

EMOTIONAL RECOGNITION & REGULATION HANDOUT

EXERCISES FOR YOUNGER CLIENTS

THE FEELING EXERCISE

Collect a number of interesting objects such as feathers, putty, stones, or anything else that might be interesting to hold. Give each child an object and ask them to spend a minute just noticing what it feels like in their hand. They can feel the texture, if their object is hard or soft, and the shape. Afterwards, ask the children to describe what they felt. With bigger groups, pair children off to take turns completing the exercise together.

THE SEEING GAME

Ask the children to spend one minute silently looking around the room. Their goal is to find things in the room that they've never noticed. Maybe there are some big things like a poster or a picture, or just little details like cracks in the ceiling or an interesting pattern on the door. After the minute is up ask the kids to share the most interesting new things they noticed.

THE FIVE SENSES EXERCISE

Take the children outside if the weather is nice and have them lie silently in the grass. Begin to call out each of the five senses in turn (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch), and ask the children to notice everything they can with that particular sense, until you call out the next one. This exercise can also work well on walks, and in a number of other situations.

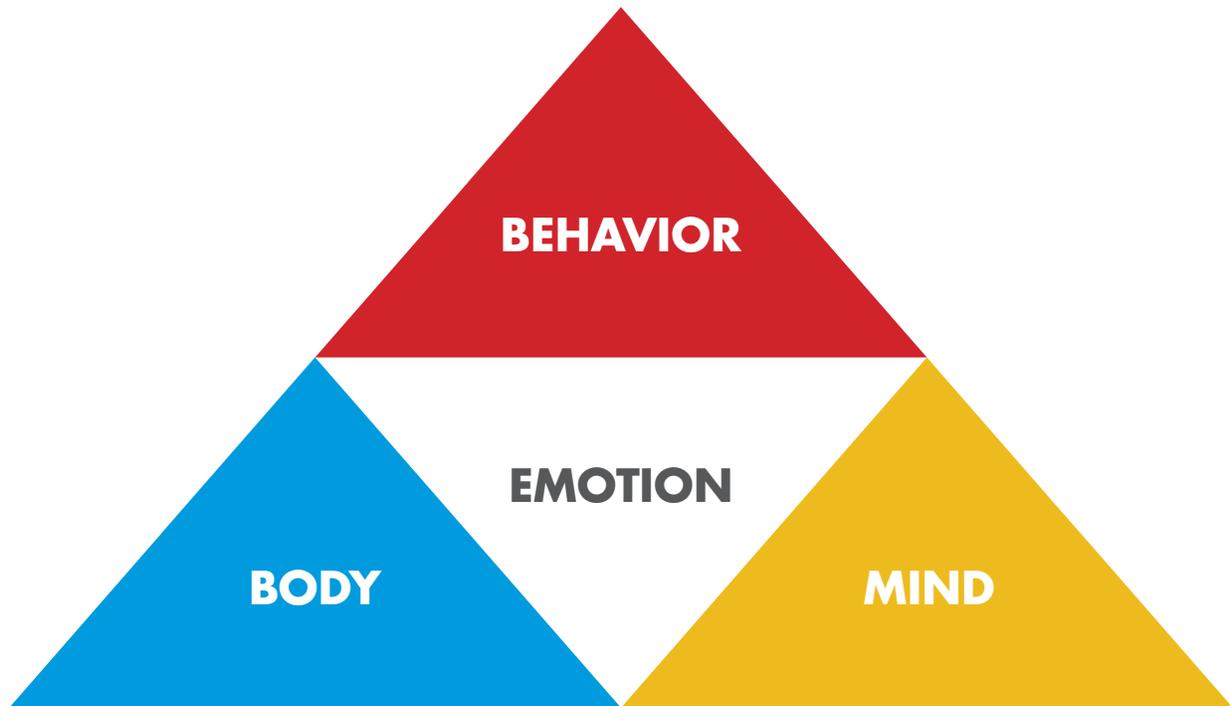
OCEAN BREATHING

Have the children sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Ask everyone to slowly breathe in through their nose, and then out through their pursed lips (as if they are blowing through a straw). Point out that the slow and steady breathing sounds like ocean waves, gently crashing on shore. Let the children continue breathing and making the ocean sound for one to two minutes.

