Best practice and evidence-based strategies to teach emotional regulation and social skills to exceptional individuals

Morning Agenda

- Welcome/Housekeeping
- Emotional Regulation
  - What is Emotional Regulation?
  - Examples of emotional regulation at work
- Sensory Issues
- Emotional Regulation and Behaviour
- Break
- Exploring Feelings
- The Incredible 5-Point Scale

Who needs this information?

EVERY ONE of US!!
Emotional Regulation is...

- Also known as Emotional Self-Regulation (ER) refers to being able to properly regulate one’s emotions. It is a complex process that involves the initiating, inhibiting, or modulating the following aspects of functioning:
  - Internal feeling states (i.e. the subjective experience of emotion),
  - Emotion-related cognitions (e.g. thought reactions to a situation),
  - Emotion-related physiological processes (e.g. heart rate, hormonal, or other physiological reactions), and
  - Emotion-related behavior (e.g. actions or facial expressions related to emotion).

Emotional Regulation is...

- The processes whereby we influence which emotions we have, when we have them and how we experience and express them.
- The ability to increase, decrease and maintain
- If an individual too often experiences certain stimuli as overwhelming, the amygdala goes into action, this response may become neurologically entrenched and difficult to rewire.

Video
Sensation is the body’s interpretation of the environment generated from stimulus. Every sensation is a form of information. There are seven senses:
- Taste
- Auditory
- Olfactory
- Visual
- Proprioception
- Vestibular
- Tactile

Video
Sensory Integration

- Defined as "...the organization of sensory information for use" (Ayres, 1972)

- A neurological process occurring in the brain that enables us to make sense of our world by receiving, registering, modulating, organizing and interpreting information that comes to our brains from our senses.

Sensory Integration (cont'd)

- Sensory input travels to the brain as sensations which tell the brain what the body and mind are doing. The brain integrates that information and tells the body and mind what to do.

- Sensory input is organized so the brain produces a useful body response, useful perceptions, emotions and thoughts.

Sensory Integration and Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Hyper- and Hypo-reactivity to sensory stimuli are common in individuals with Autism

- The stimuli that elicit them are usually unpredictable

- Individuals may try to create their own sensory stimuli i.e. flicking lights, making loud noises into their ear

- Hyper sensitivity to touch and auditory stimulation are most common sited items in children (Kientz & Dunn, 1997) and adults (Grandin 1986, 1995, Williams 1992)
Sensory Needs for Individuals with ASD

**HYPER**

- Optimal Arousal
- Avoidance
- Sensory Defensiveness

**HYPO**

- Seeking
- Sensory Registration Problems

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Sensory & Behaviour:

- Avoidance of certain stimuli or situations
- Perseverance on certain stimuli or situations (i.e. "stimming")
- Difficulty with fine and/or gross motor skills
- Restlessness, pacing or "hyperactivity"
- Difficulty distinguishing between fore- and background noise
- Difficulty recognizing environmental dangers

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Arousal Level

Passing Time
What makes emotional regulation such a difficult prospect for those we support?
Exploring Feelings™

- A two-volume cognitive behaviour approach developed by Tony Atwood to teach emotional regulation
- Divided into an anger component and an anxiety component
- Attempts to make emotions more concrete

The Emotion Thermometer™

- A concrete strategy to teaching an individual to recognize the different levels to their own emotions.
- Individualized – the person creates their own thermometer and uses their own words to describe the emotions.
In each of us, there is an Emotional Toolbox from which we can draw upon a number of different tools:

- Physical Tools
- Relaxation Tools
- Social Tools
- Solitude
- Thoughts and Perspective
- Special Interests
- Sensory Tools
- Medication

- The tools need to be practiced regularly – they are not crisis management responses.
- Introduced when an individual is calm and more likely to withhold the information.
- The overall goal is to decrease one’s set arousal level.
Breaking down behaviour into neat, concrete parts

The individual takes an active role in labelling each number

A 5-Point Scale example:
Once the scale has been developed, it can assist with further skill teaching:

- To illustrate where one needs to be in any given activity
  - Ex: At church, you need to be at a 1
  - At a hockey game, you can be at a 5
- To cue an individual that his/her arousal level is increasing and they need to calm
Review of Emotional Regulation from AM

Break

The Hidden Curriculum™

How to teach the unwritten and the abstract

Individual Case Studies – developing a teaching strategy

Questions?
Emotional Regulation

The 5-Point Scale

Exploring Feelings

Primary Stressor?

There are many stressors in life – individuals we assist tend to list the same item...

Control the stressors, control arousal levels?

- “I find it hard to understand the guys and the girls” (in response to a book about understanding girls) – 12 yr old
- “I don’t know why I have to be with other people...they all just think I’m weird” – 18 yr old
- “Another student started a hate website about me...he took pictures and put captions on them and everything. I haven’t been back since” – 15 yr old
- “School is like a hell. I really hate it” – 9 yr old
- “I wish I was funny. It’s important to be funny” – 12 yr old
- “I am not handicapped. People just don’t ever say what they really mean” – 16 yr old
“I’m 36 years old. I’ve had the same job since I was 20 and I have never had a girlfriend, a promotion or a raise...” – 36 yr old

“I just did what he told me to do...why am I in trouble??” – 11 yr old

“I was just worried about her – she is morbidly obese and obviously doesn’t know pizza is bad for her” – 15 yr old

Video

Social Relationships

- One of the most challenging aspects for individuals we support is often making and maintaining strong social relationships
- The reasons for this are varied, but much responsibility lies with a lack of understanding The Hidden Curriculum
The Hidden Curriculum items are...

- Unwritten social rules
- Are not taught to us
- It is taken for granted that everyone just 'knows' these rules
- Often different depending on what activity or location one is in
- Can change at any time, depending on the situation
- Involve verbal and non-verbal behaviours
- Idioms

Video

Teaching the Hidden Curriculum

- There are a number of strategies, including:
  - Comic Strip Conversations
  - Cartooning
  - The S-O-C-C-S strategy
Developed by Gray to assist individuals interpret social situations. She suggests a step by step approach:

1. Make small talk
2. Draw the situation, using leading questions
3. Share perspectives
4. Provide structure
5. Summarize
6. Identify a new solution

Similar to comic strip conversations – used to explain situations without the step by step as comic strip conversations

Teaches problem-solving and decision-making skills through analysis:

1. Situation
2. Options
3. Consequences
4. Choices
5. Strategy
6. Simulation
• Questions?
• Comments?