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Creating Healthy Calming Strategies for Young Children

Taylor Alexis McWhorter

A Capstone project for the Bachelors of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

## Creating Healthy Calming Strategies for Young Children

### **Introduction**

Children are able to identify the basic emotions such as happy, sad, mad by the age of three. This is proven because by age four they are already able to use many different terms to describe their emotions. “Between 2 and 4 years of age children considerably increase the number of terms they use to describe emotions.” (Denham & others, 2011 as cited in Santrock 2016). However, they may not know how to control or calm themselves down from these emotions, especially anger. In order to better help children calm themselves down from being angry, I created a two day lesson plan to teach the students at the CSUMB Child Development Center. I will provide the children with a variety of activities that they can partake in when they are upset.

### **Needs Statement**

Some preschool aged children often have what is called temper tantrums. A temper tantrum is “extreme episodes of frustration or anger.” (Daniels, E., Mandleco, B., Luthy, K, 2012, pg. 1). During this time, a young child may kick, fall down on the floor, begin hitting things or people, etc. This behavior is quite normal amongst preschool age children because they have not yet learned techniques to control their anger. Children this young have not yet learned how to express their feelings in an appropriate way, making it the most significant reason why children become so angry. However, it is important that children begin to express why they are angry and what can they do to calm down from being upset.

Language skills play an important role in how angry children can become. The reason for this is because children who are not able to properly communicate what they want or need

become frustrated which leads to anger. This is a time when parents, teachers, caregivers have to step in to help the child express what it is he/she needs. Over time, as children get older, learn language skills, and are provided with the proper techniques to overcome their anger in that moment, this behavior will decrease. The techniques that the children will learn to help them calm their anger will allow them to learn proper social skills. The social skills are important in decreasing the child's behavior with anger. "These skills lead to positive social skills and a decline in disruptive behavior over time." (Denham & Burtan, 1996).

Preschool is the age in which children want to explore and learn new things. They have just started learning how to form small sentences, and just began walking not very long ago. So it is natural that children want to go and touch everything, and use tools on their own. Children have not yet grasp the idea that they cannot do everything on their own and they do in fact need help from others. Children look forward to showing their parents what they can do and sharing their joy of completing something on their own. This is the age when children are starting to learn self management skills. An important way to help children with this development is by explaining things to them. It can be confusing to tell a child to do something, or saying a general statement to them and they do not understand.

Studies show that children being able to regulate their emotions plays an important part in their development. "Emotion regulation especially plays a key role in children's ability to manage the demands and conflicts they face in interacting with others." . Learning regulating skills and how to calm yourself from being angry will help with the many peer relationships that a lot of young children have. Children who have a difficult time controlling their emotions, especially anger will be more likely to experience rejection from their peers. Young children are

less likely to interact with a peer who is angry, and negative. Anger must be taken care of in a positive way with an activity that can relax the child's mind, and reduce their frustration. By doing so it will not only increase the child's peer relationships, but also help them to properly regulate their emotions.

To calm a child from being angry it is best that we ask questions to help get their thinking brain activated. This helps for the adult to become in control, and it also gives the child control over what they want. Being asked a question leads them to make a decision on their own. Distracting a child when they are angry or frustrated is important because it changes the child's attention to something else than his/her anger. Providing the child with numerous activities to do when they are angry will help them decide what ultimately works for them when they are upset. This is also a way to help them understand how to cope in times of anger.

Anger at a young age has to be addressed early on because it is important to a child's life. Preschool aged children have not yet learned how to control their emotions and calm down from being angry. Lastly they are unaware of how this can affect their health, if they do not have techniques to help them calm down. To prevent children from emotionally harming themselves with anger, I will provide a 2 day lesson on activities that children can partake in when they are upset. This lesson will take place at the CSUMB Child Development Center.

### **Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

By the time children reach preschool, they are already aware of the basic emotions, as well as identifying others emotions."Between the ages two and three, children begin to label their own and other people's subjective feelings." (Bloom, 1998 as cited in Steinberg et al., 2011). Children can identify when they are happy, sad, angry, and excited. In fact, many children use

emotion words in preschool while playing with their peers. They use phrases like, “he made me mad because he took my toy” or “I’m happy because we get to play together.” The use of these phrases are because childrens vocabulary about emotions are starting to increase. However, not all children between the ages of two and five know how to control their emotions. This reason is because children learn at different times, and their understanding of emotions are “linked to how extensively they engage in prosocial behavior.”(Ensor, Spencer, & Hughes, 2010, p. X). One of the most important emotions that children have a difficult time with is anger. The reason for this is because sometimes children may be tired, distressed, or may have an interruption in their normal routine. (Mireault,, Trahan,2007). Often times children do not like change, and they need structure, when they do not have this it can lead to frustration or anger. Distress or confusion can lead to a child being angry, and not knowing the proper way to express their anger.

