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**Supporting Emotion Regulation in a Large Infant Classroom**

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requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Research in Practice)*

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

**Supervised by: Aoife Titley**

## **Declaration of Authenticity**



### **Declaration**

I certify that this research, submitted for the degree of Master of Education, Maynooth University, is entirely my own work, has not been taken from the work of others and has not been submitted in any other university. The work of others, to an extent, has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Date: 9<sup>th</sup> September 2022

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**A.L.A.C.T.** – Action, Looking- back, Awareness, Creating alternatives, Trial

**C.A.S.E.L.** – Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning

**C.E.R.Q.** – Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire

**C.T.E.E.** – Causal Talk in the context of Emotional Experience

**D.C.Y.A.** – Department of Children and Youth Affairs

**D.D.L.P.** – Deputy Designated Liaison Person

**D.L.P.** – Designated Liaison Person

**E.C.** – Effortful Control

**E.F.** – Executive Function

**E.R.** – Emotion Regulation

**G.D.P.R.** – General Data Protection Regulation

**I.Y.** – Incredible Years

**N.E.P.S.** – National Educational Psychological Service

**P.A.R.** – Participatory Action Research

**S.E.L.** – Social and Emotional Learning

**S.P.H.E.** – Social, Personal and Health Education

**U.N.I.C.E.F.** – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

## **Abstract**

For the purpose of this study, my key question was “How can I as a primary school teacher support children with emotion regulation through the use of effective strategies in a large infant classroom?”. While previously working as part of the Special Education Team in my school, I observed children experiencing difficulties in managing and controlling intense emotions. This became increasingly evident during the house isolation periods amid the Covid-19 lockdowns, as observed by parents during check-in phone calls. I felt that as a teacher I was not adequately equipped with the necessary strategies to support the children.

I began by researching literature on emotion regulation and observed a significant gap, specifically around supporting such a young age group of children within the classroom environment. I decided to choose action research as my chosen research paradigm because the focus lay primarily on improving teaching and enhancing learning, rather than fixing an issue. I could examine my individual practice while engaging in critical reflection, with my values of inclusion, care, and empathy at the epicentre of my research. I introduced the children to a range of highly researched intervention strategies.

I discovered that emotion regulation is a life skill. My findings explored four central themes comprising of a safe space, key influencers of emotion regulation, pupil identity and autonomy and the power of reflection and mindfulness. A ‘safe space’ is vital to ensure that the children can develop their emotion regulation in a secure environment. Both parents and teachers represent highly influential figures who have a significant influence over the development of children’s emotion regulation. Children should differentiate between their individual identity and their state of emotion, and autonomously select emotion regulation strategies that work best for them. Lastly, critical reflection and mindfulness can have a substantial impact on enabling children to emotionally regulate through reflection by consciously acknowledging and accepting one’s emotions.

This research resulted in transformational change to both my personal self as an individual and my professional self as a teacher. My teaching practices have changed, my relationship with the parents and the children in my class have been strengthened and my own emotion regulation has progressed. Emotion regulation is an essential life skill and therefore, as educators we need more research carried out in this area, particularly with young children within the educational context, to adequately support the children in our classrooms.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### ***1.1 Introduction***

This thesis presents a reflective account of the learning journey I undertook to support the children with emotion regulation in my large infant classroom. By adopting action research as a self-study paradigm, I was enabled to explore and enhance my own individual practice as a teacher while effectively supporting the children in my class. My knowledge and expertise around emotion regulation and emotion regulation strategies evolved through engagement with relevant literature and implementation of research interventions. I began to see the significance of my values of inclusion, care and empathy within my research and their influence on the children and our relationship.

In this introductory chapter I will begin by exploring the contextual background around the significant influence of emotion regulation. I will continue by outlining my focus and aim of this research study and explain why I chose action research as my research paradigm. I will then examine the values I upheld at the epicentre of my research. I will conclude this chapter by outlining the overall structure of the remainder of this thesis.



### ***1.2 Contextual Background: The Influence of Emotion Regulation***

Ongoing concerns around mental health continue to permeate societal discussions and government agendas. One distinct factor in maintaining positive mental health is the ability to regulate overwhelming and intense emotions. “Emotion regulation stands out among candidate mechanisms in light of its association with both childhood adversity and psychopathology” (Miu, et al., 2022, p. 1). Some recent studies have explored a link between difficulties around emotion regulation and the beginning or worsening of psychopathology or mental health disorders.

“Many individuals respond to these challenges by strengthening and refining their E.R. (*Emotion Regulation*) skills, but for some, adolescence is marked by emergent or worsening difficulties with E.R. and associated psychopathology” (Silvers, 2022, p. 258). The strategies that individuals use to moderate these affective states and overcome emotive challenges, can evolve over time, across contexts, and be dependent on whether a situation is positive or negative. “Moreover, these fluctuating emotion regulation strategies may have important consequences for people’s well-being” (Newman & Nezlek, 2021, p. 1). Emotion regulation as a life skill can have a substantial impact on a person’s mental health and well-being.

### ***1.3 Focus and Aim of my Research***

This concern around mental health and its intricate link to emotion regulation, played a significant role in my inspiration to carry out this research project.

The research question I explored was “How can I as a primary school teacher support children with emotion regulation through the use of effective strategies in a large infant classroom?”.

I felt that as a teacher I was not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to support the children with emotion regulation in my class. My central aim was to identify and implement effective strategies to support the children with regulating their emotions. I also hoped to adopt a selection of these strategies to enable the children to self-regulate their emotions independently.

#### ***1.4 Self-Study Action Research***

My chosen methodology for this research was research in practice through self-study action research. According to Bassey (2002) there are three paradigms of action research comprising of the positivist research paradigm, the interpretive research paradigm, and the action research paradigm. “To the positivist the world is rational, it makes sense, and given sufficient time and effort, it should be possible for it to be understood through patient research” (Bassey, 2002, p. 37). While the positivist approach can be used by educators, it requires quantitative data and does not allow for reflection of practice. Therefore, it would not be a suitable paradigm to use to explore my research question.

“Interpretive researchers reject the positivists view that the social world can be understood in terms of casual relationships expressed in universal generalizations. To them human actions are based on social meanings, such as beliefs and intentions” (Bassey, 2002, p. 38). The aim of an interpretive researcher is to interpret their surroundings and attempt to reach an explanation for phenomena through collaboration with others. They believe that individuals and events are unique and cannot be subject to generalisation. Although the interpretivist paradigm is beneficial, the primary focus remains on reaching definitive interpretations while attempting to gather a more definitive understanding.

Both the positivist and interpretive paradigms are mainly technicist where the primary focus is to understand, rather than to question or transform phenomena. Therefore, both positivist and interpretivist paradigms would not be suitable for my chosen research project.

“The action research paradigm is about actors trying to improve the phenomena of their surroundings” (Bassey, 2002, pp. 38-39). Action research allows for greater autonomy. It involves the researcher ‘taking action’ with the primary aim of improvement or enhancement of existing practices. “You are aiming to show a development of influence, an unfolding of new understandings and actions from people working together in new ways, and their influence on one another, that is, how they learn with and from one another” (McNiff, 2002, pp. 18-19). It allows for a collaborative approach where all participant views can be incorporated.

Action research enables us as practitioners to reflect on our practices and identify aspects of our work that we would like to improve. As teachers, we are instinctively and continually enhancing our practices and developing new ideas to improve both our teaching and learning in the classroom. It is almost an innate attribute of an educator to question casual assumptions in education and critically reflect on hegemonic practices.

“But action research goes beyond the notion that theory can inform practice, to a recognition that theory can and should be generated through practice, and, as the earlier discussion of values would suggest, that theory is really only useful insofar as it is put in the service of a practice focused on achieving positive social change” (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003, p. 15).

### ***1.5 My Values: Inclusion, Care and Empathy***

“Action research begins with values. As a self-reflective practitioner you need to be aware of what drives your life and work, so you can be clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it” (McNiff, 2002, p. 13).

Values can be defined as guiding principles for how we live our everyday lives. They underpin our individual thoughts and subsequent actions. At the very beginning of this master’s course, we were encouraged to examine our individual values. Initially, I found this task quite challenging as I viewed all values as significant and struggled to identify my core values. However, through critical engagement in my reflection journal and examination of my inward self, my core values came to the forefront. I found that the values of inclusion, care and empathy permeated not just my identity as a teacher but also my individual identity as a person. “Values can evolve from different perspectives, the main categories being educational, ontological and epistemological” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 3).

Educational values emerge from our individual approach to teaching, pedagogy, and the curriculum. “Educational values can be identified through naming the things you value around education, such as inclusion, social justice and democracy” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 3). It is my belief that every child has the right to have equal access to opportunities, and that it is our duty as educators, to give children the supports necessary to enable them to achieve success and develop towards their full potential. I hope to encourage the children to adopt my value of inclusion by embracing all others irrespective of race, gender, disability, or additional need, thereby removing barriers of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination.

Ontology refers to our sense of identity and our relationships with other beings. “Ontological values stem from one’s way of being in the world and can permeate our relationships with fellow human beings...” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 3). I care about each individual child in my class and strive to create a safe and welcoming learning environment where they feel important and cared for. Noddings (1995) outlines that no child will ever achieve success unless they feel that are being cared for and that they also possess the ability to care for others. Empathy coincides with this value of care in the capacity to understand how another person is feeling and the ability to consider situations from an alternative point of view. As a teacher, I empathise with children who experience difficulties and adapt my teaching methods and classroom environment to support their individual needs.

Epistemological values embrace a theory of knowing and the generation or origin of knowledge.

“Epistemological values are determined by our view of knowledge: if we believe that knowledge is power, then our values around knowledge will not view it as a package to be delivered uncritically to students, but as something that can be co-created in a reciprocal relationship that values knowledge contribution of our students” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 3).

Dewey (1938) emphasised this idea of socially constructed learning, which is a key approach in the development of emotion regulation. He believed that schools should be a representation of real-life situations where children participate in learning through social interactions with others. “Our net result thus far is that social environments form the mental and emotional disposition of behaviour in individuals by engaging them in activities that arouse and strengthen certain impulses...” (Dewey & Hinchey, 2018, p. 20). I adopted this socially constructed learning approach in my research activities.

In conducting my research around emotion regulation and effective strategies, my educational, ontological, and epistemological values lay at the heart of this self-study, guiding my research ideas, plans and activities.

## ***1.6 Chapter Outline***

*Chapter One* has outlined an introduction to my thesis. I have explored my rationale for undertaking this research and the aims of my research study. I have outlined action research as my chosen research paradigm. I have also discussed my values of inclusion, care and empathy, which were central to this research.

*Chapter Two* will explore my critical engagement with the literature surrounding my chosen research topic of emotion regulation. I will examine the concept of emotion and explore definitions of emotion regulation. I will discuss ‘The Process Model’ presented by Gross (2007), a key theorist in this field, which represents a defining pillar in emotion regulation research. Two types of emotion regulation will be outlined and the embedded link it has with self-regulation. Early childhood as an influential factor in the development of emotion regulation will be explored, including influential figures comprising of parents and teachers. Social and emotional learning programmes such as ‘The Incredible Years Programme’ will be examined and a range of researched emotion regulation strategies will be explored.

*Chapter Three* examines my chosen research methodology and justification of action research as my chosen paradigm. I will describe my intervention approach, the data cycles and the various data collection instruments used. I will outline some ethical considerations I undertook. I will also explore triangulation of data and coding of the data.

*Chapter Four* details an analysis of the data gathered over the course of this research project. The findings will be explored in the context of four central themes:

- 1 A Safe Space
- 2 Key Influencers of Emotion Regulation
- 3 Pupil Identity and Autonomy
- 4 Power of Reflection and Mindfulness

*Chapter Five* completes this thesis by presenting a summary of the research findings, the limitations of this study and my recommendations concerning practice, policy, and future research. I will conclude my thesis with my own personal reflection.



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Introduction***

“Action enquiries begin with an individual’s question, ‘How do I improve my work?’” (McNiff, 2002, p. 9). My self-study action research project aims to explore the following research question: “How can I as a primary school teacher implement effective strategies to support children with emotion regulation in a large infant classroom?”. This chapter reviews a wide range of literature based on emotion regulation. I have outlined key themes to present my findings.

Firstly, I will define the concept of emotion and acquire a clear definition of emotion regulation. Secondly, I will explore the two types of emotion regulation i.e., intrinsic, and extrinsic. Thirdly, I will examine the ‘Process Model’ by key theorist Gross (2007). Then, I will detail how early childhood represents a key development stage of emotion regulation in a child’s life, where both parents and teachers play a significant role. Next, I will outline the concept of social and emotional learning and the use of programmes such as ‘The Incredible Years Programme’. Lastly, I will describe various emotion regulation strategies, including the use of causal talk, mindfulness, and visual aids. Within these themes, my core values and my methodology of action research remain at the heart of this review.

## ***2.2 Definition of Emotion Regulation***

“Basically, emotions can be seen as the biological reactions that arise when a situation is appraised as presenting important opportunities or challenges and co-ordinate our responding to important environmental events” (Garnefski, et al., 2002, p. 403).

Emotions play a monumental role in everyday life and can have a significant influence on both our thoughts and our actions. “Emotions – positive or negative – influence the way we perceive, learn, remember, and reason” (Pennequin, et al., 2020, p. 1). Emotion regulation is necessary to cope with influxes of both negative and positive emotions.

“Because emotions are influential in how an individual thinks, feels and behaves, it is crucial to manage and regulate them; a lack of emotional regulation leads to excessive, inappropriate and insufficient responses to environmental and situational demands” (Coskun, 2019, p. 764).

One of the earliest definitions of emotion regulation came from theorist James J. Gross. “Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (Gross, 1998, p. 275). Ogelman and Onder (2019) explore various definitions of emotion regulation outlined by theorists including Rossouw (2011) and Thompson (1994). “Emotional regulation is the ability of defining our emotions and other people’s emotions properly and reacting to situations in a socially acceptable way” (Ogelman & Onder, 2021, pp. 221-222).

Ogelman and Onder (2019) also examined how Thompson (1994) viewed emotion regulation as both an internal and external process, containing three aspects comprising of regulation, assessment, and reflection. This interpretation begins with the regulation of the emotion both internally in our cognitive thoughts and externally through our body language

and physical actions. Assessment refers to how we assess the current situation which evoked this emotional response and view it from a calm and reasonable perspective. The final step is reflection where an individual reflects on the emotional experience and acquires new learning, based on their internal and external emotional regulatory response, irrespective of that response being positive or negative. Dennis (2006) outlines the components of emotion regulation explored by Denham et.al (1998). “It reflects the ability to initiate behavioural and emotional changes during emotionally charged situations in order to meet goals and manage arousal and predicts current and later adjustment” (Dennis, 2006, p. 84) This definition has many similar components to the three-step process explored by Thompson (1994).

The definition I will be applying in my dissertation is the following:

“Emotion-related self-regulation (henceforth sometimes called emotion-related regulation or emotion regulation for brevity) refers to processes used to manage and change if, when, and how (e.g., how intensely) one experiences emotions and emotion-related motivational and physiological states, as well as how emotions are expressed behaviourally” (Eisenberg, et al., 2007, p. 288).

I decided to focus on this definition as I felt it supported most of the aspects in reference to emotion regulation explored by other theorists mentioned above. It is imperative to acknowledge that emotion regulation involves both internal and external components. It is also important to recognise the influence that our emotional state can have on our behaviours. Regulating these emotions involves a process of modification to the expression of emotions with regards to intensity, timing and the medium or methodology used to regulate these influential emotional states.

### ***2.3 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Emotion Regulation***

“On its own, the phrase ‘emotion regulation’ is crucially ambiguous, as it might refer equally well to how emotions regulate something else, such as thoughts, physiology, or behaviour (regulation by emotions) or to how emotions are themselves regulated (regulation of emotions)” (Gross, 2013, p. 7).

I believe that Gross is attempting to clarify that emotion regulation is grounded in a philosophy of managing the emotion experienced by the individual such as anger, rather than allowing the emotion of anger to dominate your responding thoughts and actions. A clear distinction is made between regulation by emotions and regulation of emotions.

“Intrinsic E.R. (*Emotion Regulation*) refers to an individual regulating their own emotions (i.e., self-regulatory processes), while extrinsic E.R. refers to an individual regulating someone else’s emotions (e.g., a parent regulating the emotions of an infant by soothing her)” (Gagne, et al., 2021, p. 1). Intrinsic emotion regulation is primarily grounded in the regulation of emotions coinciding with the distinction made by Gross (2013) between the regulation of emotions rather than regulation by emotions. Extrinsic emotion regulation examines the role of caregivers in emotion regulation which we will explore later in the chapter, with reference to both parents and educators.

Within this construct of intrinsic and extrinsic emotion regulation, many theorists including Liew (2012) and Sulik et al. (2016), refer to two perspectives including effortful control and executive function.

“Effortful control is temperament-based and refers to voluntary control over approach (activation) or withdrawal (inhibition) behavioural tendencies via attentional (shifting and focusing) and inhibitory control mechanism” (Liew, 2012, p. 106) .

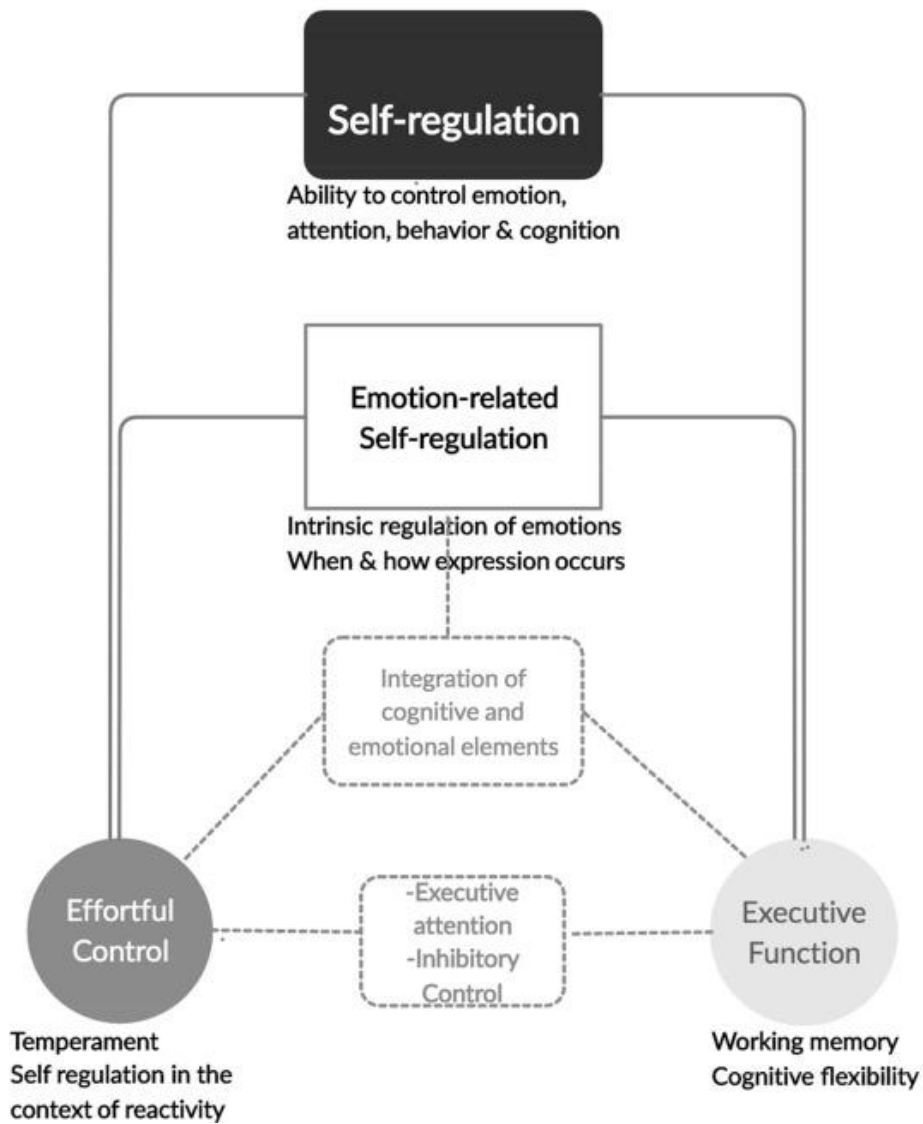
Effortful control concerns a regulation of natural or primary responses to initiate a secondary response which is more favourable to the individual. It includes both aspects of temperament and reactivity. Rothbart et al. (2011) refer to temperament as individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation. Reactivity is a broader construct comprising of impulsivity and behavioural inhibition which are primarily involuntary based. “Through EC (*Effortful Control*), individuals are not simply reacting to their environments or subservient to their impulses or emotions. Instead, the use of EC enables young children to think and act in ways that are mindful, planful or strategic” (Gagne, et al., 2021, p. 4).

“E.F. (*Executive Function*) is generally recognised as an important but ill-understood umbrella term for a diverse set of “higher cognitive processes”, including (but not limited to) planning, working memory, set shifting, error detection and correction, and the inhibitory control of prepotent responses” (Zelazo & Cunningham, 2007, p. 136).

These cognitive abilities are referred to as a set of early developmental skills by Diamond (2016) which enable us to concentrate and focus, resist temptation, and organise plans. In early childhood inhibitory control and working memory are two central executive functions which are being developed. Working memory refers to the rules or instructions we cognitively contemplate to inhibit potentially damaging or negative emotional impulses. Inhibitory control is our ability to inhibit these counterintuitive distractions to achieve the desired target behaviour. Both skills within the executive function construct, contribute to emotion regulation.

Executive function and effortful control play a central role in emotion regulation. “It should be apparent that effortful control and executive functions partially overlap conceptually, because attentional and inhibitory control mechanisms are central self-regulatory processes to both constructs” (Liew, 2012, p. 106). These two aspects highlight the integration between cognition and emotion in the process of regulating emotions. “Thus, EC and EF processes are connected to and support one another, and jointly operate to regulate emotions or reactivity” (Gagne, et al., 2021, p. 5). Zelazo and Cunningham (2007) have designed an emotion-cognition model which has been adapted by Gagne et al. (2021) (*see Figure 2.1 below*) to demonstrate how effortful control and executive function can overlap in the regulation of emotions.

Tree Diagram of Self-regulation and Emotion-related Self-regulation

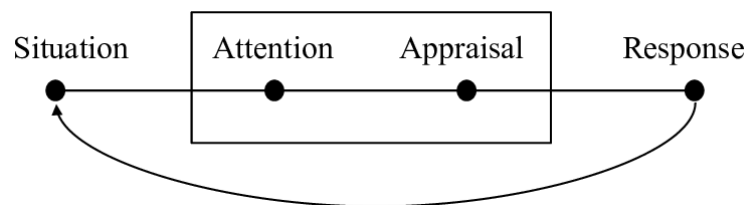


*Figure 2.1 Diagram of the Relationship between Self-regulation, Effortful Control, Executive Function and Emotion-related Self-Regulation (Taken from Gagne et al., 2021)*

## 2.4 Gross Process Model of Emotion Regulation

The Gross Process Model of Emotion Regulation is a defining pillar in the study of emotion regulation strategies.

“The process model is based on the modal model of emotion, which specifies four sequential steps involved in emotion generation: (a) an emotional situation arises; (b) attention is directed towards the situation; (c) an appraisal of the situation is formed; and finally (d) an emotional response to the situation is generated” (Kalokerinos, et al., 2017, p. 450).



*Figure 2.2 The “Modal Model of Emotion” Gross and Thompson (2007)*

Within this model, Gross and Thompson (2007) explored five emotion regulation strategies comprising of situation modification, reappraisal, distraction, rumination, and expressive suppression. The theory was that individuals would implement these strategies at a point where they would have an impact on the emotion. Following this theory, the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (C.E.R.Q.) identified nine conscious cognitive emotion regulation strategies: “self-blame, other-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, putting into perspective, positive refocusing, positive reappraisal, acceptance and planning” (Garnefski, et al., 2007, p. 2). These adaptive strategies can be divided into two categories as antecedent-focused reappraisal strategies and response-focused suppression strategies.



“The first will help a person avoid a full-blown emotion, whereas a response-focused E.R. is needed when an emotion has already been elicited” (Braet, et al., 2014, p. 494).

Reappraisal strategies refer to a cognitive change in the reinterpretation of a situation. It involves adapting a cognitive or emotional state through methods such as problem-solving, to perceive a situation from a more positive stance. Suppression strategies include ‘emotional suppression’ which I will explore later in this chapter, with regards to the role of teachers. Suppression strategies involves a modification of response where an individual chooses not to display an expressive response of an internal emotional state e.g., suppressing a facial expression or an emotional outburst.

### ***2.5 Emotion Regulation and Self-regulation***

The definition which I have adopted to define emotion regulation in my studies, includes the executive function and effortful control perspectives of emotion-related self-regulation. Eisenberg, Spinrad, and Eggum (2010) emphasise how self-regulation involves these intrinsic processes of emotion regulation where there is conscious, voluntary control of emotions, and corresponding internal and external reactions to emotional experiences.

“Self-regulation generally refers to the capacities of controlling or directing one’s attention, thoughts, emotions and actions” (McClelland & Cameron, 2012, p. 136). Emotional competence and the ability to manage one’s emotions lies at the heart of self-regulation.

“Moreover, research has demonstrated that self-regulation... is closely related to emotional competence, since children use the skills of emotional competence to regulate themselves” (Housman, 2017, pp. 3-4). Blair and Diamond (2021) support this ideology where emotions are intrinsically linked with our corresponding thoughts and behaviours.

However, in a study by Efklides (2011) the role of emotions and the regulation of emotions, in correspondence with an individual's ability to achieve self-regulation, is stated as unknown and therefore, requires further study. Contradictory to Eflides (2011), N.E.P.S. (2021) include emotion regulation as a fundamental component of their definition of self-regulation. "Self-regulation is the ability to tolerate our emotions, and to understand and manage our personal responses" (N.E.P.S., 2021, p. 1). In addition to this, Gross (1999) highlights the importance of distinguishing between forms of emotion regulation.

"It has been proposed to make a distinction between the regulation of internal states themselves (and to call this emotion regulation) and the regulation of behavioural reactions associated with these internal states (and to call this behavioural regulation)" (Garnefski, et al., 2002, p. 404).

Therefore, self-regulation entails the regulation of both emotions and behaviours simultaneously. Although self-regulation is not the core component in this research, it is necessary to note its intricate link with emotion regulation.

## ***2.6 Emotion Regulation in Early Childhood***

"The foundations of emotional regulation skill are laid in the first years of life and its effect can be reflected on the coming years" (Ogelman & Onder, 2021, p. 222).

Many theorists believe that children, even at a very young age, possess the capability to regulate their emotions, primarily when given appropriate support and guidance from their caregivers. "By the time they reach the preschool age, they have often built a large repertoire of behavioural strategies to manage their own moods" (Braet, et al., 2014, p. 494). During early childhood, children are exposed to a variety of emotions and challenging experiences.

They are continuously developing independent regulatory capacities while exploring correlations between emotions, thoughts, and subsequent actions. “In early childhood, persistence during challenges, frustration tolerance, and compliance with caregiver demands are hallmarks of successful emotional self-regulation” (Dennis, 2006, p. 84). A child’s ability to regulate their emotions is a developmental process which can take a significant amount of time and guidance to flourish.

N.E.P.S. (2021) highlight the importance of adopting realistic expectations when it comes to a child’s ability to self-regulate. Some theorists also address this concern in their studies on children’s emotion self-regulation.

“It is nonetheless clear that the ability to control one’s emotions develops from an early age: the younger the child, the more limited in his or her ability to handle emotional stimulation and its physical expression” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 3).

However, even though it is important to have realistic expectations, early childhood represents a vital point in a child’s life where their ability to self-regulate and manage their emotions are being fundamentally formed.

Housman (2017) explores two phases where emotion regulation and self-regulation are developed during early childhood. The first phase occurs during infancy and toddlerhood, from birth to the age of two years old. “Within the first phase, the infant and young toddler develop the awareness and the ability to express and experience emotion within the envelope of the caregiver-child relationship” (Housman, 2017, p. 4). During this phase, the caregiver such as a parent is responsive to the emotions of the child and guides them towards defining and expressing their emotions in a supportive environment.

