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## Supporting Preschoolers Social Emotional Development

Gladiola Peinado

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**Teaching Preschoolers To Recognize, Express and Manage Their Emotions**

Gladiola Peinado

A Capstone Project for Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

### **Introduction**

This Capstone project focuses on the social emotional regulation of preschoolers (3–5 years old) Many preschool children are not able to develop social emotional learning when just entering a pre-academic setting. Unfortunately, children with poor social emotional learning skills (SEL) are more likely to have difficulties with peer relationships, and with school adjustment understanding, because they aren't able to express or recognize emotions (Ferreira et al., 2021). When children can regulate behavior and emotion, they are better at recognizing one's and others' emotions and intentions, cooperating with one another, and building relationships with peers. In order to address these issues, I created a three lesson plan about social emotional learning skills for preschoolers at Tony's Daycare in Salinas, California.

### **Need Statement**

In a preschool setting, children often struggle to understand, express, and identify their emotions. According to Denham et al. (2012), children who enter preschool settings for the first time may find it difficult to develop social emotional learning skills (SEL) because preschool and kindergarten environments are a challenge for them to adjust to new routines. They must frequently sit still, pay attention, follow instructions, approach, and participate in group play, all of which may make it difficult for them to develop these skills. For this reason, there is a need to address young children's social-emotional learning when they transition to a preschool setting. When children develop the ability to understand, express, and recognize their own and other peers' emotions, they are more able to feel confident enough to socialize with other children in a preschool setting. Strong comprehension of emotions shows the way for effective self-regulation, consequently pointing to the successful development of emotions and better academic and life

achievement (Ferreira et al., 2021). This project was conducted to teach preschoolers to develop social and emotional skills and by inviting them to participate in different activities, it will help them to expand their emotional vocabulary, have a better understanding of emotion, and regulate themselves.

In a preschool setting, preschoolers can learn to describe their feelings with emotional vocabulary and how to help themselves and other children with their emotions by watching other children's behaviors. So they can perform these skills by engaging in social emotional learning activities. As a result, preschoolers can learn different abilities that allow them to recognize, express, and regulate their feelings, create meaningful relationships with others, follow rules, and satisfy their own needs as well as those of others (Ferreira et al., 2021). The development of language plays an important role in the regulation of emotions and the capacity to identify and categorize facial expressions according to emotion. When children enter a preschool setting, they start to socialize and build emotional vocabulary by creating relationships with their teacher and friends. According to Cole et al. (2008), when teachers model how to manage emotions and use activities that encourage children to use emotional words, children can learn different strategies to have better control over their emotions and increase their ability to express themselves and interpret other children's emotions using emotional words.

After a child's third year of life and entering preschool for the first time, it becomes crucial for children to start to increase their social emotional understanding, which continues to develop throughout their life. Dagal (2017) states that one of the most important factors for a child to start building communication skills is the environment around them. Children learn to socialize with others by observing and imitating other people's actions. This can help them create good relationships with other children and have a better understanding of their own behaviors.

Another study demonstrated that the intentional use of different strategies to encourage children to regulate themselves can have a positive impact on their emotional behaviors (Kircanski et al., 2012). Children often get frustrated because they do not have the skills to understand their emotions. This lack of emotional understanding often increases children's frustration and leads them to have tantrums. But some research shows that early teacher intervention can support preschoolers in developing social skills.

Helping preschoolers develop social emotional skills gives children the opportunity to understand, express, and regulate their emotions. With these skills, children become more independent and able to understand their emotions. as well, they build new vocabulary that helps them name their emotions; therefore, children can have more control over managing their emotions. To support SEL, teachers can implement a learning curriculum according to children's needs. Using a variety of activities, children can have learning tools that can help them in different contexts, such as the classroom or when they are playing with their peers. Research explains that preschool children who build a bond with their teacher increase their self regulation skills. ( McCurdy & Loomis, 2023).

The use of emotion words is fundamental for preschoolers to develop the ability to label emotions according to facial expressions while interacting with other children in a preschool setting or in other places. Because preschoolers who are able to label their emotions are better at controlling their emotions, have more acceptance into their school peer group, and are more prepared for the socioemotional scenarios of school (Nencheva et al., 2023), we can help preschoolers increase their ability to use emotional vocabulary to label their emotions by inviting them to participate in activities that can involve this type of word by using pictures with different facial expressions. Research data supports the concept that children learn to associate facial

expressions with emotional scenarios (Ogren & Sandhofer, 2022). When we present pictures with different expressions, children will be able to use their vocabulary skills to give names to their own emotions and those of their peers too.