In my capstone project, I will teach preschool students on the different activities they can do to calm themselves down when angry. While children know their emotions, they need to be able to know how to control them as well. It is important that they learn how to control them so that they can properly express how they feel to their peers, and adults. This is important to start at a young age because how children act when they are young can sometimes have an effect on their future life. When children get older, if they have not learned the proper way to express their anger without harming themselves or the people around them, they will release their anger in an unhealthy way.

Jolien Rijlaarsdam and her colleagues conducted a study where they examined the underlying cause of anger and frustration in children. The way children feel has a lot to do with their family, bedtime routine, and meal time routines which was used as a protective factor in

this study. In the study the researchers measured the children's anger and frustration reactions, family regularity, and child disruptive behaviors. The results showed that families who had a routine set for their children had a much lesser risk of becoming angry or frustrated. This relates to my capstone project because a lot of the way children display their behaviors when they are angry has to do with the environment around them. If children are in an environment where parents yell, use foul language, and physical force as a response to their anger children will observe that behavior. I think this is because your family life has a lot to do with how children act, and how angry or frustrated they become. If families do not have a routine in place or are teaching self-calming strategies to their children they will continue with this behavior. So what I will do is go into the classroom at the Child Development Center to make an impact on this behavior. I will model healthy responses to anger, that the students can observe. This will allow the students to have a change in their environment for school, and learn healthy calming strategies in this setting.

Cole, Bendezu, Ram and Chaw are researchers who created a study called “Dynamical Systems Modeling of Early Childhood Self-Regulation.” This article took a look at how the tension between reactions with children can correlate with the use of the strategies on how a child is regulating his/her emotions. This article focuses on self-regulation to look at how a child in early childhood can have control over their different emotions. The participants in this study were children who were between 30 and 36 months, both boys and girls. The scientist wanted to test the frustration of the children as they waited to open a gift. Staff members provided the parents and children with activities that would be enjoyable and the other that would test the child self-regulation skills. Children were instructed to stay in the room with their parents for 8

minutes as a waiting task, and not open the gift. The reason for this activity was to see how children could have self-control over themselves when they were frustrated. Results showed that children on average did suffer from frustration from not opening the gift, as expected by researchers. I believe that this study relates to my capstone project because the researchers implemented strategies to help children control their frustration. This will be the same thing that I will conduct in my capstone, by providing the students with activities they can do to calm down when they are angry.

The Eden Prairie Montessori Learning Center, took a look at how children in early childhood can regulate their emotions in a healthy way when they are angry. “All children will benefit from learning self-calming skills, but for some children, learning this skill is so essential to their success at school that it’s important for classroom teachers to focus on it as well as specialists, such as counselors and special educators.” (Montessori, 2017).. Children learning how to self-calm is not just beneficial to their overall health, but their performance in school as well. If children aren’t able to calm themselves during school hours it may affect them being able to pay attention to the lesson.” In this article they discuss how exactly important it is to teach self-calming skills, and how to do so. They discussed teaching the child how to first identify the emotions that they are feeling, and identify the level of anger or frustration by using an emotional thermometer. The second step was to teach the student self-calming strategies, like reading, drawing, and deep breaths. Teaching the students these self-calming strategies applies to Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory. Children learn through observation and modeling. I will be conducting this same idea for my capstone. The reason for this is because children need to learn how to calm themselves down to properly act in social settings, like their classroom,



grocery stores, church, and other social places they may go. The strategies that were implemented in this study are the same strategies that I will be implementing in my capstone when I teach my 2 day lesson plan. Lastly, these strategies are age appropriate and helps the children to focus on something else other than their anger.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

My capstone project will not be limited to only a certain set of students from the same cultural background. Instead, I will be completing my capstone project with students who come from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds as reflected in the participants who attend the CSUMB Child Development Center. The students that I will work with to complete my capstone project are students who come parents who can't and can afford child care. The Child Development Center works to provide affordable child care for students, faculty, and staff members here at CSUMB. However, the center does not exclude those who do not attend or work for this university. Since there are students who come from different areas, there will be some students who are fluent in English, and another language. However, those children who do not understand English may be inadvertently excluded.

### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of my capstone project, children will be able to identify what things make them angry. Children will recognize one way to calm down when they are angry. Children will also be able to identify between a negative or positive response to anger. Overall, my goal is for children to use their words to communicate what they want to do so that they can start to learn self-regulation skills at an early age.