The second phase has a greater focus on language and cognitive development. “In the second phase, from three to 5 years, the relationship continues in this manner, but the child begins to understand and discern between and among their own emotions and those of others, as well as to deal with emotions in a regulated manner” (Housman, 2017, p. 5). Within these two phases the role of caregivers such as parents and teachers are undoubtedly influential on the child’s development of emotion regulation skills.

Murray et. al (2016) explores how research has developed specific guidelines for early childhood intervention to develop emotion and self-regulation. “Interventions should be systematic and comprehensive in targeting emotional and cognitive self-regulation together and should teach explicit strategies for their integration” (Murray, et al., 2016, p. 5). The first approach supports the ideology that cognitive regulation skills can support emotion regulation and behaviour regulation. It also emphasises the importance of imparting strategies to young children to enable them to regulate their emotions. “Caregiver co-regulation is needed to support, model, monitor, and coach these developing skills during the crucial transition from childhood to young adulthood” (Murray, et al., 2016, p. 5).

The second approach recognises the influential role of caregivers in a child’s development of emotion regulation through the process of co-regulation. “Self-regulation interventions should be provided across development and settings using a systematic and intentional approach” (Murray, et al., 2016, p. 5). The final approach affirms the importance of caregivers in modelling, reinforcing, and supporting these self-regulation skills with the child through a warm and supportive relationship. This will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

## ***2.7 Co-regulation***

“Emotional development is actually built into the architecture of young children’s brains in response to their individual personal experiences and the influences of the environments in which they live” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007, p. 1). This emotional development is greatly influenced during early interactions with the child’s primary caregiver. This stage of development is commonly referred to as co-regulation.

“This development is influenced by a primary caregiver through a process known as ‘co-regulation’, in which parents or other caregiving adults facilitate the child’s ability to understand, express and modulate their thoughts, behaviours, and feelings through support, coaching and modelling in warm, responsive interactions” (Housman, 2017, p. 4).

Caregivers comprising of both parents and teachers represent hugely influential figures in a child’s development of emotion regulation. Through acknowledgement of a child’s emotions and the subsequent action or response to the emotional experience, the caregiver is imparting strategies to the child to enable them to regulate their emotions.

“Development of self-regulation is dependent on “co-regulation” provided by parents or other caregiving adults through warm and responsive interactions in which support, coaching, and modelling are provided to facilitate a child’s ability to understand, express, and modulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour” (Murray, et al., 2015, p. 3).

Through these co-regulatory practice’s children can become better equipped to develop emotional competence and emotion regulation. It is crucial that children feel supported during co-regulation and that caregivers are there to comfort them during periods of emotional arousal.

“Supportive co-regulation is built on creating a safe and secure adult-child relationship such that children learn to trust their caregivers will help them through stressful situations and emotions” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 822). As a result of developing emotional competencies in children, caregivers are also supporting the development of appropriate emotional responses in the form of emotion regulation through the co-regulation process. “In that context, “coregulation” refers to an adult and infant together forming a dyadic emotional system and co-constructing optimal affective states during social interactions” (Butler & Randall, 2013, p. 202). Therefore, within the educational context it is vital that as caregivers, both parent and teachers, engage in effective co-regulation practices enabling the children to develop towards emotion self-regulation using supportive strategies.

## ***2.8 The Role of Parents***

“In infancy and early childhood, parenting is among the most critical external influences on child reactivity, particularly in relation to emotional self-regulation” (Dennis, 2006, pp. 84-85). It is universally acknowledged that parents play a monumental role in the development of the child. Bunreacht na hÉireann outlines parents as the primary educators of the child.

“The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children” (The Constitution of Ireland, 1937, p. Article 42.1).

As part of this educational role, it is a parent’s duty to support their child in developing the skill of emotion regulation.

“Through normal socialization, the child will observe how his attachment figures (parents) regulate their own emotions and via feedback mechanisms they further learn the contingency between different E.R. strategies and parental positive or negative responses, and this will further enhance the learning process” (Braet, et al., 2014, p. 500).

By modelling how to emotionally regulate, children acquire the emotion regulation strategies utilized by their primary caregivers including parents and/or guardians. Therefore, it is vital that as significant role models, parents adapt supportive and effective strategies to promote positive emotion regulation skills amongst their children.

“Parental approach refers to behaviours that serve to increase child reward sensitivity, such as emphasizing and anticipating rewards and positive outcomes” (Dennis, 2006, p. 85). Parental approach encourages the child to focus on the reward aspect when emotion regulation is necessary. This approach supports the development of characteristics such as persistence. “In contrast, parental avoidance refers to behaviours that serve to increase threat sensitivity, such as emphasizing and anticipating threats, problems and compromised safety” (Dennis, 2006, p. 85). Parental avoidance promotes the actions of withdrawal and elusion. This can lead to an extreme lack of perseverance, and a tendency towards distress and/or frustration during a challenging task. Both parental approach and parental avoidance are greatly influential on a child’s development of emotion regulation.

“According to Pianta (1999), this early connection between mother and infant lays the foundation for children to gain greater awareness of their emotions and slowly learn to interpret and navigate them” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 822).

When a baby is distressed, the mother instinctively uses soothing sounds including imitation and reaction to try and calm the young infant. This action represents the child’s first

experience of emotion regulation. The parental ability to soothe becomes critical in the child's capacity to recover emotional equilibrium following emotional distress. This action also creates an innate ability of the child to emotionally regulate in response to adult behaviour or actions. Johnson et al. (1991) and Tronik et al. (1978) emphasise the influential role that a parent's emotional state can have on a child and vice versa.

“Decades of research have established that from infancy onward, parent-child interaction is a two-way system where both parties are shaped by each other's emotional state and corresponding behaviours and signals” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 822).

Therefore, it is vital that parents remain aware of their own emotional regulatory strategies and the impact that their emotional states can have on their children. The approach that a parent takes to a child's emotional distress can shape the child's emotional regulatory response in terms of cognitive thoughts, physical actions, and reflective behaviours.

In their article Silkenbeumer et al. (2018) offer an interesting perspective on the use of these co-regulation strategies as detrimental to child's independent ability to self-regulate.

“...although co-regulation strategies do not directly relate to emotions, they can be effective in regulating emotions (for example, by helping a child manage the situation), these approaches do not provide children with a greater awareness of their own or other's emotions, and may not be as effective at improving children's emotional self-regulation in the long run” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 822).

It is important to note that while supporting children to emotionally regulate, the primary objective is to enable them to acquire the skill of emotion regulation and develop the ability to use this skill independently.



Controversially, Siegel (2012) notes through these shared emotional experiences with a caregiver, children develop the competence to regulate their own emotions. Hirschler-Guttenberg et al. (2015) also support the transition from parental support through co-regulation to independent emotion regulation. “Over time, the child gradually develops from nearly complete reliance on parental co-regulation towards ‘independent’ emotional self-regulation” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 822).

### ***2.9 The Role of Teachers***

“Classroom environments need to provide young children with opportunities to practice self-regulation in order to develop social and emotional competence” (Viglas & Perlman, 2018, p. 1150). Therefore, it is a teacher’s responsibility to create a safe and secure learning environment where children can experience emotional distress in a supported system. This responsibility is interlinked with my values, and I believe that the establishment of a supportive learning environment is necessary for the successful development of positive emotion regulation practices.

“Faced with children in emotional distress, it is natural that adults may also experience an undesired emotional response, such as frustration or anger. Under these circumstances, adult’s self-regulation is essential if they are to assist the child in gaining control over his emotions” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 826).

Teacher’s emotional self-awareness plays a pivotal role during co-regulation, and their response or approach to a pupil’s emotional distress. Guo et al. (2015) explore how a teacher’s regulation of their own individual emotions is the first step in the co-regulation process.

“Findings suggest that teachers were aware of the risks of their emotional reactions (e.g., anger, frustration) becoming ‘automatic’ and, in a manner, steering their behaviour. Thus, they highlighted the importance of remaining calm or ‘holding back’ their own emotions as an essential part of dealing with children’s distress” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 825).

Gillespie (2015) supports the importance of teacher’s self-awareness of their state of emotion and self-regulation practices. Gillespie (2015) further outlines that this is essential to the achievement of positive co-regulation with children.

Kostel and Cameron (2021) also refer to the significance of teacher’s emotional self-awareness. “When teachers are calm, they are in a much better position to provide support and help children manage their feelings” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 825). Teachers must regulate their own stress and emotional state to attain a calm demeanour and address the child’s emotional distress proficiently. The National Educational Psychological Service (N.E.P.S.) emphasise this practice in their guide for school staff. “Teachers who are calm and use a quiet tone of voice are more likely to promote similar behaviours and feelings in their pupils” (N.E.P.S., 2021, p. 1). The practice of remaining calm is also referred to in a professional context. Kostel and Cameron (2021) refer to teachers in their study who stated that emotional awareness was an act of professionalism. “From this perspective, teacher’s emphasis on professionalism and ‘holding back’ their emotions may reflect positive self-regulation skills that encourage children’s emotional growth” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 826). This act of ‘holding back emotions’ is an emotion regulation strategy referred to in the literature as expressive or emotional suppression.

“Expressive suppression refers to the intentional inhibition of behavioural expression of emotions (e.g., stifling laughter or maintaining a neutral facial expression when feeling angry)” (Niermeyer, et al., 2019, p. 118). This expressive suppression also results in emotional suppression. Emotional suppression can be supportive of enabling children to develop positive self-regulation of emotions. This inhibitory control response can reduce negative reactive responses to emotional distress. “Alternatively, teachers perceived need to distance themselves from their own feelings may actually limit their engagement in co-regulation with children” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 826).

By overregulating their emotions, teachers risk the potential of a detrimental impact on a child’s emotion regulation development. Teachers must remain cognisant of overregulating their emotional states and inhibiting natural emotive responses. Therefore, within this research a balance must be sought between emotional suppression of negative emotions and the emotional expression of positive emotions. It is also vital to allow children to experience an emotion and use these strategies to control the potential overwhelming effect it can have on their behaviours and actions.

### ***2.10 Social and Emotional Learning (S.E.L.)***

“S.E.L. is a process of learning core competencies to recognize and regulate emotions, set and achieve goals, take other’s perspectives into consideration, establish and maintain positive relationships with others, make better and suitable decisions, and tackle interpersonal situations constructively” (Coskun, 2019, p. 765).

Social and Emotional Learning is based on the notion of socio-emotional competence explored by Walter and Sroufe (1983). Emotion regulation is a central aspect of social and emotional learning.

This type of learning enables individuals to gather a greater understanding of their emotional states while managing and expressing affective experiences competently.

Theorists have outlined five competencies of S.E.L. “Researchers generally agree upon five key competencies of S.E.L. for school-aged children, i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making ...” (Housman, 2017, p. 2). Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (C.A.S.E.L.) also agree on these five key competencies. C.A.S.E.L. also emphasise that these skills are interconnecting through their behavioural, social, and emotional aspects.

Emotion regulation is developed as a core social emotional competency through S.E.L. Each of the five key competencies play an integral role in the emotion regulation process as emotions can greatly influence our relationships, decision-making, self-management, and social awareness. Francis and Susman (2009) reiterate the importance of these five key competencies and state that they are fundamental for positive lifelong physical and mental health. Blair and Raver (2012) support this notion and apply it to educational learning during childhood, by emphasising how these competencies are necessary for academic success.

## CASEL'S SEL FRAMEWORK: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where Are They Promoted?

**Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development.** SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.



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Learn more: [www.casel.org/what-is-SEL](http://www.casel.org/what-is-SEL)

**Figure 2.3** The Five Core Competencies of S.E.L. adapted from C.A.S.E.L. (2020)

“Schools develop student’s affective characteristics through Social and Emotional Learning (S.E.L.) programs. S.E.L. is a new concept which has been included into school programs from primary school to secondary school in the UK and the USA” (Coskun, 2019, p. 765).

Policy makers and educational leaders have begun to recognise the importance of S.E.L. in recent years. They have successfully implemented the inclusion of these five key competencies and S.E.L. skills into international curricula. However, currently S.E.L. programmes are simply a recommendation and are not mandatory within the Irish context.

### ***2.11 The Incredible Years Programme (I.Y.)***

“The Parent and Teacher Training programs teach adults parenting and classroom management strategies that strengthen child-adult relationships and foster positive, social-emotional development, and behaviour in children. I.Y. Child Training Programs (small group and classroom curriculum) focus on promoting the development of S.E.L. skills in children, including social competence, emotion regulation, and problem-solving abilities” (Green, et al., 2019, p. 110).

The aim of the programme is to equip teachers and parents with suitable strategies to foster positive pupil behaviour in relation to emotion regulation, problem-solving skills and establishing relationships/friendships with their peers.

“The program teaches children S.E.L. skills through a structured weekly lesson on topics that include appropriate classroom behaviour, emotion identification, problem-solving skills, anger management skills, and friendship skills” (Green, et al., 2019, pp. 110-111).

Thus, the programme can also be perceived to prevent negative behaviours such as conduct issues and delinquency from an early age.

The Incredible Years Programme is one of the few S.E.L. programmes targeted towards young children which is available in Ireland.

“The implementation of the IY programme in several community-based agencies and schools in Ireland began in 2004 - spearheaded by Archways, the national co-ordinator of the IY programme in Ireland - as a means of preventing and treating E.B.D. (*Emotional and Behavioural Disorders*) for parents of children identified as high risk for conduct disorders” (McGilloway, et al., 2012, p. 9).

Only two independent evaluations of the ‘Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme’ have been undertaken to date. This specific study by McGilloway, et al. (2012) took place within the restricted confines of the urban context with prior experiences of behavioural and emotional difficulties. However, their findings did support the numerous advantages of an intervention programme to parents, teachers and children.

“Increasingly, classrooms were regarded by teachers, not just as places of learning; they were also places of encouragement and of positive relationships and, overall, teachers reported calmer, more positive classroom environments” (McGilloway, et al., 2012, p. 31).

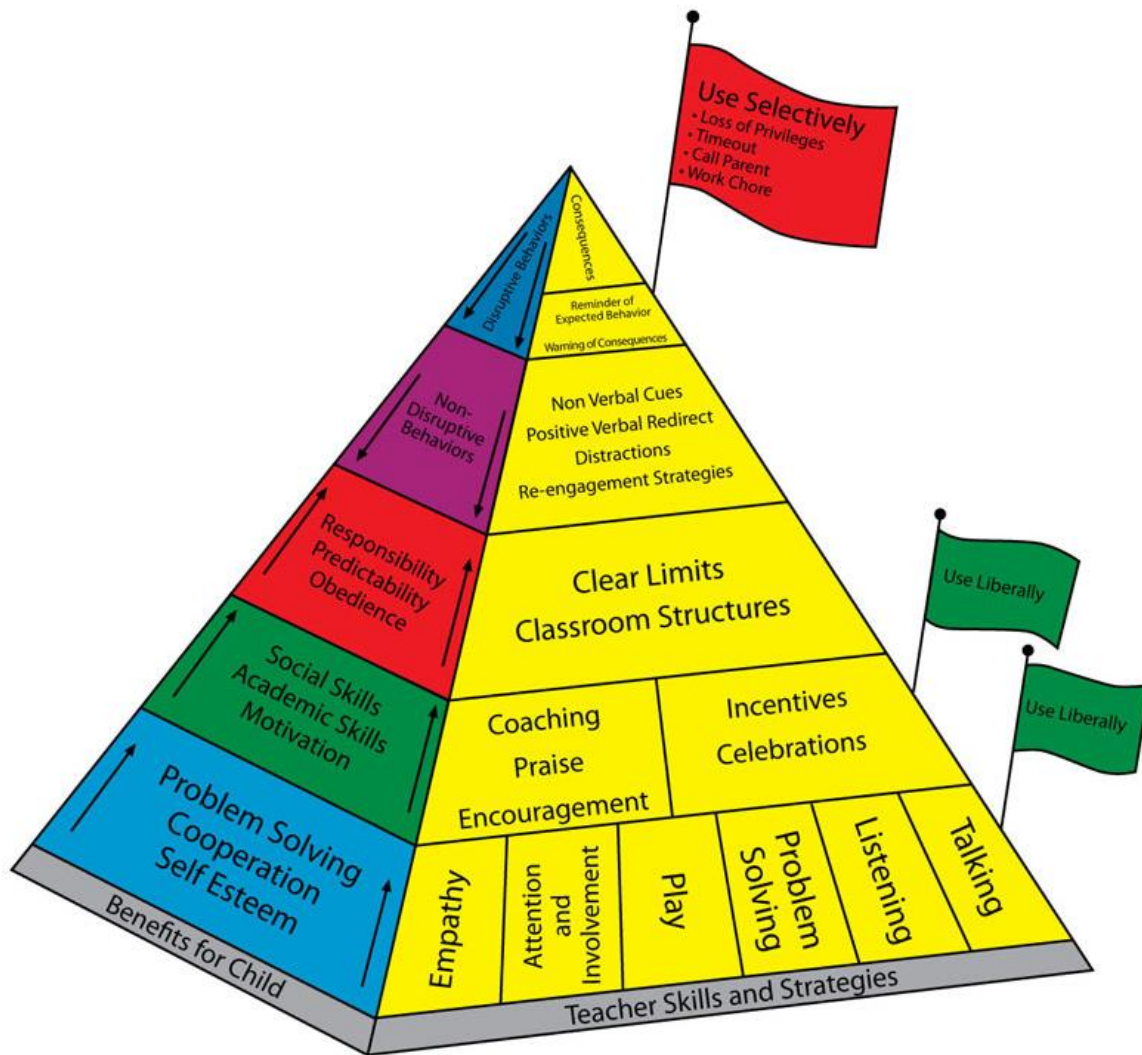
Many of the teachers involved in the study also recommended the necessity of a school-wide approach in implementing the programme effectively.

The Incredible Years Teaching Pyramid provides an overview on delivering the teaching content. The bottom of the pyramid represents practices that should be used frequently to build a strong foundation to successfully form positive and meaningful relationships with both parents and children. The middle sections of the pyramid detail teaching tools to establish clear classroom routines which promote good classroom management and positive child behaviour. “Finally, the top of the pyramid focuses on teachers helping students learn self-regulation, behavioural self-control, and problem-solving strategies so that they can be more independent in their learning” (Webster-Stratton, 2012, p. 44).

The author also emphasises the importance of sensitivity towards a child’s differences in relation to Piaget’s developmental stages, special educational needs, family background and cultural differences. This guidance is also supported by other theorists including Clark et al. (2021).

“Intervention approaches designed for this age group should consider the importance of the caregiver-child relationship in self-regulatory development and help caregivers adopt strategies that are tailored to their children’s needs” (Clark, et al., 2021, p. 144).

Within my research, it is also vital to account for children’s specific needs in acquiring emotion regulation and effective strategies.



## Teaching Pyramid®



Figure 2.4 The Incredible Years Teaching Pyramid (Webster-Stratton, 2012)



## ***2.12 Emotion Regulation Strategies***

“Strategies to regulate emotion come in many different shapes and forms...”

(Kalokerinos, et al., 2017, p. 450). I will explore the following emotion regulation strategies: causal talk and self-talk, mindfulness, physiological regulation techniques and visual aids of emotion. I hope to use these intervention strategies as part of my research with the children to enable them to develop their emotion regulation skills.

### ***2.12.1 Causal Talk and Self-talk***

“Causal talk about emotions, referred to in some studies as emotion cause talk, is commonly broken down into three categories; unelaborated comments about emotions; explanations of the causes and consequences of emotions; and empathy-related statements” (Housman, 2017, p. 10).

Causal talk can occur as part of a lesson or exploration of a hypothetical situation. Housman (2017) insists that causal talk is used most effectively during the emotional experience. Children learn to talk about their emotions during a state of emotional arousal. This practice is known as ‘Causal Talk in The Context of Emotional Experience’ (C.T.E.E.).

“C.T.E.E. consists of not only identifying and labelling an emotion but also managing intense emotions, including stress and anxiety, in the heat of the moment, when the child is in the midst of emotional arousal” (Housman, 2017, p. 11).

Teaching children how to manage their emotions during the emotional experience has the potential to be more effective than learning through the context of displaced or hypothetical events such as a role-play, storybook etc.

N.E.P.S. (2021) also support the strategy of causal talk, particularly during moments of emotional distress. They build on this by promoting the strategy of ‘coping self-talk’. “This involves teaching and supporting pupils to tell themselves affirmative, hopeful, and self-soothing statements in their heads such as: ‘I can calm down’” (N.E.P.S., 2021, p. 4). This positive self-talk can encourage children to regulate their own emotions effectively and positively.

### ***2.12.2 Mindfulness and Physiological Regulation Techniques***

“Mindfulness is the process of bringing one’s attention to the present moment” (N.E.P.S., 2021, p. 9). Black and Fernando (2014) and Flook et al. (2010) studies have provided evidence of the positive impact of mindfulness on various areas of self-regulation, including emotion regulation.

“The host of outcomes associated with implementing mindfulness-based programs in school-age and high school classrooms includes better executive functions, self-control, attention, improved social skills and caring for others, as well as increased emotional regulation and overall wellbeing” (Viglas & Perlman, 2018, p. 1151).

In their study, Viglas and Perlman (2018) selected the ‘Mindful Schools’ programme. This programme involves teaching twenty-minute lessons over the period of six weeks. Their findings discovered numerous benefits including a decrease in emotional reactivity and an improvement in impulse control.

“These findings also suggest that the implementation of a mindfulness-based program over a relatively short period of time has the potential to improve the development of self-regulation in young children” (Viglas & Perlman, 2018, p. 1156).

The theorists stress that more research is required in this field to gather more definitive results. However, mindfulness has the potential to calm a heightened state of emotion and improve automated negative behavioural responses, so its potential significance in this research should not be overlooked.

“Physiological regulation techniques...involve the use of breathing techniques, squishy balls, pillows, calm-down bottles or other tools” (Housman, 2017, p. 14). Breathing techniques are commonly used to combat feelings of anxiety. It has been scientifically proven that the more oxygen you breathe in, the less tense, short of breath and anxious you feel. “Breathing exercises help reduce feelings of physical tension” (N.E.P.S., 2021, p. 9). This strategy enables the child to calm or regulate their bodies both internally and externally when experiencing intense emotions. Muscular relaxation, where you can tense and relax different muscle groups in your body, can also support this breathing strategy. Physiological regulation techniques enable children to discover different self-soothing methods to regulate their own emotions independently.

### ***2.12.3 Visual Aids of Emotion***

“Teachers can model and normalise a range of emotions by giving pupils opportunities to express themselves in nonverbal ways” (N.E.P.S., 2021, p. 3). Treisman and Metcalfe (2018) have created a set of illustrations which represent children’s various coping responses to stress. These images enable children to identify methods or strategies that might help them during a moment of emotional distress. These illustrations have also been adapted to colourful images by N.E.P.S. (2021) and included in their guide for teachers on self-regulation.



*Figure 2.5 Emotion Chart adapted from Treisman (2019) by N.E.P.S. (2021)*

Emotion charts can be used to empower children to identify the emotion they are experiencing and a possible cause for this state of emotion. “The chart helps children identify their emotions and connect their feelings, particularly while in a state of aroused emotion, with their life experience” (Housman, 2017, p. 12). Ideally the chart should be used at the beginning and at the very end of a school day. It can also be used during circle time where the teacher can gather with the children and discuss how they are feeling along with possible causes for these emotions, in a safe and supportive environment.

“For younger children who have not yet acquired language skills, a ‘Mood Mirror’ is placed nearby so that children can associate what is on their face to the emotion they are experiencing” (Housman, 2017, pp. 12-13).

A Mood Mirror is a multi-sensory approach which enables children to establish meaningful connections between facial expressions and emotions, while also developing their own self-awareness. This is something which may be beneficial while working with a young age group in the infant classroom.

“Visual representations of emotions – whether through Emotion Books, Mood Mirrors, or gender-neutral designed figures named SheHeMes placed on Emotion Thermometers to measure emotional intensity – help children better understand not only how to identify and understand emotions but also to learn that emotions are kinetic rather than static, influenced by environmental experiences” (Housman, 2017, p. 13).

Emotion books use representations of emotions either personalised drawings or published images, to encourage children to identify their emotions and engage in causal talk. Emotion thermometers are extremely useful during heightened states of emotion. In parallel with the other visual strategies, it encourages children to make connections between the cause (i.e., the emotional situation), and the effect (i.e., the emotional response). However, the ‘Emotion Thermometer’ also enables children to express the intensity of the emotion they are experiencing and develop a more coherent understanding of their emotional experience, leading to greater emotion regulation.

Overall, these emotion regulation strategies equip the children with coping mechanisms which they can use to control a heightened state of emotion and subsequent actions and responses.

### ***2.13 Conclusion***

After critical review of the literature based around emotion regulation, it is evident that emotion regulation plays a very significant role in a child's life. The ability to regulate our emotions is a life-long skill which can greatly impact our individual cognitive thoughts and bodily actions. Emotion regulation can have a significant impact on our mental health and our ability to establish positive relationships with others. The role of both parents and teachers is highly influential in the acquisition of positive and effective emotion regulation strategies.

Although the research presents numerous strategies which children can use to regulate their emotions, it fails to present sufficient findings on individual strategies and their effectiveness. I have identified a possible gap in the literature in relation to emotion regulation within a young age group and within the educational context. It has highlighted the greater need for further research in these areas. "Remarkably, research on E.R. in children lacks coherence and several research questions have still not fully been answered" (Braet, et al., 2014, p. 494). Braet et al. (2014) among other theorists, also support further research in emotion regulation.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### ***3.1 Introduction***

This chapter outlines the research methodology I have chosen to adopt for this self-study. I will explore my chosen intervention approach, in addition to the intervention strategies I have implemented and utilized with my research participants. I will describe the data collection instruments I have used and some ethical considerations I identified while undertaking this research. I will also explore how I analysed the data I collected. I will reflect upon my values including my educational, ontological, and epistemological values, which formed the foundation of my research.

### ***3.2 My Key Research Question***

The key question underpinning my study was “How can I as a primary school teacher implement effective strategies to support children with emotion regulation in a large infant classroom?”.

My primary objectives were the following:

- ✓ To enable the children to identify their emotions and the potential cause or trigger of these emotions
- ✓ To help the children recognise the influential power of overwhelming feelings on individual thoughts and actions
- ✓ To empower the children to regulate their emotions by using effective strategies
- ✓ To progress the children towards using these emotion regulation strategies independently

### ***3.3 Research Paradigm: Self-Study Action Research***

“While there are varying conceptions of action research and while it may be adopted for different purposes; it generally involves a social practice that has the potential to be improved; systematic inquiry into practice through cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting; and the direct involvement of those responsible for the practice” (Goodnough, 2010, p. 167).

As previously stated, I chose action research as my research paradigm because it enabled me to autonomously conduct the research within my everyday work environment where I could examine my individual practice while engaging in critical reflection, with my values at the epicentre of my research. I found it compelling how action research focused on how we can enhance our work instead of fixating on the problem. “In our roles as academic or facilitators, many of us have found that the road to action research also required changes in our teaching practices” (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003, p. 19). As teachers, I believe that we are continually examining our practices and adopting new techniques with the primary objective of improving both teaching and learning in the classroom. Action research supports this ideology where the sole focus is not on the problem, rather, the area of interest or improvement.

Action research can appear in many formats including participatory research. “Participatory Action Research (P.A.R.) whereby, participants are engaged as co-researchers and work together to select pertinent questions or challenges, carry out the research, and generate recommendations from their findings” (López, 2020, p. 54).



Participatory research enables individuals to work collectively and collaboratively with the primary aim to seek improvement while analysing and reflecting on their individual selves.

“This involves people theorizing about their own practices and values, testing their own assumptions, values, ideas and practices in real-life practice; in other words, it is reflexive, drawing together theory and practice” (Cohen, et al., 2018, pp. 444-445).

The primary objective of participatory action research is to transform ‘practice’ into ‘praxis’. “Praxis here is defined as action informed through reflection...” (Cohen, et al., 2018, p. 446). Through the exploration of educational theory, individual practices and reflexivity, action research has the potential to transform ineffective or hegemonic practices into improved praxis.