THE POWER OF LISTENING

Ring a bell, a wind chime, or anything else that creates a long trailing sound. Ask each child to listen, and silently raise their hand when they can no longer hear the sound. After the ringing ends, ask the children to continue listening to any other sounds they can hear for the next minute. When the minute ends, go around the room asking everyone to tell you what sounds they heard.

Emotions are a big part of everyone’s life. Some emotions are easy to deal with, while others are more intense and difficult to manage. To start successfully managing our emotions in healthy ways it is helpful to understand what emotions are. Emotions serve a purpose and are designed to give us information, called **emotional messages**. These messages usually get to us in three different ways: 1) our body (physical sensations), 2) our minds (thoughts, memories, imagination) and, 3) our behavior (urges and actions). This is called the **Emotional Triangle**.



Look for clues in these three areas to identify the specific emotion you are feeling:

EMOTION	MIND	BODY	BEHAVIOR
FEAR	Thoughts race, imagine the worst, mind goes blank	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, breathing heavy	Fight, flight or freeze
ANGER/ IRRITABILITY	Thoughts race, imagine the worst, mind goes blank	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, breathing heavy, face gets hot	Confront, fight, yell
SADNESS	Thoughts slowed, think in circles, focused on the negative	Heavy, empty, numb, tired	Withdraw
GUILT	Critical focus on self and others’ opinion of self	Sweating, heart races, muscles tense, sick to stomach, breathing heavy, empty, numb, tired	Hide
HAPPINESS/ JOY	Thinking fast, focused on the positive	Energized, bubbly	Approach
CONTENTMENT	Focused on the moment (Mindful)	Calm and relaxed	Stay

