

## Guiding principles

We can't expect students to identify, express or manage feelings if they don't have a basic understanding of what feelings and coping skills are. When talking about feelings and coping skills with students, it is helpful to keep the following guiding principles in mind.

**All feelings are normal and valid.** Feelings are not good or bad, they just are. It is also very normal to feel more than one feeling at a time. Let students know their feelings are normal and that you understand by repeating back what you hear, without judging or interpreting—even if you don't agree with them. When students feel heard and validated, they are more likely to share in the future.

**It's never too early or too late to learn how to express and manage feelings.** There is no correlation between a student's age or grade and their knowledge of feelings and coping skills. Students only know what they have been taught or exposed to, so we can anticipate that different students will have different skill levels—and that's OK.

**Follow the students' lead.** If students are uncomfortable sharing feelings, let them know that is OK and that you, or another trusted adult, are always available if they want to share later. Similarly, if a student does not feel comfortable practicing a specific coping skill, encourage them to find another option they do feel comfortable practicing.

**Be curious.** Sometimes students need help identifying, expressing and managing what they're feeling. Getting curious allows the student to explore their own feelings.

"I wonder" statements are a helpful tool for encouraging students to explore their feelings:

“ I noticed you threw your paper on the floor. **I wonder** if you are feeling frustrated about this assignment. ”

“ **I wonder** if it's too hard to focus on deep breathing right now. Why don't we go for a short walk instead? ”

# Intentional connections

Using a feelings chart and/or coping skills may already be part of your regular classroom routine, and you may even be using a social emotional learning (SEL) program or curriculum. Sometimes, students need help making connections to understand why they are engaging in these activities. For example, if you explain to students that practicing a coping skill helps them learn to manage their feelings, it helps them understand the purpose and makes them more likely to use it on their own later. Similarly, it can be helpful to remind students that building their feelings vocabulary can help them better identify and express their own emotions.

**Tips for helping to make intentional connections:**

**Repetition is key.** You might feel like a broken record, but, as we know, repetition is an important part of learning. Students may not make the connection the first few times, and that's OK. The goal is for students to understand (in time) that building awareness of feelings and practicing coping skills throughout the school day has a positive impact on their emotional wellness.

**Keep it simple.** Don't feel like you have to say too much. Here are some ideas:

Now that we just practiced deep breathing, notice how it may have shifted how you feel. You may notice that you feel more relaxed or focused. As a reminder, it's important to practice lots of coping skills to help you learn which ones work best for you.

We just talked about how the character in the book feels. Identifying the emotions of others can help us develop empathy and better understand our own emotions, too.

I'm going to put on this brain break video for us to get our energy out and dance. Dancing is a great coping skill because it's something that can help us better manage our emotions, handle stress and feel better!

Before we start the exam, we are all going to do a quick relaxation exercise. Coping skills like this can calm our bodies and minds, helping us slow down our breathing and think more clearly.