### ***3.3.1 Action Research Framework***

Many theorists differ over the quantity of stages required to carry out the action research process. “Action research... involves the following actions: plan, act, observe, reflect, construct a revised plan, act, observe, reflect. These are repeated to form cycles of action and reflection” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 75). Lewin (1948) outlines four main stages comprising of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Bassegy (1998) identifies eight stages in action research. Both Moroni (2011) and McAteer (2013) establish five stages in the process of action research. Despite the discrepancy regarding the number of stages, each theorist recognises that action research is not a linear process and may adapt various sequential steps at different points in the process. “The steps of action research...are a recursive process that does not always proceed in a linear fashion” (McIntosh, 2010, p. 256).

### ***3.4. Research Site and Study Participants***

The research took place in a co-educational primary school. It is a Roman Catholic school with a Catholic Ethos. The school is situated in a rural community which is growing in population. It is a vertical school catering for Junior Infants up to Sixth Class. The children come from varied socio-economic backgrounds. There are approximately 240 pupils in the school and nine mainstream classes. The individuals directly involved in my research were thirty-two Senior Infant children. Throughout this thesis, I have assigned pseudonyms to the children to protect their anonymity. The children's parents and guardians were involved as part of the consent and data collection process. A critical friend and validation group comprising of fellow staff members were also involved in the data collection process.

### ***3.5 Intervention Strategies***

The research design included the following emotion regulation intervention strategies:

- i. Feelings Chart (develop emotion vocabulary)
- ii. Feelings Charades (develop self-awareness around feelings and facial expressions)
- iii. Feelings Books (match facial expressions to feelings)
- iv. Feelings Thermometer (recognise the spectrum of emotions)
- v. Tucker Turtle Technique (introduction to self-calming strategies)
- vi. Positive Self-Talk (affirmative, self-soothing statements to self-calm)
- vii. Happiness Journals (identification of positive moments of happiness, medium to self-calm)
- viii. Mindfulness and Breathing Techniques (calm and regulate the body during emotional states)

### ***3.6 Intervention Lessons (Data Cycles One and Two)***

Firstly, it is important to note that my intervention timeline was disrupted due to a personal accident and a wave of Covid-19 cases within the infant classroom, impacting both teacher and child attendance. However, every action and intervention strategy outlined in the research model and timeline (*please refer to Appendix 5*) were completed by early June 2022.

In data cycles one and two the intervention lessons took place on a Thursday morning as this was the allocated S.P.H.E. time in the class timetable. Lessons were approximately forty-five minutes in length. An introductory lesson was given to all the children participating in the research to reiterate the purpose of the study and clarify their right of withdrawal. This allowed the children to ask any questions or share concerns prior to the interventions. An individualised reflective journal was given to each child participant, and they were encouraged to actively reflect in this after every intervention lesson (*see Appendix 18*). Parent baseline questionnaires and teacher questionnaires were dispatched at this starting point in the research.

Following the disruption to data cycle one, data cycle two was revised and intervention strategies were implemented following the originally planned actions (*see Appendix 5*). A revision lesson was completed with the children to revise intervention lessons prior to the Easter Break. A critical friend observed an intervention lesson and provided insightful feedback on the progression of emotion regulation interventions within the classroom environment. All data was finally collected in preparation for data analysis.

### **3.7 Data Collection Instruments**

I utilized the following methods for data collection purposes:

- Parent Questionnaires (*baseline and endline*)
- Teacher Questionnaire
- Content Analysis of Children's Work (*happiness journals, emotion monster worksheet, feelings booklets etc.*)
- Child Interviews
- Critical Friend Reflection
- Reflective Journals (*teacher and pupils*)

#### **3.7.1 Base and End Line Parent Questionnaire**

As previously stated, Bunreacht na hÉireann outlines:

“The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children” (The Constitution of Ireland, 1937, p. Article 42.1).

Parents are the natural and primary educators of their children. Therefore, they know their children best. For my research, I believe that it was vital to gather a parent's perspective on how their children engaged with emotional regulation prior to the intervention strategies and the research process (*please refer to Appendix 20*).

This baseline questionnaire provided me with an insight into how parents perceived their child's understandings of feelings and their ability to emotionally self-regulate prior to the intervention process. I also felt it was beneficial to administer an end line questionnaire (*please refer to Appendix 21*) to identify if the intervention strategies had resulted in emotion regulation skill development or a change in relation to the children's emotion regulation practices at home. Both questionnaires contained a variety of open and closed questions with multiple-choice answers, and the option to type-in a short answer as a response to a question. On both questionnaires I inserted an "Anything you would like to add" box at the very end to facilitate longer responses and allow for more meaningful feedback.

"The questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, able to be administered without the presence of the researcher and often comparatively straightforward to analyse" (Cohen, et al., 2018, p. 471).

I chose to send home the questionnaire using a survey administrative software known as 'Google Forms'. I chose this software because the service is easy to use and would be very accessible to all parents as they are familiar with school information being sent home in email format as part of the 'Green School's Policy'. 'Google Forms' also enabled me to uphold my ethical values in ensuring that there was anonymity and confidentiality in relation to responses from individual parents. The base and end line questionnaires were useful data instruments as they provided me with a greater insight into the children's emotion regulation at home and whether the intervention strategies were transported into home life.

### 3.7.2 *Teacher Survey*

“Typically, surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared or determining the relationships that exist between specific events” (Cohen, et al., 2018, p. 334).

I chose “Google Forms” as the survey administrative software because equivalent to the parents, my fellow teaching staff would have been familiar with the application prior to my research. I restricted the survey to teachers solely within my school, as this was the primary context of my research. The survey contained a variety of open and closed questions to gather an understanding of fellow teacher’s view on emotion regulation within the classroom environment. I also provided the “Anything you would like to add” box at the end to facilitate extended and significant feedback in addition to the allocated question responses.

While selecting my research topic of emotion regulation, I came to the realisation that as a teacher I felt I lacked the sufficient knowledge and understanding in this area, to effectively support the children in my class. In my research of literature based on the topic of emotion regulation, I found it difficult to locate studies, policy documents, guidelines etc., particularly those conducted here in Ireland.

Therefore, I thought it was imperative to conduct a survey with my fellow professional teachers to obtain their views on emotion regulation with young children in the classroom.

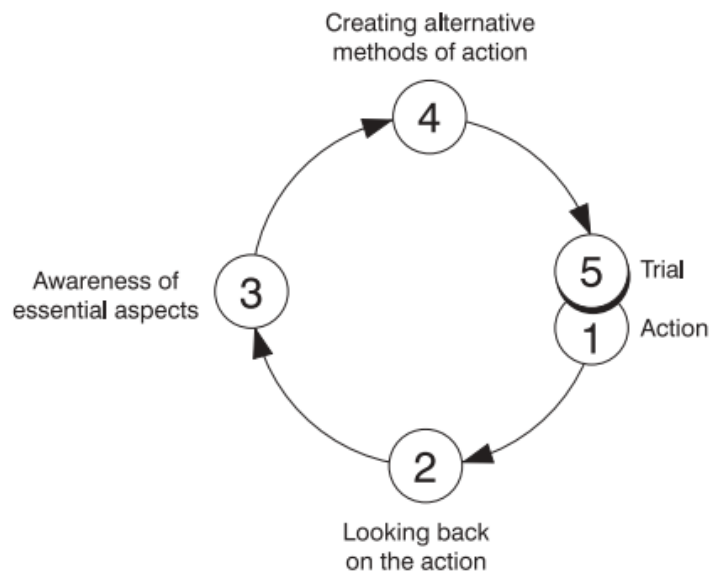
### ***3.7.3 Teacher Reflective Journal***

“McNiff (2010) places self-reflection at the heart of action research” (Cohen, et al., 2018, p. 442). Throughout my research, I have reflected on my practice through Brookfield’s (2017) autobiographical lens in the form of a reflective journal. “Critically reflective teaching happens when we build into our practice the habit of constantly trying to identify, and check, the assumptions that inform our actions as teachers” (Brookfield, 2017, pp. 4-5). Critically reflecting in my journal enabled me to identify my educational values and re-examine my ontological and epistemological values. I began to realise that by not living fully to my values within my practice, I was the embodiment of a ‘living contradiction’ as referenced by Whitehead (1989). It also encouraged me to challenge assumptions which I had made during the research process and re-examine my teaching practices, which led to greater understandings and improved teaching methods.

“Within the reflective process lies the possibility for change” (Kinsella, 2007, p. 399). Following the implementation of intervention strategies and discussions with research participants, I engaged in both practices of critical reflection and reflexivity. The reflective journal played a significant role in the establishment of my own living theory as explored by living theorist Whitehead (2009). “In living theories individuals generate their own explanations of their educational influences in their own learning” (Whitehead, 2009, p. 87).

I endeavoured to reflect in my reflective journal at least once a week, particularly prior to and following lesson interventions. At the beginning, I found the reflective journal component quite challenging, however, when I began critically reflecting throughout the research process, it became almost therapeutic and a meaningful source of data. I used the A.L.A.C.T. Model as a structural framework for my reflection process.

“It is named after the first letters of the five phases and is now used in many countries as a basis for systematic reflection in teacher education” (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 48).



**Figure 3.1** The A.L.A.C.T. Model taken from (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005).

#### 3.7.4 Observational Notes

“Because thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptions are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interaction and observation in the natural setting” (Marshall, et al., 2022, p. 101).

Cohen et al. (2018) also explore how observations exist along a spectrum, ranging from unstructured to highly structured. A highly structured observation will have a key goal in advance and a knowledge of what exactly the desired outcome will be. An unstructured observation will have no clear objective and will only become significant or apparent in later analysis of the observation notes.



As an action researcher I believe that it is vital to have a range of observations, expanding from unstructured to highly structured on the spectrum, to generate a significant amount of meaningful data.

“Observation is strong on face validity; it can provide rich contextual information, enable first-hand data to be collected, reveal mundane routines and activities, and can offer an opportunity for documenting those aspects of lifeworld’s that are verbal, non-verbal and physical” (Clark, et al., 2021, p. 541).

Observations enabled me to gather first-hand data in situ and from naturally occurring social situations. I was able to have the role of participant and gather data because of ‘insider engagement’ through concealment of my observatory role. I was also able to become a complete observer and take notes on naturalistic occurrences between the children. I took observational notes during intervention lessons and the school day. This allowed me to gather key information on the influence of the intervention lessons and the utilization of the intervention strategies by the children.

### ***3.7.5 Children’s Work Samples and Interviews with the Children***

“The most obvious potential of a qualitative research interview is that it allows us to see the interviewee as a resource, not as a problem. The interview does not necessarily aim to acquire an understanding of how things ‘really are’ or to describe the participants in simple categorical ways but instead allows the variety and diversity of the interviewee’s life to be voiced” (Jansen, 2015, p. 37).

Interviews instil a sense of agency and competency, encouraging the children to recognise that their opinions and ideas are important, and play a significant role in the research. Jansen (2015) reported in her study how many of the children felt positive and self-confident post-interview as it provided a space for them to have a voice. Interviews with the children provided them with a safe, non-judgemental space where they could share their honest opinions of the intervention strategies and lessons.

“Additional participatory methods could include visual art activities where children are asked to represent their views through drawing” (Koller & San Juan, 2015, p. 624). As young children can sometimes find it difficult to voice their true opinions or thoughts in front of their peers, drawings empowered them to share their thoughts in a creative and familiar outlet. Drawings enabled the children to reflect on the intervention lessons and their experiences of utilizing the intervention strategies. I was also able to use their drawings as a basis for their interviews as it supported the children in discussing their thoughts and feelings through explanation of their drawings.

### ***3.7.6 Validation Group and Critical Friend***

“Dialogue is also considered to be a key element of the action research process...Professional conversations with critical friends can help dislodge any fixed assumptions you have around your practice and see it through ‘new eyes’” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 53).

I was fortunate to share my work with supportive and honest critical friends comprising of a fellow teacher, my college friends, and my supervisor.

My supervisor offered invaluable support and guidance throughout the entire research process and encouraged me to challenge my thinking behind my research project while offering constructive feedback. My critical friend observed my intervention lesson and offered key observations and advice during our discussions.

“A validation group or group of persons who are knowledgeable about your research context, when you meet with them on a number of occasions during your research, may pick holes in your research and give you a hard time questioning every assumption you make” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 103).

My validation group included my work colleagues and participants. They challenged my potential biases and hegemonic practices, while encouraging me to uphold my key values of inclusion, care, and empathy.

### ***3.8 Ethical Considerations***

“When you are researching your practice as a teacher, you are researching within a learning community – yourself, students, professional colleagues, and other educators...Because your research approach involves real live participants, they must be treated ethically” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 93).

I abided by professional codes and guidelines of ethics such as the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Ethics Policy, Maynooth University Ethics Policy, D.C.Y.A. Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children (April 2012), Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017), Data Protection Act (2018) and my own school’s Child Protection Policy.

Prior to undertaking this self-study action research project, I had to contemplate various ethical considerations including the following: ethics approval, informed consent and assent, power dynamics, vulnerability and sensitivity, and storage of data. I will explore these ethical considerations in greater detail below.

### ***3.8.1 Ethics Approval***

My ethics proposal form (*see Appendix 1*) outlining my proposed self-study action research project was approved by the Froebel Department Research and Ethics Committee of Maynooth University. Ethical permission to conduct my research was sought from and granted by both the school Principal and Board of Management.

### ***3.8.2 Informed Consent and Assent***

“It requires the informed consent of participants, options for teachers/students not to take part, and with no penalty and confidentiality and autonomy of participants to be respected” (Cohen, et al., 2018, p. 454). I discussed my proposed research study with the school Principal and received permission from the Board of Management to conduct the study in the school (*see Appendix 4*). I sent the prospective participants, including both parents and their children, an introductory letter using appropriate language, and an information sheet outlining my proposed research study (*see Appendix 2*). I also provided the children with a child-friendly information sheet with pictorial symbols to aid understanding. The parents signed the parent consent form, and the children gave their assent to participate by signing their own form too (*see Appendix. 3*).

“This process of establishing an informed consent often involves a three-step process: (1) the provision of adequate information, (2) checking that participants have understood what they are agreeing to, and (3) establishing how their consent or refusal to participate is to be recorded” (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014, p. 154).

As a researcher, I endeavoured to ensure that all participants were giving informed consent and aware of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. In addition to this, I sought to adopt a ‘beneficence’ approach to the study participants as outlined in the Belmont Report.

“In this document, beneficence is understood in a stronger sense, as an obligation. Two general rules have been formulated as complementary expressions of beneficent actions in this sense: (1) do not harm and (2) maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms” (USA Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects , 1979, p. 5).

Dignity and care for the participants is vital in upholding ethical research. I ensured that all participants were aware that the aim of the research was to maximise good and minimise any possible harm for the participants.

### ***3.8.3 Power Dynamics***

“The researcher is often seen to be, or is, in an asymmetric position of power with regard to the participants; the former may have more power than the latter, be this by status, position, knowledge, role or whatever” (Cohen, et al., 2018, p. 136).

This power dynamic becomes more evident when working with young, vulnerable children. Young children have the innate desire to ‘please’ their teacher and therefore, it can pose a significant challenge to both the ethics and validity of the research.

“In order to avoid these power issues, it is essential for me, as a teacher researcher, to critically analyse my value system and take the students seriously as agents in their own education” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 97).

I endeavoured to mitigate against the potential act of silent acquiescence by openly discussing with the children their right to take on the role of a nonparticipant or to withdraw during the research process. I implored them to recognise their agentic roles as participants and share any concerns or conflicts they had about the research.

My values of inclusion, care and empathy were maintained at the forefront of my research. The values I hold as a teacher within my chosen profession were also upheld. “The following ethical values underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct as set out in this Code: Respect, Integrity, Trust and Care” (The Teaching Council, 2016, p. 6). As a teacher researcher it was vital that I made a clear distinction between the roles and relationships of teacher and students, and researcher and participants. I used a “Research On” sign (*see Appendix 6*) to clarify when we were moving from the engagement in everyday classroom learning, to the role of participants in teacher’s research project.

The best interests and rights of the children also remained a key concern throughout the process.

“In Ireland, where currently no one body is responsible for research ethics, we, as teacher researchers, may avoid risks to our young participants by employing a child-centred, inclusive approach according to Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 97).

As stated, prior in this chapter, I obtained consent from both parents and children, when they had a clear and comprehensive understanding of what the study entailed and what was expected of them as participants. “As a demonstration of voluntary participation, you need to make it clear how participants can withdraw from your research, if they want to” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 99). The ‘right of withdrawal’ remained in place throughout every stage of the study and was referred to throughout the research process.

### ***3.8.4 Vulnerability and Sensitivity***

As my research topic is based on emotional regulation, it has the potential to trigger many sensitive and upsetting eventualities. Therefore, it was imperative to identify and anticipate these possible scenarios by preparing for them conclusively by conveying ‘ethical sensitivity’.

“Ethical sensitivity as a behavioural concept has been described in the literature in several ways: a caring response, skill in identifying the ethical dimension of care, intuition regarding others’ comfort and well-being, and a component of moral care” (Weaver, 2007, p. 142).

As their class teacher, I had established a good rapport with the children and created a safe and supportive learning environment for them. Interventions were introduced at a comfortable pace enabling the children to explore them with ease and share their concerns with a trustworthy adult. Every aspect of their participation in the project was explained to them in child-friendly, appropriate language to ensure there was a clear understanding of the research. In conjunction with my ethical sensitivity, I upheld my core values of inclusion, care, and empathy.

Emotion regulation can be interpreted as ‘sensitive research’. “A simple definition of sensitive research would therefore be ‘research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it’ (Lee, 1993, p. 4). In the case of my research project, the topic of emotion regulation has the potential to intrude on personal experiences, as it is an emotionally charged area of study. “Although sensitive topics do pose an element of risk to participants, avoiding this research may be seen as evasion of responsibility and disempowering to the individuals involved” (Dempsey, et al., 2016, p. 482).

Emotion regulation as a life skill is imperative in the development of a child. Therefore, the promising benefits outweigh the possible threat of sensitivity. As part of the conclusion to the intervention lessons, the child participants completed reflections in their own reflective journal. “We believe that the process of journal writing is not only useful for understanding events, it can also be cathartic and help release pent-up emotions” (McDonagh, et al., 2020, p. 67). This gave them the opportunity to draw or write about emotion regulation strategies they had learned, or the emotions they had experienced during the lessons. They were encouraged to share these thoughts at home and discuss any concerns they had with a trusted adult such as their teacher or a parent.

“In interviewing students, they may reveal sensitive matters about themselves, their family or their teachers, and the researcher will need to decide whether and how to act on this kind of information” (Cohen, et al., 2018, p. 233).

If a sensitive disclosure had been made by a child participant concerning their individual self or their family during the research process, I would have followed our school Child Safeguarding Statement and our school Safeguarding Policy.



I would have informed our Designated Liaison Person (D.L.P.), who is our principal or our deputy D.L.P. who is our deputy principal. I consulted the Home School Liaison Person and the Learning Support Teacher as a trusted person to seek guidance and support in this area. If a child became distressed during intervention lessons or data collection, the Learning Support teacher, was on standby to look after the class while I addressed the situation in a quiet place with the child.

### ***3.8.5 Data Storage***

The data archive was kept safe in accordance with my ethical commitments and G.D.P.R. guidelines. Online soft copies were kept in a password protected online folder using the 'OneDrive' programme. Physical hard copies were stored in a number-key protected folder in a locked filing cabinet. Any physical data was eliminated of personal identifiers such as pupil's full name etc. and stored in a folder where it was accessed by a secure number pin. I used pseudonyms to uphold the promised "anonymity and confidentiality of participant's responses" (Midgley, et al., 2013, p. 211).

If data needed to be transferred, it was done using a password protected USB which was stored in a locked drawer. All data obtained during school hours, was stored, and protected in line with the school's Data Protection Policy. Both electronic and physical data obtained throughout the research process will be stored for the minimum period of six years and destroyed in the form of confidential shredding and secure deletion of digital materials, in accordance with Maynooth University guidelines.

### ***3.9 Triangulation of Data***

“Triangulation provides the researcher with the opportunity of having the findings of the research corroborated by others not directly involved in the research and can add to the validity of the research and the reliability of the outcomes” (McDonagh, et al., 2020, p. 148).

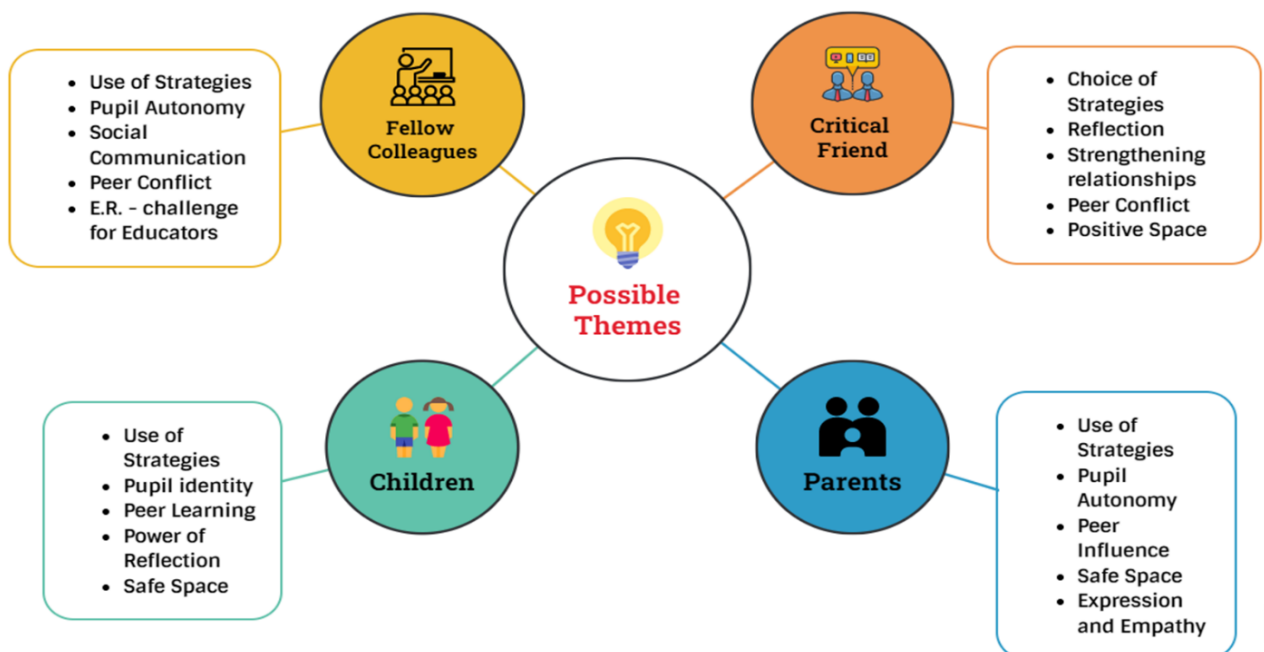
Triangulation enables the researcher to cross-check their findings from multiple perspectives. Robson and McCartan (2016) claim that triangulation improves the validity and accuracy of discoveries made during the research process. “There are a variety of forms of triangulation – multiple perspectives, methodological triangulation and outside observer triangulation” (Sullivan, et al., 2016, p. 107). I completed methodological triangulation of the data by comparing findings from quantitative data, parent and teacher questionnaires, a focus group of child participants and observations from a critical friend. I examined the data from four different perspectives: myself as the researcher in extracts from my reflective journal, the children from content analysis of their work, the parents from their questionnaire responses and critical friends from the teacher questionnaire and the critical friend observation sheet.

### ***3.10 Coding the data***

“Qualitative research methodologists have developed, described, and named a long list of systematic processes that facilitate summative data analysis of qualitative data” (Fichtman & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020, p. 184). Two of the most prevalent processes include memoing and coding. Memoing involves noting ideas and possible themes that emerge during the research process. This can assist the researcher to identify possible themes or notable ideas that are existent in various data sets.

“Coding —The process used to analyse the data generated in a study. It requires the researcher to break the data down into smaller segments and give a name to each segment” (Fichtman & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020, pp. 184-185). This coding process involves the researcher constantly comparing data segments and then categorising them into possible themes or codes that enlighten the chosen research question.

I used this coding process to analyse my data. I used a variety of techniques to analyse and code the data including highlighting, annotating, mind-mapping, and tables to cross-examine possible themes across the gathered data. The data gathered over the course of the research process was examined and re-examined scrupulously. I started off with fifty codes which I broke further down. I explored possible themes from four different lenses, akin to Brookfield (2017), which enabled me to code the data using different viewpoints and identify intersecting themes across the data sets.



*Figure 3.2 Mind Map Diagram Outlining Possible Themes*

(Taken from <https://infograph.venngage.com/infographics> )

### ***3.11 Chapter Summary***

“Action research is a work in progress” (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003, p. 11). This chapter outlined my justification for my chosen methodology as self-study action research, along with the key objectives I had guiding the research process. I described the research framework I followed in greater detail and the data cycles for the effective introduction of intervention strategies. I detailed the data instruments I used, how they were implemented and outlined why I chose those specific methods. I discussed some ethical considerations I undertook throughout the process. Finally, I outlined triangulation and coding of the data.

## **Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion**

### ***4.1 Introduction***

This chapter will outline analysis of the data I have collected over the course of my action research project. The key question I wished to explore was: ‘How can I as a primary school teacher implement effective strategies to support children with emotion regulation in a large infant classroom?’. The definition of emotion regulation that I used for the purpose of this study was taken from Eisenberg et al. (2007).

“Emotion-related self-regulation (henceforth sometimes called emotion-related regulation or emotion regulation for brevity) refers to processes used to manage and change if, when, and how (e.g., how intensely) one experiences emotions and emotion-related motivational and physiological states, as well as how emotions are expressed behaviourally” (Eisenberg, et al., 2007, p. 288).

I chose this specific definition as it encompassed the fundamental principles explored in most definitions by other theorists in the same field. In this study, I wanted to explore how the children in my infant class could be supported in this process of emotion regulation by using effective strategies. I hoped to ensure that my core values of inclusion, care and empathy lay at the epicentre of this research.

#### ***4.2 Findings: Four Central Themes***

Upon thorough analysis of the data collected during the research, the following four key themes emerged:

1. A Safe Space
2. Key Influencers of Emotion Regulation
3. Pupil Identity and Autonomy
4. Power of Reflection and Mindfulness

These principal themes will be explored in greater detail below, with reference to relevant data and literature.

#### ***4.3 A Safe Space***

From triangulation of the data, it became inevitably clear that a ‘safe space’ was a fundamental aspect in enabling the children to express and regulate their emotions.

“From my observation notes I have recorded moments where many of the children have referred to feeling ‘safe’ to show their feelings with the class. I have witnessed them comforting each other, particularly during our restorative practice of ‘Share and Solve’” (Farrelly, ‘Reflective Journal’ 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022).

Unequivocally the sense of safety and calm in their surroundings is paramount to a child’s learning environment, even more so when they are experiencing vulnerability in expression of their emotions in the company of their peers.

### ***4.3.1 Defining a Safe Space***

“Safe space describes a classroom climate that feels secure, supportive, and risk-free so that students can honestly express their individuality and opinions without fear of being the target of violence, harassment, or hate speech” (Domalewska, et al., 2021, p. 35).

The establishment of a safe space is crucial within the classroom environment, particularly when children are expressing intense emotions. Through sharing their personal feelings children experience vulnerability on a cognitive, social, and emotional level. It is vital that as educators we ensure that all children’s voices are heard, and that they have the confidence to freely express themselves in an environment supported by both their teachers and peers, without fear of ridicule or mockery.

Butler et al. (2015) outline two fundamental elements required to create this ‘safe space’.

“The school must be a “safe space,” a space where students feel comfortable and secure, and it must also be “my space,” a space over which students have some ownership and which they have the freedom to transform” (Butler, et al., 2015, p. 891).

When exploring the concept of a ‘safe space’ our focus is primarily drawn to ensuring the children feel happy and safe within their surroundings. However, the idea of ‘my space’ is often overlooked. ‘My space’ is characterised as a relational space where the children and their peers feel involved in shaping the space of the school. Child-led initiatives are explored and supported by the school community. Teachers listen to the children’s voices and ideas, while working collaboratively with them to help them to achieve their goals. “...there is an image of a school that students feel is their own” (Butler, et al., 2015, p. 907). By combining these two fundamental elements we create a ‘safe space’ alongside a ‘my space’ where the children feel secure and valued.

