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Teaching Emotion Regulation on Anger and Aggression with Preschoolers

Karina Pacheco

California State University, Monterey Bay

Introduction

Preschoolers have not yet developed emotion regulation skills, specifically anger and aggression. Emotion regulation is beneficial to promote social competence, prevent behavioral problems amongst preschoolers, and reduce negative effects that can last through adulthood. Therefore, I created a three-day lesson on emotion regulation for preschoolers aged 4 to 5 years old at Monterey Peninsula College Early Childhood Education Center in Monterey, California.

Needs Statement

Emotion regulation and emotional knowledge are beneficial to promote social competence and prevent behavioral problems amongst preschoolers. By the age of 2, children are able to show reasoning that they are able to comprehend how emotions can influence their own and others' emotions, making this a crucial time for children to be in the process of recognizing emotions for themselves and others (Dennis & Kelemen, 2009). Children with low emotion regulation skills and little knowledge of emotions can have negative effects that can last through adulthood. One will be able to form a better understanding around the importance of emotion regulation for preschoolers, by assessing what emotion regulation is, emotional knowledge, and the benefits from developing a coping skill.

“Emotion regulation is defined as the ability to manage, control and modulate emotional reactions in productive ways, modifying them according to the context when necessary, so that emotions can facilitate, rather than impede, coping in varying situations”(Di Maggio, Zappulla, & Pace, 2016, p. 2627). Emotion regulation is needed when heightened levels of emotions that may be negative or positive become too much or too little depending on the situation. Kopp (1989) states that there are three principles of emotion regulation: action system, adaptive, and having support figures. Emotion regulation involves an action system or behavioral scheme that

can be used to alter or diminish heightened emotional stimuli pertaining to distress. For example, a child in a stressful situation may play with an object or remove themselves from the situation.

The second principle of emotion regulation is adaptivity and can be supplied with different techniques. Some include preadapted programs, elemental cognitive processes that involve learned elementary associations of cause and effect, and more advanced cognitive processing that implicates planfulness, organization, and monitoring (Kopp, 1989). The last principle is the child must have support figures/role models to help regulate emotions in different situations.

Adults and caretakers as role models play a crucial role in how a child will assess a situation and learn emotional regulation skills. When having a role model that is able to control their emotions and display useful tools on how to cope with anger/aggression, a child will associate a more positive relationship with this topic.

For a child to succeed in further grade levels past preschool, he or she must be prepared academically but also obtain social-emotional skills. Kindergarten teachers have reported that one-fifth of their students did not have the social-emotional skills needed for school readiness, and 10-15% of young children are more susceptible to have moderate behavioral problems (Garrison, 2017). Preschool children that lack social-emotional skills will show aggressive behavior. This may lead to numerous problems affecting the child's personal and interpersonal aspects; such as weak self-concept, rejection by peers, and poor academic skills (Yektatalab, Alipour, Edraki, Tavakoli, 2016). Yektatalab, Alipour, Edraki, Tavakoli (2016) also states the lack of social-emotional skills may lead to delinquency, depression, failure in school, substance abuse, and an aggressive approach to problem solving and social issues into adulthood. Children with low levels of emotional knowledge are at high risk for developing behavioral difficulties such as internalizing or externalizing problems. When internalizing problems the child may

become anxious or fearful of social interactions due to misreading emotional cues, and when children externalize problems this can lead to becoming hostile toward others and acting aggressively (Di Maggio, Zappulla, & Pace, 2016). Children are also less likely to recognize other children's emotions and may react inappropriately to the situation. Emotion understanding is needed to assess the situation to apply it to emotion regulation. Maggio, Zappulla, and Pace (2016) stated that children who form an emotional understanding around the cause for other children's emotions are able to manage their own emotions and form adaptive reactions to similar situations. Thus, through emotion regulation and knowledge children will be able to promote social competence and reduce behavioral problems. Maggio, Zappulla, and Pace (2016) also stated children with greater emotional knowledge are able to show more empathetic and prosocial behavior, popularity amongst peers and teachers, and academic readiness.

