

## Emotion Management

Emotional maturity is not an absence of emotion. It is not the total control of one's emotions so that one is exclusively rational. Emotional maturity means being clear about the personal identity one values. It is being able to recognize when that identity is being threatened, recognizing and even seeking opportunities to enhance that personal identity -- and having that repertoire of actions and economy of affect that will enable one to construct, protect, or enhance that most valued personal identity. (Morse, 1982).

PURSUIT	AVOIDANCE
* Love * Desire* Hope * Joy	* Hate * Aversion * Despair
* Courage * Pride * Pleasure	* Sorrow * Fear * Anger * Guilt

Most of us are good at learning and remembering facts. We can recite that it is 93,000,000 miles to the sun, recall that our phone number is 555-1234 and name people in our group. Feelings are not so simple or straightforward. We can have a number of feelings at once, and they can be conflicting. We can have one set of strong feelings on the surface, a sense of uneasiness just beneath our conscious awareness and suddenly have a wave of new feelings that seem quite different, and that can change how we perceive things or what we experience without even realizing it occurred. For example:

*Dennis is driving to the restaurant. He thinks about hunger, about the person he is meeting and who else might be at the diner. He considers his bank balance, who will pick up the check and that he really needs to be studying instead of going out to eat. He remembers how upset his stomach got the last time he drank alcohol, that he missed classes the next day and then remembers the teacher's comments about his outstanding work on the paper he just got back from class. Suddenly a car is coming toward him in his lane.*

Most of the activities in our waking hours are filled with fleeting and contradictory affective content. Some of it is not so fleeting. It may be two minutes, two hours or two years before Dennis stops thinking about some of the things that occurred in that brief slice of time.

Feelings are powerful! There are many feelings that we are glad to have, feelings of acceptance, safety, love. There are feelings that we pursue, spend time, and energy to encourage as part of our lives. There are other feelings that we dislike, that are disquieting or upsetting to us.

Our feelings may be very private things, or they may be events we wish to share with others. Both pursuit and avoidance feelings can be private, or things we wish others to keep to themselves. Dennis is elated about his test scores, but doesn't want others in his group to know, since he is afraid they may tease him or feel envious of his grades. He tells his insurance company about his accident, and how angry he is at the other driver, but he doesn't tell his group anything about his car accident. He thinks he might be in love, but doesn't tell his parents, because they might not approve. He does tell some of the members in the group. He doesn't tell his new love interest about his sore throat, but does tell the teacher about it, and calls group members to say he can't attend because he might make others ill. He has nagging feelings begin to emerge about his scholarship, but decides to ignore them, and hopes the committee won't learn about the course he's flunking until after tuition is paid. One of the members of the group encouraged him to do that and told of a time that worked out for her.

Feelings are transitional episodes that are crucial to our emotional well being. They help us maintain our sense of well being and who we are. They frame us for ourselves, and they give those around us an essence of who we are. Those who are healthy, recognize those feelings, accept that they are occurring and then make decisions about which are helpful and which are potentially destructive.

In teaching and working with youngsters, it is critical to know that we are having feelings -- to be aware, to accept that we feel a certain way. At the same time, we are not captives of our feelings. We have the ability to keep and enhance feelings, or to process and refocus affective messages. We need to know that we are angry, and what the core issue is that produced the feeling of anger, but we also need to remember that we can control anger, transform it or use it to good advantage. We have the same control over our positive feelings. Feelings are strong, and we can utilize them to advance our humanity, our personal development and the well being of our self and our students.



### Lack of organization

Evidence that poor organizational skills is an issue:



Student is turning things in haphazardly and occasionally, yet clearly understands the work.



Often comes without a pencil or paper, and borrows from others.



Appearance may be disheveled, not well coordinated or neat.



May not be clear about when and how to take notes; when does take notes, misplaces them



Due dates are often missed.



When work is turned in, may be disjointed, partially completed, lack flow and continuity.



Remember getting to a destination and not having everything you wanted? You were missing your sleepwear, your favorite pants, your medicine, or maybe you arrived and realized the suitcase was sitting by the door. Ever gone looking for your keys so you could use the car? It probably only occurs once in a while, because many of us have organizational skills, almost automatically. When we misplace something it can be so distracting and upsetting. Imagine having your whole life work that way and not know how to fix it!