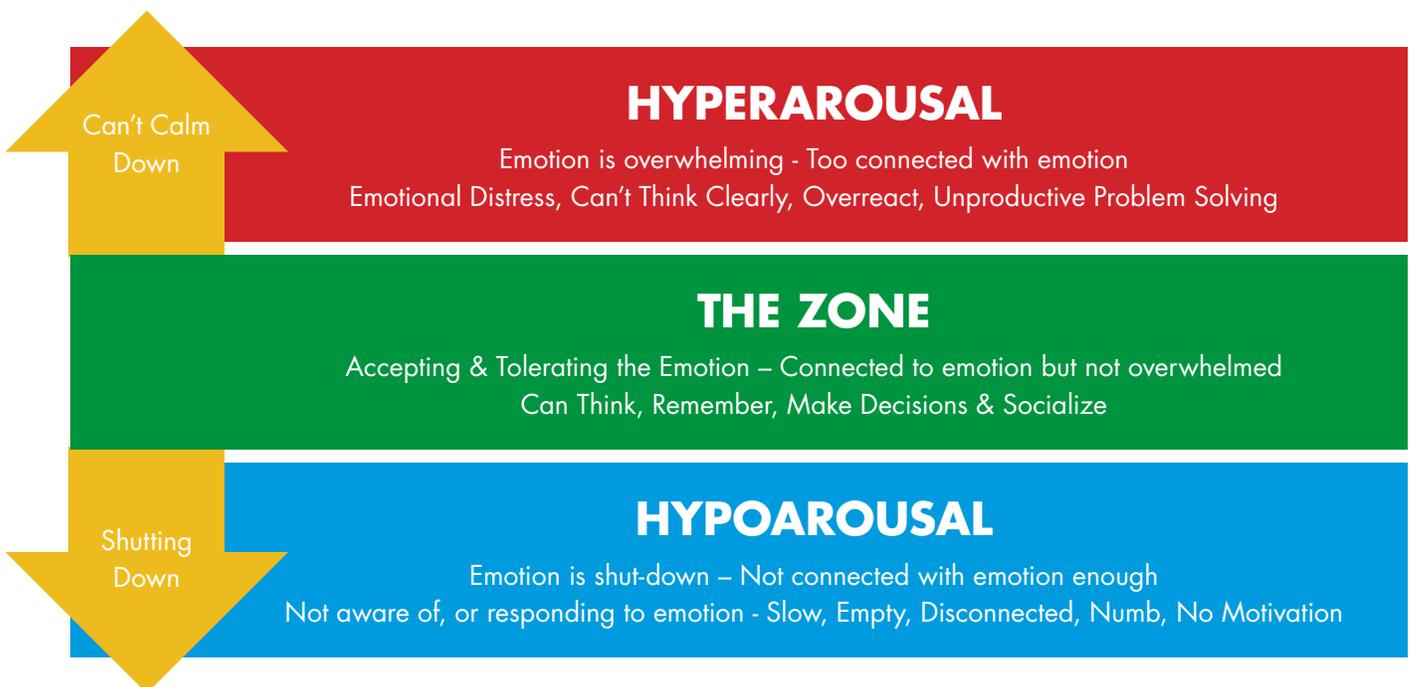
BRAIN INJURY & EMOTIONS

People with a brain injury can be left with changes in emotional reaction and behavior that they did not experience before. A brain injury can change the way people feel and express emotions, as well as increase and intensify emotional triggers. Some people may experience emotions very quickly and intensely but with very little lasting effect. For example, they may get angry easily but get over it quickly. Or they may seem to be “on an emotional roller coaster” in which they are happy one moment, sad the next and then angry. This is called **emotional lability**. Mood swings and emotional lability are often caused by damage to the part of the brain that controls emotions and behavior. In some cases, the brain injury can cause emotional reactions or outbursts that may not have any relationship to the way the person feels.



RECOGNIZING & MANAGING EMOTIONS

Learning to recognize and label triggers and emotions will help reduce unwanted emotional reactions. A Useful way to think about how we experience and manage emotions is through the **Zone of Tolerance**, which represents the comfort levels at which we can manage our emotions. When we are on the edge of our “zone” we are **emotionally vulnerable**. When we struggle to stay in our zone, managing simple things in life can also become a struggle, mainly because we get stuck in emotional reactions that have worked for us in the past.



MY EMOTIONAL REGULATION PLAN

NAME: _____ **DATE:** _____

SITUATIONS/TRIGGERS: When these things happen, I am more likely to feel unsafe and upset (circle all that apply)			
Not being listened to	Feeling pressured	Being touched	People yelling
Feeling lonely	Feeling left out	Being stared at	Teasing
Not having a say	Particular class/subject	Not understanding work	Argument
Particular time of day	Contact with:	Other:	Other:

WARNING SIGNS: These are things I notice when I am put in that situation (circle all that apply)			
Sweating	Red and/or hot face	Acting & feeling hyper	Being rude
Sing/hum	Breathing heavy	Wringing hands	Swearing
Pacing	Becoming very quiet	Loud voice	Bouncing legs
Squatting	Damage things	Hurt	Isolating/avoiding others
Crying	Hygiene issues	Clenching teeth	Rocking
Hit someone	Leave the room	Throw things	Hurt others

**Plan derived from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.*

MY ACTION PLAN

POSSIBLE WAYS TO RESPOND TO THE SITUATION AND MY FEELINGS: These are things that might help me calm down and keep myself safe when I'm feeling upset (circle all that apply)			
Being around other people	Listening to/writing music	Hugging person/pillow	Sitting/talking with support person
Pacing in private	Coloring/drawing	Reading a book	Singing softly
Exercise/using the gym	A cold splash of water	Writing in a journal	Punching a pillow
Humor	Bouncing a ball	lying down	Singing softly
Time to myself	Fidgeting	Deep breathing	Telling myself to relax

When _____ happens,

I feel _____ and that's ok!

When I feel _____

I will use my strategies of _____

Other ideas about what to do when feeling emotional outburst or mood swings:

**Plan derived from Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.*