Preschoolers need a coping skill to work alongside emotion regulation. There are two important aspects of Mindfulness, being non-judgmental and being present. For example, being able to self-regulate while paying attention to the present moment in an accepting non-judgmental way (Garrison, 2017). Garrison stated that learning these skills at an early age can promote well-being and instill physical and mental well-being long term to prevent negative outcomes. This kind of awareness can be taught through structured actions that require individuals to exercise their will over their physical and mental actions (Stanley, 2018, p.3). Stanley (2018) found that, after one session of mindfulness teaching with preschoolers attentional control improved in the classroom. In addition, after conducting a year of mindfulness yoga with preschoolers, their skills improved of effortful control, executive functioning, and attention (Stanley, 2018). Overall, there may be direct and immediate benefits to mindfulness lessons for preschoolers.

Given the benefits of emotion regulation and emotional knowledge, I have created a three-day interactive lesson on emotion regulation for preschoolers aged four through five at Monterey Peninsula College Early Childhood Education Center, Monterey, California.

Theory

Bandura, in his Social Learning Theory, stated that personal, behavioral, and environmental experiences collaborate to make up the foundation for development and human functioning (Parangimalil, 2014, p.663). The mediating processes that occur between stimuli and responses affect whether an individual identifies with models, imitates, and responds to reinforcement. Behavior is also learned by observing one's environment and imitating others. Children pay attention to these models and decipher new behavior. Similar to which I stated earlier, children who are able to form an emotional understanding from other children's emotions are able to manage their own emotions better and form adaptive reactions. Identification is another factor that occurs with a model and involves adopting observed behaviors, values, beliefs, and attitudes of another individual (McLeod, 2016). Bandura assumes that through vicarious learning this is done so by observation, and individuals will imitate activities depending on who the models are and how they perform (Green, 2002, pg. 226). Green (2002) also states a child is more likely to mimic a cartoon character's heroic actions. Given that I will read books containing interesting characters dealing with anger and aggression, I anticipate the children will want to follow the book's protagonist and mimic coping mechanisms. I will be conducting various activities for the students to which they will observe interactions from stories and then express their understanding of the observation with their classmates. Therefore, I am creating a series of lessons to help preschoolers form a better understanding of how anger and aggression are expressed and creating an emotion regulation skill.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted at Monterey Peninsula College Early Childhood Education Center. The ethnic composition of the participants ought to reflect that of one of the preschool classrooms out of four at the site. The Ocean room contains twenty-nine students and the race/ethnicities range from Caucasian, Black, or African American, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or Latino, and Asian (Mpc Ece lab school, pc, 2020). The Mpc Ece lab school (2020) also states in the class the children's native languages range from English, Spanish, Samoan, Italian, Farsi, and Vietnamese. The age range for the class is four to five and one child is three and a half. From the Mpc Ece lab school (2020), only five students from the class pay the full cost of the program, and the rest receive benefits or are on a sliding scale. I do not expect my participants to be different from what the overall population looks like due to the three other classrooms also containing diverse students. The Ocean room contains five-year-olds while other classrooms, generally, have children who are younger. Because I will be conducting the lesson in English, the participants will have to be English proficient enough to understand the content and tasks of the activities. From the Mpc Ece lab school (2020), only 95% of the Ocean classroom is proficient in English. This lesson is geared toward preschool-age children and would work also with younger elementary age students but is not likely to apply the same ways for older children. By changing the reading level of the books and adding in more reflective time as a group and individually, the lesson plan could be geared toward younger elementary age students.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide three, 30 to 40-minute lesson plans preschool-age students enrolled at Monterey Peninsula College Early Childhood Education Center

At the end of the project, participants will be able to:

1. Identify a situation that makes them angry.
2. Identify one emotion regulation skill.
3. Demonstrate one mindfulness technique individually.