### Solutions

- Use daybooks, planners and notebooks as part of the course expectations.
- Specify that it is time to write down the assignment and write it on the board, or stand beside the youngsters who need support and be certain the material is recorded appropriately.
- Consider using partners, pairing those who have a natural organizational ability with those who are still learning.
- Teach the actual learning behaviors expected, methodically, and with practice opportunities periodically.
- Teach word webs, story sequencing, various forms of note taking, including computer-generated programs.
- Give key words to let students know it is an organizational point.
- Choose the skills that are most missing or thwarting progress and develop a task analysis, teaching the student in a step-wise fashion.
- Use organization as a theme, showing organizations and systems -- engines, plants, solar system, roads/maps.
- Remember that structure can be developed through a sequence of steps that become second nature or ritualized. It helps to do that with learning behaviors.
- Students who are mildly MR or have some symptoms of autism will respond best to organized, ritualized classroom that are predictable and help them feel a sense of control over what will occur next.
- All students like a sense of continuity, but youngsters with behavioral and emotional disorders are able to cope and work best in predictable, structured, consistent organizational patterns.
- Appoint a class note taker -- then photocopy notes for students who need them.
- Have row captains and group facilitators who collect assignments or homework and facilitate completion within the group.



## Family problems

Evidence that student is actually the adult in the home:



Student seems preoccupied or unfocused while at school.



Peer community building and friendships are severely limited - no time for extra activities, sports, music.



Homework is not completed, or hurriedly rushed through during other classes.



Siblings are a major part of thinking and planning, with more of a protective role occurring.



The student asks obtuse questions that suggest s/he is struggling with something that feels private and too big to deal with alone.



Absences are common, preceding the change in focus and lack of attention to school.



For children who have chronic problems, expect to see them do much better during the week and to be highly distracted and unhappy on Mondays and Fridays.



Remember back to a family crisis in your own life. It may have been the death of a sibling, a time your parents discussed divorce or a long trip when you were going to be left behind. Perhaps it was when you al were going to move away from your cherished home. Everything comes out of focus. Suddenly the things that seemed important became tiny and unimportant.

If you have no example in your life, the way the USA responded to the Twin Towers on 9/11 would be similar. We all stopped what we were doing in shock. We revisited beliefs, fears, hurts, felt despair and suffered, though we were a continent away.



## Solutions

- Build a sense of safety for the youngster, separating school / work from home.
- Make accommodations in each activity that asks for parent participation, allowing the student to find alternatives to family participation --- and that includes youngsters who may not have a father on father/son activities or after school activities where some parents volunteer. They may be able to get another teacher to stand in, the principal, a member of the school board, etc.
- Develop a list of community resources so you can provide a referral if asked or when appropriate.
- Model positive, upbeat attitude in approaching problems and issues.
- Get school counseling for the youngster if possible.
- Teach students about resilience and honor daily acts of courage, self control.
- Remember to review the rules about referrals to CPS or Child Welfare when abuse or neglect are suspected.
- Talk with the nurse or secretary of the school to increase clarity about home issues. They often are a repository of community history and family dynamics for generations. Remember last year's teacher for this, too.
- Help the child determine boundaries about what they want to share and who they can share it with, since the feelings will be strong and surface frequently.
- Find outlets for emotional overloads so the student can ventilate, soothe self, regain composure rather than ignoring or denying the pain and sorrow.
- Talk with teachers who have siblings so support is broad based --- and sibling support and community building can be helpful when families are in distress, suffering from calamity, facing separation, unsettled.



## Illness

Evidence that student is suffering from illness:



Student is frequently absent or tardy.



Stamina is missing -- head down, heavy breathing, skin color is "grayish" with bags under eyes, glazed look to eyes, lack of pupils tracking, no energy to engage in horse play.



Willing self to start an activity seems like a major task with lots of lethargy, may doze during class, nod during lectures, even while taking notes.



Major change in weight in a short time or change in appetite.



Coughing, wheezing, constant need for water, dizzy spells when stand up, shaky hands.



