MODULE 9 · EMOTIONAL LITERACY PLANNER

# Teaching children to *understand and regulate* their emotions

Emotional literacy is not simply asking children how they feel. Like reading, it must be taught, explicitly, patiently and often. This planner builds the skill across three connected lessons: first the brain and body, then the words, then the strategies, so children can recognise what is happening inside them before we ask them to manage it.

**Age** around 5–8 | **Format** 3 connected lessons | **Threads** well-being · language · self-regulation

> *We teach children to notice the alarm, name it, and learn what settles it. A child who cannot yet name what they feel cannot choose what they need.*

## THE PATH WE ARE TEACHING

Emotion → Body response → Recognise the feeling → Name the feeling → Choose a strategy

Children move along this path only with teaching and practice. Each lesson in this planner strengthens one part of it, and all of it is underpinned by one idea: every emotion is allowed. There are no "good" or "bad" feelings; each one carries information, and what we choose to do with a feeling is separate from the feeling itself.

## THE THREE LESSONS

1 **What happens in my brain and body?** · the amygdala, and the body's clues

2 **Naming and recognising emotions** · vocabulary and a colour-and-feelings framework

3 **Self-regulation tools and strategies** · breathing, movement and connection

## HOW TO USE IT

Teach the lessons in order, over a week or a fortnight, and keep revisiting them. Model everything yourself: name your own feelings and show your own regulation out loud. Use visual supports, daily check-ins and predictable routines so the practice becomes second nature, not a one-off topic.

LESSON 1 · UNDERSTANDING

# What happens in my brain and body?

*Teaching the amygdala, and the clues the body gives us*

AIM

"*My body gives me clues about how I am feeling.*"

## Teach it: simple brain language

Introduce the amygdala as a tiny, almond-shaped part of the brain, a kind of **alarm** or **guard dog**. When something feels big or scary, the alarm goes off and gets our body ready to fight, run or freeze. It is trying to keep us safe, but it cannot always tell the difference between real danger and a knocked-over tower. When the alarm is loud, the thinking part of our brain goes quiet, which is why it is hard to think clearly or "just calm down" in that moment.

## Notice the body's clues

- **Heartbeat.** Fast or thumping?
- **Breathing.** Quick, shallow or held?
- **Muscles.** Tight fists, shoulders, tummy?
- **Temperature.** Hot cheeks, or cold hands?
- **Face and body.** Frown, tears, wanting to hide or move?

## Teacher modelling

Think aloud with your own example: "My heart is beating fast and my shoulders are tight. My alarm has gone off. I think I am feeling frustrated. I am going to take three slow breaths." Children learn this far more from seeing it than from being told it.

### VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS

Draw a simple brain with the "alarm". Make a body outline and mark where children feel things. Use a hand model (fingers folded over the thumb) to show the thinking brain "flipping its lid" when the alarm fires.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Where do you feel things in your body?*
- *What does your body do when you are excited? When you are cross?*
- *Why might our alarm go off even when we are safe?*
- *What happens to our thinking when the alarm is loud?*

### PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

- Body-outline "where do I feel it?" colouring.
- Jump, then place a hand on your heart and notice.
- Make the "alarm" and "thinking brain" with your hands.
- A class body-clues poster to keep and add to.

### MISCONCEPTIONS TO LISTEN FOR

- "Only bad feelings are in the body." (All feelings have body clues, including excitement and joy.)
- "The alarm means something is wrong with me." (The alarm is normal and protective; everyone has one.)
- "I should be able to stop the feeling." (We cannot stop feelings; we learn to notice and respond to them.)

### REFLECTION

LESSON 2 · LANGUAGE

# Naming and recognising emotions

*Building vocabulary with a colour-and-feelings framework*

AIM

"*If I can recognise and name my feeling, I can begin to decide what I need.*"

## Teach it: an emotional vocabulary

Give children precise words for feelings, and the permission to use them. Start with a core set and widen it over time:

happy · sad · angry · calm · worried / anxious · frustrated · excited · proud · confused

## A colour-and-feelings framework

A resource such as *The Colour Monster*, or a colour-and-feelings board you build with the class, gives children a gentle, visual way to identify and talk about emotions, linking each feeling to a colour they choose. It makes a feeling easier to point to before a child has the words.

