***STRATEGIES TO HELP STUDENTS SELF-REGULATE***

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As students return to in-person learning, they may have trouble self-regulating after so much time away from the traditional classroom. They might benefit from learning some cognitive behavior therapy strategies to calm down, reframe their thoughts to be more positive, and stay focused on learning.

Teachers and other staff members should incorporate cognitive behavioral therapy-based self-regulation strategies into lessons and interactions to ensure students with disabilities can focus on learning and work toward their IEP goals. Otherwise, they may not receive FAPE.

We do not necessarily know what kids’ experiences have been, so we should have a trauma-informed mindset. Kids are naturally resilient, but we just have to be mindful that some days go great, and some days might not go as planned. We must ride those waves of feelings as we all adjust. The waves might be larger at the beginning, then, as students start to see that things are more consistent and they are feeling safe in their environment, those waves may decrease and become a little more manageable to ride out.

Teachers and other staff might use these ideas to promote students’ self-regulation:

Reframe negative thinking: A student may become dysregulated because he thinks an assignment is impossible and he is not going to answer any questions correctly. Teachers and staff might help the student to recognize his disruptive thinking and reframe it. The student can think instead that he has done the required reading and has done well on similar assignments. He can also remember that he can ask for help as he works on the assignment if he needs it.

Identify emotions: Allowing students to use an emotional thermometer with a five-point scale to identify and calibrate feelings can be helpful. Talk about how the student’s feelings and thoughts are connected. A student might be at a level 5 because she is angry about an assignment she doesn’t think she can finish, and feels her face getting hot and her fists clinching.

Model problem-solving: Staff members should allow students to see how they ask colleagues for help when they become upset. Kids do not think that adults ask other adults for help. Their mindset is usually, “You’re an adult, figure it out!” A teacher can say, “I got upset about a problem, then I calmed down and asked for help.” This helps students to see how they too can re-navigate problems.

Develop lists: Assist students making lists of coping strategies they can refer to when they are starting to feel dysregulated. Students can make lists for low- and high-intensity feelings. A student might put on a list that he can use a fidget tool, take a break, or engage in deep breathing to self-regulate. A teacher can post a list of strategies where every student can see it and simply prompt a student to review the list if she notices a student is becoming dysregulated. Sometimes they just need a cue.

Promote self-monitoring: It might be helpful for teachers to keep track on a sticky note on the wall or whiteboard when students make progress with self-monitoring, such as using appropriate language to express their feelings, thinking about different outcomes while trying to solve a problem, or using coping strategies to stay calm during an assessment. Teachers should celebrate these successes with students, even if they’re not doing them 100 percent correctly at first. Students love to see their progress charted. Sharing this information with parents helps to promote collaborative relationships and lets them know what is happening in the classroom. Sharing the class-generated coping strategies with parents may also be helpful to reinforce strategies at home or to add on to their own family strategies.

Encourage peer support: It is ok to allow students to talk with each other about how to self-regulate and benefit from sharing their experiences with each other. Relationship building increases students’ confidence in expressing their ideas to each other and listening to each other’s ideas.