Methods

Day 1

First, I introduced myself and told the class why I am there. Then, I introduced the first breathing technique I created. I asked the children to pretend they were holding a very warm hot chocolate and to take four deep breaths to cool down the drink. After the brief breathing technique, I began to conduct the story *When Sophie gets angry really, really angry* (Bang, 2004). This is a story of a little girl named Sophie who gets really angry over her sister taking her toy and decides to run into the forest, and once she has calmed down she returns home. I used the felt cut out I made of the main character Sophie, to help the children better recognize the various emotions she was feeling through the story, see Figure 2. After about ten minutes, I asked the students questions about the story and their perspectives on what happened. Then I explained to the students how they will be drawing a picture from the question “What do you do when you get really angry?” for around 10 to 15 minutes. While the students are drawing, I will go around asking questions about their pictures and writing comments they make from their drawings. At the conclusion, I individually asked the students about their pictures and released them outside.

Day 2

Today, I first conducted a recap of the last session they had, which took about 2 minutes. Then, I introduced the second breathing technique I created. For this breathing technique, I asked

the children to imagine holding a cupcake with a candle on top. As a group, we took four deep breaths to try and blow the candle out. I moved into reading the book *When I feel angry* (Spellman, 2000), for around 15 minutes. This is a story about a bunny experiencing various situations that make him angry but through the story, he figures out ways to help him overcome them and form coping skills. Then, I led a 15-minute open discussion with questions dealing with topics from the book and making connections to similar scenarios the children go through. I jotted down comments from the students on a giant notepad. In the end, I individually asked the students to show or tell what emotion regulation skill they would use in similar situations the main character showed in the book.

Day 3

On day 3, I first conducted a recap of the last session, which took around two minutes and introduced the third breathing technique. For the third breathing technique I created, I had the children imagine being very angry and as a group, we took four deep breaths to help us calm down. After, I introduced the mindful jar and explained to the students how to find peace when strong emotions come up, for around 10 minutes. The mindful jar is filled with water and some glitter, and when you shake it the glitter swirls around. The glitter is to signify the thoughts in your head when you get very angry, and once the water begins to settle and clear, your mind does the same when you calm down. Then, I explained to the students how they will dance like the glitter in the jar using scarves and following the music. After 10 minutes, I conducted a recap of all the breathing techniques they had learned and asked children which were their favorite to help them calm down for about 5 minutes. At the conclusion, I asked the students questions about the calming techniques.

Results

Learning Outcome 1 was participants would identify how anger and aggression are expressed. First off, I introduced the first breathing technique. See Figure 1 for student participation. During the activity one child brought up the idea of putting marshmallows into the hot chocolate breathing technique. Once I brought up the topic of anger, multiple students began to share stories of when they have felt this emotion. One child was able to explain a situation on how he was unable to put marshmallows into his hot chocolate because his mother said no, and he showed how he became angry by pounding his chest and kicking. He ended by saying that his mother said the next time he would be able to put marshmallows into his hot chocolate. I received multiple stories from the other children similar to this one explaining how they express anger, even before implementing my lesson. I moved on to the story *When Sophie Gets Really, Really Angry* (Bang, 2004), through the story I asked questions for the participants to follow through the story with me. Through the story, the children recognized the changing emotions the main character went through. From Figure 2, one is able to see the felt “Sophie” I created and used her as an example to show the changing emotions that occurred from the main character throughout the story. After the story, I briefly went through the story again, recognizing emotions and allowing the children to briefly connect them to situations they have been through and talked about solutions to resolve being angry. I then moved onto the drawing portion, and I believe four students out of the six were able to meet this goal, see Figure 3. The four students that met the goal were able to give brief explanations of their pictures and connect them to situations that made them angry or of anger. One child that did not meet the goal was very shy and told me that she drew a heart and nodded her head yes when I asked if she drew this picture about being angry. Another child that did not meet the goal drew a picture for her mother of their family dog and put it in her cubby for her mother. I believe the learning outcome was partially

met. I was able to receive the feedback I wanted from the story but lost some interest in the drawing portion.

