

# Sparks of Emotions

## PURPOSE

In this learning experience, students will identify the different ways in which emotions can arise. This can be from current events or be influenced by past events. The emergence of emotions can escalate or change depending on a variety of factors. Students will see how they are similar to others through their shared experiences of changing emotions. Students will practice how to become aware of the present state of their nervous system in order to better at notice 'triggers' or 'sparks' of a particular emotion, and the level to which they've developed skills at containing or elevating the emotion.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Describe how emotions can arise from events and can escalate
- Identify how past experiences can influence current emotions
- Explain how and why emotional responses are shared human experiences and also vary from person to person

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



**Recognizing  
Common Humanity**



**Attention &  
Self-Awareness**

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Images previously used for the "Spark and Forest Fire" story in Chapter 3, Learning Experience 4
- Colored tape or string to map out the "Resilient Zone" on the floor.
- "Rafi and Ronan" story and questions (provided)
- "Robin's Difficult Day" story and questions (provided)
- Copy of blank Resilient Zone

## LENGTH

45 minutes

### CHECK-IN | 5 minutes

[PAUSE]s can be up to 10 seconds each

#### Settling Activity

- *"Let's take a moment to get comfortable and in an alert position. What does your body need right now? [PAUSE]*
- *For you it may be settling into your chair, or if you feel like it, leaning against a wall, sitting or lying on the floor. Please take a moment to make yourself comfortable in an alert position. Feel free to move if you need to. [PAUSE]*
- *Now I invite you to think of a resource, something that makes you feel better, safer, happier, or stronger.*
- *It could be a person, place, thing, something about yourself, or a memory of a kindness you experienced. It can be real or imaginary. Notice the details of this resource and any sensations associated with it. [PAUSE]*
- *Now, when you think about this resource, what do you notice happening inside your body? Notice the sensations. [PAUSE]*
- *Next, I invite you to bring your attention to your body and what it is in contact with. Perhaps you feel the chair against your back, your hand on your leg. Possibly the coolness of the table, the softness of your shirt, maybe the air going in and out of your nostrils. What sensations do you notice on the inside? [PAUSE]*

- *Scan your body for a pleasant or neutral sensation and just pay attention to that and observe it. See if it changes or stays the same. [PAUSE]*
- *You can always shift your body and your focus to another place that feels better. You can always focus on your resource. [PAUSE]*
- *If you get distracted, remember that you are human and it's okay to get distracted. Just acknowledge you're distracted and try to bring your attention back to your resource or a pleasant or neutral sensation in your body. [LONGER PAUSE]*
- *As we do this, we're learning more about our bodies and how to calm them and make them feel better.*
- *Now we'll finish the practice. If you closed your eyes, I now invite you to open them. Thank you."*

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### PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION | 5 minutes

#### Instructions and Guiding Language

- *"Today we'll be exploring emotional reactions: what contributes to them, and what can be done to empower ourselves in response to them. We recently talked about sparks and forest fires as a metaphor for how emotions can arise. Think for a moment about what you remember from that conversation. What are some ideas that you remember about the 'spark and*

***forest fire’ metaphor and how it relates to human emotions?***

- ***Something all human beings have in common is that we all experience emotions connected to the experiences we have. It’s interesting and important to understand that while we all experience emotions, we don’t all experience the SAME emotions during any given experience. People can be in the same place, sharing an external (outside) experience, yet have a very different internal (inside themselves) experience.***
- ***Individual past history contributes to how we experience a situation. In many cases, we didn’t have control over our past experiences when they were occurring. Also, the current state of our nervous system impacts how we experience a situation, and that is something we do have some control over. And the element we may have the most control over is how we respond to the emotions we are feeling during a situation. This is a skill we can develop.”***

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### **INSIGHT ACTIVITY 1 | 5 minutes**

Exploring Emotional Reactions

#### **Activity Overview**

Revisiting the spark and forest fire metaphor helps to introduce the idea that past experience can influence individual reactions to the same event. Different people can and do have very

different reactions while in the same situation based on their own personal histories.