In a preschool setting, preschoolers are exposed to a wide range of emotions. As a consequence, it is essential that preschoolers develop social learning skills to help other peers when they are upset. For example, the use of emotional vocabulary, such as kind words and empathy abilities, can help them to help other peers when they are experiencing a negative emotion. To help preschoolers develop these skills, we can invite them to participate in activities that provide them with emotional vocabulary and observe different scenarios that support their ability to react and express their emotions to others. Storybooks are a great way to introduce preschoolers to a variety of words that they can use to help their peers when they have a need. Not only that, but another activity that helps preschoolers develop emotional abilities is puppet shows. When children see puppets playing with emotions, they facilitate their ability to express empathy toward others. Implementing activities in a preschool curriculum that involve literature, music, and movement promotes the learning of ideas that are connected with kindness and empathy (Flook et al., 2015). By learning from these activities, we encourage preschoolers to put themselves in someone's shoes. Research demonstrates that practicing these abilities enhances the development of executive function, which is essential to academic success. Therefore, the preschool years are essential to encourage the practice of these abilities (Flook et al., 2015).

The ability of self regulation in a child starts to develop during the first five years of life. For this reason, in the preschool years, it is necessary to implement activities that support preschoolers how to regulate themselves when they are experiencing negative emotions. Some research points out that early self-regulation is one of the most important abilities to support in

the early years of a child's life because it is essential to the development of regulation skills and academic success. (Razza et al., 2020). Teaching preschoolers how to take deep breaths can help them manage their emotions when they are angry or upset. The use of breathing techniques helps with focus, mental coordination, and control of the whole body. When children learn breathing techniques, such as “smelling the flower” and “blowing out the birthday candles,” they experiment with how taking a deep breath can calm themselves and make them feel relaxed (Razza et al.,2020). By learning these breathing techniques, preschoolers can put them into practice everywhere because this technique does not require any tools to do it and they can use this learning skill throughout the day when they experience negative emotions to help them regulate themselves.

Social emotional learning in preschoolers is essential to address. When children enroll in preschool for the first time, they often struggle to adapt to new routines and follow expectations. If children have trouble adjusting to new routines, it can impact their ability to regulate their emotions and behaviors. In order to support preschoolers social emotional development, I implemented three lessons over a period of three days. In the first lesson, the emphasis was placed on using emotional words to label pictures of facial expressions. The second lesson emphasis was on identifying two ways to help a peer who is having a negative emotion and the third lesson emphasis was on demonstrating one strategy for calming down. This lessons was implemented with preschool children from 3 to 5 years old with a Hispanic background at Tony’s Day Care in Salinas, California.

### **Theory**

The social learning theory developed by theorist Albert Bandura suggests that social behaviors are influenced by three main factors: observation, modeling, and imitation. These

factors have a big impact on how people develop skills that help them with emotions from birth into adulthood (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2011). According to this theory, children can learn from observation and be influenced by the way other people behave. Think about how children have the need to develop the skills to express, understand themselves, and manage their emotions when just entering a preschool setting. Observing can be a good source of learning because, when preschoolers observe others, they give them the opportunity to learn new behaviors by imitating their actions, which can help them understand others and their own emotional behaviors. Using images with different types of emotions can help children identify their emotions by observing and showing how they feel. As a consequence, children can build emotional vocabulary, which can help them label their emotions.

According to Bandura, imitation is observing another person's actions, like behaviors, movements, or facial expressions, and then mimicking these actions (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2011). The use of books that talk about emotional behavior and the part with teachers can be a good tool for reinforcing positive conduct in preschoolers because, according to SLT, this is a component of the symbolic model, which is characterized by the behaviors of real or fictional characters in media such as books, movies, television shows, and websites. (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2011). This gives them the opportunity to observe and imitate the behavior learned. It can also increase the ability of preschoolers to demonstrate kindness and empathy and help their peers when they have negative behavior. To reinforce these skills, I read a book called “My Friend Is Sad with Elephant & Piggie (Willems, 2007),” expecting the children to understand the meaning of the reading and give ideas on what they can do to help others when they experience negative behavior.