Learning Outcome 2 was the participants would identify one emotion regulation skill. This learning outcome could not be completed due to COVID-19.

Learning Outcome 3 was for the participants to demonstrate one mindfulness technique individually. This learning outcome could not be completed due to COVID-19.

Discussion

This portion could not be completed due to COVID-19.

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Figure 1

Student participation from first breathing technique

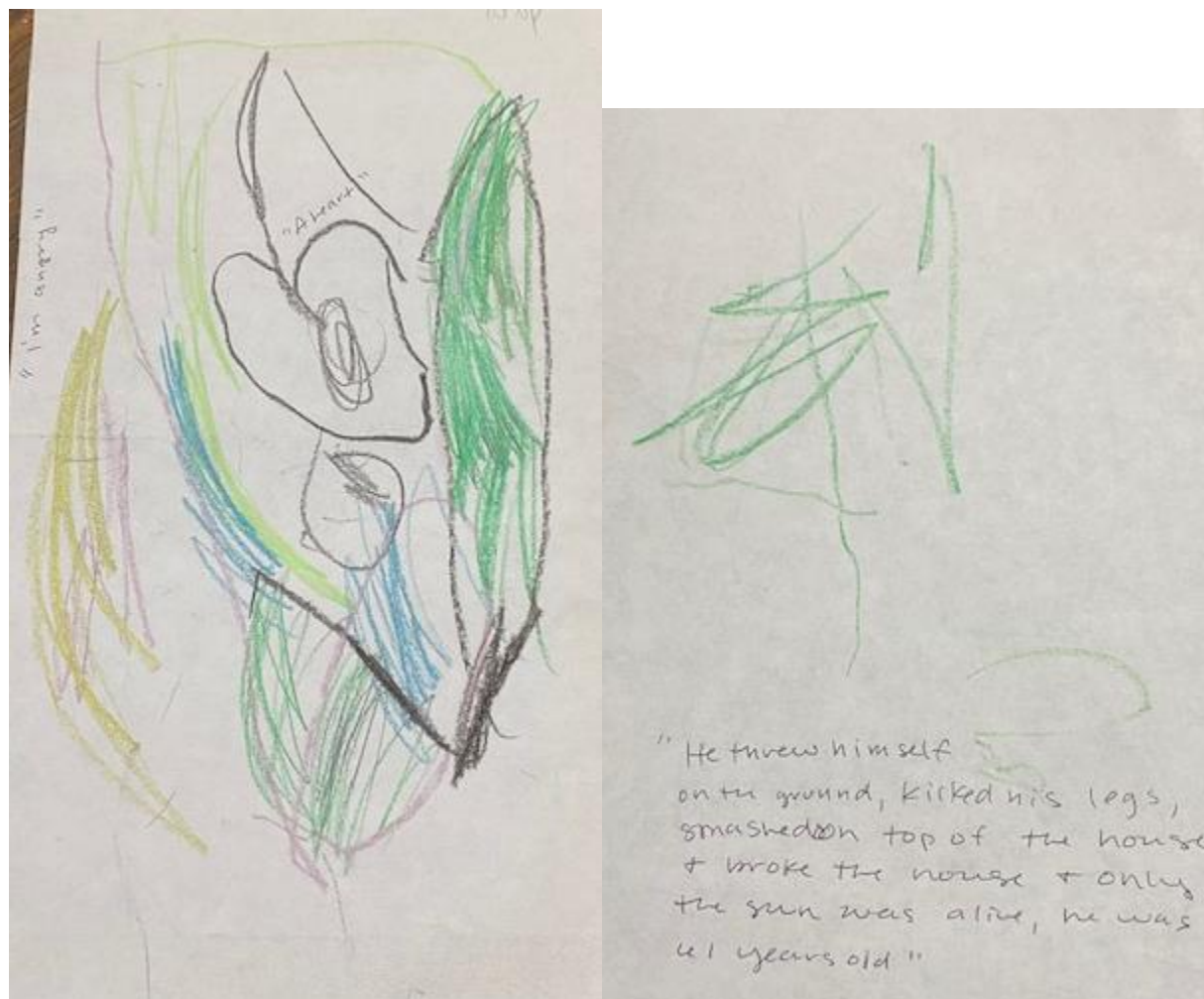


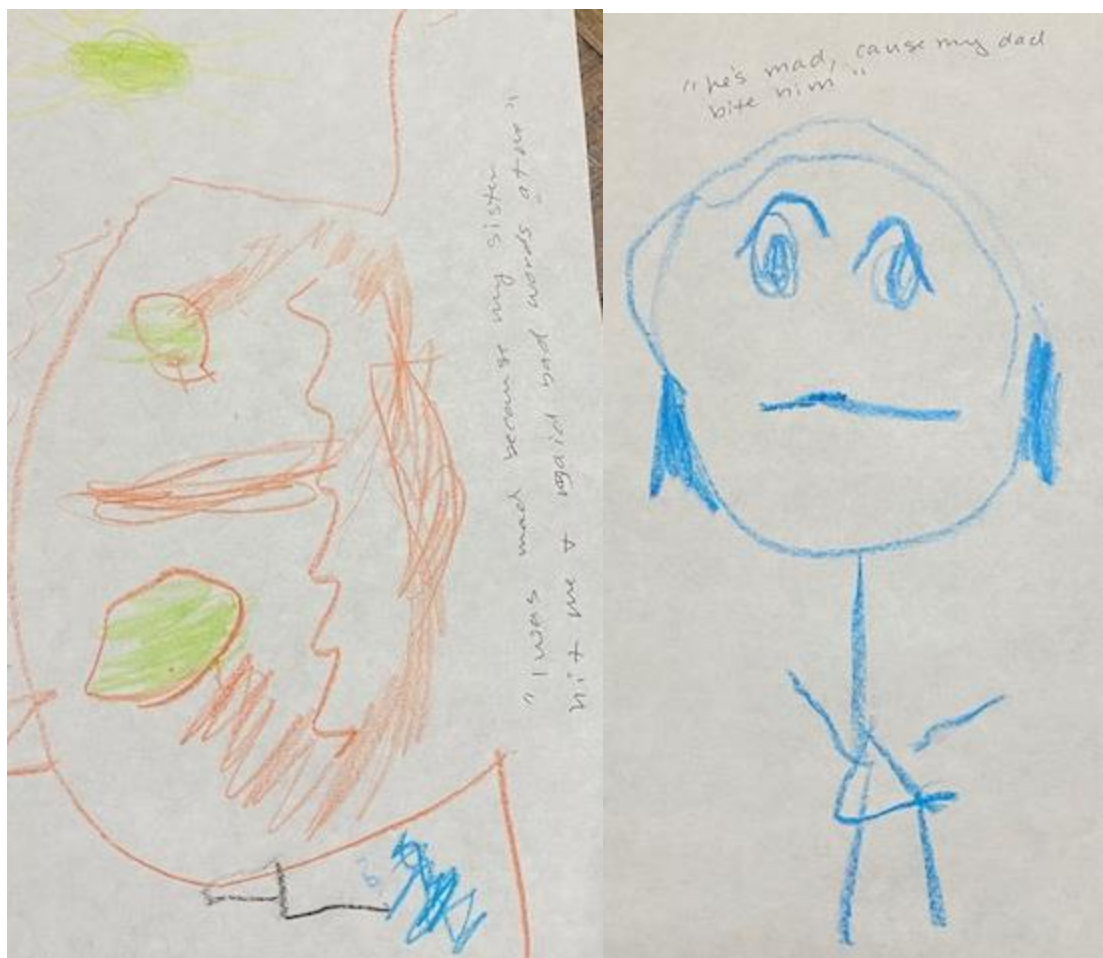
Figure 2

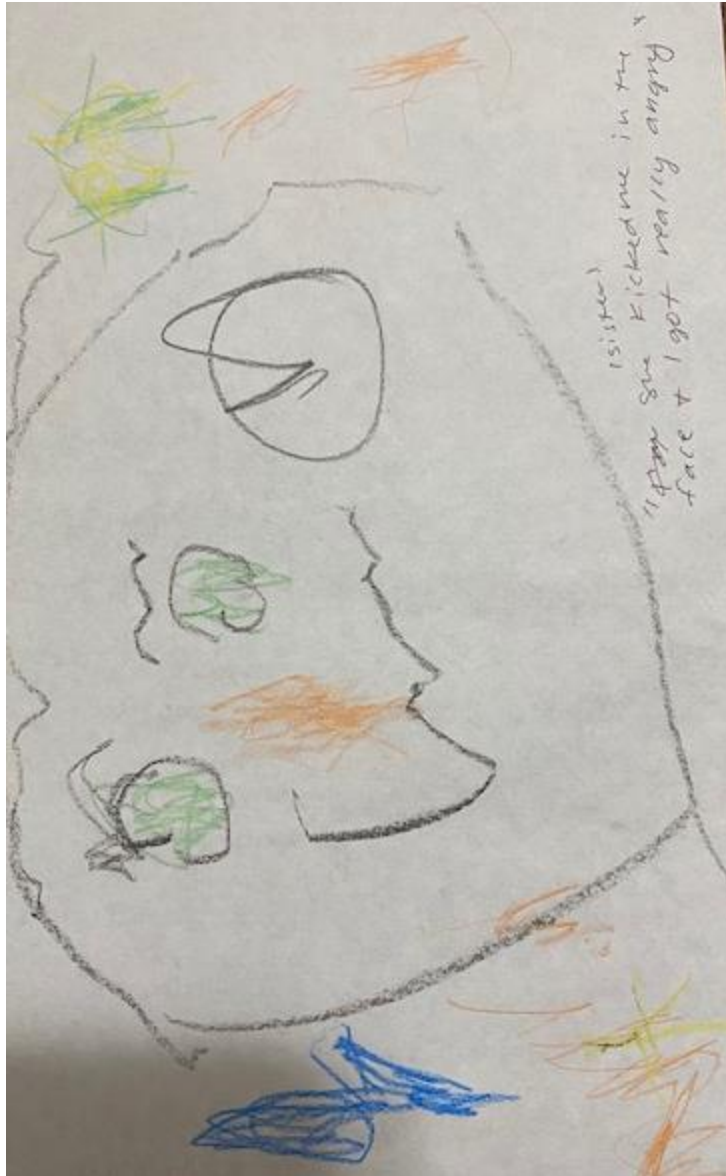
Example felt piece of main character “Sophie”, from When Sophie Gets Really, Really Angry.



Figure 3

Results of drawing activity





Appendix A

Presentation from Capstone Festival

Teaching Emotion Regulation on Anger and Aggression with Preschoolers

By: Karina Pacheco

Need

- Emotion regulation is beneficial to promote social competence, prevent behavioral problems amongst preschoolers, and reduce negative effects that can last through adulthood.
- "Emotion regulation is defined as the ability to manage, control and modulate emotional reactions in productive ways, modifying them according to the context when necessary, so that emotions can facilitate, rather than impede, coping in varying situations" (Di Maggio, Zappulla, & Pace, 2016, p.2627)

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

- Bandura, stated that personal, behavioral, and environmental experiences collaborate to make up the foundation for development and human functioning (Parangimalil, 2014, p.663)
- Bandura assumes that through vicarious learning this is done so by observation, and individuals will imitate activities depending on who the models are and how they perform (Green, 2002, pg. 226).

3

Project

Who:

The Ocean Room contains 29 students aged 4 to 5, with one 3 year old.

What:

3 day lesson plan

Where:

Early Childhood Education Lab
School of Monterey Peninsula College.



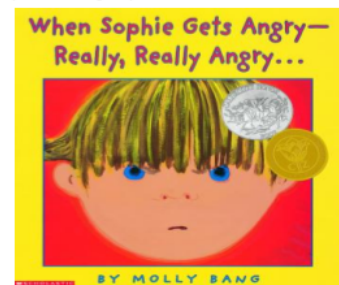
Learning Outcomes

1. Identify a situation that makes them angry
2. Identify one emotion regulation skill
3. Demonstrate one mindfulness technique individually

5

Activity 1:

- Learning outcome: Children will be able to identify a situation that makes them angry.
- Breathing technique #1
- Book: *When Sophie gets angry really, really angry.*
- Drawing Activity: "What do you do when you get really angry?"



6

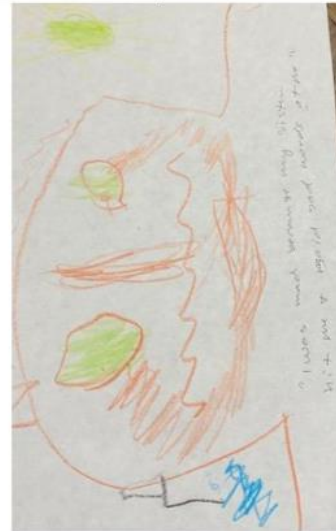
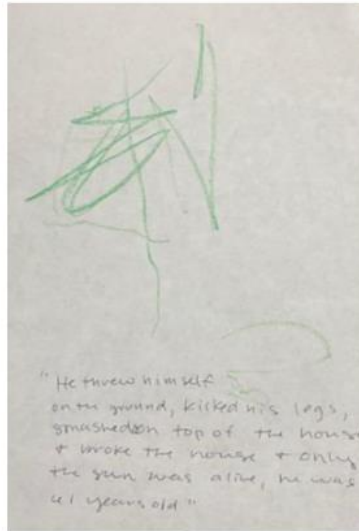
Results

- Partially met



7

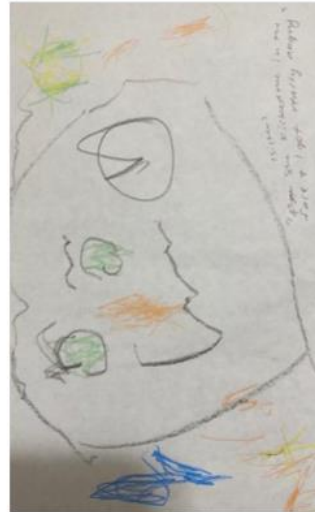
Results continued



Results continued

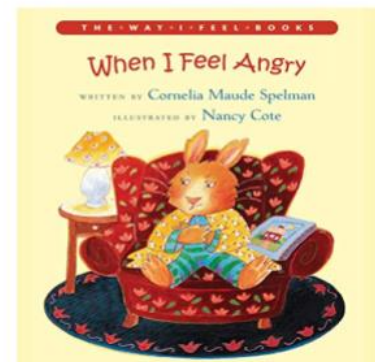


9



Activity 2:

- Learning outcome: Identify one emotion regulation skill
- Breathing technique #2
- Book: *When I Feel Angry*
- Discussion: open discussion



10

Results

- This learning outcome could not be completed due to COVID-19



11

Activity 3:

- Learning outcome: Demonstrate one mindfulness technique individually.
- Breathing technique #3
- Mindful jar
 - Dance activity
- Recap of breathing techniques



12

Results

- This learning outcome could not be completed due to COVID-19



13

Discussion

- Could not be completed due to COVID-19



14

Thank you! Any Questions?

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