

## Emotion Regulation Case Example

**Student:** Ava

**Grade:** 3rd

**Presenting Problems:** Interruptions and Off-Task Behavior

**Intervention:** Praise

### Background

Lately, Ava's teacher has observed a concerning pattern in Ava's interactions. Ava, who used to be cooperative, has started to challenge the classroom norms with a defiance that puzzles her teacher. In class, Ava's reactions can be unpredictable. During math independent work time yesterday, the teacher found Ava at her desk, pencil paused over her worksheet, her frustration visible in the way she fidgeted with her eraser. When the teacher approached, offering assistance, Ava pushed her worksheet away, her voice rising, "I can't do it, leave me alone!"

### Getting Started

**Decide whether you are going to teach and practice the skills with the whole class, a group of students, or just with the targeted student**

The teacher has decided that she would like to teach all her students about emotion regulation, and she is going to incorporate some whole-class strategies, but she also wants to meet and work with Ava so that she can help Ava develop an emotion regulation plan.

**Develop a shared language for communicating about emotions in your classroom (e.g., poster, picture wall, etc)**

The teacher hung up a feeling scale poster in her classroom. She has decided that she will use the feelings scale when she does a morning check in with her students as well as throughout the day so that she can identify or help any students who may be feeling heightened emotions. She will also introduce the feelings scale to Ava when she meets with her one-on-one.

**Create a list of coping skills to teach and practice with the student(s) (see coping skills list in Beacon)**

The teacher printed the coping skills list from Beacon so that she could go over the skills with Ava and help her practice and identify skills that are most helpful to her. The teacher has also identified some skills that she would like to practice with her whole class (e.g. breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises, and mindfulness).



**Create a “take a break/cool down space” in the classroom with guidelines on how the space will be used (see setting up a cool down space handout in Beacon)**

The teacher has set up a cool down space in the back of her classroom. She has put a timer and a coping skill toolbox that has some coping skills cards and fidgets (see Beacon for coping skill cards). She is going to introduce the space to students and model to them how and when to use it.

**Implementation**

**Introduce the intervention to the student**

Sample Script

Teacher: Ava, I have noticed that you have been getting really frustrated in class lately. You seemed really upset yesterday when you were working on your math problems. What was going on?

Ava: I was just having a bad day and then I feel stupid when I don't understand things.

Teacher: I know it can be frustrating to not understand things. I also know that when I'm frustrated, I can sometimes take it out on other people. For example, I was stuck in traffic on my way home last night so then when I walked in, I yelled at my dog because she jumped on me. I know my dog was just really excited to see me, but I was in a bad mood because I was late getting home. It wasn't my dog's fault I was stuck in traffic. I felt bad after I yelled at her. Have you ever felt that way?

Ava: Yeah, I got mad at you yesterday because I was getting frustrated when I was working on my math worksheet, but I know you were just wanting to help me.

Teacher: Would it be ok if we worked together to learn some skills to help you when you have strong emotions such as when you are frustrated?

Ava: Yeah

Teacher: These skills are called emotion regulation skills. I will be teaching and practicing some different skills with you as well as the whole class. I would like to help you create a toolbox of skills that can help you when you feel strong emotions. We will start working on these next week. Does that sound good?

Ava: Yeah



## **Communicating with the Caregiver about the intervention**

After talking with Ava, the teacher called her caregiver and let her know that she would like to start working with Ava on learning emotion regulation strategies that could help her inside and outside the classroom. The teacher also shared with Ava's caregiver that it could be helpful to practice these skills with Ava at home. The teacher shared the Emotion Regulation Caregiver handout with Ava's caregiver.

## **Discuss the different triggers and signs that the student(s) might need to use emotion regulation strategies**

Sample Script: First Day

Teacher: Hi Ava, I know I mentioned I would be teaching you about emotion regulation skills, but do you know why it is important for us to learn these skills?

Ava: Not really

Teacher: Sometimes when we have really strong emotions it can cause us to become dysregulated. When we are dysregulated, it can be hard to think clearly and it can also cause us to make silly decisions. Have you ever been so mad, excited, or worried that you feel like your mind is racing?

Ava: Yeah, I feel like that a lot.

Teacher: Can you share some examples of when you have felt like that?

Ava: Well, you already know I get frustrated with my work. I also get really mad at my brother when he messes with my stuff.

Teacher: I want you to think of an example of when you were really mad at your brother. How could someone tell that you were mad? When I get really mad, I start to talk really fast, what happens when you get really mad?

Ava: When I get really mad, I start to get hot and I think my face turns red.

Teacher: That happens to a lot of people. Some people say their palms get sweaty, they might start breathing faster, or their heart races. These are just examples. It can be different for everyone.