### ***4.3.2 The Classroom as a Safe Space***

“It is good to share how you feel. This is a safe place with your friends and teacher!” (Laura, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022). As a teacher, I endeavour to create a safe and comfortable learning environment for the children in my class, in line with my core values of inclusion and care. Prior to starting my action research project, I had already established a ‘safe space’ with the children. Unintentionally, I had followed Butler et al. (2015) in the creation of a ‘my space’ and a ‘safe space’. At the beginning of every school year, I create a ‘Wow Wall’ with the children where they select pieces of work every week that they feel proud of and want to share with the whole class. Alongside this, we designed a class display with puzzle pieces to demonstrate to each child that individually they are an important member of our class and, that we are all unified in both our support and care for one another.

This ‘my space’ encourages the children to feel included in the classroom and creates sense of ownership within the class environment. I also strive to create a supportive learning environment through the practice of open and honest class discussions by using restorative approaches such as ‘Share and Solve’. This gives the children a voice and creates a ‘safe space’ where they can share issues that have arose in the class or on yard with their peers. We work as a whole class to solve the problem with support from fellow peers. This foundation of a ‘my space’ and a ‘safe space’ for the children, was developed and invoked throughout the research process.



The Tucker-Turtle Technique provided the children with their very own ‘safe space’. “Researchers have found that the ‘turtle technique’ is an effective way for children to calm down and a good first step before engaging in problem solving” (Webster-Stratton, 2012, p. 431). When the children experience overwhelming feelings, the ‘tucker turtle technique’ provides them with a sanctuary they can retreat to. Teacher modelling of when and how to transition into their imaginary shells, enabled the children to feel secure in exploring the emotion regulation strategy.

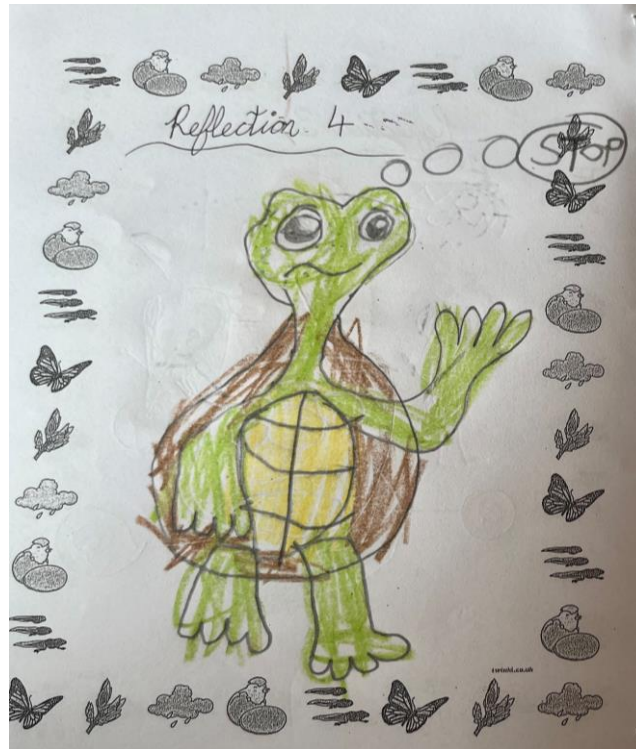
“Then the teacher modelled the four steps of the self-control technique consisting of (a) stop to think, (b) go into shell (head down and cross arms), (c) take three deep breaths, and (d) calm to think of a solution to the problem (child taps his or her forehead with a finger)” (Drogan & Kern, 2014, p. 243).

Through the exploration of role-play scenarios and by adding playful elements such as our own class ‘Tucker Turtle’ teddy, the children felt comfortable when practising the technique.

“Step 2, Go Into shell, was defined as any of the following: child putting head down, child placing hands and arms across chest or on chest area or holds hands or arms, child curling in a ball and/or crouching on the floor” (Drogan & Kern, 2014, p. 240).

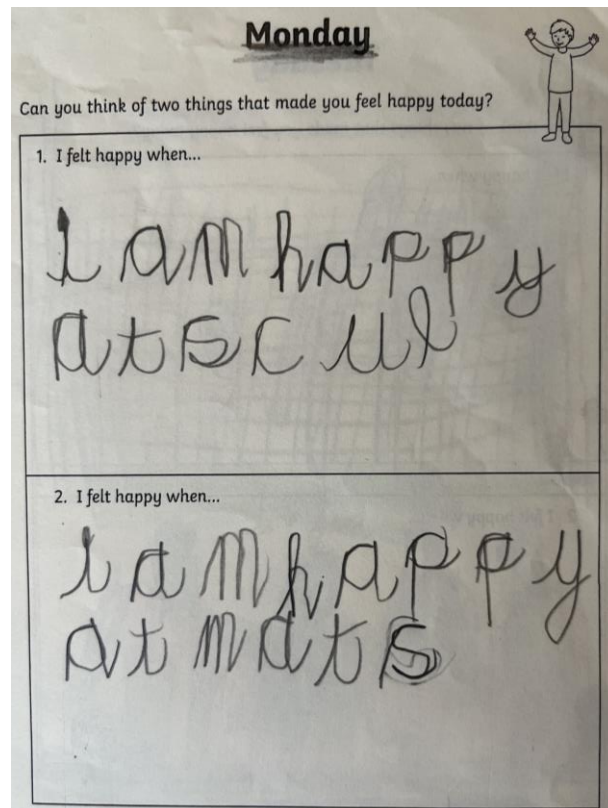
Step Two involved the children creating their own ‘Tucker Turtle’ shell which was vital in creating their own ‘safe space’ when experiencing intense emotions.

“I used Tucker Turtle when my sister broke my Lego set! I just felt so angry, and I knew I would get in trouble if I hit her, so I just curled up into my shell until Mammy came to help” (Sam, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022).



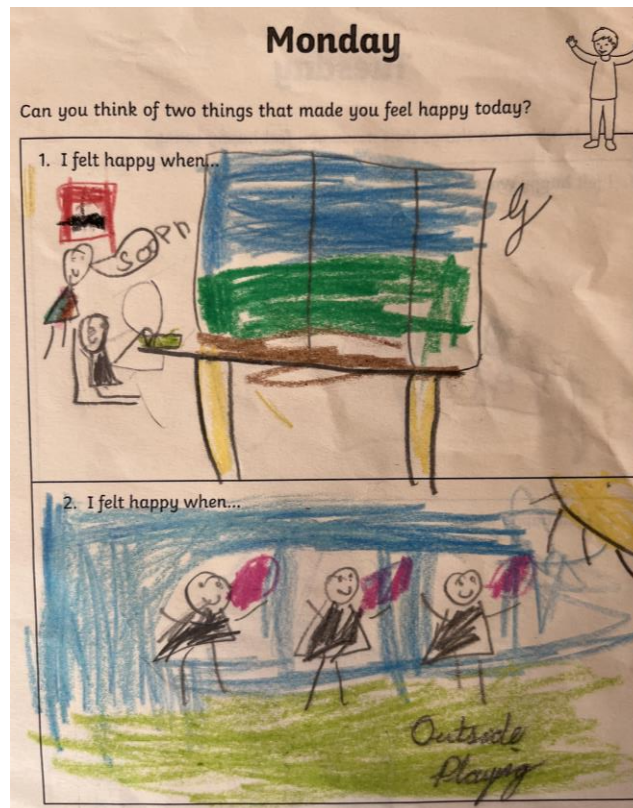
*Figure 4.1 Sam's Reflection 4 Drawing of Tucker Turtle*

The happiness journals also provided the children with a 'my space' and a 'safe space' where they could independently identify positive moments that occurred in their daily lives. The idea for a happiness journal stemmed from the following quote cited from key theorists in emotion regulation: "when a child herself is unable to regulate her emotional reaction, an invitation to reflect can increase and stimulate the pupil's emotional self-regulation" (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 828). These journals represented a safe outlet where the children could explore their feelings while concentrating on the positive emotions experienced throughout the day. There was no pressure put on any individual child to share their drawings or thoughts with the rest of the class. This practice was implemented to maintain the 'my space' and 'safe space' aspects of the research.



**Figure 4.2** Mia's Happiness Journal Monday Writing

The first image above (see Figure 4.2) depicts a happiness journal excerpt where Mia explained: "I am happy at school because I like learning all the different things and playing with my friends. It is like a home for everyone!" (Mia, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2022). The use of the word 'home' emphasised to me the success in the creation of a learning environment where the children felt safe, in parallel with the one place where most children feel the safest i.e., their home with their family.



*Figure 4.3 Sarah's Happiness Journal Monday Drawing*

The second image above (*Figure 4.3*) displays a drawing where Sarah illustrates herself practicing the capital cursive letter 'G' and myself as the teacher standing next to her. "I drew this picture because you said my capital Gs' were really good today. Most days I don't do great handwriting but today I tried my best and did them. I drew the sky and the grass too because it reminds me of my farm at home" (Sarah, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

The child felt comfortable to speak freely about how she finds handwriting difficult. Sarah made the same connection as Mia in reference to the 'home'. Similarly, Sarah also makes an unconscious connection to her secure 'home' environment through the affiliation of the sky and green fields to her familial place of security.

Overall, the classroom as a ‘safe place’ is a fundamental aspect in exploring emotion regulation with young children. I have also discovered that concepts such as ‘my space’ and a ‘safe place’ are dependent on the classroom teacher. It is essential that I establish and facilitate both concepts to enable the children to feel safe within the classroom environment. “Such a lovely, positive atmosphere in the classroom from the minute you walk in” (Critical-Friend, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022). It is also important that this ‘safe space’ and positive atmosphere is upheld and experienced by all members of the class, both children and teachers alike.

#### ***4.3.3 The Home as a Safe Space***

U.N.I.C.E.F. Ireland outlines that every child has the right to grow up in an environment where they feel safe and secure. They have the right to develop, to play and to learn in an environment that is free from harm. Therefore, a child’s family home should represent a ‘safe space’ for the child to emotionally regulate with the support of their family, while being comforted by their familiar and secure surroundings.

“She has great communication skills but when she gets angry or frustrated, she can get overwhelmed, she removes herself from the room and when she calms down, comes back to talk it out” (Parent-A, 2022).

A child’s bedroom can often represent a place of sanctuary where a child feels most at peace and free from harm.

Within the home, many of the children had adopted their own emotion regulation strategies which involved retreating to their bedroom environment while experiencing intense emotions. Parents also mentioned this practice as a strategy they resorted to or utilised prior to participating in this action research project.

“If it’s a really bad situation involving other siblings & a really bad temper, I will remove her from the room & go into her bedroom with her, I don't say anything but let her calm down & come to me when she is ready” (Parent-D, 2022).

Many parents admitted that this was a strategy they did unconsciously, perhaps from past childhood experiences or from recognition of their child’s place of tranquillity. Thus, accompanying them to the bedroom in hope of a calming influence over the intensity of their emotion and corresponding behaviour.

“Sometimes going to their room and getting into bed, hugging teddies and hiding under the quilt” (Parent-B, 2022). This ‘safe space’ was also mentioned numerous times during an intervention lesson where we examined how we can change our emotional state e.g., from sad to happy. The children were invited to identify what they do when they feel an intense emotion and what they could do to turn a negative feeling into a positive feeling. “When I feel angry, I go to my room, slam the door, hug my favourite teddy, and snuggle up in my rainbow blanket!” (Rachel, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022). This practice presented the most popular action taken by most of the children when they felt an overwhelming emotion. It was interesting to note that the children who chose other methods such as colouring pictures, listening to their favourite song and reading a book, all transpired in the location of the child’s bedroom. “When I feel sad, I like to draw happy pictures on my bed beside my toys to cheer myself up!” (Jessica, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022).



*Figure 4.4 Jessica's Reflection 5 of What Calms Me Down.*

To conclude, the home as a 'safe space' is an essential aspect in enabling children to regulate their emotions. A home represents the primary location of a child's sense of safety and security. It is crucial parents establish a safe, nurturing environment where children feel secure in expressing their feelings. When children are in a 'safe space', they feel comfortable to explore different strategies to control and regulate intense emotions.

#### ***4.4 Key Influencers of Emotion Regulation***

After examination of the data, it became evident that as a teacher I played a highly influential role in the emotion regulation process of the children. As a role model in the children's lives, they often mimic my behaviours and coping mechanisms.

“I have noticed over the past few days that the children are copying phrases that I use in class such as: ‘The only mistake in art is if you are not having fun!’. I also observed the children using phrases from our emotion regulation lessons when they are chatting on yard such as: ‘How did that make you feel?’” (Farrelly, ‘Reflective Journal’ 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022).

This highlighted to me the influential role I play as a teacher in the lives of the children, particularly in their emotion regulation progress.

Their fellow classmates and peers also have a central role in young children's lives and can have significant impact on their individual characters and corresponding behaviours. “I drew the same mood monster as Charlie because he is my best friend!” (Fionn, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2022). Children can often imitate behaviours of their peers, irrespective of these behaviours being positive or negative, in an attempt to ‘fit in’ or succeed among their peers.



#### ***4.4.1 Teacher as an Influencer of Emotion Regulation***

“When a teacher establishes and upholds class expectations... students learn that they can trust their teacher” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47). With the establishment of a ‘my space’ and ‘safe space’ a teacher builds a foundation of trust with their students. By upholding the expectations of treating one another with respect and the practice of sharing individual feelings in a safe and supportive environment without fear of mockery, children feel secure in developing and exploring their emotion regulation skills. In the creation of this ‘safe space’ the teacher becomes a key influencer of emotion regulation for the children. By introducing them to the concept of emotion regulation through intervention lessons and strategies, the children begin to view the teacher as a mentor to follow and imitate.

It is fundamental that teachers build a strong relationship with the children.

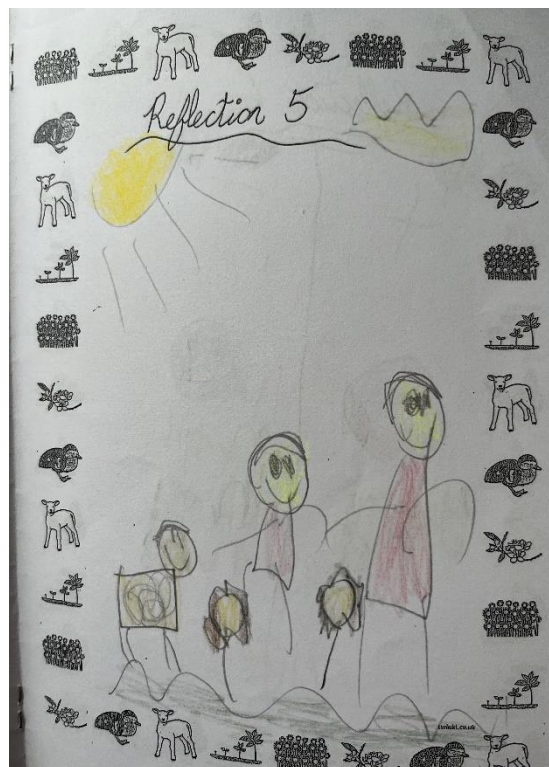
“A positive and warm relationship, also referred to as a teacher–child relationship that is high in closeness, may help the child feel emotionally safe, develop cognitive and social competence, and have improved school success” (Acar, et al., 2021, p. 4).

If children feel ‘emotionally safe’ than they will ultimately feel more comfortable in sharing their emotions and exploring emotion regulation strategies. “I think it is good to share how you feel. It is nice for teacher to share how she feels too!” (Paul, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022). By sharing our emotions as teachers, we are enabling the children to experience this sense of feeling ‘emotionally safe’, and encourage them to share their emotions in the comfort of a positive and close teacher-child relationship.

This teacher-child relationship can also represent a ‘safe space’ as previously outlined in the section above.

“Close teacher–child relationships can be conceptualized as safe havens for children where they are emotionally secure and thus able to more easily adapt to the school environment and be academically successful” (Acar, et al., 2021, p. 12).

This close teacher-child relationship was evident in the children’s reflections and happiness journals where they often drew me as the teacher as part of their reflective drawing. In the image below (*see Figure 4.5*) the child reflected on a moment where he felt calm and chose when I, his teacher, showed him the flowers growing in the school garden during playtime.



**Figure 4.5** Billy’s Reflection 5 Drawing of Teacher and Billy at Playtime

As a role model who had created this teacher-child relationship of trust and emotional security, I became a key influencer in the exploration of emotion regulation in my class. “Teachers should emphasize the importance of exercising self-control and restraint when challenged and of responding appropriately” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47). Throughout the school day moments can arise, where as teachers, we feel challenged, and our patience can be tested to the limits. It is vital to model emotion regulation strategies for the children so they can see how these strategies work in real-life scenarios.

“Today I felt overwhelmed, and the children were very hyperactive, and listening skills were extremely poor. I decided that this was the best time to model Tucker Turtle. Inside my shell, I peeked out at the children and watched as one-by-one they began to regulate and transform into their own Tucker Turtle Shell” (Farrelly, ‘Reflective Journal’ 6<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

This was a significant moment in the research process for me. It encouraged me to recognise the importance of modelling the emotion regulation strategies in action. The children recognised that as a teacher, even I needed to emotionally regulate when I felt overwhelmed and reacted by supporting me through engaging in the emotion regulation strategy too.



*Figure 4.6 Fionn's Reflection 4 Drawing of Teacher as Tucker Turtle*

Through teacher modelling of the emotion regulation strategies, the children can see how to use these strategies to manage overwhelming emotions in real life situations.

“For example, if students lash out verbally or physically when mistreated by others, teachers can help them to learn restraint and self-control, which lead to more positive and constructive responses” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 48).

By exploring these emotion regulation strategies with the guidance of the teacher as a key influencer, children can adapt their automated negative behaviours by adopting these strategies to successfully control intense states of emotion. “I like how teacher does the mood monster wall, tucker turtle and the meditation with us. It’s really fun that way!” (Mia, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

#### ***4.4.2 Peers as Influencers of Emotion Regulation***

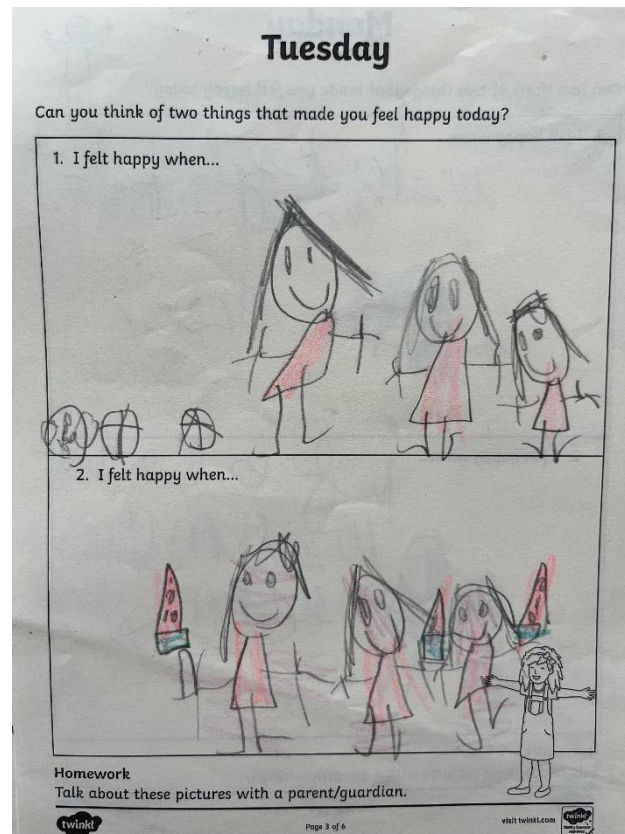
“Students’ numerous interactions with peers throughout the school day are believed to be related to students’ emotion- and academic-related outcomes” (Valiente, et al., 2020, p. 582).

Unquestionably, peers play a highly influential role on the development of the individual child. Children place great importance on interactions with their fellow peers, particularly when it comes to peer acceptance. They are highly influenced by the opinions and actions of their peers.

“Peer influence can be described as the process whereby one child changes, or is changed by, another child. Influence indicates that an individual behaves in such a way that they would not have acted alone. This change in behaviour is attributed to a desire to match peers in behaviour or ability level” (Valiente, et al., 2020, p. 582).

This peer influence is also evident in the child’s development of emotion regulation.

In contrast to their relationship with the teacher as an older, authoritative guide, who is leading them through their learning journey, communication with their peers is done on a level of equality and voluntarism. Children are free to establish friendships with their peers and determine which children they are most compatible with. “Nevertheless, because students strongly value peer relationships and often match their behaviours to the behaviours of their peer group, peers are believed to influence student outcomes” (Valiente, et al., 2020, p. 582). In parallel to the modelling influence of the teacher, peer influence can also encourage children to imitate positive behaviours.



*Figure 4.7 Ava's Happiness Journal Tuesday Drawing*

In the image above (*Figure 4.7*) the child recalled a happy moment of playing outside with her friends. She drew a picture of playing football together and another picture where they had the same yoghurt for lunch. Although, this portrays peer influence in a simplistic sense, it emphasises the desire of the child to be the same as her fellow peers and to 'fit in'.

Children often search for approval and support within their peer group. "The positive nature of peer interactions, beyond mere exposure to peers, is critical for students' emotional competence, including self-regulation" (Valiente, et al., 2020, p. 583). Through meaningful interactions with their peers, children can adopt effective emotion self-regulation strategies and utilise these methods during communications with their peers.

Observing their peers embracing the strategies and using them to control intense emotions, influences the individual child to mimic the same approach.

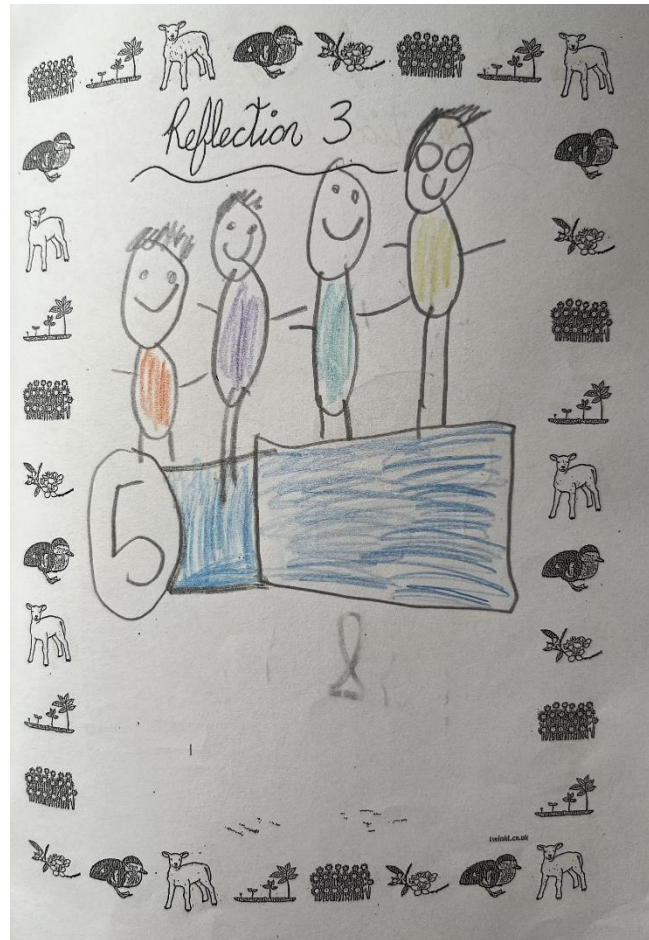
“I felt sad today. Billy showed me my happiness journal and I felt happy again. He said that it is okay to be sad, but it is important to try and be happy!” (Rachel, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

This simple interaction transformed Rachel from a state of sadness to a state of happiness. It encouraged the child to use the strategy of the happiness journal to regulate their emotional state through positive peer influence.

“Peers can collectively shape the social environment of the classroom by encouraging what are considered acceptable emotional and behavioural expressions in the classroom” (Valiente, et al., 2020, p. 585). Peer influence can dictate the class view on acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, alongside appropriate strategies to be used to regulate an individual’s intense emotional state.

“I’ve observed over the last while that ‘Share and Solve’ discussions are far more positive than they used to be. Previously some of the class would have used Share and Solve as an opportunity to complain about their peer, whereas now it is more positive” (Critical-Friend, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

By creating a ‘safe space’ with their peers, where a greater emphasis is placed on accounting for other children’s feelings while sharing individual states of emotion, our restorative practice was transformed by the children through peer influence. The children began identifying their feelings, including potential feelings of their peers, and recognising possible reasons behind these emotive states while adopting strategies to regulate intense emotions.



*Figure 4.8 Billy's Reflection 3 Drawing of Billy in 5<sup>th</sup> Place*

The image above (*Figure 4.8*) is a prime example of how peer influence can promote a positive classroom atmosphere and result in a change of perspective, in addition to adapting behavioural and emotional expression. Billy drew a picture of when he came in fifth place in a racing game at playtime. Generally, fifth place would not be viewed by children as a moment that would evoke a sense of achievement. “I drew this picture because Cian said that it was really good coming in 5<sup>th</sup> place when there’s so many in the class. This made me really happy!” (Billy, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2022).



Peer influence was successfully regulating the child's initial emotional response of frustration and failure to one of happiness and achievement. "Results indicated that the self-regulation skills of classroom peers moderated children's individual self-regulation growth" (Montroy, et al., 2016, p. 80). Coinciding with the study carried out by Montroy et al. (2016) the class peer was able to mediate a potential overwhelming negative state of emotion and corresponding behaviour, enabling the individual child to develop greater emotion self-regulation.

#### ***4.5 Pupil Identity and Autonomy***

Throughout the research process it became evident that both pupil identity and autonomy would play a central role in the development of emotion regulation skills. The children engaged in a learning journey where they began to realise that their emotional state was a separate entity to their individual identity.

"Just because I feel a feeling, it doesn't mean I am that feeling. Like if I feel angry it doesn't mean I am an angry person all of the time!" (Jessica, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

Autonomy over what strategies they preferred to use also played a significant role in their emotion regulation development. This was also transferred into their home life. "I heard a lot about the mood monster wall, 'Rachel' felt very comfortable expressing her feelings this way" (Parent-A, 2022). The child's autonomous selection of their preferred emotion regulation strategy had also been adopted into their home life.

#### ***4.5.1 Identifying emotions and corresponding behaviours***

In order to successfully regulate their emotions, children must have the ability to identify their state of emotion. I found it surprising how many of the children found this extremely challenging at the beginning of the research process.

“I am shocked at how difficult the children are finding it to identify their feelings. We played a game of feelings charades today and most of the class were unable to act out or use facial expressions to show a feeling e.g., happy” (Farrelly, ‘Reflective Journal’ 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2022).

The mood monster wall was developed in response to this research finding. The focus was primarily placed on identifying the emotion and the reason behind that state of emotion. “They are able to articulate how they are feeling and can say why they chose that particular feeling. For example, one child chose nervous and was able to tell the teacher he has a big race coming up!” (Critical-Friend, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

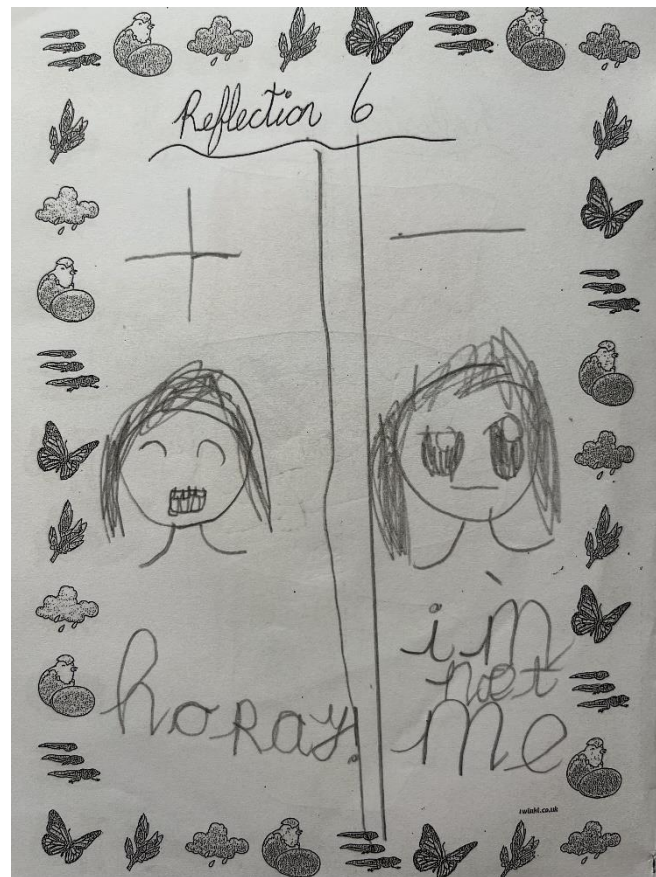
Identifying corresponding behaviours in response to these emotions is vital in the development of emotion regulation strategies and skills. “Studies have shown that learning how to regulate emotional responses and behaviour in adaptive and socially appropriate ways plays an important role in children’s successful development” (Kurki, et al., 2017, p. 50). Throughout the research process the children were encouraged to identify their feelings and the possible reasons for why they might be feeling that way. This later developed into the children identifying behaviour patterns for certain emotions. “When I feel sad, I cry. When I get in trouble I cry too. Mammy says I cry a lot, but I don’t know what else to do!” (Sarah, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022). This particular child had a tendency to cry as a reflexive behaviour whenever she felt an overwhelming emotion.