Modeling has an impact on preschoolers behavior as well. Attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation are all components of the process that Bandura refers to as modeling. Paying attention to what is occurring or being observed would be the first step in the process. The child needs to reflect on what they saw and what they focused on after making the observation. Reproduction follows, and it is finished by copying the behavior that has been seen. The last stage of the process, motivation, addresses the impact of preschoolers' social-emotional abilities. imitated the actions. For preschoolers, it can be difficult to regulate themselves when experiencing a negative emotion because they lack the skills that help them manage their emotions. For this reason, it is important for children at preschool age to learn how to manage their emotions. Modeling some strategies that help them manage their emotions can increase their skills to control their tantrums and crying episodes. As well, when children learn these skills, they can decrease their aggressive behaviors, resulting in a better relationship with their peers and a successful academic performance at school. In my project, I modeled one simple breathing technique, such as stopping and blowing a pinwheel. In this breathing exercise, I had the student use a pinwheel. Allow them to inhale deeply for a few seconds, filling their lungs with air. Then, after taking a full breath, I had them hold it for one second before exhaling slowly in front of their pinwheel to make it spin. With this exercise, I'm hoping children will learn a breathing technique that helps preschoolers have better control over themselves and lower their stress levels when experiencing a negative emotion.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

My project will take place in Tony's Daycare setting in Salinas, CA. This center currently has 12 children enrolled and all of them are Hispanic. Fifty percent of the children are between 3

and 5 years old. 30% are toddlers between 12 and 18 months old and 20% are infants. However, I will be focused on the oldest group of children to do my project. I worked with 7 children that are at preschool age 3 girls and 4 boys. However, the youngest children are welcome to participate. Furthermore, according to the registration record for this daycare, all the children are primarily Hispanic. That means that 100% of the population in this center is Hispanic. All the children in Tony's Daycare pay the full cost of the care. And most of them are bilingual; they speak English and Spanish. For this reason, my lesson will be conducted in two languages because it will be more convenient for children with any level of proficiency in both languages to participate in it if the lesson is conducted in both languages.

### **Learning Outcomes**

I will create three 30 minute lessons during a period of three days for preschool children with the need to develop SEL skills in preschool settings. This project will have three learning outcomes.

1. Preschoolers will be able to use emotion words to label pictures of facial expressions.
2. Preschoolers will be able to identify two ways to help a peer who is upset.
3. Preschoolers will demonstrate one strategy for calming down.

### **Method**

#### **Location and Participant**

I conducted three lessons on recognition and management of emotions at Tony's Daycare in Salinas, CA. The three lessons were conducted over three days in a classroom with 8 participants: 4 boys and 4 girls. Their ages ranged from 3 to 5 years old. All the children are Hispanic and speak two languages (English and Spanish). Most of them were able to express

themselves in long sentences while we were having a discussion about the activities. All the activities were developmentally appropriate for the children's age and they were conducted in both languages.

### **Procedure and Materials**

On the first day of my lesson, I introduced myself and the topic of how to recognize and name their emotions. At the beginning of the activity, I started with a short conversation with the children about what they know about emotion by asking questions about “how they feel and what causes this emotion. To assess this activity, I used a character emotion chart with five different emotion faces; happy, sad, angry, scared, and hurt. I pointed out each character, and the children were able to recognize and name each emotion. Then, to complete the activity, the children use a piece of round paper and crayons to represent their emotions by drawing on the paper how they feel. After they drew their emotions on the paper, the children stuck the paper on the chart that matched their emotions. Also, during the activity, the children shared and expressed how they felt and what made them feel that way. This activity took about 15 minutes.

on the second day, I presented the topic of how to help a friend who is having a negative emotion. I used an ebook called *My Friend Is Sad with Elephant & Piggie* (Willems, 2007). This book talks about two friends; one is sad, and the other is trying to do everything he can to make his friend happy by showing empathy for others and identifying their emotions. While I was reading this story, I pointed out each episode that demonstrated how children can help friends when they have a negative emotion. The book was about 8 minutes long. When the book was over, I proceeded to assess this learning outcome by asking a question to see if they were able to identify one way to help a friend when they were having a negative emotion. I gave all the children the opportunity to share their ideas and while I was listening, I wrote their ideas on a

chart. Most of the children were able to identify one or more ways to help a friend when they were having a negative emotion. The discussion took about 10 minutes. Once we finish the discussion, I thank everyone for their attention and end my activity. This lecture was conducted in English and Spanish.