### **Methods**

#### **Day 1**

On the first day of my lesson, I will reintroduce myself to the students. Then, I will let them know that I will be reading a book and asking questions before and after the reading. See Appendix A. I will first ask the students what it means to be angry. If they aren't able to provide a clear definition of what anger is, I will then provide them with a more accurate definition. I will ask the students what are some things that make them angry and provide them with examples of situations that may anger them. For instance, asking does it make them angry when someone takes their toy? Or when they get in trouble for something that they did not do. The pre questions will take about 3 minutes, since there won't be a large group of students. Next, I will read *When I Feel Angry* by Cornelia Maude Spelman. After reading the book, I will have 5 minutes of questions and discussion, about positive decisions students can make when they are angry.

## **Day 2**

On the second day of my lesson, I will have the students draw a picture of their interpretation of how they look when they are angry. Their pictures will be drawn on a paper plate, and when their pictures are completed I will attach a wood craft stick to the end of their paper plate. See Appendix B. The wood craft stick will allow the students to put the paper plate over their face to show their angry face drawing. While the students are in the process of drawing their pictures I will ask a series of questions. The first question will be "what should you do to calm down when you are angry?" The students responses should be based on the calm down strategies that were provided in the book I read the day before. The next question I will ask the students based on their answer, "is that a good way or bad way to calm down?" Some of the positive answers that I will be looking for are; go talk to someone, play with a toy, take deep

breaths, or do arts and crafts. This activity will take 15-20 minutes, considering some students will want to draw more than one picture, and explain their answers to my questions thoroughly.

### **Results**

Learning Outcome 1 was for students to identify what things make them angry, before reading “*When I Feel Angry*” by Cornelia Spelman. See Appendix A. I asked the students what things made them angry. The common answers for this question were:, when someone hits them, takes something that they are playing with, or when they get in trouble. This learning outcome was met because the students were able to properly express the things that make them angry.

Learning Outcome 2 was for children to demonstrate one way that they calm down when they are angry. The students identified what things they can do when they are angry, after I read “*When I Feel Angry*” by Cornelia Spelman. The children were able to recall 3 things from the book that the character did, that they could also do to calm down. Some of the calm down strategies that the children answered were talking to an adult when they are angry and need to express what’s wrong, playing with their favorite toy, and doing art things like; painting, drawing, and coloring. In Table 1, I have created a written table of the responses from the students. According to the responses that I received from the students, I do believe that this learning outcome was met.

Learning Outcome 3 was for students to be able to distinguish between a negative from a positive response to anger. In order to assess their learning, I had them do a drawing activity, where students had to first draw their version of what they looked like when they’re angry, and I asked what was a bad way to show anger. See Appendix C. Four out of six students answered that hitting people and crying wasn’t a healthy way for them to express their anger. The other

two students answered saying throwing things, and sitting there by themselves was not a healthy way for them to express their anger. After the drawing activity, the students had to say one thing in relation to the book that they could do as a positive response to anger. Some of the responses were take a deep breath, go outside, talk with an adult, arts and crafts, and play with their favorite toy. I believe that my learning outcome was met through this activity.

### **Discussion**

I believe that my capstone execution was successful. Throughout the two days of my lesson, plan the students were very engaged in what they were learning. The students were interactive with one another as well as with me by asking questions, answering questions, and making comments in regards to what I was saying to them. The goal of my capstone was to execute a lesson plan about anger management to the students at the CSUMB Child Development Center. In my lesson, I provided the students with age appropriate activities to use when they are upset. AtIn the end of my lesson on day two, children had demonstrated that they met all of my learning outcomes.

The research that I found strongly related to my lesson with the students. The research was similar in terms of what I wanted to do, and what I wanted the students to learn. Initially, I thought that my results would not be the same as the results in some of the research articles I found. However, this was not true. My results were similar to those described in the same as the research. My results were consistent with Albert Bandura's theory, which is about modeling behaviors. I modeled positive behaviors for how children should react when they're angry, and the children observed this modeling. By using this theory, I was able to provide the participants with a learning experience.

I wish that I would have had a chance to include more areas of diversity in my project. I believe that if I worked with more students--, for example, the entire class--room there would have been more diversity of participants included for my capstone. One thing that I would do differently is plan my project out more thoroughly before executing it. By doing so, I would have given myself more time to do my lesson plan with the students, and plan out my lessons better. Lastly, another thing I would do is work on my time management. I believe that I did have a hard time managing when I would do my lesson plan and calculating how long it would take.

Overall, I think that this project was meaningful. The children learned important strategies to help them with their anger, and they enjoyed doing so. The children were able to partake in a fun and interactive activity while also learning at the same time. The students may not remember everything that was taught in the lesson, but I do think I made an impact. I believe that I set a foundation for them to begin to learn how to properly control, and express their anger. I hope that my lesson can inspire the students to share their techniques with others on how to calm down when they are angry.

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## Tables

Figure One:



## Appendices

Appendix A:

Appendix B:

Appendix C: