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# Increasing Pre-Kindergarten Students' Emotional Awareness and Regulation

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Increasing Pre-Kindergarten students' Emotional Awareness and Regulation

# Mildred Garcia Diaz

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Human Development and Family Science

Increasing Pre-Kindergarten students' Emotional Awareness and Regulation

#### Introduction

Many pre-Kindergarten students have not yet developed emotional awareness and regulation skills. This leads to a number of pre-K students not having the skills needed to seek help or identify how they feel thus, have a hard time regulating their emotions. The benefits of further educating them on emotional awareness and regulation, is they learn ways of managing their emotions and are able to express themselves and get help when they need it, now and in their future. To increase their ability to regulate their emotions and gain emotional intelligence, I created a three-day lesson for pre-K students at Olson Elementary School in Marina, California.

#### **Needs Statement**

Many pre-kindergarten students are in need of learning more about emotional regulation and intelligence to help them better navigate their emotions in their social and personal lives. Children who lack emotional regulation skills have been shown to be linked with negative behaviors, academic, and social outcomes (Graziano et al., 2007 as cited in Oattes et al., 2018). A key component of emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to identify, label and accept one's emotions, also known as emotions awareness (Gratz & Roemer, 2004 as cited in Oattes et al., 2018). Another component of EI is knowing how to properly self-regulate emotions, or with the help from outside influences. That is why it is important to show children how to ask for help to ensure they know when, and how to ask for help. When a child possesses emotional intelligence skills, they are capable of handling their emotions effectively and have more positive relationships in life along with more empathy opposed to those who lack emotional intelligence (Raver & Garner, 2007). Teaching children about EI can impact them positively in many aspects such as knowing how to distinguish emotions, ways of regulating their emotions, and being able to ask for help.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as one's capability to be aware and control one's emotions, handling them adequately in relationships with people around us (Hendron et al., 2022). For preschool aged children, this looks like being able to identify emotions and being capable of expressing them appropriately. For their age which is typically four to five years old, it is expected that they experience frustrating moments where they act on their emotions impulsively because of their young age and lack of experience. Children who can positively regulate and understand emotions, are linked to developing positive and supportive relationships with peers and teachers. Inclusively they have been shown to participate more in social settings, and achieve higher than those with low emotional competence who also are more likely to be rejected by peers and develop less fulfilling relationships (Ladd et al., 1999 as cited in Denham et al., 2016). That is why parents and educators play a vital role in exhibiting the correct emotional response through social referencing, modeling, and emotional contagion (Morris et al., 2007 as cited in Oattes et al., 2018). Children who have strong emotional intelligence have been linked to having positive peer exchanges and handling conflicts with peers with prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2014). These piece of information may support the idea that children who put into practice taking a second to notice how they feel and what caused it can better handle conflicts and assess what can be done differently next time. Therefore teaching preschoolers about emotional intelligence, which includes emotional awareness, can advance their social-emotional skills and set them up for a bright future.

Emotional regulation in young children can be described as having the ability to regulate emotions, and behaviors (Bierman, 2008 as cited in Denham, 2014). The self-regulating skills a

child possesses may be a reflection of the practices from interactions at home. What a child experiences with their family at home tremendously impacts the way they respond to emotions and how they choose to handle them (Repetti et al. 2002). According to Garner et al. (1996), children who are exposed to a lot of communication, and emotional expression in their families supports the child's ability to be in touch with their own emotions and provides the child with more opportunities to exercise healthy ways of regulating their emotions. Emotional regulation is the key for pre-K students to handle difficult times in a healthy manner. Self-regulation skills elevate children's early classroom adjustments and academic success and often positively affect other aspects of their life as well (Denham et al., 2014). When a child is able to self regulate it is a sign of healthy EI skills which can be exponentially helpful in a moment they might feel overwhelmed by emotions and in their future quality of life. Self-soothing techniques can include deep breathing exercises, and movement breaks along with many others which help children calm down and respond in an appropriate manner.

Children with self awareness can advocate for themselves and others in a given situation. It is a very useful skill that will help children build up their abilities in other areas of their lives and overall contributes positive outcomes because they are aware of what is happening and when it is time to reach out and get help. After all, the goal of education is to teach students how to learn, communicate and problem solve effectively (Ringsmose & Kragh, 2013). When children hold these skills it prompts them to be aware of their surroundings and notice things like if they will need help in a situation or if they see someone who needs help. This creates a child who is attentive to their environment and overall makes them prepared for future situations in life when they might need to outsource for support. That is why I believe that children should be aware of

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examples and situations when they would need help from other people. This is to ensure children are aware of danger and when it is a good idea to ask for some help.

Emotional intelligence for pre-K students is a necessity as it will allow them the skills to notice their feelings and what triggered them. Moreover, having good coping skills or emotional regulation abilities can give children a way to release the tension they might feel. To improve pre-K students' emotional regulation skills, I plan to execute a 3-day presentation for pre-K students at Olson Elementary School in Marina, Californias.

#### Development

Children need healthy role models to build their emotional development. With healthy role models, their emotional intelligence grows and is nourished over the child's life, giving them the best chances of having healthy relationships in the future (Denham et al., 2003). Teaching children about emotional intelligence is crucial during the first few years of life to ensure they are familiar with emotions and how to handle them adequately. Children who are in preschool should be wanting to engage in play with new children, and are capable of consoling others who may appear to be sad. Inclusively, they should be able to follow simple directions and inevitably a part of this is learning from making mistakes (Malik & Marwaha, 2022). Nonetheless, three to five year olds are able to identify and label emotions are linked to having a meaning, and after 14 months they are capable of identifying where the emotions are directed to (Repacholi, 1998 as cited in Serrat et al., 2020). My project will aim to revisit their ability to identify and label emotions ranging from happy, sad, angry, scared, calm and love to see if they can correctly identify them from one another by choosing one to describe how they are feeling. Moreover this

will serve as a refresher of why someone might feel an emotion and ways to communicate it to others.

Moving along to self regulation, children at this age can greatly vary in their abilities to self regulate. Research has shown that during the ages of three to seven there is a major shift where children go from co-regulation or reactive responses to being able to self-regulate. To be able to do this, it requires great executive function and language skills which is the reason why it varies so much from one child to another (Calkin, 2007 as cited in Montroy et al., 2016). Typically during the preschool years, they are developing at exponentially high rates in their language, problem solving skills and much more. All of these skills tie together to enforce a child's ability to identify emotions, perspective taking and calm-down strategies (Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017). With that being said, the key during their emotional development at this age is to seek opportunities to model and prompt teachable situations to expand their self-regulation skills. In my program we will work as a collective group to practice some self-soothing techniques they can use. Last but not least, being able to ask for help for young children is easy since they are very reliant on their parents still at that age (Australian Government). As they grow older it is crucial they adopt self-reliant skills to be more independent and be able to ask for help on their own. In my lesson plan we will cover situations when it is appropriate to ask for help.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

My program will be executed at Olson Elementary School in the prekindergarten classroom. The ethnic breakdown of the school is as follows; 48% Hispanic or Latino, 25% White, 14% Asian American, 5% African American, Hawaiian at 3% and the remaining is 4% for individuals with two or more races (NCES, 2020-2021). Additionally 45% qualify for free lunch, meaning they meet the income cut off and receive help from the school district since they are on the lower earning scale. In the classroom there is a mixture of children ranging with differences like one student speaks primarily Spanish, and two others who have autism. These differences have the potencial to affect how well they intake the information given to them. If students lack English proficiency, they might not be able to fully comprehend the material and would be excluded or limited from participating. Lastly, this program is designed to be presented to children ages four to five therefore this material can only be used with that specific age group. The type of work we will be doing in my program is geared towards children in their early childhood, entering school since not all children are required to attend school till six years old. (California Department of Education, 2023). These children might not yet have the skills to identify how they feel, and how to properly express themselves. Additionally, they might not be familiar with how to self-sooth or ask for help when needed. For these reasons I decided to make a program that targets informing children about emotional awareness and regulation.

#### Learning Outcomes

I plan to provide 30 minute lessons for three days out of the week to Pre-kindergarten students at Olson Elementary school.

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

- 1. Identify one emotion they are feeling
- 2. Specify one self-soothing technique they would use
- 3. Indicate one situation of when to ask for help

#### Method

Day 1

First, I introduced myself and explained to the classroom why I was joining them on that day. Next, I held up the book The Color Monster and asked if students have read it before. Some students exclaimed with excitement they have, then we jumped into reading it. I read the book throughout once then the teacher gave me a pop up version of the same book. I asked if students wanted to read it one more time and the majority said yes. I read the book one more time and students admired the pop out drawing that came up from the book. Once I was done reading it, I asked for volunteers to raise their hand and express an emotion on their face they saw in the book. They expressed an emotion on their face and I asked which emotion they were expressing and all of them responded accordingly. Afterwards, I called students by the color carpet they were sitting on, to take a seat at a table to begin a worksheet about the book we just read. Once all students were seated. I proceeded to pull up the google slides that served as a reminder of all the different colored monsters and their emotions we saw in the book. View Appendix B. I passed out the worksheet, and crayons. View Appendix A for Emotion Identifying worksheet. I showed students an example of what the worksheet should look like, which included writing their name, coloring the monster according to the emotion they felt, and writing that emotion on the sentence prompt. I walked around helping students with the worksheet since some students needed some more guidance. As I was doing this I asked why they felt the emotion they chose and I got to hear a couple of their reasonings. As they completed the worksheet I collected it from them, and gave them a sticker in return for their participation. As my time came to an end, I thanked them for their participation and announced I'd be back in a couple days.

#### Day 2

I greeted the students and expressed I was happy to be back. Behind me I set up six cups each with an illustration and the emotion written of the color monsters from the book we read on Monday that included happy, sad, scared, calm, love, and angry. I added I was going to give them a popsicle stick with their name on it, and I wanted them to place the popsicle into which jar matched their emotion they were feeling at that moment. I called students row by row and everyone placed their popsicles into a jar. After everyone got a turn, I called on three students and asked why they felt the emotion they chose. Next, we began my activity with me stating how feeling some of those emotions can be hard to deal with and it can be tough to calm down. I wanted to share ways they could calm down when feeling sad, or angry for example. I presented a video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJOuW-5opl4) where they practiced a calming technique, more specifically a deep breathing exercise that ran about 2 minutes long. Afterwards, the classroom was very calm and so were the students, and we practiced a couple more deep breaths after the video was done playing. Next I explained how sometimes you need a different kind of calming technique where you move around and get all the built up energy out from inside you to feel calm. I played a 3 minute long video

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwT5oX\_mqS0) where they did a movement break exercise. When the video was done playing, I showed them Figure 1 which included a poster board that consisted of a prompt situation. The situation mentioned was, "You are taking turns sharing a toy and you get mad because it is now the other person's turn to play with the toy". I gave the directions of thinking which calming technique they just practiced, they would utilize in that scenario. I called students row by row and they began to paste their name tag I gave them under which movement break they'd use. Once everyone got a turn, I pointed out a couple students and expressed how I liked they'd use said calming technique they chose. I existed by saying sometimes we feel a big emotion and we can use these tools like deep breathing exercise, movement breaks to help us calm down in those tough moments. I thanked everyone in the classroom for participating and said I'd accompany them on Friday.

#### Day 3

On this last day, I will remind the students of the work they did the last two days alongside me. Next, I described how we all need help at certain challenging moments and presented a video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Urb3GYD63og) that shows some example situations of when to ask for help that is about 2 minutes long. After the video, I wrote down an example on the board of a situation when someone would need help. I asked students to raise their hand if they agreed, and I proceeded to put a tally if they did. I asked students to give their own situation when they could ask for help, and also tallied who agreed. Finally I thanked them for allowing me to present to them and recap all we learned together. I will wrap up by giving stickers to all the students to show my gratitude.

#### Results

Learning outcome 1 was that participants would identify one emotion they are feeling. I put together a worksheet for them to complete which included a blank monster for them to color according to which emotion they were feeling (See Appendix A). At the bottom of the worksheet, there was a prompt for them to identify which emotion it was they felt at the given moment of completing the worksheet. As I reviewed the worksheets, I was looking for students who indicated the correct coloring of the monster according to the emotion they listed on the worksheet. Out of 14 participants, 10 depicted the correct coloring for the given emotion they felt. Four participants gave inconclusive results like coloring the monster a rainbow, or did not indicate which emotion it was they felt. See Table 1 for details. I believe this learning outcome was met.

Learning outcome 2 was that the participant would specify one self-soothing technique they can use in a given situation. I created a board with a situation on it that I read outloud to the participants. Then, I called students up so they could indicate which calming technique they would use by placing their name tag under which method they would prefer to use. I analyzed the results by how many students placed their name tag properly under the calming method they would prefer to use. See Figure 1. Out of 15 participants, 14 properly specified which technique they would use. I would say this learning outcome was met since all participants indicated which calming technique they preferred to use, but since it was a group activity there is a chance some students might just have put their name without fully understanding what it meant.

Learning outcome 3 was that the participants would indicate one situation of when to ask for help. After my activity, I asked students for their own examples of situations where it is appropriate to ask for help. I proceeded to write their answers on board and tally the number of students who raised their hand in agreement. I wrote down five of their answers along with the tally of who agreed with the scenario. Since this was a classroom discussion and everyone added or participated, all 15 participants were able to indicate a situation when help is needed. I believe this learning outcome was met. See Figure 2.

#### Discussion

I believe this project was successful and all three learning outcomes were met. The participants were excited to learn what I had planned and walked away with something useful. Because all the participants were four to five years old, their development was appropriate for that age range for the most part, in being able to distinguish and identify emotions. The majority of participants were able to participate and follow directions. Given where they are developmentally, I wanted to reinforce the skills of identifying emotions by encouraging them to complete a worksheet where they had to indicate what emotion they were feeling. Since coloring was a part of completing the worksheet I think this helped involve children into the activity more. They also practiced calming techniques they could utilize when feeling intense emotions. I think this part was fun for the children because they got to relax and move their body around, thus the students responded well to it. Lastly for indicating a situation of when to ask for help, this was engaging for the students since they had to participate and give their own input of a situation that was suitable. My results were consistent with the development of children at this age as they for the most part, identified an emotion successfully, and indicated a calming/soothing technique they would use when given a prompt situation. And were able to indicate a situation of when to ask for help.

In regards to the diversity, I believe my project included all participants, except those who might not know English as their first language. One student spoke Spanish as their first language and needed more guidance from me in the activities. In the future if I was given the opportunity to redo this, I would perhaps get a bilingual book therefore everyone is given a fair chance in getting quality information from the book. I would also use illustrations to differentiate the two types of calming techniques; deep breathing and movement break exercises. Overall, I feel that participants walked away feeling secure with being able to identify how they feel, how to calm down, and when to ask for help from others. Ensuring that children have these skills can make a difference in their overall well-being and attitude towards life.

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<u>966cdo&hitCount=49&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=20&docI</u> <u>d=GALE%7CA338522434&docType=Article&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=</u> <u>ZONE-MOD1&prodId=AONE&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CA338522434</u> <u>&searchId=R3&userGroupName=csumb\_main&inPS=true</u>

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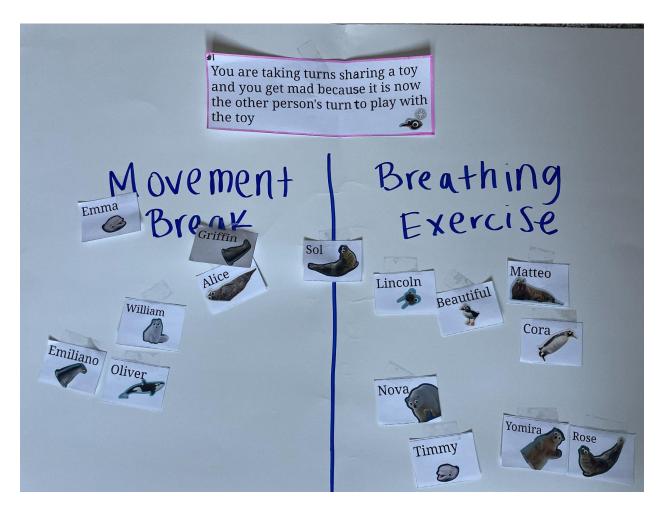
# Table 1

Participant	<b>Emotion Listed</b>	Accurate or Not
Participant 1	happy	accurate
Participant 2	scared	not accurate
Participant 3	happy	accurate
Participant 4	calm	accurate
Participant 5	sad	accurate
Participant 6	sad	accurate
Participant 7	N/A	not accurate
Participant 8	calm	accurate
Participant 9	sad	accurate
Participant 10	happy	accurate
Participant 11	sad	accurate
Participant 12	happy	accurate
Participant 13	N/A	not accurate
Participant 14	N/A	not accurate

# Participants' answers to emotion worksheet

### Figure 1

Product of Learning outcome #2



#### Figure 2

Product of Learning outcome #3

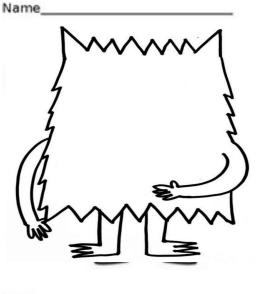
When do you ask for help? Need help with homework/classwork: HIL THE Need help to tie Shoes: ## ## !!!! Need help with Showers: +++ 111 Need help picking clothes to wear: HILI Need help when Feeling Sad: +++++++1

# Appendix A

Blank worksheet for Learning outcome #1

The Color Monster Coloring Ideas!

Hi! I'm the Color Monster! What's your name? How are you feeling today?



I feel

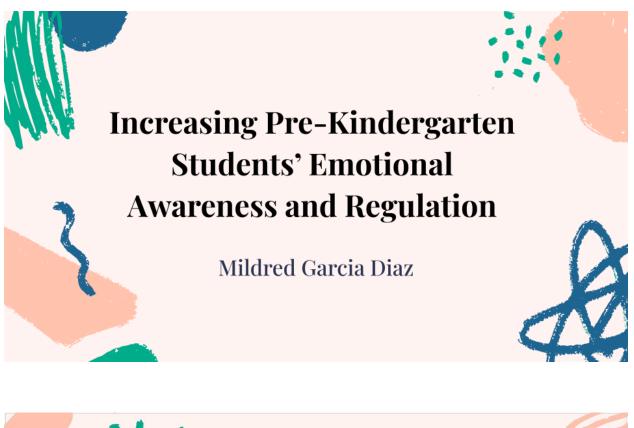
# Appendix B.

*Reference for participants for Learning outcomes #1* 



Appendix C

Presentation for Capstone Festival/ Audience



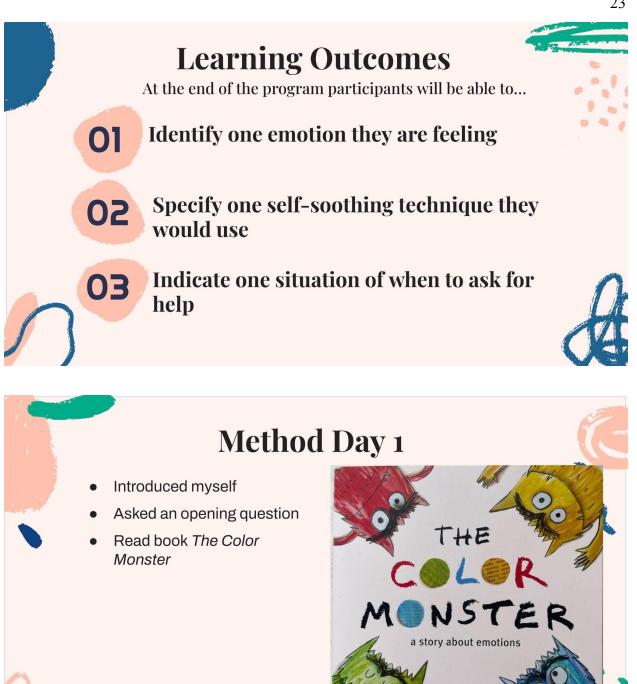


# Development

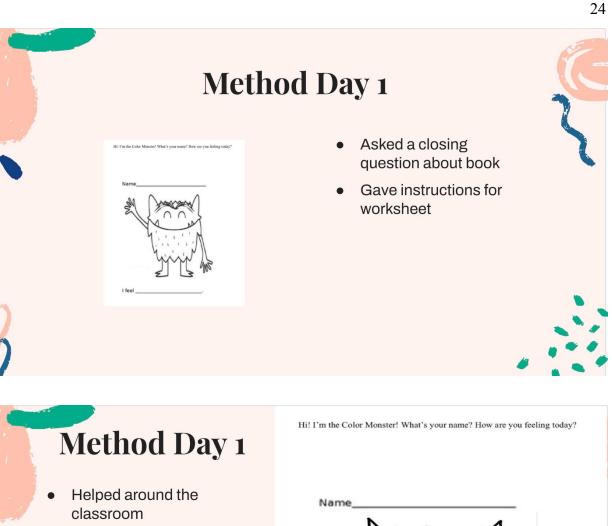
- At age 5 they can have more control over their emotions and less tantrums
- Exploring and learning how to express emotions
- Aware of others feelings, and their own
- Becoming more independent



	7	What, V	Where, W	ho	and Why?	6
	WHAT I created a three-day lesson plan targeted towards three learning outcomes					Y
		WHERE	Olson Elementary School in Marina, CA			
		WHO	15 Pre-kindergarten students			
		WHY	Did I choose emotional awareness, and regulation and intelligence?			
			NE OLSON MENTARY		EMOTIONAL	Ŕ
$\langle I \rangle_i$					LINIELLIGENCE.	



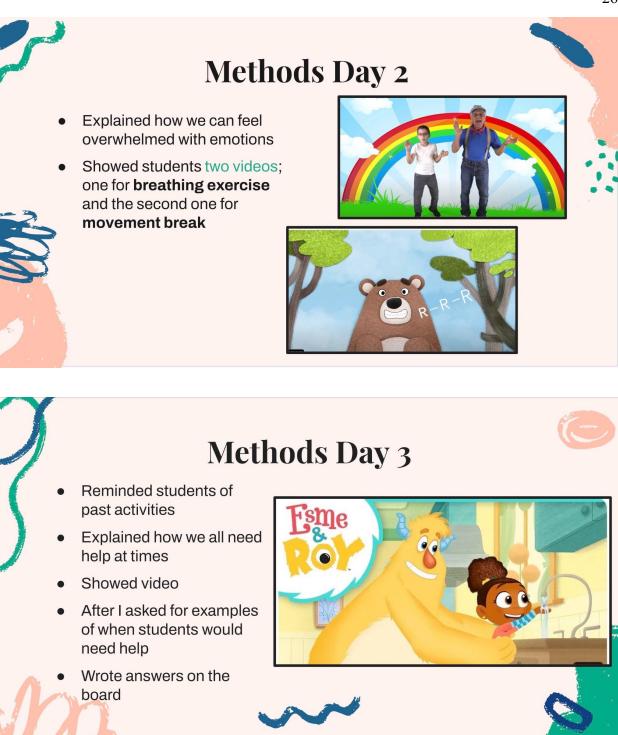
ANNA LLENAS

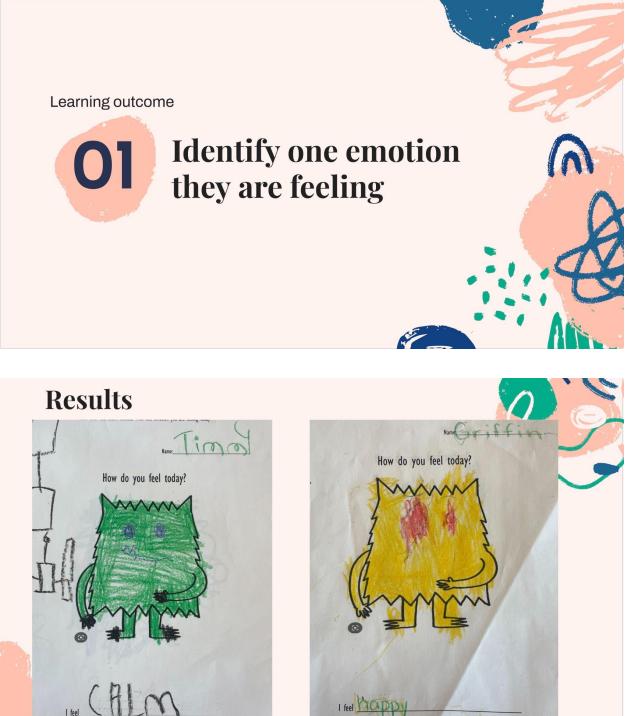


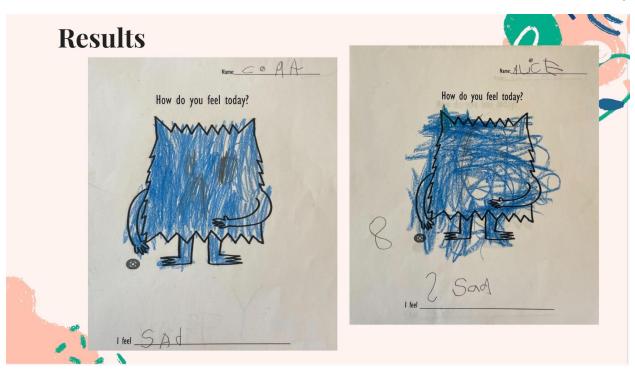
Collected worksheets and gave out stickers

I feel

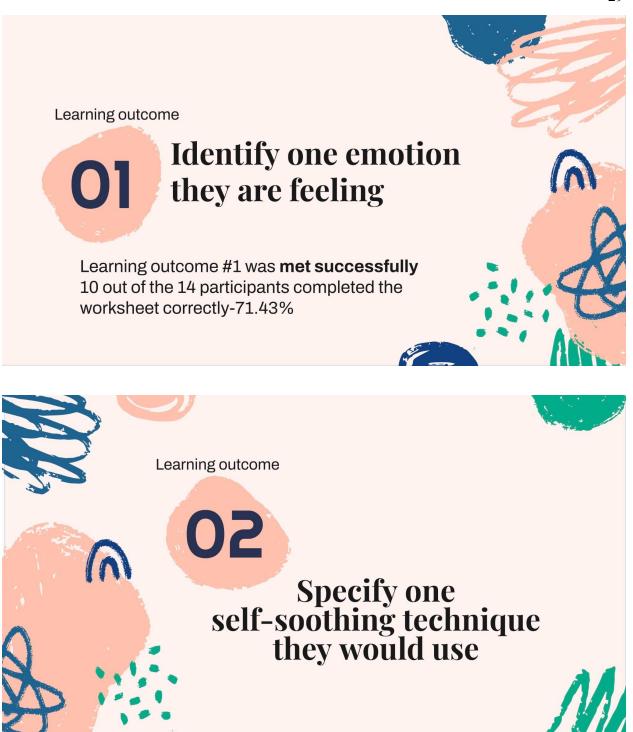


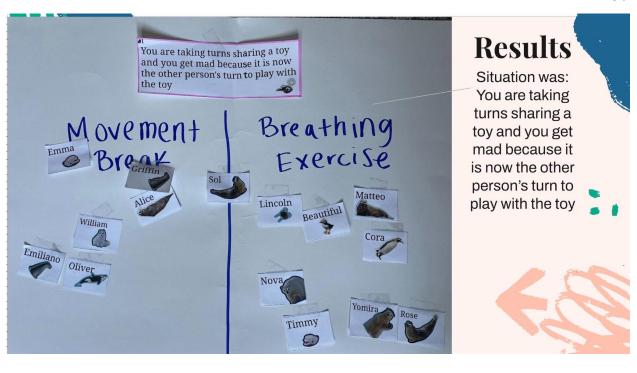






		Participant	Emotion Listed	Accurate or No
	Preze coler the blank measure with one egocian you are feding today	Participant 1	happy	accurate
	Hare EM A AND A A A	Participant 2	scared	not accurate
NEP		Participant 3	happy	accurate
name. Upor	How do you feel today?	Participant 4	calm	accurate
How do you feel today?		Participant 5	sad	accurate
Junna	Z	Participant 6	sad	accurate
4	A 115	Participant 7	N/A	not accurate
3	En anti	Participant 8	calm	accurate
		Participant 9	sad	accurate
	a the	Participant 10	happy	accurate
Mr. ald alfrand	1	Participant 11	sad	accurate
		Participant 12	happy	accurate
		Participant 13	N/A	not accurate
N 1		Participant 14	N/A	not accurate





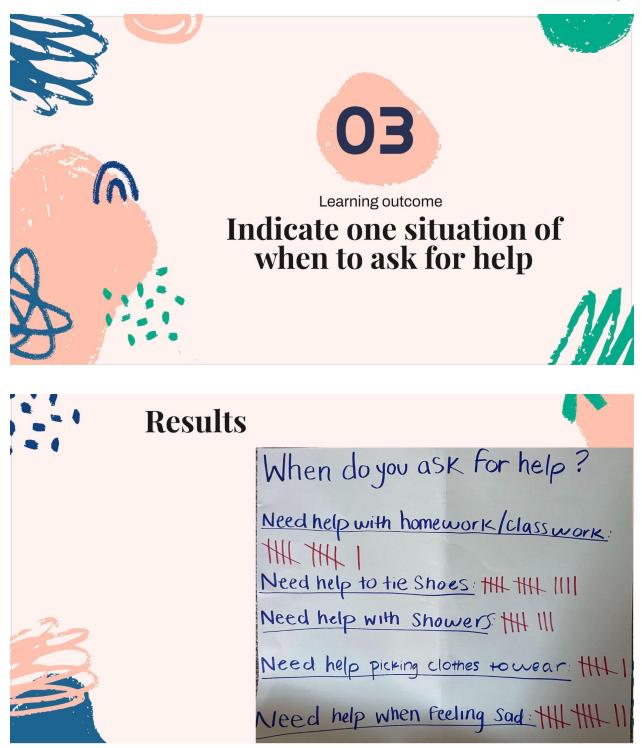
Learning outcome

02

# Specify one self-soothing technique they would use

Learning outcome #2 was **met successfully**, 14 out of 15 students participated and specified a self-soothing technique

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# Discussion

- Overall this program was successful
- Students were excited to participate and had fun in the activities
- Something I would have done differently is use visual aid on board for learning outcome #2





