"A Hopeful, Healthy & Happy Living and Learning Toolkit / Teachers' Guide"

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR THE SELECTED THEMES

Theme 2: I know about feelings

Emotional Development

- **ages 2-5**

In this age children develop their self-awareness and begin to explore their autonomy. During these early years, they begin to recognize and label basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, and anger. They become more attuned to the facial expressions, body language, and vocal cues that convey these emotions. The recognition - on the part of the caregivers - of the child's emotions becomes an important tool that can be used to deal with the emerging difficult feelings of frustration and anger.

Since the primary developmental goal of toddlers is to assert themselves as independent little entities, the caregiver does well to avoid situations that make a child feel powerless and out of control. By offering the child an environment that stimulates him and at the same time protects him, it greatly facilitates, during this period,

- **ages 6-12**

With mental development occurring at a rapid pace, they learn the power of cognitive functions over emotion. During this period, they begin to have contacts with a wider social group and can understand social influences. Their ability to perceive and describe emotions is developed and influenced by sociocultural and family contexts.

Due to the growing awareness of peer influence, it is possible to discern that one of the most basic motivations of a child at this age is to avoid embarrassment at all costs. They do everything they can to avoid attracting attention, especially when they are likely to provoke teasing or criticism from their friends.

Realizing the arbitrary standards by which the world operates, the 'pre-adolescent' child may begin to perceive life as a 'theatre of the absurd'. Mocking and scorning adults become the child's favorite "feelings".

- ages 13+

Emotional development continues into adolescence. Teenagers are on a journey of self-discovery. That is why they constantly change direction, moving sometimes to one place and sometimes to another place in search of the truth.

Their interest in family matters will decrease and the focus of his attention will turn to relationships with his friends. Nevertheless, they are still focused and self-absorbed. Hormonal disturbances due to puberty can cause uncontrollable and rapid mood swings.

Emotions in adolescent development are an integral part of identity formation, peer relationships, emotional regulation, risk-taking behavior, mood swings, moral development.

Emotional Diversity & Support

Individual emotional development can vary and children progress at different paces. Social and cultural factors play an important role in shaping a child's emotional development. Acknowledging and accepting emotions from self and others is critical to empowering emotional well-being and promoting mental health at any age. Many students find it difficult to identify their feelings.

Strategies to support children in coping with difficulties arising from unpleasant emotions: emotion vocabulary, emotion journal, emotion regulation techniques, positive self-talk, acceptance of emotions.

Theme 4: I understand others

Understanding Others through Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of others, as well as to perceive and empathize with them. In the context of education, empathy is critical as it helps to create positive teacher-student and peer relationships.

Empathy in Education

In the context of education, understanding these stages of empathy development allows educators to adjust their teaching methods to support children's emotional development. Empathy is based on the ability to regulate emotions. Simply perceiving the emotions of others, without the ability to internally manage and analyze them, limits empathy. In children, creating a safe environment and the example we provide are necessary processes for learning and practicing emotion regulation. When children feel safe, they can develop better emotional connection with others and show empathy.

Teaching strategies: active listening, random acts of kindness, acts of helping, peer mentoring, empathy circles

Theme 6: I listen to myself

The importance of Self-Awareness & Reflection in Personal Development

Reflection and self-awareness as tools for children's critical thinking and independence; they can enhance children's ability to think critically, recognize different points of view and make independent decisions.

Self-awareness is linked to emotional intelligence, which includes recognizing and managing emotions, as well as understanding the emotions of others. Self-awareness and reflection develop over time as children develop intellectually and emotionally. Daily reflection can help children identify their strengths and interests.

Practical Strategies

Strategies for guiding children to understand their thoughts, feelings and needs:

- encourage children to talk about their thoughts and feelings
- make them feel comfortable talking to you without fear of rejection or criticism
- ask frequent questions that encourage analysis of their thoughts. For example, "why do you think you feel that way?" or "what do you think about when you feel this way?"
- meditation techniques – Mindfulness

Theme 9: I can solve conflicts

Forms of Conflict & Aggression in children

The school environment, particularly in preschool, may encourage aggression as a coping mechanism due to increased tension. Child aggression includes direct (verbal and physical actions) and indirect (gossip, exclusion) forms. It varies across developmental stages, influenced by emotional regulation and social skills.

Childhood aggression if not framed and depersonalized is associated with difficult psychosocial adjustment in adolescence, such as delinquency, substance use, behavioral problems, and academic difficulties.

Conflict management & Teaching Skills

Conflicts can sometimes be handled by avoiding them, while in other cases, it may be more appropriate to confront them directly and explore the benefits of each approach. Learning practical conflict resolution skills is important for personal growth and interpersonal relationships.

Constructive conflict resolution teaching strategies: use of counseling & guidance, solution seeking & negotiation, recognition of emotions, interpersonal communication skills (such as communicating one's needs and listening to others).

Theme 10: I can cope with change

Understanding the Impact of Change to children

Even small changes in children's world can have a significant effect on their psychology. Examples such as a trip, a change in schedule, or any small change in their daily routine can cause fear, worry, and uncertainty. Change usually signals a loss of routine and predictability, things that children find important to a sense of security.

We need to consider how young children perceive change and how it changes their feelings. Children's perception of changes depends on their age, development and the support they receive from adults.

The Importance of Resilience & Adaptability

Resilience theory posits that what is important to mental well-being is not the inherent nature of adversity, but our adaptive response to it.

Ways to facilitate children's positive acceptance of change:

- offer information to help children understand upcoming changes
- demonstrating resilience as a model of behavior
- confirmation of feelings
- maintaining a routine
- cultivating curiosity to make change an interesting process
- emphasizing benefits and involving children in decision-making so that they can help and cope positively with change.

Theme 13: I am grateful

Gratitude and Psychosocial Well-Being

Gratitude is a profoundly influential emotion that shapes positive interactions and personal well-being in the classroom and beyond. It also encourages students to recognize and appreciate the positive aspects of their lives, which, in turn, can enhance their interactions with peers and teachers. Gratitude is inextricably linked to compassion and empathy. When individuals experience gratitude, they tend to show more understanding and support for others. It serves as

a defense mechanism in difficult situations. Practicing gratitude can help train the brain to be more sensitive to the experience of gratitude, helping to improve mental health over time.

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