By adopting some of the emotion regulation strategies when she felt intense feelings, she was able to adapt her corresponding behaviours into a more appropriate and controlled response. “Certainly, seems to be managing emotions better recently...” (Parent-A, 2022).

In addition to identifying their feelings and corresponding behaviours, it became evident that the children were beginning to separate their individual identities from their emotive states. This was not an anticipated outcome of the research; however, the finding became apparent during the research process. “When I am happy. I am me! When I feel angry or sad, I am like the mood monster and I’m not me!” (Rachel, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022). Some of the children began to connect their individual identities to the emotion regulation process.

“Warin (2010) brings to light the questions about identity and argues that self is crucial to a person’s overall psychological well-being as it enables one to take control of our lives and helps to manage our experiences” (Raburu, 2015, p. 95).

I observed how the children connected the act of controlling emotions with both our personal identity as an individual and our social identity with our peers. “If someone is angry all the time, then you’re not going to want to play with them because they will ruin the game and it won’t be fun anymore!” (Billy, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022). In addition to this, the child also recognised how their emotive state can be seen as a separate entity to their individual identity.



*Figure 4.9 Rachel's Reflection 6 Drawing of Positive Emotion and Negative Emotion*

In the drawing above (*Figure 4.9*) Rachel has separated her individual identity from her emotive state. She drew the positive emotion of happiness in the first column with a phrase of affirmation “Hooray!”. In the second column Rachel drew a negative emotion of anger, with the definitive phrase “I’m not me!”. Here, she is making a clear distinction between her state of emotion and her individual identity. “Developing positive identities touches on some fundamental questions facing every young child: ‘who am I?’, Is it ok to be who I am? and what is my place in the world?” (Raburu, 2015, p. 97). These fundamental questions relate the individual self to their personality, a sense of belonging and morality, among other concepts, with a notable absence of temporary emotional states.

#### ***4.5.2 Autonomy over strategies to use***

Realistically, every emotion regulation strategy is not going to work successfully for every child in the class. Therefore, it is vital that we enable the children to autonomously select the strategies that work best for them.

“The connotations of autonomy are that the individual can act independently of external authority and take the initiative for thinking and then acting as s/he sees fit; each individual senses an equal right to explore and express their own particular views, free from others’ inhibiting judgements; and therefore, has the ability to challenge habitual ways of thinking and traditional notions about his/her position in learning and/or in life” (Hargreaves, 2014, p. 296).

For the purpose of this study, my finding was centred around the pupil’s initiative to control an intense emotion, express their individual feelings without judgement or ridicule and transform from an overwhelming state of emotion to an authoritative position, where they could utilise effective strategies to control intense emotions in a constructive manner.

By providing a range of strategies for the children to use to emotionally regulate, we are also enabling them to autonomously select and utilize strategies that work best for them as individuals.

“Black and Deci (2000) found students’ perceptions of their instructors as supportive of autonomy predicted increased autonomous self-regulation, perceived competence, interest/ enjoyment, and decreased anxiety” (Patall, et al., 2010, p. 898).

This autonomous self-regulation of emotions will develop into a life skill for the children. The below image (*see Figure 4.10*) portrays a child's autonomously chosen strategy which she uses to regulate her emotions. As part of her reflective process, Mia drew a self-portrait with speech bubbles saying 'Stop' and 'Take a Deep Breath'. From further analysis of this piece of data, I realised that the speech bubbles were also steps taken from the 'Tucker Turtle' emotion regulation story. Mia had adapted these steps to autonomously create her own emotion regulation strategy to use when she felt overwhelmed. "I liked trying all the different things like the mood monster board, the feelings thermometer, and the meditation. My favourite one is Tucker Turtle though!" (Paul, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022).



**Figure 4.10** Mia's Reflection 5 Self-Portrait Drawing

By providing the children with a choice of strategies, we are enabling them to gravitate away from co-regulation and develop independent emotion regulation. This also fosters self-discipline while encouraging the children to discover which strategy works best for them.

“In this study, teachers reported believing that providing students with choices increases student interest, engagement, and learning; that students spend more time and effort on the learning task if they are offered choices; and that giving students choices helps build other important skills, such as self-regulation” (Patall, et al., 2010, p. 896).

By exploring a range of strategies and allowing the children to experience them, it provided me with a valuable insight into identifying the most popular strategies used.

“As I’ve previously said, the Mood Monster Wall is working effectively, but the class are also very good at using the Feelings Thermometer to explain what level (1-5) they are at” (Critical-Friend, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

The Feelings Thermometer was particularly effective in supporting the children to identify when emotions became overwhelming and that heightened emotions need to be regulated by using strategies. This was also a strategy that intertwined with other strategies explored in the class, as it enabled the children to identify when they needed to implement their preferred strategy to regulate their emotional state.



**Figure 4.11** Paul's Reflection 3 Drawing of The Emotion Thermometer

The parent endline questionnaire gave me an insight into whether the strategies were discussed or used within the home environment. Sixty percent of the children had mentioned the different strategies at home. Within this sixty percent, each parent was able to recognise all the strategies from a list with one or two exceptions. This showed me that the children were sharing or using the range of strategies with their parental figures. “I would be interested in my child learning more strategies for emotional regulation & being informed of this to encourage their use at times” (Parent-B, 2022). As a key influencer of emotion regulation, parents referred to the word strategy in its pluralist terms, highlighting the need for more than one strategy to support emotion regulation.



Therefore, children autonomously selecting from a choice of strategies, is an essential aspect in the development of emotion regulation as a skill.

#### ***4.6 Power of Reflection and Mindfulness***

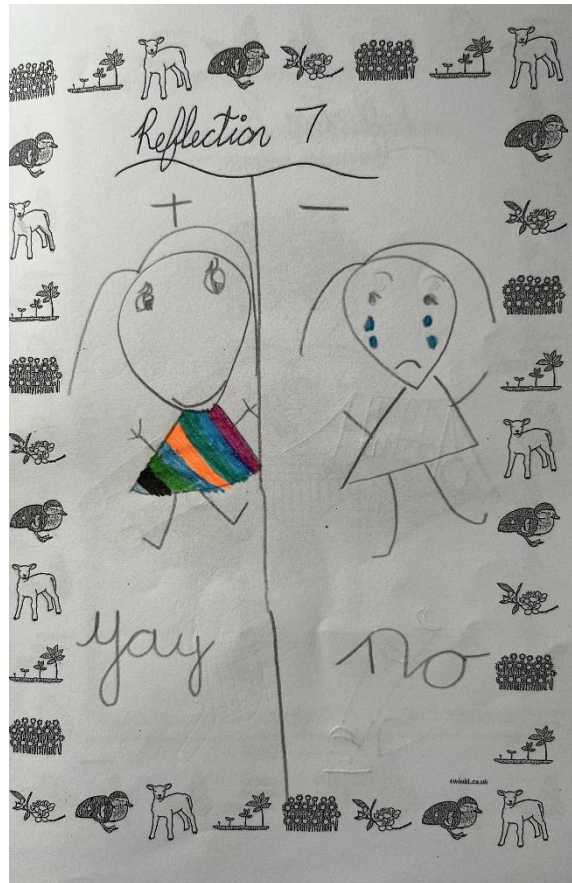
The final theme that emerged from analysing the data, was the necessary provision of time for reflection and mindfulness in the classroom to support the development of emotion regulation.

“The essence of mindfulness is simple: by attending to the present moment with an attitude of acceptance, openness and curiosity, we can train our minds, regulate our emotions, control our behaviours, and cultivate healthier relationships with the people and events around us” (Armstrong, 2019, p. 31).

This quote perfectly encapsulates the ultimate goal and potential benefits of practising mindfulness and reflection during the development of emotion regulation.

##### ***4.6.1 Impact of Reflection on Emotion Regulation***

Reflection was explored using methods including the children’s self-reflection journals and their happiness journals. These individualised booklets created a ‘safe space’ for the children to engage in self-reflection. “Reflection, or the process of critically thinking about our behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and values, has been identified by numerous researchers as an important part of any learning process, be it formal or informal” (Roberts, 2008, p. 117). By allocating time in each lesson for reflection, the children had the opportunity to reflect on both their new learning surrounding emotion regulation and their progress in developing emotion regulation strategies.



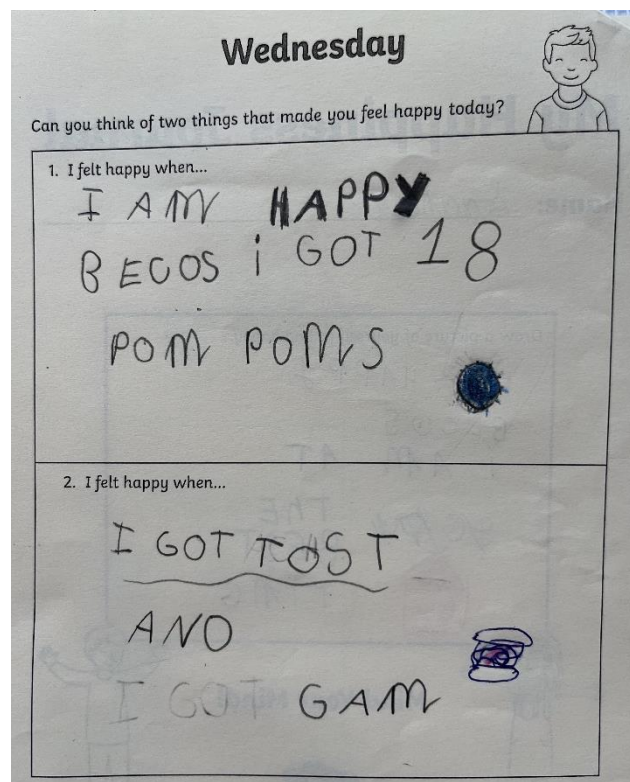
*Figure 4.12 Jessica's Reflection 7 Drawing of Positive Emotion and Negative Emotion*

It is vital to note that guided reflection also played a significant role in supporting the children's emotion regulation development.

“Students may not have any idea how to proceed, and without some direction and guided questioning, reflective activities may result in written logs or verbal narratives of events with little critical thinking applied” (Roberts, 2008, p. 118).

The children were encouraged to reflect on the lessons and emotional experiences that may have arisen during the lesson activities. By clearly setting this premise at the beginning of the reflective process it ensured that the children engaged critically in their reflections.

“The development of reflective ability can be facilitated in a variety of ways from individual activities such as journaling to group dialogue and discussion” (Roberts, 2008, p. 119). By engaging in guided reflection at the end of lessons through partner chats and group discussions, the children were developing their ability to critically reflect on lesson activities and emotive states. It also led to their reflections becoming more individualised and in depth.



*Figure 4.13 Fionn's Happiness Journal Wednesday Drawing*

Engaging in reflection enabled the children to reflect on their emotions, thought processes, behavioural responses, and coping strategies within their own emotion regulation abilities. “Invitation to reflection can be seen as a response-focused strategy linked to Gross (1998) process model of emotional regulation, wherein reflection first occurs only after emotions are fully triggered” (Kostol & Cameron, 2021, p. 828).

By reflecting on their emotional experiences, the children were able to examine how they felt, what triggered that feeling, how they responded and most importantly what they would do differently if the same experience arose again.

“When my brother took my toy, it made me feel angry. Normally I’d hit him or scream but I decided to stop and take a deep breath like what we do in class” (Laura, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

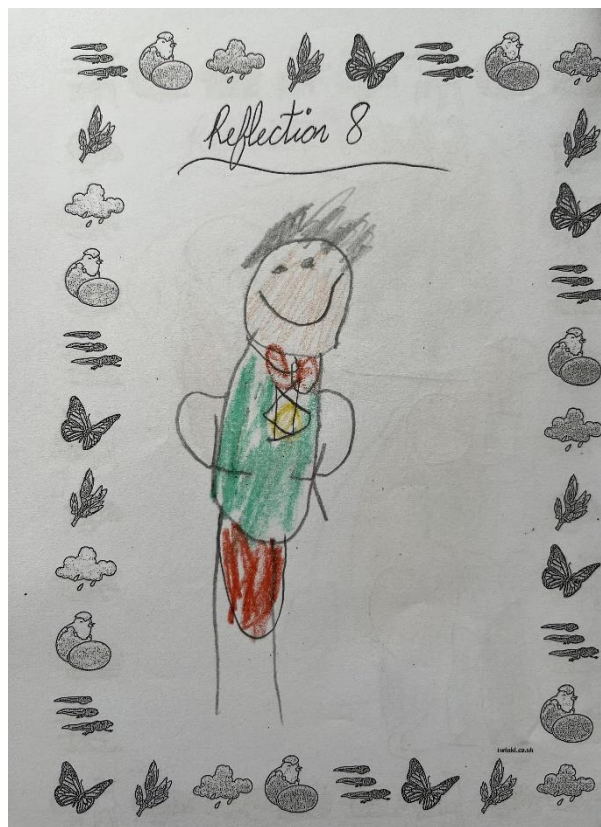
As a response-focused strategy, reflection enables the children to gather a new insight into their emotion regulation skills. “Experience leads to observation, reflection about that experience, and ultimately the development of new insights or conclusions which shape different action in the future” (Roberts, 2008, p. 117). They can learn to adapt their reflexive negative behaviours and adopt emotion regulation strategies to support them during heightened emotive states.

#### ***4.6.2 Impact of Mindfulness on E.R.***

Mindfulness also played an integral role alongside critical reflection. Prior to the research, the children and I had not engaged in mindfulness practices in the classroom. This was a new experience which enabled the children to create their own ‘safe space’ and relax both body and mind. The calming influence of the mindfulness lessons was noticeable from the start.

“I cannot believe that I have never engaged in mindfulness with an infant class prior to this. Although it took a few attempts to stifle the giggles and maintain concentration, the children are now at a point where they ask, ‘Can we do mindfulness today?’. It has worked really well for the majority of the children who enjoy the sense of calm and a break from the busy school day” (Farrelly, ‘Reflective Journal’ 6<sup>th</sup> May 2022).

The children particularly enjoyed the guided imagery element of the mindfulness lessons, where they had the opportunity to adopt a persona and explore mindfulness through an imaginary storyline. “I loved the superhero story. I could imagine flying high above the clouds away from my bad feelings” (Sam, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2022). Some of the children also adapted this mindfulness practice as a strategy to manage intense emotions, akin to the mindfulness practice explored by Sedenka (2019) in her elementary classroom. “When these emotions arose, I told them to stop and take some breaths and picture that emotion either floating away down a stream or floating up and away into the clouds” (Sedenka, 2019, p. 667).

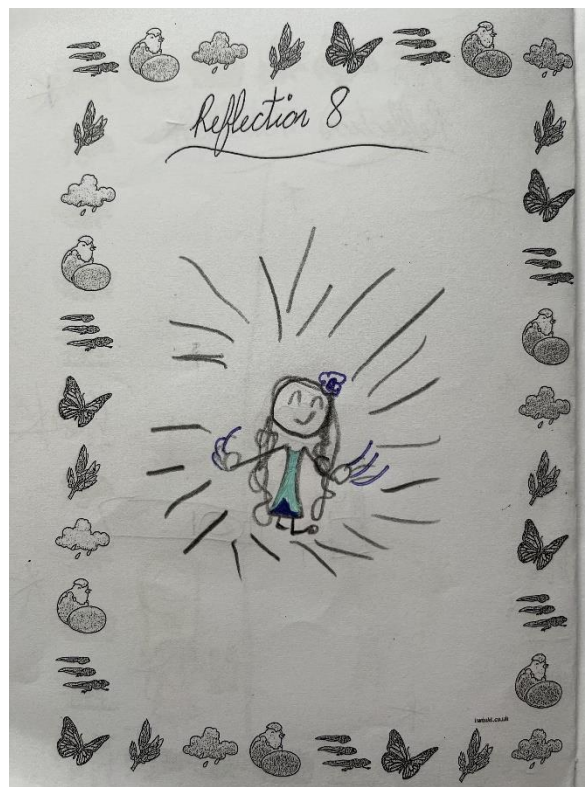


*Figure 4.14 Sam's Reflection 8 Drawing of Superhero Mindfulness Journey*

Mindfulness was also referred to with regards to breathing techniques, on numerous occasions in the baseline parent questionnaires. Many of the parents mentioned the use of breathing exercises at home in supporting their children's emotion regulation.

“Counting on her fingers and breathing slowly to calm down” (Parent-A, 2022). “Deep breathing when upset” (Parent-D, 2022). “I will sometimes get her to take deep breaths and count e.g., 1 Zen, 2 Zen etc.” (Parent-A, 2022).

The various breathing techniques enabled the children to calm the heightened state of emotion they were experiencing. “The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel” (N.E.P.S., 2021, p. 9). Deep breathing exercises supported the children's emotion regulation by creating a sense of calm and control over intense feelings. “Studies have shown that simply stopping what you are doing and taking some mindful breaths helps you get into a calmer state” (Sedenka, 2019, p. 667).



**Figure 4.15** Laura's Reflection 8 Drawing of Meditation

#### ***4.7 Chapter Summary***

The four themes I discovered after extensive analysis of the data were a safe space, key influencers of emotion regulation, pupil identity and autonomy and the power of reflection and mindfulness. The establishment of a safe space is fundamental in exploring emotions and emotion regulation. Teacher and parents are key influencers in modelling and teaching emotion regulation skills and strategies. Pupil identity and autonomy enable the children to develop emotion regulation as a life skill and adopt suitable strategies to support them. It is vital that they recognise heightened emotional states as separate from their identity as individuals. Lastly, engagement in reflection encourages the children to reflect on their emotional states and behaviours and adapt their negative responses. Mindfulness also provides them with the ability to create their very own 'safe space' and create a calm environment free of tension and anxiety.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### ***5.1 Introduction***

This self-study action research was carried out with the primary aim of exploring effective strategies to support children's development of emotion regulation in a large infant classroom. My values of inclusion, care and empathy guided me throughout the research process. This chapter begins by summarising my main findings and identifying the limitations of this study. I will outline my recommendations for my own professional practice, school policy and future research. The final words will explore my own personal reflection.

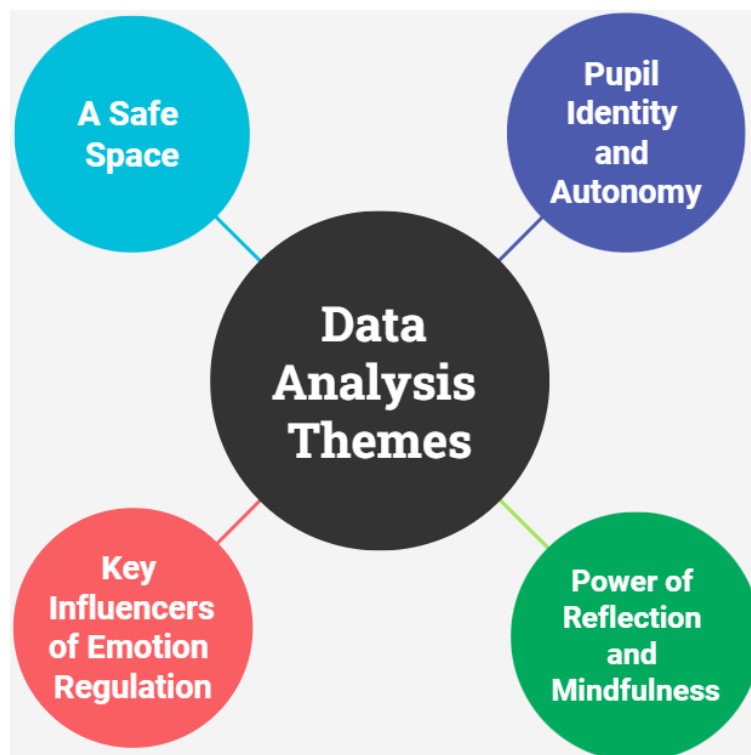
### ***5.2 Research Summary***

The comprehensive examination of literature based on both action research and emotion regulation equipped me with the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake this action research project. Within the literature review, I centred my critical review around central themes including defining emotion regulation, types of emotion regulation such as intrinsic and extrinsic, its link to self-regulation, the influence of early childhood, the role of parents and teachers, the use of S.E.L. programmes and various emotion regulation strategies previously explored by researchers in this field. While engaging with the literature, it became apparent that a noticeable gap exists surrounding the exploration of emotion regulation with such a young age group of children, particularly within the educational context.



Self-study action research was chosen as a suitable methodology as it enabled me to autonomously conduct my research within my everyday work environment, examine my individual practice and engage in critical reflection, with my values at the epicentre of my research. Intervention strategies included a mood monster wall, feelings books, feelings thermometer, the tucker turtle technique, positive self-talk, happiness journals and breathing techniques alongside mindfulness. Data was collected using the following data collection instruments: parent questionnaires (baseline and endline), teacher questionnaire, content analysis of children's work (happiness journals etc.), child interviews, critical friend reflection and reflective journals (teacher and pupils). Data was analysed and coded using a framework based on the four lenses outlines by Brookfield (2017).

The four central themes that emerged after analysing the data were:



**Figure 5.1** Mind Map Diagram Outlining the Four Key Themes

(Taken from <https://infograph.venngage.com/infographics>)

A living theory was established in line with Whitehead (2009), which acknowledged emotion regulation as a life skill requiring both fostering and support, using effective strategies and modelling by key influencers, in both a safe and secure school and home environment.

### ***5.3 Limitations of the Study***

This study had some limitations. Firstly, in choosing action research as my chosen paradigm, research was carried out on a singular case basis i.e., with one individual class group and class level. “One of the weaknesses of action research is its localism and the difficulty we find in intervening in large-scale social change efforts” (Brydon-Miller, et al., 2003, p. 25). Therefore, the potential of this study failed to extend beyond the local context. The exploration of emotion regulation strategies was confined to the infant age group within the designated classroom setting.

Secondly, no assessment tool was found to evaluate the effectiveness of specific emotion regulation strategies for the children as individuals or as a class group. A longitudinal study would also have had the potential to examine emotion regulation strategies used in early childhood and on through the following years of life towards adolescence and adulthood. Lastly, it would be impossible to outline definitive results or findings from this research due to its phenomenological basis.

#### ***5.4 Transformative Change and Recommendations***

“While you may never be able to marvel at a perfected, polished, definitive set of findings...you can marvel at the enormity of what you have learned...and the power it holds for transforming both your identity as a teacher and your teaching practice” (Fichtman & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020, p. 197).

This quote aptly summarises the penultimate result of this action research project. This research has resulted in transformative change in my teaching practices. It has also highlighted the need for further research in emotion regulation, with a primary focus on young children within the educational context.

##### ***5.4.1 Transformative Change***

Prior to embarking on this professional research journey, I was oblivious to the potential impact my newfound learning and research experiences would have on my professional practice. I discovered that at times I was inhabiting Whitehead’s (1989) ‘living contradiction’ and failing to uphold my core values of inclusion, care, and empathy within the classroom.

My teaching practices have evolved. Prior to implementing mindfulness as an intervention strategy, I had no experience of mindfulness practices in the classroom. I now recognise the positive influence of mindfulness for the children as it provides them with a break from the busy school day while instilling a sense of calm within the classroom environment.

The mood monster board and happiness journals encouraged me to recognise the significant need to check-in with the children on a daily basis. Despite having a large group of thirty-two children, it is vital to ensure that every voice is heard and given the opportunity

to share personal stories or upsetting issues. Lastly, the restorative practice of share and solve, although beneficial in isolation, is far more constructive alongside the teaching of emotion regulation. The children are taught to recognise and acknowledge both their own individual feelings and the feelings of their peers.

Following my research, I can now acknowledge the importance of strengthening relationships with both the children and their parents. A daily check-in provides the children with the opportunity to be heard by both the teacher and their peers in a busy class environment. Some parents have adopted the emotion regulation strategies at home and enjoyed sharing their progress. This has created a more open relationship where both of our roles are respected in the lives of the children, not only in relation to their academic development but also regarding their personal and social development.

Lastly, my experience as a 'living contradiction' lies within the concept of emotion regulation itself. As a confessed perfectionist, who often strives off routine and plans, this research project forced me to exit my comfort zone and challenge myself. I felt I had to be a role model for the children and ignore my anxieties, by taking on this project and presenting it to college professors and my peers, which previously would have been the epitome of a horrific nightmare.

### **5.4.2 Recommendations**

As a result of my research discoveries, I strongly recommend the nationwide implementation of an effective S.E.L. programme. “In Ireland, few S.E.L. programmes have been developed and evaluated” (Dowling & Barry, 2021, p. 1). Social and Emotional Learning Programmes help to develop five core social and emotional competencies outlined by C.A.S.E.L., comprising of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. These essential life skills are fundamental in the development of the child and their future self.

“School-based social and emotional learning (S.E.L.) interventions are proven to be one of the most effective universal mental health promotion strategies for young people demonstrating positive outcomes including improving social emotional skills, mental health and well-being and academic outcomes as well as reducing negative health and social behaviours” (Dowling & Barry, 2021, p. 1).

The potential benefits of this programme are extensive, particularly when mental health remains a constant issue at the forefront of modern society.

Therefore, I firmly advocate that education policymakers, curriculum personnel and the department of education re-examine the current time allocation for S.P.H.E. and consider a redraft of the curriculum where a greater emphasis is placed on mental health and equipping young children with the necessary skills, such as the five competencies mentioned above, to promote positive mental health and well-being. I implore for sufficient funding and comprehensive teacher and parent training to successfully implement an obligatory programme across all primary schools in Ireland.

Finally, I propose that more comprehensive and large-scale research be carried out on social and emotional learning in relation to effective strategies and potential benefits both short and long term. There should be yearly reviews of the nationwide S.E.L. programme to ensure that all material and components are up to date with current evidence-based research. The potential of a compulsory countrywide programme is astronomical regarding the possible benefits in terms of positive mental health and well-being while enabling society, both young and old, to cope with the modern stresses and anxieties of everyday life.

### ***5.5 Future Research***

Further research that I would like to conduct within this area would include:

- Six month or yearly follow-up investigations to examine what emotion regulation strategies have been maintained, adapted, or abandoned over time and with the progression of age
- Further interventions involving a variety of age groups and emotion regulation strategies across the primary school context
- Longitudinal studies examining emotion regulation skills from the beginning stages of infant education to the end stages of primary school education
- Longitudinal studies examining emotion regulation strategies in the first years of life and their development into adolescence and adulthood
- Development of an assessment tool to reveal children's emotion regulation capabilities and suitable strategies based on their individual learning styles, personality, and processing skills

### ***5.6 Final Words***

As I finish my self-study research project, I feel both enthusiastic and concerned. I am overjoyed to have found a topic of research that has enlightened not only my teaching practices but also led to growth within myself as an individual. I have ascended my values of inclusion, care, and empathy, and endeavour to leave my persona as a ‘living contradiction’ firmly in the past.

I am worried about the current provision of education to children regarding mental health and the development of life skills such as emotion regulation. I feel empowered to continue my research in this area and share my newfound learning with as many educators and educational influencers as possible. I aspire to see some of the recommendations I listed above successfully implemented in the Irish primary education context in the near future.

I will finish with a quote from an influential theorist who shares my core value of care and recognises the need to foster the successful development of the child through the highly influential time of childhood.

