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FOR PARENTS

Making the Magical Superpowers from This Book More Tangible

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO SELF-REGULATION AS IT RELATES TO THE STRATEGIES IN THIS BOOK

The first step of the self-regulation process for the young child is to understand the physical signals of each different state of regulation. After providing them with those clues (which are illustrated to you throughout the five sections of this book), it is important to provide your child with concrete language so they can then label their connected feelings.

Please refer to the following suggestions to aid your young child in the self-regulation process:

1. It is equally important to reassure your child that it is okay to feel all different types of feelings, including challenging ones—that is, there is nothing to be ashamed of when experiencing those difficult feelings.
2. Another powerful way to encourage your child to follow through with specific exercises would be to model the specific strategy yourself; for example, when getting frustrated or upset myself, I will often utilize a deep breath. When my children were younger, I would actively stop and state: “I am feeling mad/frustrated; I am putting those mad/frustrated feelings into my deep breath.” The more our children see us implementing the tools and supports that we are actively trying to teach them, the more likely they are to use them themselves!
3. Finally, with very small children, it can be extremely helpful to pair the specific strategy introduced (I would recommend one per week) with a tangible multi-sensory tool or visible reminder that they can wear throughout the day, such as a fidget bracelet. I have used this with the students I have worked with, and with great success. Please see the photo below for reference.

HOW TO MAKE THE STRATEGIES FROM THIS BOOK EVEN MORE TANGIBLE/VARIATIONS

STOP SIGN

If you would like a more tangible way to remind the child of this important superpower, a good tool/strategy would be to simply sketch a stop sign. (Either you could do this, or have the child complete this independently or contribute, which would provide ownership over the tool.) The stop sign should be small enough to fit on a key ring, so that you can clip it to the child's belt loop as a reminder throughout their day.

PALM PUSH

A simple way to make this strategy more concrete for young children would be to utilize a tangible object, such as a soft fidget filled with sand, beads, or other materials. Explain to your child that they are putting feelings that make us overwhelmed into the fidget. Once all of those feelings are inside the fidget, we then push those feelings between our palms until they disappear! The tactile input reinforces the strategy.

SQUEEZE YOUR WIGGLES

In order to make this magic spell more tangible, you can cut out squares of bubble wrap. Have the child hold one piece of bubble wrap in each hand. Explain that this represents their wiggles or "frozen" feelings, and that when they squeeze the bubble wrap, the wiggles/frozen feelings will disappear! The audible popping noise should reinforce the message. To make this even more tangible, you can purchase the large bubble wrap and have the child draw or write out what represents their wiggles. You can also have your child hold a fidget in each hand, to provide them with tactile input; the fidgets represent their wiggles/frozen feelings.

HEAD BELOW KNEES

This strategy is especially beneficial for getting the body out of fight or flight (the sympathetic nervous system), as it activates the parasympathetic nervous system through the vestibular system. It is especially important to try to direct the child to immediately engage in this exercise at the first sign of physical or emotional dysregulation, as long as there are no medical contra-indications. This exercise can be completed from a seated or standing position.

FEEL WHERE YOUR BODY IS

I have found as a treating therapist for over a decade that, in order to work, one of the most important elements of a strategy is a child's buy-in with regards to its efficacy; that is, how well does it work? Here is a simple before-and-after experiment that can be done with all of the provided strategies, but will work most effectively with this exercise as it is most correlated with the proprioceptive system (involved in the sense of where the body is in space). Set a timer for a specific time, or possibly more importantly, have your child/student set the timer. They should then draw a self-portrait; direct them to include as many details as they can. Have them complete this exercise. Afterwards, direct them to complete another self-portrait with the same duration of time on the timer. You should see more details on the second self-portrait, due to increased proprioceptive input!

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES PER SENSORY AREA— SUGGESTIONS FOR ADULTS

Hi adults! The magic spells cast by the Mindful Magician of Feelings Town can't work every time. While there is no guarantee that the magical powers will always work, any good magician (you in this case!) will always have another trick up their sleeve. Here are some alternative spells you and your child can cast to help them regulate their emotions and senses, and a handy guide for what emotions and senses require which magical power. You can use the magic words below as a script to steer you through the spell, just as the magician did in the story.

STRONG FEELINGS STREET

This area is connected to the process of emotional regulation. Examples of related feelings include: frustration, anger, sadness, and anxiety.

Teach your child the following strategies when your child is having strong and overwhelming responses:

1. The Mantra: Are you ready to give it a try? Give yourself a tight hug and touch your head if you are ready! A mantra is a word or phrase you tell yourself when you are feeling mad, sad, or just overwhelmed. It can help you push past those hard feelings and make it easier to do challenging things!
2. Here are some examples of mantras:
3. "I can do it!"
4. "No big deal!"
5. "I am loved."
6. You can also come up with your own!
7. Clap twice and tell the helpful grownup reading you this book your very own mantra. Amazing job!
8. Journal in Your Mind: This is a special journal that you are creating inside your brain. Yep, seriously. Inside this journal, you will imagine writing or sketching down any thoughts that are bothering you during the day or keeping you awake at night. Let's make ours now. What color is the cover of the journal? What color are the pages? What are you using to write or draw with: a pencil, a crayon, a marker? Okay, now draw or write anything on your mind that may be worrying you. Ready, go!