These scientific findings are useful for explaining and understanding our emotional reactions:

- Current and past experiences can trigger emotions
- People can get better at noticing and responding to emotional triggers
- All people are united in their changing experience of emotions
- What triggers emotions varies from person to person
- The state of our nervous system influences how we appraise (judge or evaluate) a situation

### **Group Work**

***“In pairs or small groups, read the Scenario 1: Rafi and Ronan resource and verbally answer the accompanying questions.”***

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### **INSIGHT ACTIVITY 2 | 15 minutes**

Scenario 2: Robin’s Difficult Day

#### **Instructions and Guiding Language**

Read “Robin’s Difficult Day” aloud or ask students to read it together in small groups.

- Point out the zones on the floor or ask students to sketch a visual of the zones on a piece of paper.
- ***“As you listen to or read the story together, notice where the character may be***

experiencing a “spark” by pausing and discussing it with your group, snapping your fingers or placing an asterisk on the paper.

- Each time you notice a spark, move along the zones that are mapped out on the floor or identify where Robin might be on your paper copy of the resilient zone.
- At each spark move along the “resilient zone map” on the classroom floor. Discuss what zone you think the character is in and why. Use the questions below to prompt discussion.
  - What was the spark?
  - Why did you choose to stand where you are?
  - What emotion(s) might Robin be feeling at this moment?
  - What might happen if Robin had more awareness right now?
  - If Robin has worked to decrease the spark in the moment, how do you know that?
  - What might Robin do to help themselves at this moment?”

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 10 minutes

### Instructions and Guiding Language

- “We all experience difficult days sometimes. Each little thing can add up until we feel overwhelmed or stressed out. Then we might do things that we wouldn’t ordinarily do, like lose our temper. That’s why we practice methods for balancing our body and mind, like resourcing, grounding, training our attention and cultivating our awareness.
- That way, anytime there is a spark, we can notice it and maybe we can relax ourselves or help ourselves feel calmer or more settled.
- Let’s do a practice in silence now. [PAUSE]
- If someone did something kind for you recently, or if you were kind to someone else, you may want to use that as your resource. If you’d rather do grounding, you can find a comfortable way to sit or something comfortable to hold or touch.
- Let’s now take a few moments to think about our resource or pay attention to our grounding. [PAUSE at least 30 seconds.]
- Now let’s do tracking and pay attention to the sensations inside our bodies. [PAUSE]
- If you find a pleasant or neutral sensation, pay attention to that and watch it. See if it changes or stays the same. [PAUSE]
- If you haven’t found a pleasant or neutral sensation, see if you can shift to another

*part of your body to find a place that feels better.* [PAUSE]

- *If you'd like, focus on your breath as you breathe normally. Count your breaths if you wish. If you find paying attention to the breath uncomfortable, make your own choice to go back to your resource or grounding, or just take a small break, thinking your own thoughts in the way that's comfortable for you.* [PAUSE for 15-30 seconds.]
- *Reflect for yourself: What did you notice on the inside?"*

#### **Debrief** (4 minutes)

Invite volunteers to share their thoughts, using one or more of these questions as a guide:

- *"What are some things that were happening for you during the story about Robin's difficult day? Any sensations in your body at particular times? What were they and when did they arise?*
- *What about feelings? What were some emotions you felt and when did they come up?*
- *Any thoughts that went through your mind as you were hearing this story?*
- *How are you like Robin and how are others like Robin?*
- *Have you learned anything about emotions that you hadn't thought of before?"*

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## Scenario 1

### Rafi and Ronan

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Rafi and Ronan go to the same school. One day when they are on the playground, they hear a dog barking. Rafi's family has a dog at home that they love very much.

The barking makes Rafi's heart beat faster and Rafi hopes the dog might want to play.

Ronan was once bitten by a dog. When the barking begins, Ronan's heart starts beating faster and Ronan's body tenses, thinking there might be a dog nearby.