On the last day of the lesson, I used a pinwheel to teach children a breathing exercise to better control their emotions when they experience a tantrum. I used an outdoor setting to conduct the activity. First, I introduce the activity by asking the children, "What is a pinwheel and what makes the pinwheel spin?" Also, I explain to them how a big breath would help them calm their bodies when they were experiencing negative feelings. Then I model the activity by giving a demonstration of how to take a deep breath to make the pinwheel spin. Then I give each child a pinwheel and I allow them to explore it for a bit. After that, we make the pinwheels spin together. While they were doing the activity, I guided them to take a big breath in and blow it out (blowing a pinwheel). Then we continue, using different techniques, by asking them to make the pinwheel spin really s-l-o-w-l-y (exaggerating the words), and after that, we take a big, deep breath and blow really slowly. Also, I ask them to make the pinwheel spin fast by taking short, fast breaths. After that, I asked them. "To take a big breath and blow it out as hard as we can, using soft, quiet breaths to show them different techniques for their breathing to blow the pinwheel. When we finished, I assessed them by asking them if they were noticing "how the pinwheel was spinning." and "how does your body feel now?" at the end, everyone shared how they felt. Also, I asked them when they could apply these techniques and most of the children responded with the expected answer. This activity took about 15 minutes in an outdoor setting.

### **Result**

The first learning outcome (LO 1) was that participants will be able to use emotional words to name pictures with different facial expressions. The number of participants in this activity was 6. To assess this learning outcome, I used an emotional chart with five different emotion expressions (happy, sad, hungry, scared and hurt) so that the children could demonstrate how much they know about emotions and use emotional vocabulary to indicate each emotion. Of the 6 children, was able to recognize and name each emotion when I pointed to it on the chart. Then, when I asked the children to look for the image on the emotional chart, that it matched their drawing of the emotion that they felt. 2 of the children indicated being happy, 1 indicated being sad, 1 indicated being hungry, and 2 indicated being hurt. Then, when everyone indicated their emotion, we analyzed the chart and all the children were able to name each emotion again, and they noticed that no one on the chart indicated being scared. So it means that 100% of the children were able to identify and use emotional words to express how they felt. The results demonstrate that LO 1 was fully met.

The second learning outcome (LO2) was for the participant to identify two ways to help a peer when is upset. After we observed, listened, and discussed the ebook called *My Friend is Sad*, I proceeded to assess my LO by asking the children to mention two ways that they can use to help a friend who is upset. Out of the 8 children that participated in this activity, they were able to indicate more than two ways to help a friend who is upset. This means that 100% of the children in this activity, were able to mention two or more ways to help a friend who is upset after they learned from the book. The results demonstrate that this learning outcome was fully met.

The number three learning outcome (LO 3) was for the participants to demonstrate one strategy for calming down. Nine children participate in this activity. To assess this LO, I asked

the children, “How does your body feel after they make the pinwheel spin?” Then, everyone shared that they felt calmer after practicing the breathing exercises. Also, the participant understood how taking a big breath would help them calm their bodies when they were experiencing a negative emotion. After that, 8 of the 9 participants was able to spin the pinwheel together and explain how their bodies felt after using these breathing exercises. The results show that 90% of the participants met the expectations of LO3. So it means that this LO was fully met.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this project was to support preschoolers with social and emotional skills that would help them have success in a preschool setting. Additionally, I believe that this project was a successful learning experience because the participants engaged fully in all three days of the lesson's activities. I easily connected with them and received their full attention. All the participants engaged during group discussions and they were able to share their ideas during discussions about recognizing emotion expression and also mention different examples from the book to help a friend who is having a negative emotion. the first learning outcome was fully met at 100%. The participants not only understood and expressed each emotion on the character emotion chart, they also drew a picture of how they were feeling the day as well; they use a color to match each emotion on the chart, and even though I did not ask them to draw in a particular color, they were able to do it. On the second outcome, students On the second outcome, students demonstrated that they were able to use two ways to help a friend when is upset. All the participants fully met the outcome of (LO 2). The third learning outcome (LO3) was also completed successfully. In my opinion, this activity was the most enjoyable of the three lessons. The children engaged with the pinwheels while they practiced different breathing techniques to help relax their bodies before going back to class. I was able to observe the result inside the

classroom. Therefore, I can say that all three learning outcomes were fully met, and I have the full attention and success of the participant.

Thinking about Bandura's social learning theory; this project shows how children learn by observing, modeling and imitating other behaviors in their environment. A clear example of this is learning outcome number two (LO 2), in which the children observed each episode in the book and then were able to demonstrate what they learned from the book by giving them opinions on how they can help a friend who has a negative emotion. By sharing passages from the book, the participants were able to illustrate how the book acted as a social scenario that modeled different ways in which kids can support a friend. As well, in another example, I can mention learning outcome three (LO3) because the children were able to demonstrate their ability to calm down by practicing some breathing techniques that they can use whenever they need it.