## **Teach, model, and practice different coping skills**

Sample Script:

Teacher: It can be helpful to pay attention to these physical signs and then when we are feeling this way to have some coping skills in our "toolbox" to help us manage these emotions. Hopefully, after working together, we can identify other

signs that might help you recognize when you may need to use these skills. By practicing ahead of time, it will help us respond better when we notice these signs. Learning how to regulate our emotions can lead to better relationships, improved focus, and help us reduce stress. I am going to share a checklist with you that has some coping skills that we can practice. Some of the ideas on the list you might be familiar with, but I will also practice some with you that you might not know. (Teacher shares the [Coping Skills for School Checklist](#) with the student). Which of these coping skills do you think could be helpful when you are feeling this way?

Ava: I like to draw.

Teacher: That's great! Do you feel like drawing can help you when you notice you might need you are feeling frustrated and need help calming down?

Ava: Yeah maybe

Teacher: Ok, I would also like to practice another skill with you. This is called deep breathing. I will show you first and then we can do it together. First, you take a deep breath through your nose and let your belly fill with air, then you will breathe out through your nose. I am going to place one hand on my belly and the other hand on my chest. As I breathe in, I can feel my belly rise, and as I breathe out, I can feel my belly lower. See how my hand on my belly is moving more than the one that's on my chest? That's how you will know you are doing it correctly. Now, I am going to take three more deep breaths. Ok, now let's practice together.

After practicing with the student

Teacher: How do you feel about that coping skill? When do you think you could use this skill in your daily life?

Ava: It was ok. Sometimes right before we have a quiz or a test, I get really nervous and then I feel like I forget everything, maybe I could try doing this before I take a test.

Teacher: That is a great idea! Can you think of any other examples?

Ava: Maybe when I feel myself getting frustrated about my work.

### **Develop a plan for the student(s) to practice using the skills**

Teacher: Those are great examples! I would like for you to practice using these skills when you are feeling like you need to regulate yourself. I might prompt you to use these skills when I notice you are getting upset. We will reflect on your practice the next time we talk. I will also be introducing some emotion regulation skills to the whole class over the next few weeks, and we will talk about your reactions to them when we meet.



## **Help the student(s) develop an emotion regulation plan after they have decided which coping skills are most helpful**

### *Follow Up Session*

- The teacher asked Ava how she did with using the skills and if she found them helpful. Ava shared with the teacher that she thinks the drawing helped but that the deep breaths didn't really help. The teacher let Ava know that not all emotion regulation strategies work for everyone so it's important that they find ones that she likes and feels are helpful. The teacher asked Ava if they could practice some other coping skills and Ava said they could. The teacher pulled out the coping skills list and they practiced a few more coping skills together. The teacher told Ava to practice using these skills this upcoming week.

### *Follow Up Session*

- After the teacher and Ava practiced multiple coping strategies and decided which ones were helpful to her, they worked collaboratively on an emotion regulation plan that Ava could use when her emotions were out of control. See the sample below.

### [Emotion Regulation Plan Student Example](#)

## **Provide frequent prompts and reminders for the student to apply emotion regulation skills at the first signs of emotion dysregulation**

The teacher provided positive feedback whenever she noticed Ava using the strategies. The teacher also offered constructive feedback about times Ava did not use a coping skill when it might have been helpful.

## **Use de-escalation skills when the student's emotions are heightened**

When Ava walked into the classroom one morning, her face was bright red and she did not respond when her teacher greeted her. The teacher walked over to Ava and bent down at her desk.

Teacher: Ava, it seems like you are really upset, what's going on? (De-escalation skills: help the student label or name the emotion, empathetic listening)

Ava: My brother just makes me so angry! He almost made us late this morning and then he was arguing with my mom the whole way to school which puts my mom in a bad mood.

Teacher: I can see why you are angry. It can be frustrating when someone else makes us late. I'm sure that also made for a stressful ride to school. (De-



escalation skills: verbally validate and normalize the student's feelings, be non-judgmental)

Ava: It was!

Teacher: Do you want to take 5 minutes to cool down in the calm down corner, or do you feel like you are able to start your morning work? (Find common ground; Give student choice)

Ava: I would like to go to the calm down corner, but I will just go for a few minutes.

Teacher: Ok! That sounds like a good idea. Go ahead and set a timer and then you can get started on your morning work when you are done!

**Use Beacon progress monitoring tools to evaluate the extent to which this intervention is improving the target behaviors as intended.**

The teacher has been entering progress monitoring data in Beacon daily to track whether Ava has been improving with her emotional outbursts. Prior to the intervention, Ava was having several emotional outbursts a day. Since the intervention, Ava has only been getting a score of "moderate problem" about once a week. This has been a huge improvement for Ava, but the teacher wants to continue progress monitoring until Ava is only scoring "not a problem" or "slight problem".