

The Travell Counselor's Corner



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December: Managing Emotions



Throughout the fall, our Travell tigers have been hard at work setting both classroom & personal goals, while engaging in discussions & activities meant to bolster their growth mindset. Last month, we took a close look at **gratitude** & the importance of remaining grateful for all that we have while simultaneously striving to achieve. This can be very tricky!

As we quickly move into the winter months, classes will move into Second Step's second unit which is titled "**Emotion Management**." This is a skill that can be just as tricky, even for us adults, and especially during the upcoming holiday season! The following is another *sneak peek* at what you can expect your children to be practicing here at school during the month of December as well as some ideas you may wish to implement during your time together at home.

In Grades K-2, the main focus will be on "**identifying emotions**" in both themselves & others through the use of body language and context clues. Children will begin with the basic emotions such as happy, sad & mad, eventually progressing to more complex emotions such as worried, frustrated, proud, & disappointed. At home, you can encourage children to identify which emotions the characters in their favorite books & movies might be experiencing, but you can also ask them to do this in real-time scenarios you encounter with friends, family members, or even witness amongst strangers in the grocery store. To make it fun, you can play a game of emotional charades! As always, it is best to share **personal examples** with your children such as a time you felt proud or disappointed & how you handled it.

Each grade level will also be learning ways to feel **calm** including slow breathing, positive self talk & asking for help. Have your children show you these strategies at home; you may even find them useful! If so, let them catch you in the act of using them :)

In addition, children will be introduced to the thought that others can have different feelings about the same situation. Your children will be hearing that our emotional reactions to current circumstances are often based on similar past experiences. *This instruction is the very foundation of empathy.*

In Grades 3-5, the focus will begin to shift toward more specific ways to **manage** these emotions they have become so familiar with in previous years. Your children will be learning about the types of information that different emotions provide us with regard to our wants & needs. If you see them experiencing sadness, fear or even happiness, try to pause & ask your child what this emotion is helping them to learn about themselves. What they take away from each new scenario will help them feel better prepared to handle those still to come!

Children will also be learning about the various degrees to which they can experience an emotion. *This is easiest to make sense of when we start with the three basics: happy, sad and angry.* When we look closely, many other feelings we experience (such as content, devastated, annoyed, or furious) are actually just the presence of higher or lower levels of these core emotions in our bodies. If you begin to incorporate a wider array of descriptive feeling words in your home, your children should be able to point out the differences!

At this level, children will now begin to explore additional strategies for managing those top tier emotions. *These include taking a break, rethinking, planning ahead, and breaking down big situations.* Taking a break can look very different when children are at school, home, in the car or in a public setting. Making some time to discuss the different options available to your child in each of these situations could help them feel more comfortable from the start. Rethinking means asking **specific questions** about what types of changes would have to take place in order to result in a different outcome. As a family, you can create a chart of questions that feel most natural to you & refer to them often as you each encounter scenarios you would like to rethink.

Additionally, children will be introduced to the idea of the “**balanced brain.**” They will begin to comprehend the difference between logic & emotions, as well as the many ways strong emotions can prevent us from learning or making the best choice for ourselves and others.

The feeling of “**stress**” will be explored in depth; what are the signs, which types of situations can cause it, and what can they do to manage it? While stress often has a negative connotation, very joyous, exciting events can trigger a stress response in our bodies as well. **For example, the holidays!**

Our oldest children will begin practicing their ability to anticipate events that stir up big emotions and plan appropriately for them in advance. One strategy includes breaking down overwhelming events into smaller, manageable tasks. Your children may need some help doing this for themselves at first. *However, we all know how observant they are!* Don't be surprised if they are able to assist **you** in identifying one of your own personal stressors and even provide feedback on how you can rethink it, plan ahead, and break it down. Some language you might use includes the idea of control. When emphasis is placed on the things within our control, we are more likely to successfully manage a difficult scenario.

In summary, I take a look at all that has been presented above, and I cannot help but be sincerely impressed. The concepts and skills that our children are exploring & engaging with across grade levels are some that I think we can all agree we still struggle with embracing as adults! We may not see results overnight, but I am beyond confident that the effort we are all making as a team is sure to provide our young tigers with all of the tools, resources & support they need to truly thrive as lifelong learners and positive contributors to our community. *They already have so much to teach us when we listen!*

Let us all take time this holiday season to slow down and practice some mindfulness. Let us sit in the gratitude of all we have to be thankful for. Let us engage our growth mindset as we begin to craft our new year resolutions. Let us acknowledge the vast range of big emotions that come up for others around this time of year & make a conscious effort to include **empathy** in all conversations. And as always, let us show grace and kindness to ourselves. Let's allow ourselves & others the opportunity to rest & recharge in a way that enables all the best versions to show up when we need them! Let us not lose sight of the small things that make us feel most magical, and let's be sure to bring a little **love and light** with us wherever we may go ❄️🧑‍🎄❤️