“Children are like tiny flowers. They are varied and need care, but each one is beautiful alone and glorious when seen in the community of peers” (Friedrich Froebel)

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**Appendix 1. Ethical Approval Application Form**  
**(Granted from the Froebel Department at Maynooth University)**



**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education**  
**Master of Education (Research in practice) (MEd)**

**Ethics Approval for Master of Education (Research in Practice)**  
*(Please read the notes in the course handbook before completing this form)*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Student name:</b>                                  | Nessa Farrelly  |
| <b>Student Number:</b>                                | 21251802  |
| <b>Supervisor:</b>                                    | Aoife Titley  |
| <b>Programme:</b>                                     | Master of Education (Research in Practice)  |
| <b>Thesis title:</b>                                  | Supporting Children with Emotional Regulation in a Large Infant Classroom   |
| <b>Research Question(s):</b>                          | “How Can I as a Primary School Teacher Implement Effective Strategies to Support Children with Emotional Regulation in a Large Infant Classroom?”   |
| <b>Intended start date of data collection:</b>        | 10 <sup>th</sup> January 2022   |
| <b>Professional Ethical Codes or Guidelines used:</b> | <p>DCYA Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children (April 2012).</p> <p>Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)<br/>         (if a child were to disclose something that I thought constituted a child protection issue, I would be obliged to bring it to the D.L.P./D.D.L.P. and this would supersede any assurances of confidentiality or anonymity that I might have promised as a researcher.)</p> <p>Records will be kept in compliance with current university and school guidelines.</p> |

**1(a) Research Participants:** Who will be involved in this research?Participants/group (*tick all that apply*)

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Early years / pre-school          |   |
| Primary school students           | √ |
| Secondary school students         |   |
| Young people (aged 16 – 18 years) |   |
| Adults                            | √ |

Provide a brief description of the individuals and their proposed role in your research below  
[Max 50 words]:

The individuals directly involved in my research will be thirty-two Senior Infant children. The children's parents or guardians will be involved as part of the consent and data collection process. A critical friend and validation group will be involved in the data collection process. Other individuals involved in the permission process will be the principal, the Board of Management and Maynooth University.

**1(b) Recruitment and Participation/sampling approach:** *How will these participants become involved in your research? What type of sampling is involved? Please describe the formal and informal recruitment processes? Please describe the type of participation and level of engagement of participants? Are there gatekeepers and what is their part of sampling process? [Max 100 words]*

I will make a verbal request to the Principal. I will send a letter to the Board of Management to seek their permission to carry out my research project with my class.

The children will be ongoing, active participants in the research. The parents will be active participants in the provision of consent and during the data collection process. I will have initial conversations with parents to inform them that I plan to do an action research project. I will send home a letter describing the research project, an information sheet outlining how their children would be involved in the process, and a parent consent form. The children will give informed assent by signing a child-friendly pictorial letter and consent form showing how they will take part in the research project. There will be an "opt-out" option for both parents/guardians and children throughout the research process where they will have the right to withdraw at any stage.

I intend to avail of a critical friend who will complete reflective templates based on their observations during the data collection process.

The research will take place in a mixed national school with a Catholic Ethos. It is a vertical school catering for Junior Infants up to Sixth Class. There are approximately 240 pupils in the school and nine mainstream classes.

The aim of my research is to identify suitable supports and strategies which I can implement in the classroom to support children with emotional regulation difficulties. I hope to enhance my own teaching practice and gather a greater understanding of these emotional difficulties and how I can support young children to regulate their emotions.

My proposed research question is “How can I as a primary school teacher implement effective strategies to support children with emotional regulation in a large infant classroom?” My chosen methodology will be research in practice through self-study action research. My methodology will be underpinned by both my epistemological and ontological values including care, inclusion and empathy. My data will be qualitative. My data sources will involve both people i.e., participants, and artefacts i.e., reflective journal. I will ensure that my research site, research participants and validation group remain anonymous. I will also ensure that data remains confidential and is stored in a safe place in compliance with Maynooth University guidance on GDPR.

My data collection tools will comprise of:

- a reflective journal
- observations
- transcripts of interviews
- transcripts of conversations
- analysis of children’s drawings/worksheets
- parent and teacher questionnaires/surveys

I have chosen these specific data collection tools as I believe they will be the most relevant to my research topic and allow for triangulation of data. Data collection will commence on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022. My final edition of my research project will be submitted on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2022.

**3. Ethical Issues:** Please outline the main ethical issues which may arise while undertaking this research. *Outline the nature of consent and assent about participants. (You should discuss these concerns and outline the responses/supports you will provide in the boxes below)*

There are many ethical considerations to examine while carrying out my research. I must consider my ethical professional values, responsibilities to pupils and parents, responsibilities to the university, and other legal requirements, should I decide to make my research public. I also need to consult relevant school policies, data protection guidelines and safeguarding children policies.

Therefore, I need to gain permission from the following people / bodies:

- The thirty-two children in my class
- The parents of the children in my class
- The Principal
- The Board of Management
- The University (Maynooth)

It is vital that there is anonymity in relation to the individual children, fellow teachers, my validation group and the school. As I am working with Infants, consent may pose an ethical challenge. I will overcome this by seeking informed and voluntary consent from their parents/guardians. There will be an "opt-out" option for all participants throughout the research project where they can withdraw at any stage. I will also break down my research ideas into child-friendly language and pictorially show the children how they will participate in the research. I will explain how the research is not about measuring them, but rather they are helping me to develop my practice in the classroom. I will use visual cues such as a research on and off sign to ensure the children are informed when data collection is taking place in the classroom.

As my research is based on emotional regulation, there may be sensitivity around the topic, leading to upset or distress. I will consult the HSLP and the Learning Support Teacher as a trusted person to seek guidance and support. If a child becomes upset/distressed during data collection I will ask a responsible and trusted adult, such as the L.S. teacher, to look after the class while I address the situation in a quiet place with the child.

Data will be stored in a secure, encrypted location. Hard copies will be kept in a number-key protected folder in a locked filing cabinet. Soft copies will be kept in a password protected online folder using the OneDrive programme.



Vulnerability (*minimising risk, discomfort, coping with unforeseen outcomes, can any aspect of the research give rise to any form of harm to participants, including the researcher?*) [Max 100 words]

I will endeavour to minimise risk to my best ability. Emotional regulation can be an uncomfortable and distressing topic for some parents/guardians and children. Therefore, I will provide support for participants and consult relevant trusted people i.e., HSLP. Where possible I will have a trusted and responsible person in the room to enable me to remove a child where necessary and address any issues which may arise during the data collection process, on a one-to-one basis outside of the classroom.

As the researcher, this self-study may have an impact on both my professional growth and my relationship with my fellow staff members. I plan to maintain a positive attitude during the research process, especially during unforeseen outcomes. I have established a good working relationship with my colleagues and plan to keep them fully informed during my research process.

Unforeseen circumstances may include a level of COVID-19 quarantine. Therefore, I plan to adapt my study to accommodate this by moving my research online. I would ensure that there is a parent in the room during any online interaction with the children. I would also remain vigilant of ethical issues which may arise from this and ensure anonymity and confidentiality are not impacted.

Outline the potential for increased risk to participants considering changing circumstances in the school environment because of immediate closure or threat to privacy or anonymity. Consider implications for a change or changes in methodological tools (virtual formats). [Max 50 words]

There is an increased risk, particularly in relation to privacy and confidentiality. Changes in methodological tools would include the following:

- online lessons through Seesaw/Microsoft Teams where data can be collected through audio transcripts
- student responses through drawings uploaded online (ensuring anonymity in responses)
- audio transcripts from recordings and conversations during student interviews/conversations on Microsoft Teams
- questionnaires and surveys using Google Forms as this programme would enable anonymity and confidentiality in teacher/parent responses
- data storage using OneDrive as this would allow for encrypted and secure storage of data
- student and parent support through check-ins in the form of phone calls/Microsoft Team's meetings with Learning Support Teacher/HSLP

Power dynamics (between researcher-participants, amongst participants, insider-research, reflexivity, gatekeepers, working with your colleagues, working with students, etc): [Max 100 words]

I plan to overcome any power dynamics through taking a democratic approach towards my relationship with participants and colleagues. I will remain vigilant of the fact that I will be working with young, vulnerable children. I have established a safe, comfortable learning environment for the children to learn and develop which will support the children during the research process. There will be an "opt-out" option for the children where they can withdraw if they no longer feel comfortable participating in the research project. I will remind them that the project is voluntary, and they do not have to share anything they feel uncomfortable about or find distressing.

I will reflect on my position throughout the research in relation to my values, assumptions, research approach, research stance and the actions I have taken. I will reflect internally on my own practice and externally on the context of the research. There is an "open-door" policy established in the school where all staff are encouraged to have open, honest relationships where each individual is respected, and their voices are heard. I plan to maintain this ideology while working with my participants and colleagues during the research process.

Informed consent and assent (for participants - and guardians where appropriate. Please also note any other approvals that may be required from other bodies (i.e., Board of Management.): [Max 100 words]

I will ensure that all consent and assent is provided voluntarily and fully informed of the components of my action research project.

I will gain approval from the following people / bodies:

- The thirty-two children in my class through child-friendly pictorial assent forms
- The parents of the children in my class through an explanation letter, an information sheet and a parent consent form
- The Principal through verbal request
- The Board of Management through a letter outlining my action research project and a signature of consent attached
- Maynooth University through my ethics proposal form

Consider if consent of participants may need to include a list of any new scenarios/situations that may be required for data collection activity in light of school closures or short-term illness of school members (teachers/SNA) and how this may impact the research. Outline below; [max 50 words]

As the data collection process would be adapted, consent would need to be reiterated as the parent's would have previously consented to data collection in the classroom environment and not through an online forum. Therefore, I plan to include a clause in the parent consent form alerting them to the possibility that part of the data collection process may be moved online in the event of an unforeseen circumstance e.g., quarantine due to Covid-19 directives

Consent of participants may include the following in light of school closures etc.:

- Consent from parent and children to disable camera and record an audio interview using Microsoft Teams
- Consent from parents and children to transcribe the data from audio recordings
- Anonymising photos of the children's drawings
- Anonymising typed, written or oral responses through online platforms such as Seesaw
- Parent presence during online lessons or conversations on Microsoft Teams
- Second responsible adult in online forum such as the Learning Support Teacher or DDLP to enable me to respond to any issues which may arise, such as moving a student who is upset to a break-out room to address their concern. Also, alerting parents before a potentially distressing issue for the children is explored as a whole class.

Sensitivity (topics that may be potentially sensitive, intrusive or stressful, have you considered what to do in relation to dealing with the aftermath of a sensitive disclosure? how do you intend to deal with unexpected outcomes?) [Max 100 words]

Emotional regulation is a potentially intrusive and stressful topic to explore with young children. The children have the right to withdraw at any stage from the research process if they feel uncomfortable or upset. I will seek advice and support from my principal/DLP if a sensitive disclosure has been made. I will seek advice from relevant colleagues such as the HSLP, on how to approach the aftermath of the disclosure. I will ensure that a trusted and responsible adult is nearby or in the classroom during data collection to enable me to address any issues privately in a quiet place outside of the room. I will alert parents prior to any potentially upsetting aspects for the children during the data collection process. Unexpected outcomes may arise throughout the research process and I will adopt a positivist and informative approach to these outcomes.

Data storage (where will the findings be stored; will they be potentially published in future? And by whom?)  
[Max 100 words]

All data collected will be relevant to my research topic. Data will be produced for my own personal use and if required by the research examiner. The data archive will be kept safe in accordance with my ethical commitments and GDPR guidelines. Any data stored online will be saved in an encrypted folder on OneDrive. Any physical data will be eliminated of personal identifiers such as pupil's full name etc. and stored in a folder where it will be accessed by a secure number pin in a locked filing cabinet. If data needs to be transferred, it will be done using a password protected USB which will be stored in a locked drawer. Data will be stored for the time stated and destroyed in accordance with Maynooth University guidelines.

*Ensure you have read University Ethics guidelines for Human Research and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) related documentation to address the above questions on data.*

**Attachments**

Please attach, where available and applicable, information letters, consent forms and other materials that will be used to inform potential participants about this research.

**Declaration** (Please sign and date)

'I confirm that to the best of my knowledge this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of undertaking this research.' If any of the conditions of this proposed research change, I confirm that I will re-negotiate ethical clearance with my supervisor.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Supervisor use only:**

Date Considered: \_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Approved   |  |
| Approved with recommendations (see below)            |  |
| Referred to applicant                                |  |
| Referred to Department Research and Ethics Committee |  |

*(Tick as appropriate)*

Recommendations:

Signature of supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

**Department use only:** *(only where applicable)*

Date Considered: \_\_\_\_\_

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Approved by Froebel Department Research and Ethics committee        |  |
| Approved with recommendations (see below)                           |  |
| Referred to applicant (changes to be approved by supervisor)        |  |
| Referred to Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Subcommittee |  |

*(Tick as appropriate)*

Recommendations:

Signature of Dept. Ethics Committee Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Approved by Froebel Department Research and Ethics committee |  |
| Referred to applicant (changes to be approved by supervisor) |  |

*(Tick that apply)*

**Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Subcommittee use only** *(only where applicable)*

Date Considered: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
FSS Research Ethics Committee nominee

## Appendix 2. Information Sheet for Parents and Children



**Maynooth University Froebel Department of  
Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas  
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am a student on the Master of Education (Research in Practice) programme with the Froebel Department of Primary Education at Maynooth University.

As part of my degree, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on how I as a teacher can implement emotional regulation strategies and whether these strategies will lead to young children managing their emotions more effectively in the classroom. (I will be looking at how to support children to identify how they are feeling and teaching them different strategies to help them manage their feelings.)

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by trying out different ideas to help them manage their feelings and observing whether they are effective/useful in the classroom.

The data will be collected using observations, interviews, a daily teacher journal, analysis of children's work and parent questionnaires. The children will be asked their opinions through discussing our different feelings and how we can support ourselves when we feel that way.

The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. Your child will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage.

All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines and existing GDPR policy. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Please note that due to unforeseen circumstances e.g., Covid-19 quarantine, this research may be moved online and use online formats such as Microsoft Teams.

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in this project. If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at [nessa.farrelly.2022@mumail.ie](mailto:nessa.farrelly.2022@mumail.ie).

Yours faithfully,

.....



**Maynooth University Froebel Department**

**Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas  
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

## **Information Sheet**

### **Parents and Guardians**

#### **Who is this information sheet for?**

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

#### **What is this Action Research Project about?**

Teachers in the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a teacher. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes, interviews, questionnaires and analysis of children's work. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

#### **What is the research question?**

- "How Can I as a Primary School Teacher Implement Effective Strategies to Support Children with Emotional Regulation in a Large Infant Classroom?"

#### **What sorts of methods will be used?**

- Observations, Reflective Journal, Children's drawings, Questionnaires, Surveys, Interviews

#### **Who else will be involved?**

The study will be carried out by me Nessa Farrelly as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

#### **What are you being asked to do?**

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with my class. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines.

#### **Contact details:**

**Student:** Nessa Farrelly

**E:** [nessa.farrelly.2022@mumail.ie](mailto:nessa.farrelly.2022@mumail.ie)





Mood Monsters Word Mat



Child's name .....

I am trying to find out about feelings

and what we can do to help us when we feel a certain way.

I would like  to look at you and  listen to you when you are in school and to write down some notes about you.



Would you be ok with that?



Mum or Dad or Guardian can talk to you about this. If you have any questions just ask!



If you are happy with that could you sign the form that I have sent home?



If you change your mind after we start, that's ok too.



### Appendix 3. Parent Consent and Child Assent Forms



Maynooth University Froebel Department of  
Primary and Early Childhood Education  
Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas  
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

#### PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in this study. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Parent / Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent / Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child \_\_\_\_\_

Child's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Maynooth University Froebel Department of  
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas  
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.

### Child's Assent to Participate

**My parent/guardian has read the information sheet with me and  
I agree to take part in this research.**



**Name of child (in block capitals):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Maynooth University Froebel Department of  
Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas  
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

### **Declaration by Researcher**

This declaration must be signed by the applicant(s)

I acknowledge(s) and agree that:

- a) It is my sole responsibility and obligation to comply with all Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.
- b) I will comply with Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.
- c) That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy.
- d) That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy.
- e) That the research will not commence until ethical approval has been granted by the Research and Ethics committee in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Signature of Student:

Date:

## Appendix 4. Letter to the School Board of Management

02/09/2021

### RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Principal and Board of Management,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study in my Senior Infant class in [REDACTED]. I am currently studying a Master of Education programme at Maynooth University and have just started the process of writing my master's thesis. The study will revolve around the social and emotional difficulties which children face in a large infant classroom, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom. The data will be collected through various sources which include observations, a daily teacher journal, staff / parent questionnaires etc.

The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. The participants will be allowed to withdraw from the research process at any stage. All information will be confidential, and information will be destroyed in a stated time frame in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until ethical approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at [nessa.farrelly.2022@mumail.ie](mailto:nessa.farrelly.2022@mumail.ie)

If you agree, kindly sign below and return a copy of the signed form.

Yours faithfully,  
Nessa Farrelly

Approved by:

---

Print your name and title here

Signature

Date

### Appendix 5 Research Model and Timeline

| <b>Date</b>                          | <b>Action</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Week Beginning:</i>               |   |
| <i>24<sup>th</sup> January 2022</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss research with the children</li> <li>• Send home consent forms and information sheets</li> <li>• Parent Survey</li> <li>• Teacher Survey</li> <li>• Meeting with critical friend to discuss research</li> </ul>   |
| <i>31<sup>st</sup> January 2022</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the “Feelings Chart”</li> <li>• Develop Emotion Vocabulary: learn to label their emotion and emotion causes</li> <li>• “Mood Mirror” – develop self-awareness of emotions</li> <li>• Meeting with critical friend to discuss research</li> </ul>   |
| <i>7<sup>th</sup> February 2022</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create personalised “Feelings Books”</li> <li>• Causal talk- recognise emotion and talk about it</li> <li>• “Feelings Charades”: Match facial expressions to different emotions</li> <li>• Observation and critical reflection by critical friend</li> </ul>   |
| <i>14<sup>th</sup> February 2022</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the “Feelings Thermometer”</li> <li>• Recognise intensity of different emotions</li> <li>• Use during moments of heightened emotional states during everyday class time</li> <li>• “How Would You Feel If?” Game – Identify feeling and state of feeling using the feelings thermometer</li> <li>• Meeting with critical friend to discuss research</li> </ul> |
| <i>Mid-Term Break</i>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of progress of data cycle 1</li> </ul>  |

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>28<sup>th</sup> February 2022</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the “Turtle Technique” for when our feelings become too strong</li> <li>• Discuss how to change “Blue Feelings” into “Yellow Feelings” e.g., sad into happy</li> <li>• “Changing Feelings” Game – Identify ways to help the characters change their feelings from blue to yellow.</li> <li>• Observation and critical reflection by critical friend</li> </ul> |
| <i>7<sup>th</sup> March 2022</i>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce “Positive Self-Talk” – “I can do this! I can calm down!” etc.</li> <li>• Discuss negative self-talk and how to change this to positive self-talk</li> <li>• Create a “My Happy Book” with pictures, drawings, messages of encouragement etc.</li> <li>• Meeting with critical friend to discuss research</li> </ul>  |
| <i>14<sup>th</sup> March 2022</i>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce “Mindfulness”</li> <li>• Finding your safe place</li> <li>• Guided Imagery Exercises</li> <li>• Deep Breathing Exercises</li> <li>• Observation and critical reflection by critical friend</li> </ul>  |
| <i>21<sup>st</sup> March 2022</i>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recap lesson with children</li> <li>• Child Interviews</li> <li>• Parent Survey</li> <li>• Meeting with critical friend to discuss research including structured observations and critical reflections</li> </ul>  |
| <i>April 2022</i>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Analysis</li> </ul>   |

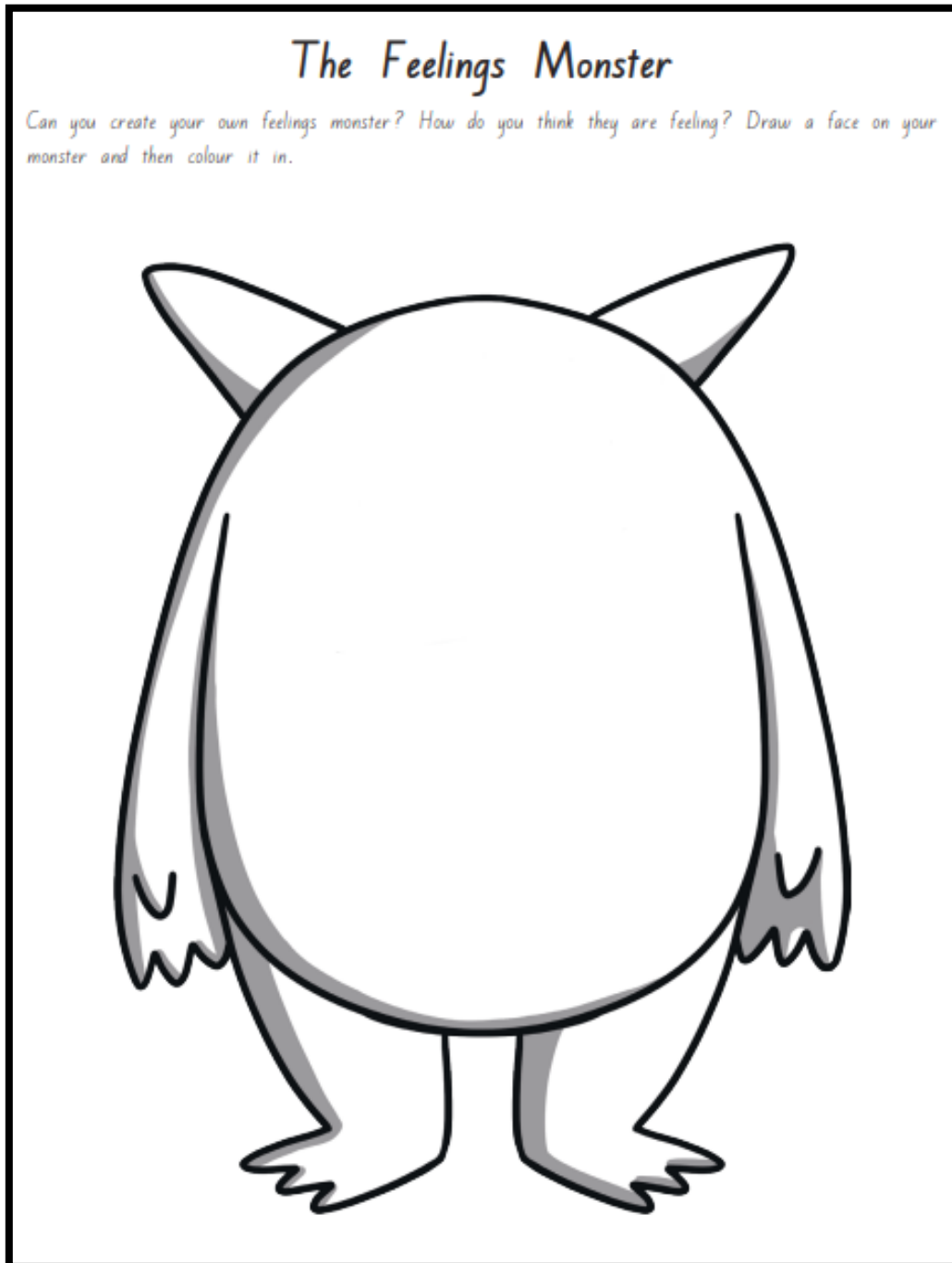
## Appendix 6. Research On Sign





## Appendix 7. Mood Monster Worksheet

*Copyright©Twinkl*

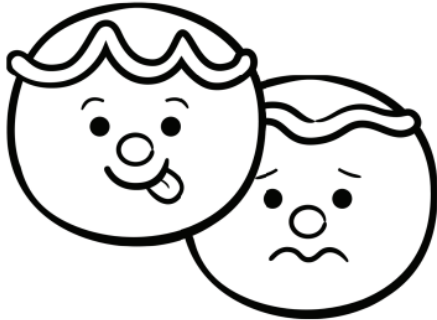
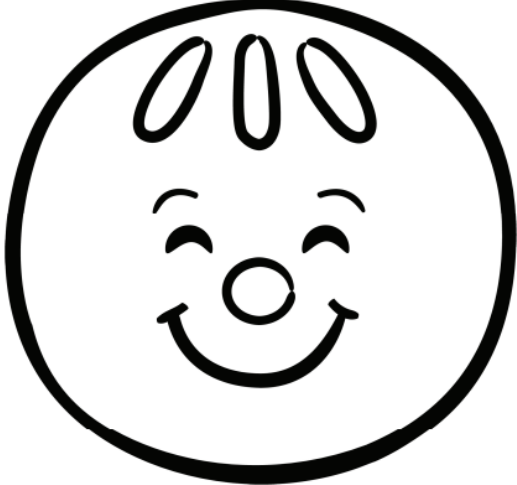



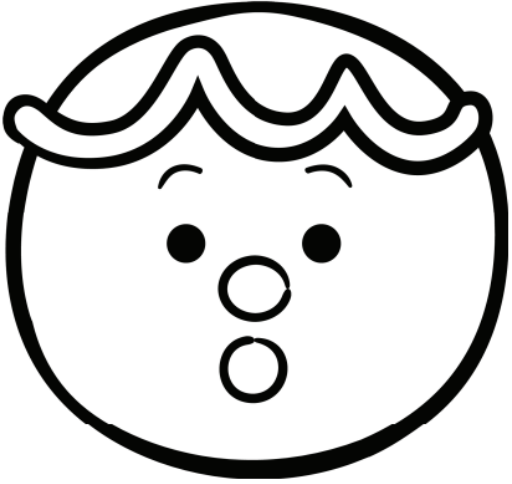
### Appendix 8. Mood Monster Wall

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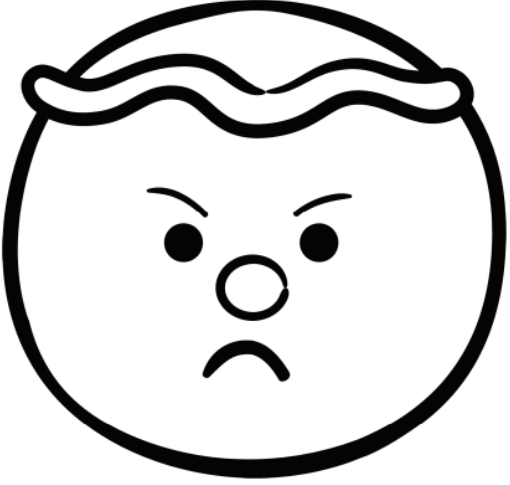
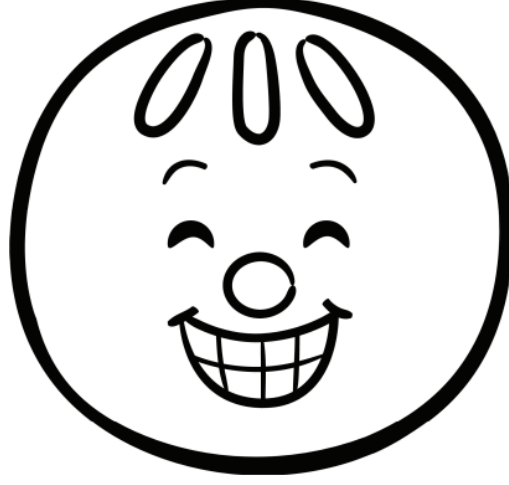


