Elementary Safe School Program

Emotional Self-Regulation Model (“Break Plan”) – Step Two

**Program Primary Goal**: To develop a meaningful relationship (Massachusetts Advocates for Children: Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, 2009) with the target student and the on-site school problem solving team, in which we collaboratively (Ross W. Greene, 2006) resolve the challenges surrounding the identified situation, using the following goals as a procedural framework (Margaret E. Blaustein, 2010).

1. Stabilize referred student.
2. Identify specific triggers and individual impediments to behavior control and emotional regulation.
3. Teach identified skills to referred student and on-site team, using a multi-disciplinary and individualized approach.

**Step Two Details**

***Once the referred student is stable, the next step is to teach the student how to a) identify their feelings, b) modulate their feelings and eventually c) express their feelings***. Typically the referred student has done so in the past by engaging in inappropriate, disruptive or aggressive behaviors. Our goal is to de-escalate the problematic situations, by allowing the student an opportunity to have a “break” outside of the classroom environment and spend some time re-focusing and self-modulating. The purpose behind this approach is to allow the child to dictate and discover that they are in charge of their own feelings, and to teach them that they have the opportunity to get their needs met, or feelings validated without using the destructive methods that were previously in their skill set. The purpose is never to restrict or confine the use of the breaks, and if implemented with fidelity, you will see the need for them decrease over time. A commonly expressed concern is, “What happens if the student manipulates the use of them?” An appropriate response would warrant some flexibility in allowing the student to figure out the benefit of the breaks and weigh out the consequences of taking them too often on their own. The safety aide will help to problem solve and process through this concern, but often the “breaks” become a meaningless intervention if overrun with structure and rules; as the student will only see this as another thing he/she is “told” to do. This plan is most effectively implemented with the student guiding the progression, and the timeline for this step is variable depending on the student’s needs and level of pathology prior to implementation.

**Step Two Model Outline**

1. Safety aide will teach the student the purpose and intent of using “breaks” to help identify, modulate and express their emotions. They will collaboratively work with the student and school team to come up with a safe location for the breaks. ***Identified expectations will be 1) time limit of break 2) location 3) signal for use*.** When the break intervention is implemented, it is not appropriate to determine how many breaks are necessary, as the student will be unable to identify the number. Typically several are used in the beginning, and it is important to allow that to occur, to mitigate the opposition. If we restrict the use and frequency of them, it will become a power struggle. **(Feeling Identification)**
2. Once the use of breaks seem to be forming a behavioral pattern, the safety aide and student can collaboratively problem solve to identify a fair number of breaks per day or even week. These can then be structured in the form of “Break Tickets” and the student will be given the opportunity to use them when needed. They are to be used at any time, whenever the student feels necessary. They are learning to modulate the feelings they experience.***It is important to remember that we may not always understand their “triggers” as they may not be seen as rational from an outside perspective; often times the student’s escalations are based in irrational thought processes, which is why they are perceived as “un-triggered” and occurring “out of nowhere.”***We are beginning to teach the skill of appropriate timing by allowing them to dictate the use. **(Feeling Modulation)**
3. Once the student is consistently using the breaks as outlined in their specific plan, it is appropriate to allow the student some opportunities to use their breaks within the classroom setting. That may look like an extra desk at the back of the classroom, or perhaps the student is allowed some time (expectations clarified by collaborative problem solving) to read or put their head down on their desk. We are beginning to teach the skill of appropriate emotional expression at this time. It is helpful to still have a setting available outside the classroom in case of emergent or highly escalated situations. (**Expression of Feelings)**

*References:*

Margaret E. Blaustein, K. M. (2010). *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents: How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency.* New York City: Guilford Press.

Ross W. Greene, J. A. (2006). *Treating Explosive Kids, The Collaborative Problem-Solving Approach.* New York City: Guilford Press.