

Self-Regulation Wellbeing Walks

Notes for Teachers

Introduction

The aim of these walks is to support children to notice the impact of nature on their emotional state. The focus will be to investigate the benefits of being near plants as a strategy to self-regulate.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to understand and manage our own behaviour and reactions. Regulation requires firstly an awareness of feelings, and secondly the capacity to think about how to express these feelings. When feelings are unmanageable (too big) it helps to know how to calm ourselves so that we can think more clearly. During this walk, children are supported to consider their big feelings and explore whether being in nature may help bring these into a more manageable state.

Dysregulation

Dysregulation is the inability to control or regulate one's emotional responses, which leads to mood swings and/or emotional outbursts. The results can be an acting out with inappropriate behaviour. This can happen when someone cannot recognise their feelings and they are overwhelmed. Dysregulation occurs for anyone when an overwhelming situation occurs. We all can find that we have moments that we are unable to self-regulate (for example our buttons are pushed or we are triggered). A person with a history of neglect or abuse, which has interrupted normal development, will need extra support to develop a capacity to self-regulate.

Calming strategies

Calming strategies can be supportive for coping with overwhelming, 'too big' feelings and should never be used to be dismissive of underlying feelings.

All feelings are valid. There are no 'good' feelings or 'bad' feelings. Feelings are there to help us know what is going on and to understand what we need to do. Discuss with the children what being calm feels like and looks like:

- Our muscles relax
- Our minds are clear
- We can concentrate
- We feel positive
- We may feel creative
- We notice what is around us
- We feel free

Supporting children during the walk

Some children will say that they feel calmer as they experience nature but other feelings may also be felt. They may feel like singing, dancing or running. Some children may find they feel like crying. This is because when we give space to feelings we can feel many different things. Some may find it very difficult to know or say how they feel. It is important to say that this is OK and that we all can find it difficult to know and describe our feelings sometimes.

Although some children will not find their experience of the walk positive, this can still be thought about in the context of wellbeing as wellbeing is supported by being seen, heard and acknowledged. It is important to empathise and not tell a child to feel differently, and to have an idea of who can provide any further support that might be needed. For some children this may not be their parent and it will be supportive to think about who the adults are in school who they feel they can talk to.

Signposts for external support can be found at:
<https://www.place2be.org.uk/page/get-urgent-help/>