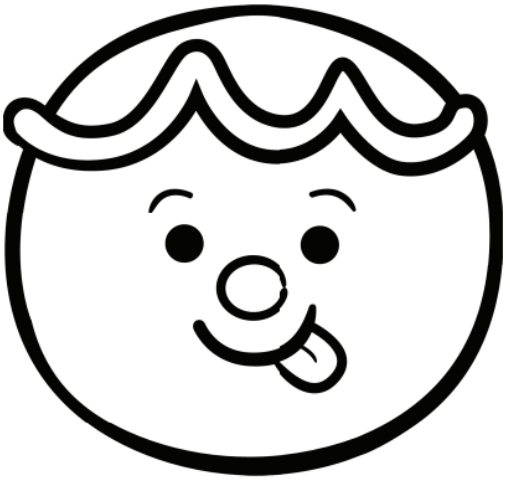
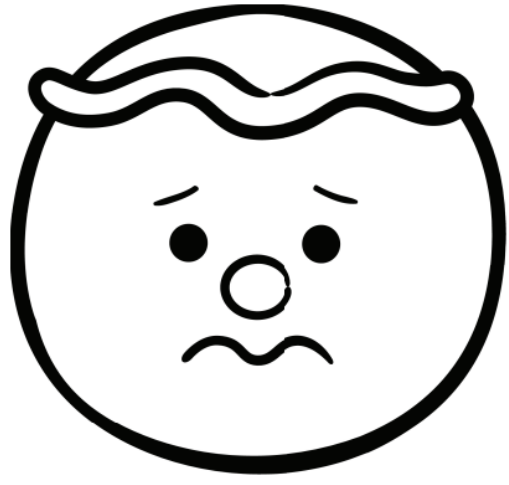
**Appendix 9. Feeling's Booklet Template** (Copyright©Life Over C's, 2018)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>My Book<br/>of<br/>Feelings</b></p>  <p>Name: _____</p> | <p>She feels happy.</p>  <p>happy</p> |
|--|---|

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>He feels sad.</p>  <p>sad</p> | <p>She feels surprised.</p>  <p>surprised</p> |
|---|---|

**Appendix 9. Feeling's Booklet Template** (Copyright©Life Over C's, 2018)

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>She feels angry.</p>  <p>angry</p> | <p>She feels proud.</p>  <p>proud</p> |
|--|---|

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>He feels silly.</p>  <p>silly</p> | <p>She feels worried.</p>  <p>worried</p> |
|---|---|



### Appendix 10. Feelings Charade Cards

Copyright©Twinkl



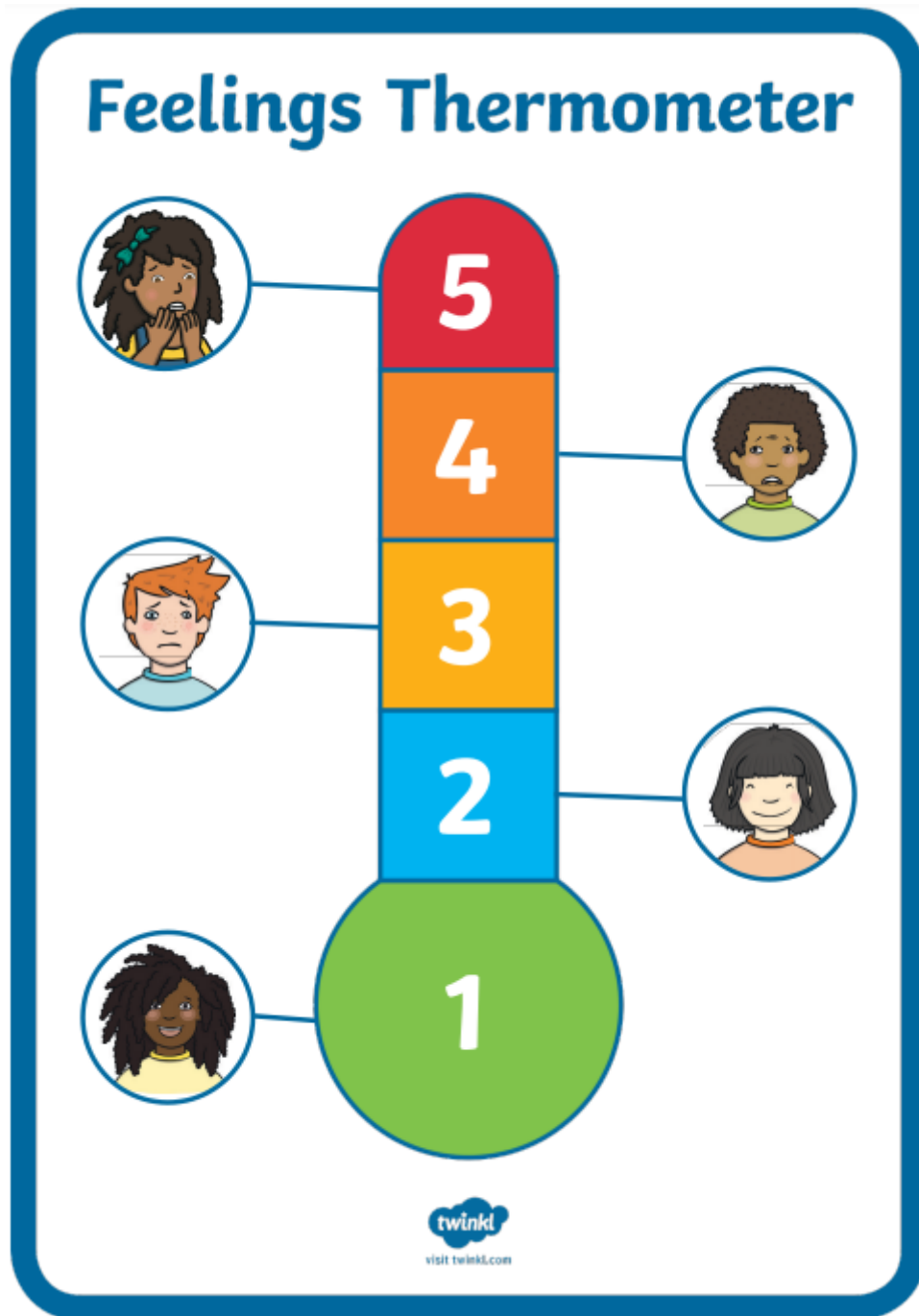
### Appendix 10. Feelings Charade Cards

Copyright©Twinkl




### Appendix 11. Feelings Thermometer

Copyright©Twinkl



## Appendix 12. Tucker Turtle Story and Technique

Copyright©NCPMI



# Tucker Turtle Takes Time to Tuck and Think

A scripted story to assist with  
teaching the "Turtle Technique"

By Rochelle Lentini, Lindsay N. Giroux  
and Mary Louise Hemmeter

**ChallengingBehavior.org**  
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**IDEA: the Work**  
Office of  
Special Education Programs  
U.S. Department of Education

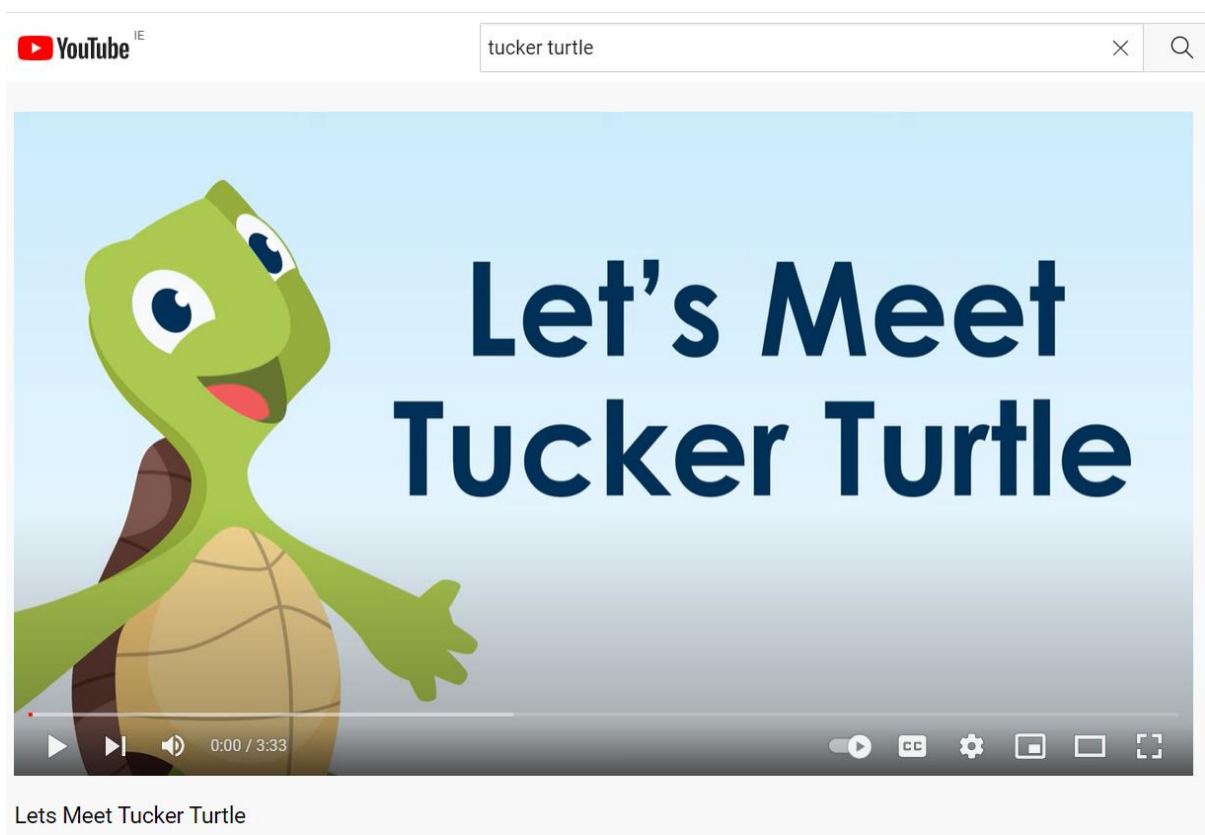
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**NCPMI**



## Appendix 12. Tucker Turtle Story and Technique

*Copyright©Child Care Aware ND*



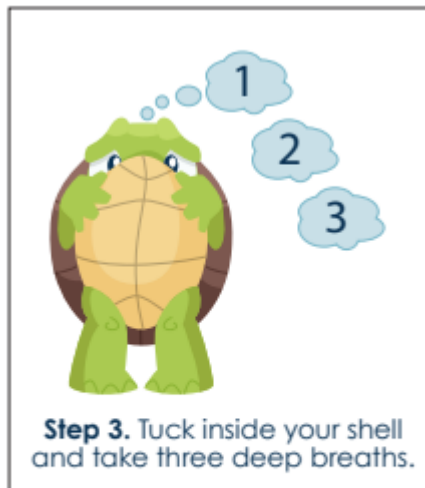
Lets Meet Tucker Turtle

**YouTube Clip - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5w9GPMoDXI>**

## Appendix 12. Tucker Turtle Story and Technique

Copyright©NCPMI

### NCPMI **The Turtle Technique**



## Appendix 13. Strategies for Different Feelings Worksheet

Copyright©Twinkl



# Angry

Colour in the strategies you would use to manage anger.

When I feel angry, I can feel better by...



slow breathing



counting to ten



having some quiet time on my own



going outside



colouring in



playing with my favourite toy



**Add a strategy of your own.**

## Appendix 13. Strategies for Different Feelings Worksheet

Copyright©Twinkl



# Sad

Colour in the strategies you would use to manage sadness.

**When I feel sad, I can feel better by...**



talking to  
someone I trust



playing with my  
favourite toy



getting an air cuddle



drawing a picture



exercising



listening to music



**Add a strategy  
of your own.**

## Appendix 13. Strategies for Different Feelings Worksheet

Copyright©Twinkl



# Tired

Colour in the strategies you would use to manage tiredness.

When I feel tired, I can feel better by...



having a rest



reading a book



eating a healthy snack



lying down for a nap



going outside



watching a  
TV programme



**Add a strategy  
of your own.**

## Appendix 13. Strategies for Different Feelings Worksheet

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# Scared

Colour in the strategies you would use to manage fear.

When I feel scared, I can feel better by...



talking to someone I trust



drawing a picture of what I am scared of



getting an air cuddle



taking deep breaths



thinking about something else



staying close to someone from home



**Add a strategy of your own.**



## Appendix 13. Strategies for Different Feelings Worksheet

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# Bored

Colour in the strategies you would use to manage boredom.

When I feel bored, I can feel better by...



playing outside



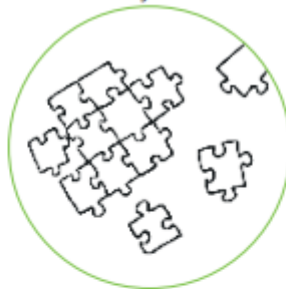
playing a game with someone from home



drawing a picture



reading a book



doing a jigsaw puzzle



building a den



**Add a strategy of your own.**

### Appendix 14. How Would You Feel If? Cards

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How would you feel if...



You were late to school?

How would you feel if...



Today was your birthday?

How would you feel if...



It began to snow?

How would you feel if...




You had no one to play with at break?

How would you feel if...



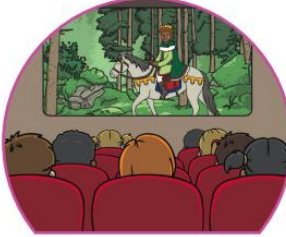
You forgot your lunch?

How would you feel if...



There was a fire alarm?

How would you feel if...



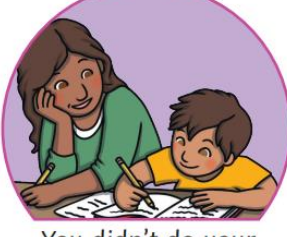
You went to the cinema?

How would you feel if...



You were listening to your favourite music?

How would you feel if...




You didn't do your homework?

How would you feel if...



You had an argument with your friend?

How would you feel if...



You were told off in class?

How would you feel if...



You weren't allowed on the computers?



## Appendix 14. How Would You Feel If? Cards


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How would you feel if...



It was the beginning of the summer holidays?

How would you feel if...



There was chocolate cake at lunchtime?

How would you feel if...




School finished early tomorrow?

How would you feel if...



You had to miss a break?

How would you feel if...




You went on a rollercoaster?

How would you feel if...



You went to a friend's house?

How would you feel if...



The internet was broken at school?

How would you feel if...



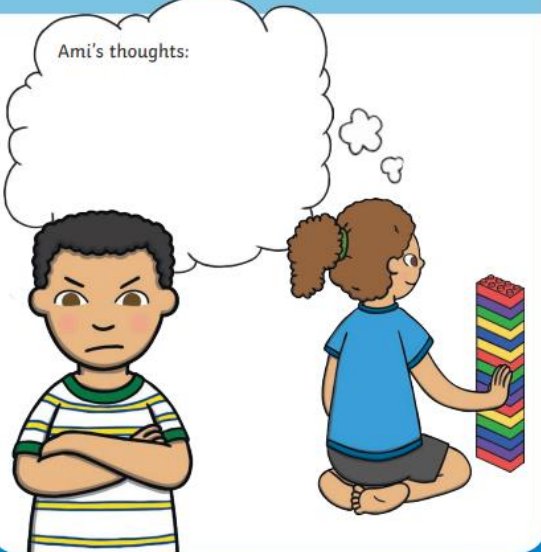
You lost your mobile phone?

### Appendix 15. Feeling Scenario Cards

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**Ami is playing with building bricks, but she's put the pieces in the wrong place! I don't like what she's making. I have a big frown on my face.**

Ami's thoughts:

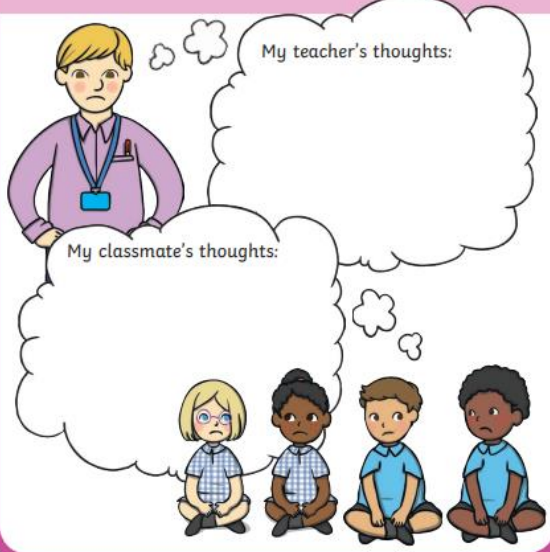


The illustration shows a boy on the left with a frown and his arms crossed. A girl on the right is kneeling and stacking colorful building blocks. A thought bubble above the boy contains the text 'Ami's thoughts:'. A small thought bubble above the girl shows her looking at the blocks.

**I started singing a song really loudly in class while my teacher was talking.**

My teacher's thoughts:

My classmate's thoughts:

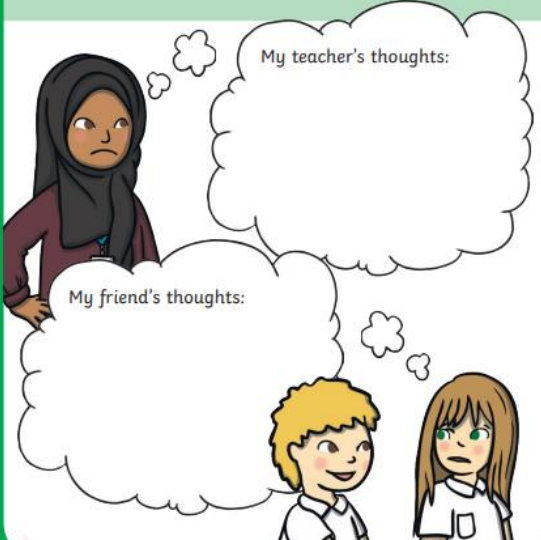


The illustration shows a teacher on the left with a stern expression. Four students are sitting on the floor on the right, looking towards the teacher. A large thought bubble above the teacher contains the text 'My teacher's thoughts:'. A thought bubble above the students contains the text 'My classmate's thoughts:'. Small thought bubbles above each student show them looking thoughtful or concerned.

### Appendix 15. Feeling Scenario Cards

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**I started talking to a friend while the teacher was giving instructions to the class.**

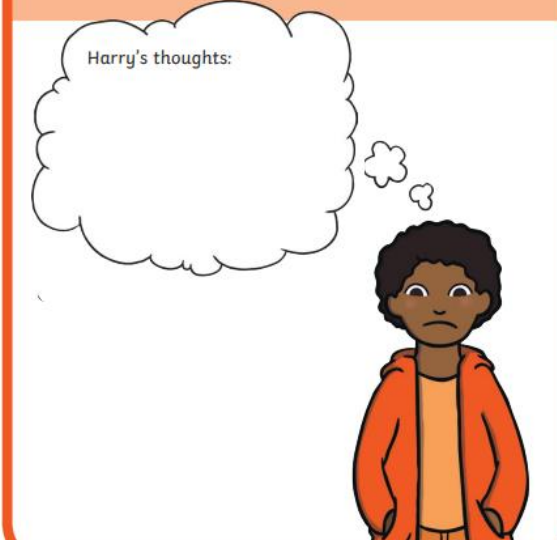


My teacher's thoughts:

My friend's thoughts:

The illustration shows a female teacher in a hijab on the left, looking stern. Two students, a boy with blonde hair and a girl with brown hair, are on the right. The boy is talking to the girl. There are two large thought bubbles: one above the teacher and one above the two students.

**Harry has had his hair cut. It looks really silly. I tell him what I think of his haircut.**



Harry's thoughts:

The illustration shows a boy with dark skin and curly hair wearing an orange hoodie. He has a sad or thoughtful expression. A large thought bubble is positioned above him.

## Appendix 15. Feeling Scenario Cards

*Copyright©Twinkl*

**Tim has a bag. It's got my favourite superhero on it. I tell him I like it.**

Tim's thoughts:





## Appendix 16. My Emotions Poster

Copyright©Twinkl

# My Emotions

'Can You Find...?' Poster Instructions  
**Find these children in the picture.**



happy child  
sad child  
angry child  
tired child  
hungry child  
surprised child  
worried child  
excited child



### Questions

Can you find a child who shows the way you are feeling now?

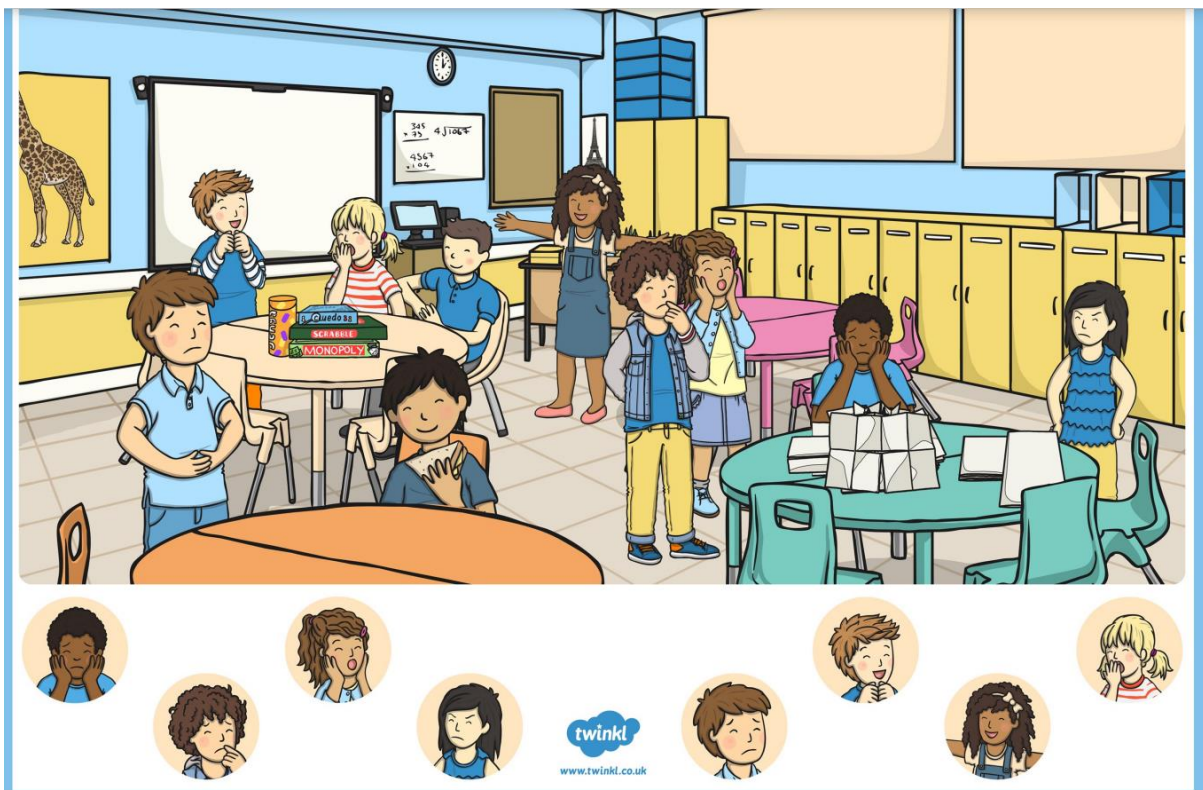
What do you do when you are angry?

How would you make the sad child feel better?

What do you do when you are sad?

## Appendix 16. My Emotions Poster

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## Appendix 17. Happiness Journal Template

*Copyright©Twinkl*


# My Happiness Journal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Draw a picture of yourself feeling happy.




**Mind Your Mind!**



## Appendix 17. Happiness Journal Template

*Copyright©Twinkl*

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <h1>Monday</h1>  |  |  |
| <p>Can you think of two things that made you feel happy today?</p> |  |   |
| 1. I felt happy when...  |  |   |
| 2. I felt happy when...  |  |   |



## Appendix 17. Happiness Journal Template


*Copyright©Twinkl*

**Tuesday**

Can you think of two things that made you feel happy today?


1. I felt happy when...

2. I felt happy when...



## Appendix 17. Happiness Journal Template


*Copyright©Twinkl*

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <h1>Wednesday</h1>   |  |  |
| <p>Can you think of two things that made you feel happy today?</p> |  |   |
| <p>1. I felt happy when...</p>                                     |  |   |
| <p>2. I felt happy when...</p>                                     |  |   |



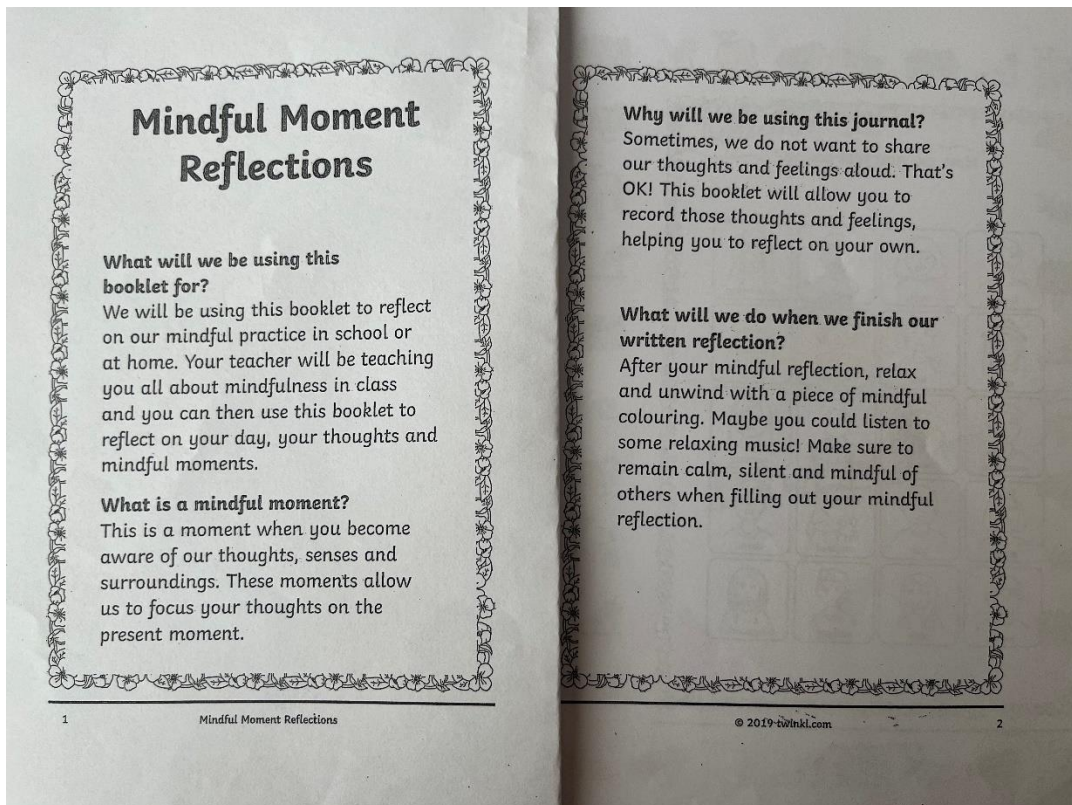
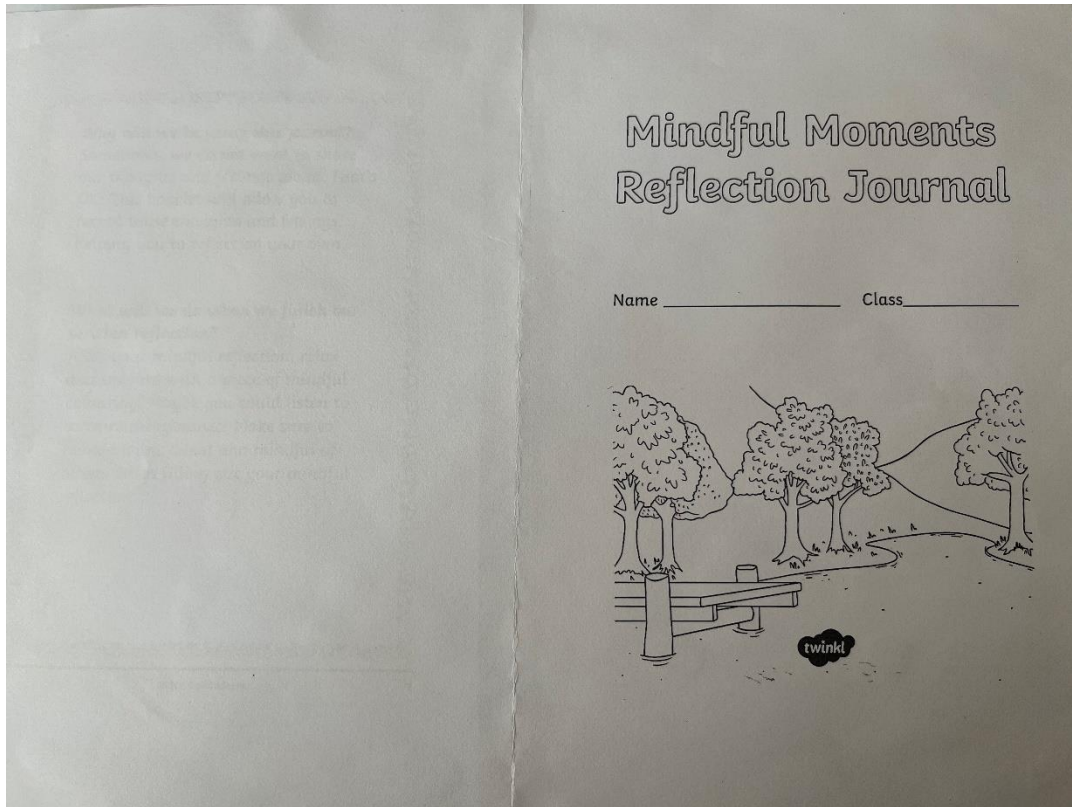
## Appendix 17. Happiness Journal Template