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS STATION

This area is connected to the sensory system being overwhelmed by the environment. Examples of different sensory stimuli that feel overwhelming include: visuals, auditory inputs, olfactory information, and tactile/touch inputs.

Teach your child the following strategies when your child is having strong and overwhelming responses:

1. One Detail: Look around the room. Find something that you can really focus on that will make you feel calmer. It can be a finger, a pillow, a mark on the wall, or even a blade of grass! Notice every detail about it. Block out everything else—all of the sounds, sights, smells. All that matters in this moment is what you are focusing on. When you're ready, you can come back to what you are doing! :)
2. Bubble Breath: Imagine you have a wand of bubbles—do you feel it in your hand? You are going to pretend you are blowing a bubble as big as the grownup reading this book! When you breathe out, be careful not to pop it! Breathe in through your nose, breathe out a large “bubble” through pursed lips.

WIGGLY WAY

This area relates to feelings of physical dysregulation. The child may seek proprioceptive (deep pressure), vestibular (rotational or head below knees), or tactile (light or deep touch) input in order to self-regulate from a physical perspective.

Teach your child the following strategies when your child is having strong and overwhelming responses:

1. Arm Pretzel: First, put your arms straight down in front of you, with the back of your hands touching. Cross your arms. Touch your palms together with crossed wrists. Lace your fingers together. Twist your arms up to your chest. Squeeze all your fidgety feelings until they disappear!
2. Cocoon: First, get on your hands and knees. Next, put your head in your arms and squeeze your body into a tight, tight ball facing the floor. Now, picture where in your body you feel your wiggles the most. Do you feel them in your feet? Your arms? Your neck? Or are they all over your body? Now, squeeze those wiggles out of your body until they disappear. Ahhh...so much better!
3. Manipulatives: Examples are unifix cubes, lacing beads, and LEGO® bricks. It is important that you keep your eyes on the teacher or lesson during important points when using this tool. Note: It is helpful for the child to have access to manipulatives in connection to related activities to provide connected and functional participation. For example, during lessons, consider having your child/student connect LEGO® and spell out sight words with dry erase marker. Manipulatives can be included in a child's individualized self-regulation bin to utilize on an as-needed basis, as well.
4. Hug: Cross your arms in front of you, far enough to bring your palms almost to your sides. Squeeze your arms or sides tightly, squeezing out all of the fidgety feelings!

MOVEMENT MOUNTAIN

This area is connected specifically to the proprioceptive sensory system, which is involved in providing the body with information of where it is in space. Its receptors are located within the body's joints and muscles. Children with difficulty in this area may move their entire body more than others, fall to the floor, crash into walls, and/or have difficulty feeling where different parts of their body are.

Teach your child the following strategies when your child is having difficulty in this area:

1. **Finger Pull:** Put one hand palm up, one hand palm down (both facing each other). Touch all of your fingertips together (except thumbs), and pull them apart as hard as you can, pulling all of those movement feelings away until they disappear!
2. **Backpack:** Wearing your backpack or bag throughout the day, as long as it is heavy enough (but not too heavy that you will hurt your back), will give you what we therapists call “heavy work” that should help keep you feeling calm.
3. **Doodle the Lesson:** When we are moving, we are keeping our brain and body awake! We are also feeling where our body is! Here is a great way to stay focused on an important job while your teacher is teaching a lesson. It can be done from your desk or from the rug.
 - a. Get a whiteboard and a marker.
 - b. Make your whiteboard into four boxes (if you can’t do this on your own, ask your teacher to help).
 - c. Listen carefully to your teacher as they teach the lesson. What are the four most important parts of the lesson? Draw each one in the box.
 - d. If you need more boxes/if there is more important information, grab another whiteboard and make more boxes!
 - e. Figure out a time, in advance, to share your work with your teacher, and/or participate in the lesson as much as you can!

INSIDE BODY FEELINGS ZOO

This area is connected to the interoception system, responsible for those feelings felt internally. Examples of different internal stimuli include: hunger, thirst, being full, hot, cold, needing to use the bathroom, etc.

Teach your child the following strategies when your child is having difficulty registering these types of feelings:

1. **Squeeze into a Ball:** While sitting on the floor (or in a chair), push your feet flat on the floor (or on the seat of the chair) and squeeze your knees to your belly with your arms, turning your body into a ball; curl up and squeeze all the muscles in your whole body!
2. **Mindfulness:** Set a timer starting at one minute. Place one hand on your heart, and one hand on your belly. Tell yourself the following: “For this one minute, I am going to focus only on my breathing, noticing how it goes in, noticing how it goes out. If any thought comes, that’s okay—I can let it float away on a cloud, and re-focus on my breathing.”

REFERENCES

How to Be a Superhero Called Self-Control
Self-Control to the Rescue