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#### Questions:

- What emotion or emotions might Rafi be feeling? What about Ronan?
- What kind of 'spark' is the dog's bark for Rafi? For Ronan? Why?
- Some of their sensations are the same, like their hearts beating faster, but other sensations in their body might be different. Why might that be? (Increased heartbeat can accompany heightened emotions whether pleasant like excitement or unpleasant like fear.)
- What do you think is happening in Rafi's nervous system? Where might Rafi be in the three zones?
- What about Ronan?
- It's the same dog, making the same bark, but Rafi and Ronan judged or evaluated it differently. Rafi didn't evaluate it as dangerous, but maybe Ronan did. Our nervous systems are constantly evaluating what is going on around us. This is called "appraisal."
- Pause for a moment and think about Ronan's racing heart and tightening body...notice what you're feeling in your own body [PAUSE], in your heart [PAUSE]. Notice if some feelings of care and compassion are coming up for you. This often happens even in stories, as well as in real life, that our personal response is one of empathy and compassion for someone who is struggling or afraid.

## Navigating Emotions



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## Scenario 2

### Robin's Difficult Day

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Robin, who is 15 years old, woke suddenly, realizing it was late. Why hadn't the alarm gone off? "Robin, get up! You're going to be late for school!" Robin's mother shouted.\* Her voice was so loud!

"Okay, okay, I'm coming," Robin grumbled, but too softly for Mother to hear.

"Robin!" Mother's voice was inside the room now. Her voice sounded even louder, like a horn blasting the ears, hurting them. "Get up right now!" she shouted.\*

Robin stumbled out of bed and began to get dressed. Still feeling tired and irritated, Robin looked out the window and could see it would be cold outside. Robin reached for a favorite piece of clothing, a soft knitted scarf that Grandma had given as a present. Robin loved how it felt so smooth and nice. Grandma's smiling face came to mind. Suddenly, Robin felt a little bit happier.

"Wait, you forgot your cell phone, and I can pick you up today so you don't have to ride the bus," Robin's mother said as Robin passed her. Robin grabbed the cell phone and put it into the side pocket of their backpack.

As Robin approached the school, there was a group of students standing near the door. They were a couple of years older than Robin and often were rude and sometimes kind of intimidating. Robin tried to avoid them on the way into school, but one of them called out. At the instant of hearing that familiar voice, Robin felt a chill running down the spine and legs going numb.

One of the older kids started towards Robin and got near enough to grab out, but Robin quickly dodged away and hurried into the school building.

Slipping into the classroom just in time, Robin was glad to see Bailey who was a good friend. It felt a little better now to be sitting down next to a good friend but Robin's heart was beating so fast and hard it was hard to hear the words of the teacher.



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## Scenario 2

### Robin's Difficult Day

*(continued)*

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Robin realized the teacher was handing out a sheet of paper and felt their eyes open wide. What was this? A test?

"Do we have a test?" Robin asked Bailey.

Bailey nodded. "Yeah, didn't you study for it?"

"No, I completely forgot. I didn't study at all!" Robin grimaced.

Robin was feeling even more frustrated now. When did the teacher even mention the test? Robin felt angry with the teacher and also was personally upset for not having remembered it.\*

As the teacher placed the tests on the students' desks, Robin felt afraid about failing the test. With a stomach that felt all tight and knotted, Robin reached for the scarf, since sometimes its softness helped with feeling better.

But the scarf wasn't there! Robin realized that it must have fallen off in the dash to get away from the older kids. Now Robin felt completely deflated and even more sad and angry. There was no way to concentrate at all on the test now.

Finally the school day ended and Robin went outside to where parents came to pick students up from school. "Please don't let those students that hang out in front of the school entrance be out here," Robin thought. "That's the last thing I need today."

But sure enough, there they were and they were heading Robin's way.

"Where's my mother?" Robin wondered, watching them get closer.

"Hey, Robin!" one of the kids called out.

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## Scenario 2

### Robin's Difficult Day

*(continued)*

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Just then Robin's mother arrived. Quickly opening the door, Robin jumped into the car.

"Where were you?" Robin shouted at her. "You're late!"

Robin's mother looked surprised. "Robin! Why are you shouting?" Robin dropped the backpack onto the car floor and gave it a hard kick, yelling, "I hate this school!"

"Robin! Calm Down!" Mother said sharply.

Then Robin looked down and saw that the stomping had broken their cellphone which was in the side pocket of their backpack. The screen was completely broken. Anger turned to sadness, and Robin started to cry.

"Oh honey, I can see you're very upset," said Mother. "It looks like you've had a really difficult day. Maybe you want to rest on the way home, and then we can talk whenever you are ready."

## Navigating Emotions