*Copyright©Twinkl*

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <h1>Friday</h1>   |  |  |
| Can you think of two things that made you feel happy today? |  |   |
| 1. I felt happy when...                                     |  |   |
| 2. I felt happy when...                                     |  |   |

## Appendix 18. Children’s Reflective Journal Template

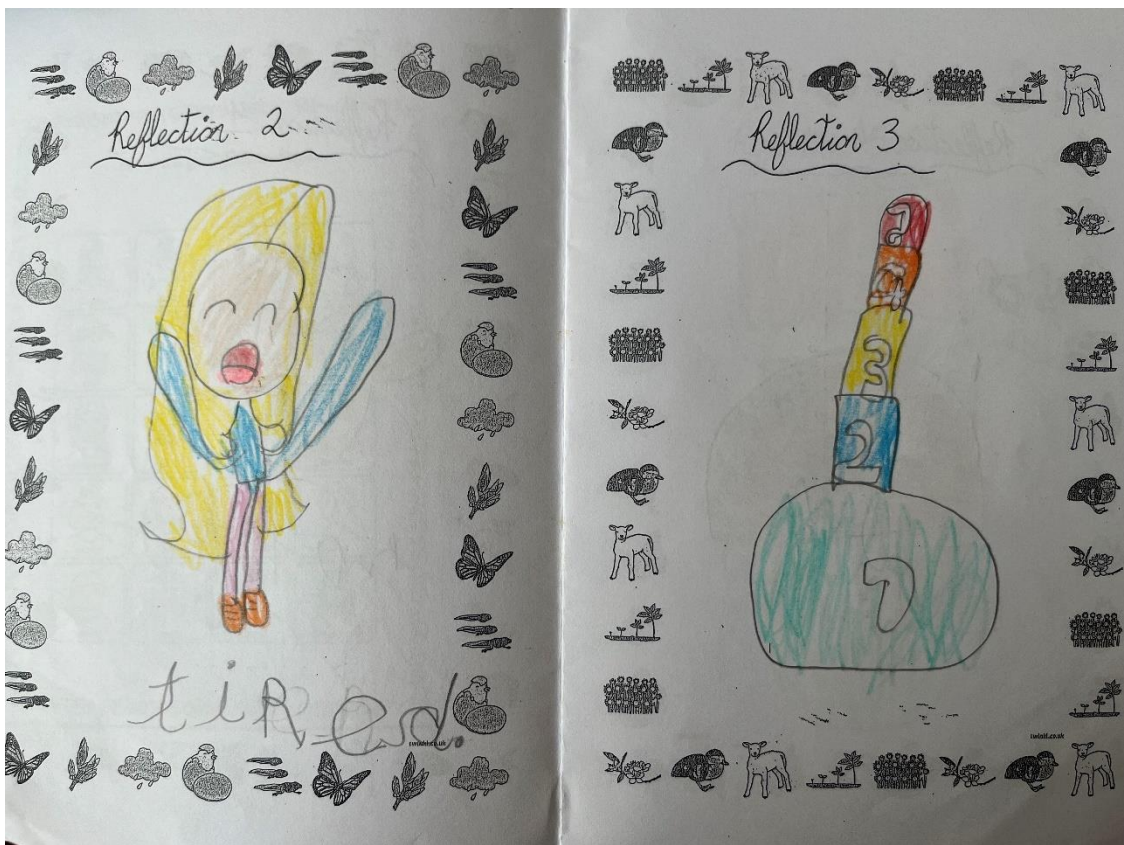
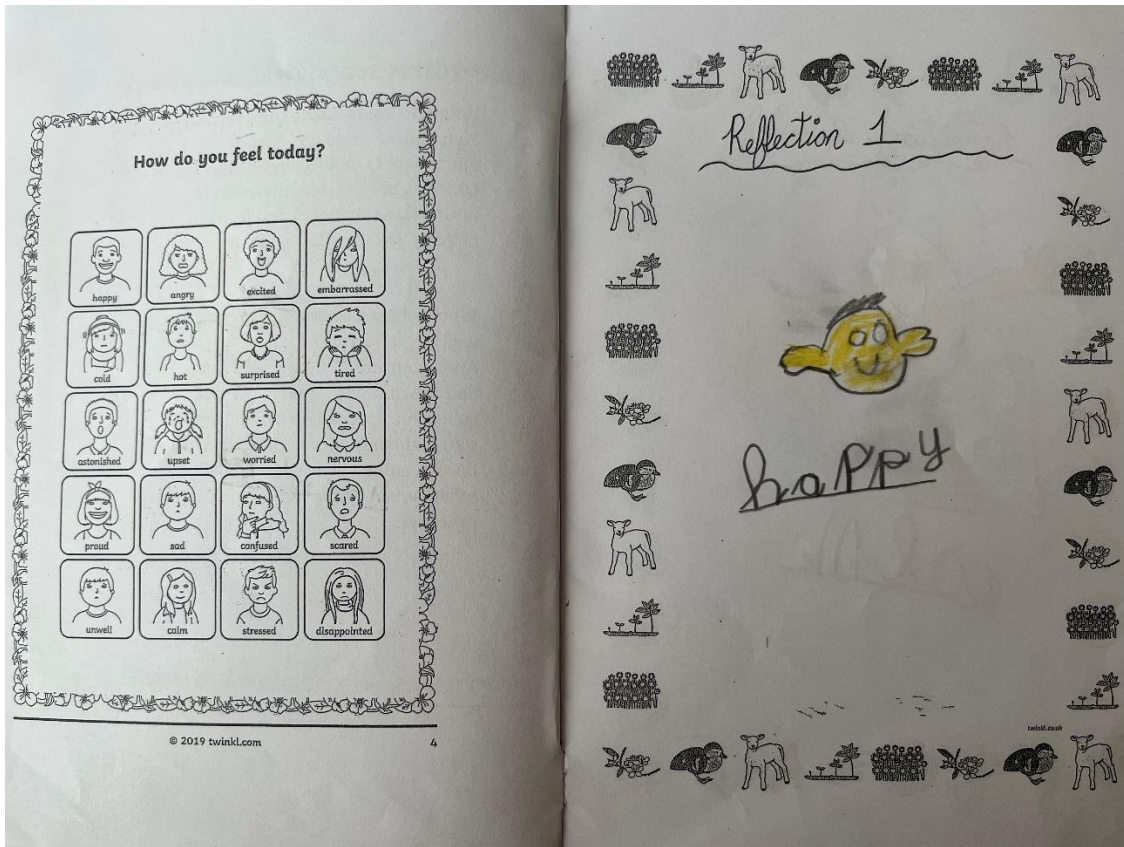
Amended Pages from Copyright©Twinkl to create Booklet





### Appendix 18. Children's Reflective Journal Template

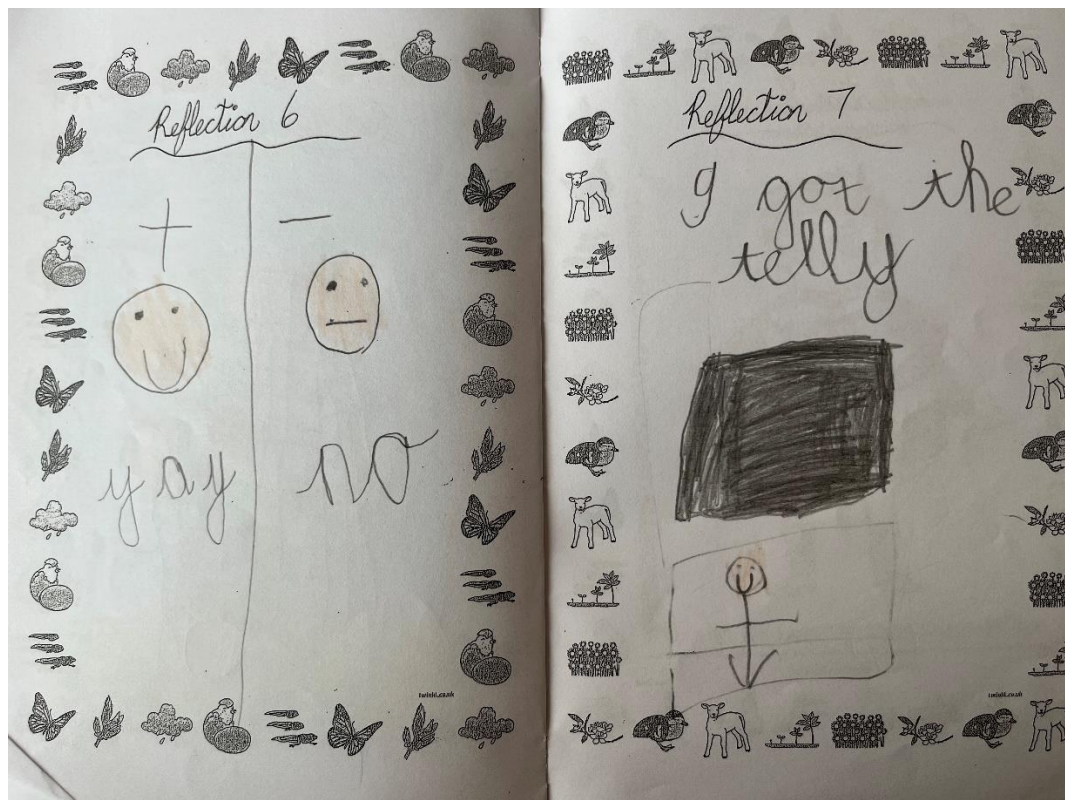
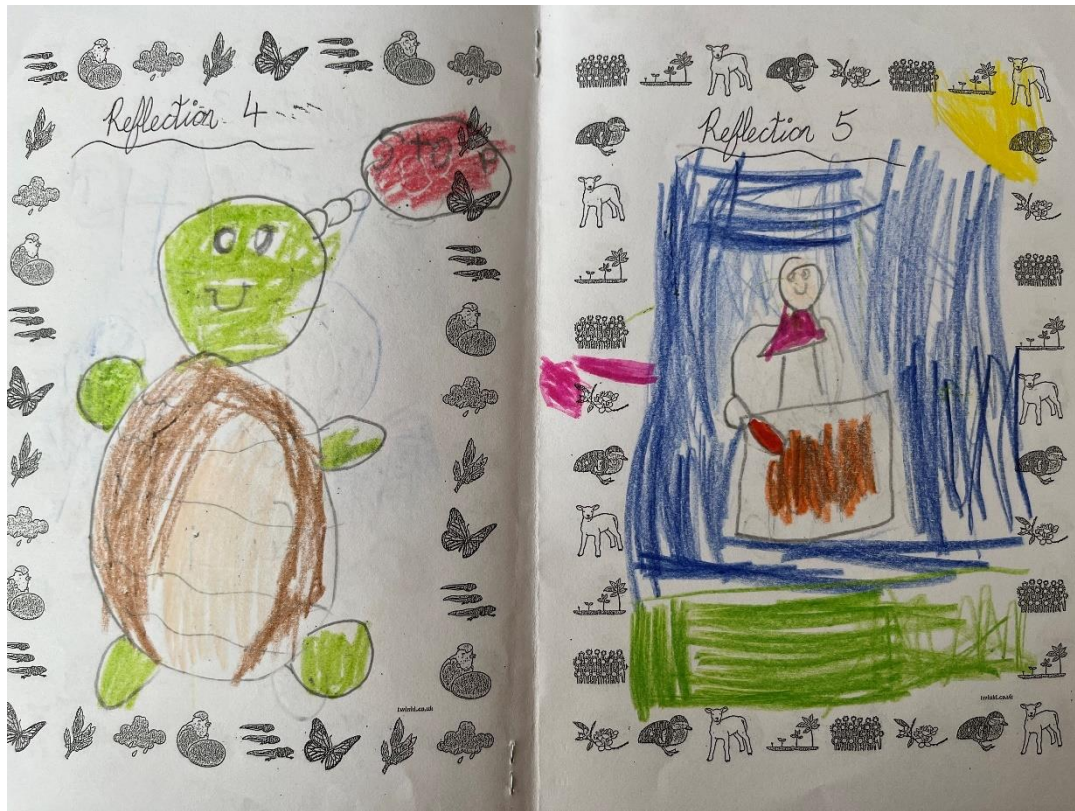
Amended Pages from Copyright©Twinkl to create Booklet





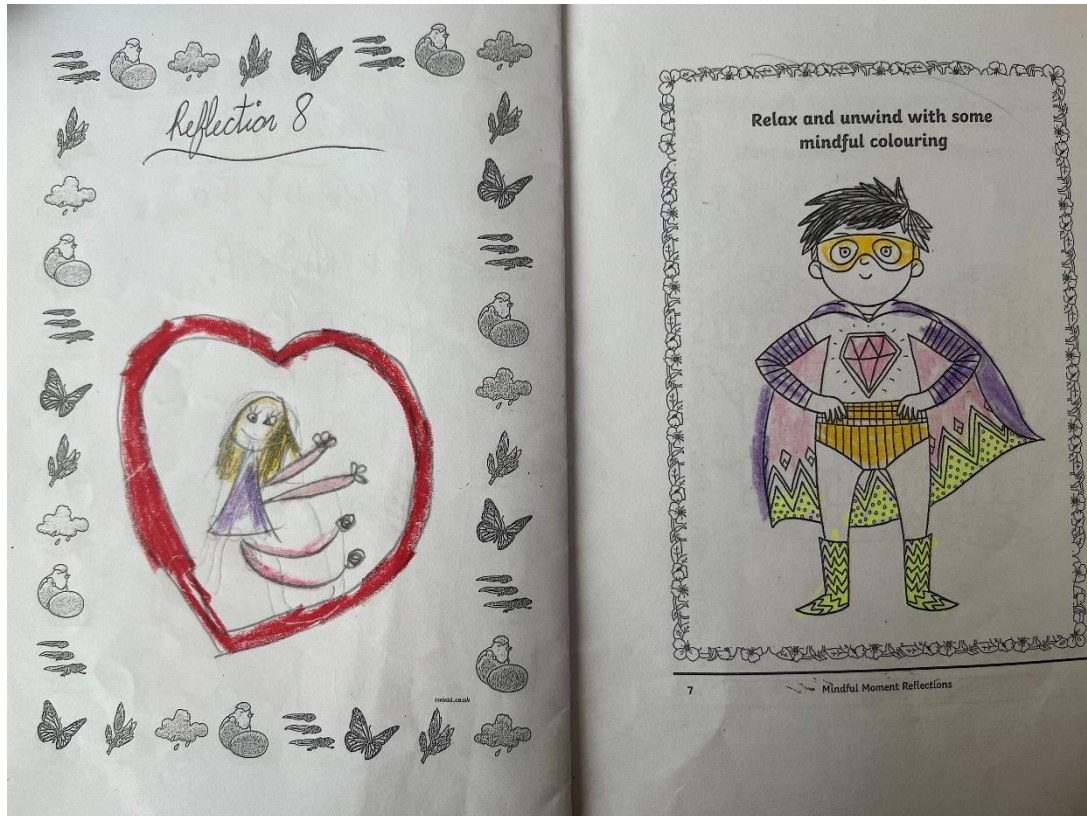
### Appendix 18. Children's Reflective Journal Template

Amended Pages from Copyright©Twinkl to create Booklet



## Appendix 18. Children's Reflective Journal Template

*Amended Pages from Copyright©Twinkl to create Booklet*



*(A Sample Selection of Excerpts from Research Participants Shown in Appendix 18.)*



**Appendix 19. Critical Friend Reflection Template**

**Critical Friend Reflection**

Q1. What emotion regulation strategies have you observed in the classroom?

Q2. How do you think the children are responding to these strategies?

Q3. Do you think the strategies have helped the children to express and regulate their emotions? If so, in what way?

Q4. Was there any particular strategy that you observed which worked effectively for the children?

Q5. Was there any particular strategy that you observed which did not work effectively for the children?

Q6. Have you made any other observations? If so, what are they?

## Appendix 20. Parent Baseline Questionnaire



### Supporting Children with Emotional Regulation

As part of my Masters with Maynooth University, I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on how I as a teacher can implement emotional regulation strategies and whether these strategies will lead to young children managing their emotions more effectively in the classroom. (I will be looking at how to support children to identify how they are feeling and teaching them different strategies to help them manage their feelings.)

This questionnaire will remain fully anonymous and will be used for the sole purpose of collecting data / information about how children identify their feelings and what they do to help them manage or control these feelings, prior to exploring this in depth in the classroom as part of my research project.

Thank you for your help!

Ms. Farrelly

## Appendix 20. Parent Baseline Questionnaire

Do you think your child can identify their feelings? e.g. I am happy. I am sad etc. \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Sometimes

Do you think your child can describe their feelings or identify the cause of their feelings? e.g. I feel happy because I am going swimming today. I feel angry because you took my favourite toy without asking me. \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Sometimes

## Appendix 20. Parent Baseline Questionnaire

Do you think your child could manage or control their feelings better or more effectively? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Does your child use any strategies to manage strong feelings? If so, what are these strategies? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

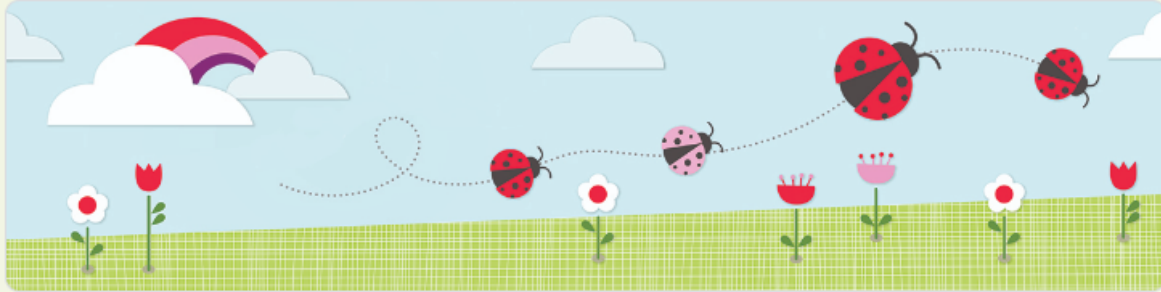
Do you think the Covid-19 pandemic has had an influence on how your child identifies or manages their feelings? If so, in what way? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Anything you would like to add. \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 20. Parent Endline Questionnaire



### Supporting Children with Emotional Regulation

As part of my Masters with Maynooth University, I have completed a research project with the children. The focus of my research was based on how I as a teacher can support children to identify how they are feeling and teaching them different strategies to help them manage their feelings.

We explored different strategies including:

1. Feelings Chart – Mood Monster Wall
2. Feelings Books
3. Feelings Charades
4. Feelings Thermometer 1 - 5
5. The Tucker Turtle Technique
6. Positive Self-Talk
7. Happiness Journals
8. Mindfulness - Superhero Story

This questionnaire will remain fully anonymous and will be used for the sole purpose of collecting data / information about how children identify their feelings and what they do to help them manage or control these feelings, prior to exploring this in depth in the classroom as part of my research project.

Thank you for your help!

Ms. Farrelly

## Appendix 21. Parent Endline Questionnaire

Do you think your child can identify their feelings? e.g. I am happy. I am sad etc. \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Sometimes

Do you think your child can describe their feelings or identify the cause of their feelings? e.g. I feel happy because I am going swimming today. I feel angry because you took my favourite toy without asking me. \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Sometimes

## Appendix 21. Parent Endline Questionnaire

Has your child mentioned any of the strategies we have used in the classroom from the following list? \*

1. Feelings Chart – Mood Monster Wall
2. Feelings Books
3. Feelings Charades
4. Feelings Thermometer
5. The Tucker Turtle Technique
6. Positive Self-Talk "I can do this!"
7. Happiness Journals
8. Mindfulness - Superhero story

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Has your child used any of the strategies mentioned above at home? \*

- Yes
- Maybe
- No



## Appendix 21. Parent Endline Questionnaire

Do you think these strategies could be used at home to help your child manage their feelings? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Do you think your child manages or controls their feelings better or more effectively? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Anything you would like to add. \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 22. Teacher Questionnaire



### Supporting Children with Emotion Regulation

As part of my Masters in Research and Practice with Maynooth University, I am doing a research project with Senior Infants. The focus of my research is based on how I as a teacher can implement emotion regulation strategies and whether these strategies will lead to young children managing their emotions more effectively in the classroom. (I will be looking at how to support children to identify how they are feeling and teaching them different strategies to help them manage their feelings.)

As part of my research, I would like to invite you to complete this questionnaire. This questionnaire will remain fully anonymous and will be used for the sole purpose of collecting data / information about emotional regulation in the classroom and children's ability to emotionally regulate.

Thank you for your help!

Nessa Farrelly

## Appendix 22. Teacher Questionnaire

What is emotion regulation? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Do you use emotion regulation strategies in your classroom? If so, what are they? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel confident in teaching children about emotion regulation? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

## Appendix 22. Teacher Questionnaire

Do you think that there needs to be more emphasis on teaching children about emotion regulation? \*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Do you know of any policies or department documents that support teachers with emotion regulation in the classroom? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the Covid-19 pandemic has had an influence on how children manage their emotions in the classroom? If so, in what way? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Anything you would like to add. \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 23. Post Intervention Pupil Interviews Transcribed

### Child Interview 1 – Laura

1. What did you like or learn from our lessons on feelings and mood monsters?

*“It is good to share how you feel. This is a safe place with your friends and teacher!”*

2. Did our feelings tricks (emotion regulation strategies) help you?

*“When my brother took my toy, it made me feel angry. Normally I’d hit him or scream but I decided to stop and take a deep breath like what we do in class”*

### Child Interview 2 – Sam

1. What did you like or learn from our lessons on feelings and mood monsters?

*“I loved the superhero story. I could imagine flying high above the clouds away from my bad feelings”*

2. Did our feelings tricks (emotion regulation strategies) help you?

*“I used Tucker Turtle when my sister broke my Lego set! I just felt so angry, and I knew I would get in trouble if I hit her, so I just curled up into my shell until Mammy came to help”*

## **Appendix 23. Post Intervention Pupil Interviews Transcribed**

### **Child Interview 3 – Mia**

1. What did you like or learn from our lessons on feelings and mood monsters?

*“I like how teacher does the mood monster wall, tucker turtle and the meditation with us. It’s really fun that way!”*

2. Did our feelings tricks (emotion regulation strategies) help you?

*“I liked the meditation thingy. I like going somewhere in my mind and I find it relaxing!”*

### **Child Interview 4 – Jessica**

1. What did you like or learn from our lessons on feelings and mood monsters?

*“Just because I feel a feeling, it doesn’t mean I am that feeling. Like if I feel angry it doesn’t mean I am an angry person all of the time!”*

2. Did our feelings tricks (emotion regulation strategies) help you?

*“Yeah! I liked the Tucker Turtle one because it gives you control and its like you’re creating your own spot to calm down”*

## **Appendix 23. Post Intervention Pupil Interviews Transcribed**

### **Child Interview 5 – Paul**

1. What did you like or learn from our lessons on feelings and mood monsters?

*“I liked trying all the different things like the mood monster board, the feelings thermometer, and the meditation. My favourite one is Tucker Turtle though!”*

2. Did our feelings tricks (emotion regulation strategies) help you?

*“They all helped me. I like having different ones so I can use them when my mood monster is too big and I want to get control again”*

**Appendix 24. Data Findings Table**

| <b>Data Set</b>                | <b>Amount</b>                                | <b>Result (s)</b>  | <b>Other Info.</b>  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Baseline Parent Questionnaire  | 17 Responses                                 | 88.2% think children can manage their own feelings<br>88.2% think children can describe their feelings, causes<br>52.9% believe their children could manage their feelings better<br>41.2% said maybe<br>58.8% use strategies at home<br>29.5% believe Covid has had an impact | More detail was given in open-ended questions with a short response at the end of the questionnaire |
| Teacher Questionnaire          | 3 Responses                                  | 100% feel confident in teaching E.R.<br>66.7% say more emphasis needs to be put on E.R.  | More detail was given in open-ended questions   |
| Children's Reflective Journals | 29 (1 lost, 2 permission slips not returned) | Insight into what they liked, what worked best etc.  | Pupils reflected after each E.R. lesson. Free to write or draw anything they wanted.                |
| Children's Happiness Journals  | 26 (3 absent)                                | Interesting how some pupils found this difficult while others really enjoyed it.   | Pupils reflected Monday to Friday every day and identified 2 things that made them happy.           |



|                                     |                       |  |   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|--|---|
| Children's Helping Emotions Booklet | 29                    | Interesting to see what they came up with to support them.   | Pupils identified what they do to help them when they are feeling angry, sad, tired etc.            |
| Mood Monster Worksheet              | 26<br>(3 absent)      | Interesting to hear the children describe their monsters and the reasons behind certain colours etc.   | Pupils designed their own mood monster showing how they were feeling.                               |
| My Book of Feelings                 | 13                    | Interesting to see colour and feeling associations e.g., red = angry   | Pupils coloured in different feeling faces.   |
| Critical Friend Reflection          | 1<br>(Covid Absences) | Interesting to hear an outside perspective   | Recap final lesson. Reflection Template was used.   |
| My Own Reflective Journal           | 1                     |  | Used Microsoft Word Document  |
| Child Interviews                    | 5                     | Interesting to see their observations/ thoughts  | Transcribed responses in Microsoft Word Document  |
| Endline Parent Questionnaire        | 10 Responses          | 80% think children can identify feelings<br>70% say they can describe their feelings<br>60% say E.R. strategies were mentioned at home<br>70% say the strategies are helpful<br>60% believe their child has better E.R. skills | More detail was given in open-ended questions with a short response at the end of the questionnaire |

## Appendix 25. Possible Data Analysis Themes

(Based on Brookfield's (2017) lenses)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Pupils Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pupil Identity – r.j. “I’m not me”</li> <li>● Choice of strategies – r.j. reflections</li> <li>● Power of mindfulness – r.j. superhero</li> <li>● Inner harmony – r.j. superhero, calm</li> <li>● Peer Learning – hap.j.</li> <li>● Having Fun! – hap.j.</li> <li>● Feeling understood – r.j., c.i.</li> <li>● Safe space – r.j.</li> </ul>  | <p><b>Parent Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Importance of talking</li> <li>○ Express as you Experience</li> <li>○ Deep Breathing</li> <li>○ Use of Strategies</li> <li>○ Influence of others e.g., siblings on E.R.</li> <li>○ Covid-19 Influence e.g., fear of crowds, reassurance, nervous, comfort of home – safe space</li> <li>○ Influence of Parental E.R.</li> <li>○ Empathy</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Critical Friend Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussion</li> <li>▪ Critical Thinking</li> <li>▪ Self-reflection of feelings</li> <li>▪ Relating to real life situations</li> <li>▪ Establishing a positive atmosphere</li> <li>▪ Positive influence over other aspects</li> <li>▪ Choice of strategies</li> <li>▪ Participatory</li> <li>▪ Strengthening peer relationships</li> <li>▪ Strengthening teacher-pupil relationship</li> <li>▪ Peer Learning</li> <li>▪ Expression of Emotions</li> <li>▪ Support</li> </ul> | <p><b>Fellow Teachers Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Use of strategies</li> <li>➤ Individual choice dependant on situation</li> <li>➤ Seek advice from fellow staff</li> <li>➤ Informal programmes</li> <li>➤ Social communication</li> <li>➤ Dealing with Peer Conflict – difficulty with solving problems independently</li> <li>➤ Covid-19 Influence – emotional immaturity, increased need for reassurance</li> <li>➤ E.R. as a Challenge for Educators</li> </ul> |

\* r.j. = Reflective Journal

\* hap.j. = Happiness Journal

\* c.i. = Child Interview