

Ideas for Using Lee Pesky Learning Center's Social Emotional Learning Mat

Identifying Feelings

- The faces of the children on the learning mat express different emotions. Feeling a range of different emotions is natural.
 - Talk about what your child thinks each child in the pictures is feeling. It is okay if your child names a different feeling than what the labels say. Many words can be used to name the emotions such as disappointed, frightened, worried, confused. You might respond by saying, "This face looks sad to me. How do you look or act when you feel sad?"
- Check-in with your child regarding how he or she is feeling.
 - Ask your child to point to how they feel saying something like, "I see you are showing me that you feel frustrated. Is that right?"
 - "Let's talk about why you feel that way and how we can work through this together. How can I help?"
 - "I am going to point to happy because I feel happy right now. I feel happy because I am spending time with you. How do you feel right now? Why do you feel this way?"
- Children do not always know how a certain situation makes them feel. You can talk about the children in the photographs to help.
 - Point to a face and talk about something that makes you feel this way. Then ask your child to give you an example of when they feel that way. For example: "I feel scared when something new is happening. When do you feel scared?"

Special Places

- Sometimes we need a special place to go when our emotions are high. Setting up a special place at home can be helpful--a place for your child to go when she is feeling overwhelmed and needs a place to refocus.
 - The special place might have soft pillows and a blanket, something nice to look at like the peaceful scene on this learning mat, and something to cuddle.
 - While in the special place, your child can hug a stuffed animal and practice some of the strategies in this handout.
 - Explain to your child how this special place can help and how it can be used. The front of the learning mat has bunnies in a den that can help you explain what a special place is to your child. You can also talk about how a special person can provide comfort.

- Prompt use of the special place. "I noticed your body is showing me you are frustrated. Is this correct? I'm wondering if going to your special place would help you work through that frustration. Would you like me to come with you or do you prefer to go on your own?"

Self-Comfort

- Use the blanket space on the mat to discuss with your child ways to move between emotions on the learning mat. What can your child do to comfort himself and change how he is feeling?
 - For example, your child could draw people, places or things on the blanket that would bring comfort or provoke positive thoughts.

"Hill Breathing"

- "Hill breathing" is a wonderful activity for your child to use when they are feeling sad, anxious, upset, angry, frustrated, or very excited. Taking deep breaths helps us feel more relaxed and better able to express thoughts.
 - First, put your finger down at the bottom of the hill near the sign that says "path." Then, while tracing your finger up the left side of the hill, slowly take a deep breath in. Pause at the top of the hill and then move your finger down the right side while exhaling slowly.
 - Repeat several times. This is also helpful to do before engaging in a situation that might create strong emotions.

Count to 10

- If your child is feeling angry or frustrated, sometimes it helps to slowly count to 10 before talking about it.
 - On the learning mat there are 10 rocks in the river. Show your child how to use those rocks to count slowly to 10.
 - Point to each rock as you say a number; 1...2...3... and so on. Or, if counting to 10 is challenging, simply touch each rock slowly.

Goal Setting

- Goal setting when you are young is different than it is for adults. One of the most important things you can do to help build the foundation of goal setting is to use the word goal whenever it fits. Here are some ideas:
 - Talk about the bunny having a goal of climbing the hill. The bunny may need to go slowly, or use positive self-talk, or even take breaks to meet the goal.
 - Make sure goals are attainable. When a goal is met, celebrate! High fives and "you met your goal" are all that you need to celebrate.
 - Talk about the goals you set for yourself. For example, "I have a goal to get all of the laundry folded this weekend." Or "My goal is to go for a long walk today."

- Give encouragement along the way! If your child sets a goal to pick up her toys every night before going to bed for a week, notice each night how well your child is doing and say something about it.
 - “I noticed you picked up all your toys again. You are getting one step closer to meeting your goal.”
 - “I noticed you are working on your goal of picking up your toys. What might help—asking for my help when cleaning up your toys or setting a timer to help you stay on task when it is time to clean up your toys?”
- When your child is disappointed that she did not meet a goal, talk about it.
 - How is your child feeling? What is a positive take-away from the experience? What could she do differently next time?
 - Talk about the idea that it simply means you did not meet your goal yet. Perhaps help your child adjust the goal so it is more attainable and build from there.
- Let your child know that she can get assistance with her goals. The adult bunny may have to help or give advice to the baby bunny. When discussing a goal of folding laundry, mention that the child could help the parent, and vice versa, to accomplish the goal.

Offering Choices

- Giving your child choices during the day can help your child become more self-determined and independent. Provide your child with two options.
 - For example, “Do you want to wear your blue shirt or green shirt today?”
“Do you want to ride in the wagon to the park or walk to the park.”
 - All these small choices add up through the day and enable your child to make his own choices and become more self-determined.
 - The other benefit of offering many small choices is that when you must choose for your child, often he is more willing to listen and follow your directions after having had the opportunity to make his own choices.

For more interactive learning mats and information about social emotional learning, visit <http://www.lplearningcenter.org>