I experienced some challenges that, fortunately, did not affect the development of the project. The first challenge was the attendance of the children. This project was to request 8 participants to participate in the 3 days lesson but on the first day, 2 of the participants were not able to attend class. Surprisingly, this did not affect the outcome of the lesson. Another challenge was the late arrival of the book. For learning outcome number 2, this challenge made me change the structure of the activity by using an ebook instead of a conventional book, which made it more convenient to do this activity because it caught children's attention easily and they were able to observe more carefully each example that demonstrated them how to help a friend when is upset.

For future direction in this project, if I were to do it again, I would implement more activities that help students calm down during the day in a preschool setting or outside of school.

Like learning outcome number three (LO 3), the purpose of the lesson was to teach the students breathing exercises so they could continue practicing them throughout the day. The constant practice of these exercises would help them to have better control over their emotions during the day, relax their bodies, and decrease negative behavior. Also, next time, I would invite parents to participate in these activities with the purpose of teaching them breathing exercises to help their children at home when they are having negative emotions. By implementing breathing exercises, parents and children can lower their stress levels and have better control over their emotions.

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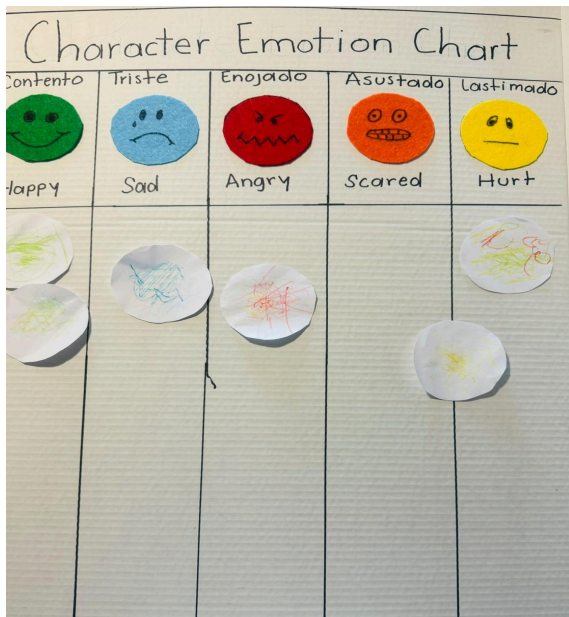
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### Appendix A

*Character emotion chart to meet Learning Outcome 1*



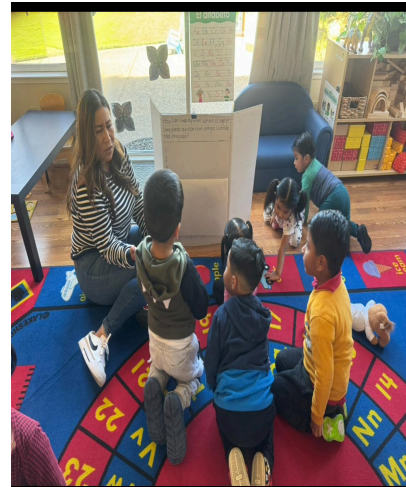
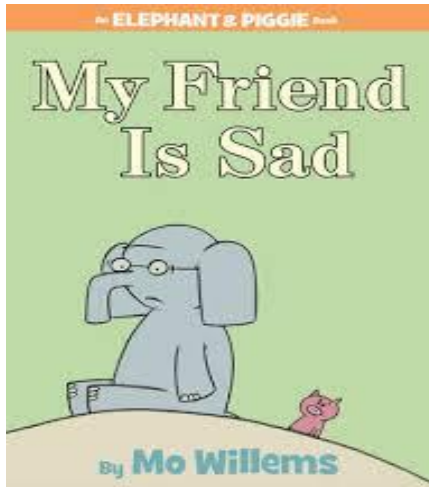
*Appendix B**Book**Chart to assess Learning Outcome 2*

Chart responses to: What are two ways to help a peer who is having a negative emotion?

