learn about ourselves. Classrooms that allow children to make age-appropriate choices, within boundaries that allow feelings of safety, encourage self-efficacy, motivation, and independence.

4. Emphasize emotional meaning/Model the importance of emotions

Our culture does not acknowledge the importance of emotional understanding and meaning. It is through understanding the message of our emotions that we are empowered to act in ways that connect with our best judgment. In class, adults must model this understanding of emotions by validating children’s feelings and then helping them explore options in response to those feelings.

5. Create an active and cooperative atmosphere

Classrooms that encourage a collaborative and cooperative approach to problem-solving allow children to approach learning in a calm and relaxed manner, thus enhancing cognitive processing and memory.

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6. Make time each day for journaling and reflecting

Ideally, reflection should occur every 90 minutes throughout the day, giving the brain time to integrate new learning with old and encode it in memory. Practice of new concepts is vital also, allowing children to experience what they are learning actively. The brain changes constantly with new learning and rewires itself as new elements are stored in memory and practiced as they are learned.

7. Reframe mistakes

An essential component of learning is to feel safe enough to make mistakes and be able to reframe them in a way that allows learning to occur. Classrooms that allow children to learn to reframe mistakes lower stress and increase cognitive processing capability. Reframing also builds self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation as children can evaluate how to correctly use their skills, as well as decide which new skills need to be developed.

8. Celebrate accomplishments

Our brains are naturally structured to focus on the negative elements. Celebration of accomplishments allows children to build optimism in a realistic way and teaches them to focus on the things that they do well. It is important to teach our children to use their strengths to support their challenges. The child who can say, “I stink at soccer, but I am very good at art,” is learning to balance his/her emotional response to challenges and to value him or herself.

9. Take children’s aspirations seriously

When children have a goal, support them to pursue it. Pursuit of personal goals increases self-efficacy and a sense of personal effectiveness. Children who set and monitor progress toward their goals build an effective lifelong skill that enhances the development of executive function.

10. Consciously model and teach EQ Skills

Recognize the power of role modeling, start with yourself. Children are very aware of a sense of cognitive dissonance when adult actions diverge from expectations set by those adults. Adults increasing EQ appears to affect the development of children’s EQ skills.