## We each feel differently

Teach explicitly that two children can feel the same emotion and show it in different ways: one child who is worried goes quiet, another becomes silly or cross. There is no single "right" way a feeling looks, which is why we ask and listen rather than assume.

### CLASSROOM PRACTICE

- A visual emotion board, revisited daily.
- Morning and afternoon emotion check-ins.
- Drawing or painting "how I feel today".
- Role-play and stories to spot and name feelings.
- Matching faces, colours and feeling-words.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *What colour would you give this feeling? Why?*
- *Can you feel two things at once?*
- *How does your "worried" look? Does it look the same as your friend's?*
- *What helps you show someone how you feel?*

### MISCONCEPTIONS TO LISTEN FOR

- "Some feelings are bad." (All feelings are allowed; it is behaviour, not feeling, that we guide.)
- "If you look happy, you are happy." (Faces do not always match feelings; we check in rather than assume.)
- "Big feelings mean you are being naughty." (A big feeling is information, not misbehaviour.)

### REFLECTION

LESSON 3 · STRATEGY

# Self-regulation tools and strategies

*At least three ways to help the body and mind settle*

AIM

"*When I know what I need, I can help myself feel steady again.*"

## 1 · Breathing and slowing the body

Deep breathing, counting, grounding, or a quiet pause. Try "smell the flower, blow the candle", breathing in time with a finger traced up and down the other hand, or counting five things you can see. Slow breathing tells the alarm it is safe to quieten.

## 2 · Movement and sensory regulation

Stretching, walking, pushing against a wall, squeezing a stress ball, or spending time in a calming space with sensory materials. Movement and firm, safe pressure help the body discharge the alarm and reset.

## 3 · Connection and communication

Asking a trusted adult for help, using emotion cards, talking to a friend, drawing the feeling, or using a visual communication tool. Co-regulation, borrowing a calm adult's steadiness, is often what a child needs most.

AN IMPORTANT BOUNDARY

Regulation strategies must never be used as a punishment or to silence a feeling. They are not about making a child "be quiet" or "stop crying". They help a child understand what they need and regain a sense of control. The feeling is always allowed; the strategy simply helps the child carry it.

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

- Build a class menu of "what helps me" strategies.
- Practise each strategy when calm, so it is ready when needed.
- Make personal calm-down cards or a strategy fan.
- Pair a feeling with a strategy: "When I feel … I can …".

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *What already helps you when you feel big feelings?*
- *Which strategy would you like to try first?*
- *How will you know a strategy is working?*
- *Who can you go to when you need help?*

MISCONCEPTIONS TO LISTEN FOR

- "The calm space is where you go when you are in trouble." (It is a chosen, positive space, never a sanction.)
- "A strategy should make the feeling disappear." (It helps us carry and ride the feeling, not erase it.)
- "Asking for help means I failed." (Asking for help is itself a skilful strategy.)

REFLECTION

BEYOND THE THREE LESSONS

# Making emotional literacy part of the everyday

*From a taught topic to a lived classroom culture*

Three lessons begin the work; consistency sustains it. Emotional literacy grows when the vocabulary, the check-ins and the strategies appear every day, in small, predictable ways, and when adults keep modelling them. The goal is a classroom where naming and regulating feelings is simply "how we do things here".

## Keep it visible and routine

- A permanent emotion board and a protected calm space.
- Daily check-ins at predictable moments.
- Feeling-words woven into everyday talk and stories.
- Strategy cards kept where children can reach them.
- Emotional literacy folded into your class agreements.

## Keep modelling it

- Name your own feelings and regulation out loud.
- Separate the feeling from the behaviour, every time.
- Meet a dysregulated child calm and regulated yourself.
- Notice and name feelings you see, gently and often.
- Celebrate noticing and naming, not just "being calm".

ASSESSMENT THROUGH CHANGING EXPLANATIONS, NOT A WORKSHEET

Look for growth in what children notice and say over time: a child who can point to a body clue, name a feeling more precisely, choose a strategy unprompted, or separate "I feel angry" from "so I hit". Capture these moments, in the child's own words, rather than marking a test.

WHAT I NOTICED THIS FORTNIGHT

ONE THING I WILL DO NEXT TO SUSTAIN THIS