Participant	Responses	Accuracy
Participant 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sing a song</li> <li>● Play with them</li> </ul>	100%
Participant 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Give a hug</li> <li>● Share a toy</li> </ul>	100%
Participant 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Telling a Jock</li> <li>● Acting like a clown</li> </ul>	100%
Participant 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Give a candy</li> <li>● Invite them to play</li> </ul>	100%
Participant 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Read a book</li> <li>● Share a toy</li> </ul>	100%
Participant 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Give a kiss</li> <li>● Asking if want to be my friend</li> </ul>	100%
Participant 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Make a funny face</li> <li>● Play soccer</li> </ul>	100%
Participant 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sharing toys</li> <li>● Invite my friend to play with my dolls</li> </ul>	100%

*Appendix C*

*Use a pinwheel to meet Learning Outcome 3*



## Supporting Preschoolers Social Emotional Development



**Gladiola Peinado**  
**Human Development and Family  
Science**

## Introduction

- Been a preschool teacher for 6 years
- AA in Early Child Development
- I chose this topic because I constantly see preschoolers struggling to recognize, express and manage their emotions when they enter a preschool setting for the first time.



## Needs Statement

Focal Group  
Preschool children from 3-5

### Problem

- Children entering preschool find it difficult to adjust to routines and follow expectations.
- If children have trouble adjusting to new routines, it can impact their ability to regulate their emotions and behaviors.

### Need

- Most children struggle to regulate their emotions and behaviors. Addressing social emotional learning is vital at this age.



## Theory

Social learning theory

Developed by theorist Albert Bandura suggests that social behaviors are influenced by three main factors:

- Observation
- Imitation
- Modeling



This theory is related to my project because my participants follow this three main factors, they learn by observing emotion on face expression, they imitate behaviors and modeling through actions.

## Learning Outcomes

I created three 30 minute lessons during a period of three days for preschool children with the purpose to help them to develop social emotional skills. This project had three learning outcomes.

1. Preschoolers will be able to use emotion words to label pictures of facial expressions.
2. Preschoolers will be able to identify two ways to help a peer who is having a negative emotion.
3. Preschoolers will demonstrate one strategy for calming down.



## Method

### Location and Participation



#### Location

Tony's Daycare in Salinas Ca.

**Children age:** 3 to 5 years old.

#### Diversity

**Students:** 8

**Gender:** 4 boys-4 girls

**Ethnicity:** Hispanic

**Language:** English/Spanish

## Method Procedure & Materials



### Day 1:

- Short conversation about emotion.
- Present a character emotion chart with five emotion expressions
- Children represent their emotions with a drawing

### Day 2:

- Present an ebook "My Friend is Sad"
- Pointed out each episode that demonstrated how children can help a friend when is having a negative emotion.
- Children share their ideas.

### Day 3:

- Introduce a pinwheel and model them how it works.
- Explain the benefits of breathing exercises
- Make the pinwheel spin together.
- Ask how they body feel after practicing breathing exercises

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## Assessment Result: LO 1

### Assess Method:

- Children drew their emotion then identify the feeling and posting it on the character emotion chart.



### Results:

- 6/6 Children were able to use a emotion vocabulary to identify and name each emotion on the chart.  
100% of the LO 1 fully met.



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## Assessment Result: LO 2

### Assessment Method:

- Children observe different episodes on a book called "My friend is sad"
- Ask: How can I help a friend when is having a negative emotion
- write their ideas on a chart

### Results:

8/8 Children were able to identify and mention two ways to help a friend when is having a negative emotion  
100% of the LO 2 was fully met



## Assessment Result: LO 3

### Assessment:

- Children practice two breathing techniques with a pinwheel to aid in their relaxation.

### Result:

- 8/9 children understood that breathing techniques can aid in relaxation.  
90% of the LO 3 was fully met.



## Discussion

### Successes

- Easy to connect with them,
- Have their attention for most of the time
- Children engage in all the activities

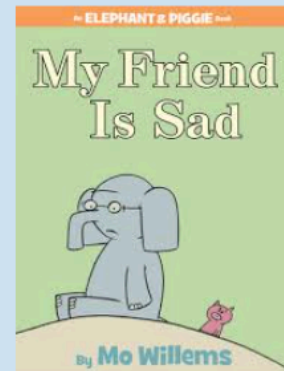


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## Discussion

### Challenges:

- Book arrived late
- Children Attendance



## Future Direction

- Invite teachers and caregivers to teach and explain breathing techniques to childrens so they can be used anywhere when they are having a negative emotion
- Implement breathing activities as transition before children return to their classroom
- Encourage the children to use breathing exercises by setting up areas where the children can practice this exercises.



“

Thank You!

”