Student complains of muscle weakness, feeling sick, experiencing pain, frequent headaches.



Remember a time when you were really ill or felt weak and uncertain about your health. If you seldom have health issues, go for two days without eating and sleeping, then try to go about all daily activities as if nothing is wrong. Some children suffer chronic pain and somehow manage to keep going. Poor health robs us of vitality, motivation, interest in life, even self esteem. Empathy is a strong support for those who are ill.












## Solutions

- Provide prophylactic needs for student comfort willingly and with respect
- Set up a home calling system for times when the student is out of school at the hospital or bed-ridden.
- Use the illness to teach more about health and disease issues, letting the student and family or health care providers explain how to understand and support the student an illness.
- Let parents know about concerns and progress of symptoms at least monthly
- Listen to requests to see the nurse and stay in touch with health care professionals
- If concerned, make sure parents or health professionals are contacted. Many times it is the teacher who first recognizes health issues and can get relief for the student through vigilance and concern. It is not uncommon for the teacher to be the first to see evidence that suggests seizures or a tumor in a student.
- Remind students of basic hygiene, and increase hand washing, use of tissues and covering mouths during flu season and increase in colds and communicable diseases
- Model care for boundaries and minimize sharing of drinks, food, containers in common.
- If a student has a chronic disease, allow them to share their needs and expectations with others in the class, including history of the illness, focus on those who overcome or learn to live with the condition, and consider bringing in an adult role model who has coped successfully with the disease.
- Consider counseling for grief and loss. . . and Kubler-Ross material on death and dying can be applicable. Those stages are often present during loss of health. . . **denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance** .
- Empathy, empathy, empathy and remember to add joy, love and hope to the life of the child. Humor also helps.
- Many children need nutritional support when ill. Be open to allowing healthy snacks, even providing them.



## Emotional Disability

Evidence that student may be unable to visualize reality as we expect:

-  Student seems unable to see or attend to the needs of anyone but self.
-  Constant state of arousal with respect to safety or feeling "out of control" or being controlled by others outside of self; may express rage when someone takes more control than usual.
-  May be hypersensitive about self and insensitive to the needs of others.
-  Ritualizing with panic when organization changes.
-  Repeats statements with a sense of agitation -- "We didn't have fourth hour;" "I'm not going to eat that...you can't make me eat that" ...etc.
-  Quick bursts of rage with no real triggers, and unable to self soothe or respond appropriately.
-  It takes an extraordinary length of time to calm self after arousal.
-  Lack zest for life, may speak of death, killing self, deep sadness
-  Watch for youngsters who **internalize** -- have turned their unhappiness and emotional neediness to the inside. They may be withdrawn, quiet, unable to express their unhappiness, suffer from eating disorders, inability to care for themselves appropriately, frequent absences and many instances of blank stares, flat affect, unfocused presence.



Remember finding out that the serial killers who were most dangerous lived next door to people who did not even know there was anything wrong? The most dangerously ill people do not show it. We all have times when we are healthier and less well, emotionally. It is a dimmer switch instead of "on" and "off". There are also things in one culture or a role for one member in a community that is not accepted in another community or culture. Helping requires seeing the person first and worrisome or odd things as symptoms that the student needs us instead of frightening ourselves.



## Solutions

- Learn about different kinds of special emotional needs.
- Work assiduously to **not** blame family, home, drugs. Support, not labeling or blaming is needed and it is not important to know how things got to the place that the student is upset, only that we find a way to help the student feel safe and able to grow.
- Consistency is vital, with predictable routines, consistent procedures, posted and mutually developed rules.
- Sense of safety is the precursor to emotional growth, so increase structure, allowing students to feel sure of what is coming next. It will decrease anxiety and help students feel that they will get help to stay safe and maintain self control.
- Foster positive teacher-student relationships with value for the being of the youth foremost in interactions.
- Increase pro-active student rapport with the aim of a cooperative and positive learning community.
- Teach self monitoring, self control and work toward democratic interactions.
- Decrease competitive activities and minimize opportunities for power struggles or control issues.
- Teach pro-social interaction and communication skills.
- Assess students for strengths and individualize expectations to maximize support for each student.