

CHAPTER 4**LEARNING
EXPERIENCE****5****Navigating Emotions**

Investigating Risky Emotions

PURPOSE

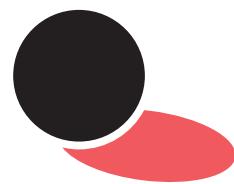
The purpose of this learning experience is to help students identify the characteristics of difficult or “risky” emotions by engaging in a guided process of inquiry. This process can

then be used to think about any emotion and its potential risk for oneself and others if it gets out of hand.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Practice discerning emotions that can be risky when they become too strong.
- Recognize that one can investigate emotions by using a process.

PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS

**Attention &
Self-Awareness**

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- The “emotion families” created earlier in the “Creating Emotion Families” activity, ideally placed on a board so everyone can see
- A large piece of chart paper with the questions from the “Investigating Risky Emotions Checklist” (provided at the end of this learning experience) written on it so everyone can see it

LENGTH

30 minutes

CHECK-IN | 5 minutes

- "We've been talking about emotions and needs.
- In order to notice our own emotions and needs, or the emotions and needs of others, we need to be able to pay attention.
- So we're going to start by strengthening our attention.
- Take out your resource kit and choose one resource. Place it in your desk. It's there if you need it.
- Let's pay attention to our bodies for a moment. If your body feels like it needs a stretch, take one.
- Let's get back in our chairs, sit up straight, and get comfortable.
- This time we're going to focus our attention on our breathing. But if it makes you feel uncomfortable or you don't want to do breathing, you can think about your resource instead and notice how that makes you feel inside.
- See if you can notice the feeling in your nose and face when you breath in [Pause.] and also when you breath out. Or you can notice the breath in your belly. [Pause.]
- Let's try to sit for a few minutes while we practice paying attention to our breathing. [Have students practice focusing on their breath for about one to two minutes, depending on their ability.]

- What did you notice?" [Share aloud.]

INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 15 minutes

Investigating Risky Emotions

Overview

In this insight activity, students investigate risky emotions, thinking about how risky an emotion could be and what those emotions might have in common.

Content/Insights to be Explored

- Some emotions are more risky than others, in that they can prompt behaviors that harm ourselves and others if they get out of hand.
- We can identify risky emotions by asking questions about them.
- Once we identify risky emotions, we can be heedful of them (exercise caution) and "hold back" (exercise restraint) when we notice them getting strong.

Materials Required

- The "emotion families" created earlier in the "Creating Emotion Families" activity, ideally placed on a board so everyone can see
- A large piece of chart paper with the questions from the "Investigating Risky Emotions Chart" (provided at the end of this learning experience) written on it so everyone can see it

Instructions

- Show your students the emotion family groupings they created in the "Creating

Emotion Families" activity. Place these on a board where everyone can see them.

- Remind them of the spark and the forest fire analogy. Some emotions can be sparks and can become big forest fires if we let them get out of control. We call these "risky emotions."
- Ask them if any of the emotions on the emotion family cards could start a big fire. These emotions are ones that could become risky. Whichever ones they choose, explain that you will then as a class "investigate" that emotion like a detective, using your "risky emotions checklist." Invite them to come up to the board and put a mark next to whichever emotions they feel might be risky and should be investigated
- Distribute the "risky emotions checklist" to all students.
- Choose one of the marked emotions to start with, then run through the checklist as a class, reading aloud and asking each question in turn of that emotion.
- Move on to the next term they marked and go through the checklist again.
- Debrief by asking if the risky emotions they identified have anything in common, and whether we should be careful if we notice risky emotions in ourselves or others.

Teaching Tips

- Be attentive in case students feel that risky emotions are "bad" or that they need to fear or suppress them. There are many

things in life that we need to be heedful of, and exercise restraint around, such as fire, electronics, or valuable and fragile objects. Restraint does not mean repression, but implies dealing with something constructively to prevent harm to self and others. The purpose of identifying risky emotions and strategies for dealing with them is for students to learn to navigate emotions constructively without having to suppress or repress them.

- The purpose of the questions in the "risky emotions checklist" is to get students to think for themselves about how to analyze thoughts and emotions in terms of the potential benefit or harm they can bring. It is not to provide right or wrong answers. Rather, it introduces them to the concept of questioning the kinds of impact different emotions can have.
- Allow as much time as you have for students to assess other risky emotions.

Sample script

- *"Remember these cards that you created in our last activity? I'm going to place them where everyone can see them.*
- *Who can help us remember what we meant when we talked about the spark and the forest fire? How can emotions be like a spark that leads to a forest fire?*
- *Some emotions can turn into big fires if we let them get out of control.*
- *How did we describe those emotions that can turn into big fires? We call them risky emotions. They are emotions that can grow*

bigger and sometimes cause us to have bigger difficulties.

- Do any of these emotions on the board seem like they might be risky? [Call on specific students and have them come up and mark the emotion they feel might be risky and should be investigated.]
- We're going to investigate these risky emotions, as if we were detectives, to see how risky they are.
- Fortunately we have a good detective tool. It is this checklist. It has questions we can use to see if an emotion is risky and if so, how risky.
- Using the checklist let's first investigate the emotion "frustration." (Go through the questions on the checklist with students, asking for how they would answer the questions. Write their answers on the board or chart paper.)
- Now that we've answered all the questions, let's decide. Is frustration a risky emotion? If so, is it very risky or just a little risky?
- [Continue on to a few other emotions, as you have time.]
- Now that we've identified some risky emotions, let's think about what they have in common. What is alike about these emotions?
- How can we be careful when we notice risky emotions in ourselves or others?
- What is one action you can take if you think you're experiencing a risky emotion. "

[Note: be sure to help students think of ways they can process or handle a risky emotion that does not involve merely suppressing it. Many such strategies have already been presented in the SEE Learning curriculum, such as grounding, resourcing, Help Now! strategies. They can be encouraged to find other strategies too, such as talking to an adult or friend, taking deep breaths, taking a pause, walking away, finding a solution to the problem, etc.]

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 7 minutes

Observing the Mind for Emotions

This is similar to the final reflective practice in Chapter 3, which is found in Learning Experience 6 and is titled "Observing the Mind." The only difference here is asking students what emotions they noticed at the end of the practice. They will raise their hands silently when they notice an emotion, thought, or sensation and lower their hand when it goes away.

Sample script

- "Let's sit up and get into a comfortable sitting position.
- If we're too excited or too tired, or if we're not in our resilient zone, it will be hard to train our attention. Just like in our drawings where we drew our minds when they were too dull or too excited.
- So let's sit upright with our backs straight. And so we don't get distracted, let's lower our eyes to the ground or close them.

- First we'll do a resourcing and grounding activity to help us be in our resilient zone.
- Let's think of one of our resources in silence, perhaps think of a favorite person or thing.
- Or if you prefer, you can do some grounding where you are sitting. Really feel the chair against your body and imagine you are a sturdy tree, with roots going down into the ground. [Pause.]
- Let's focus on our breath now. Be aware of your breath as it goes in your nose and into your body. Then, feel it as you breathe out. Remember if you start to feel uncomfortable, you can go back to your resource or to grounding. [Pause for 30 seconds or longer if your students are comfortable doing so.]
- Now let's practice just watching our mind.
- We're going to stop focusing on our breath. Instead, we're just going to watch to see whatever comes up in our mind.
- But instead of getting caught up in our thoughts or emotions, we're going to see if we can just be observers. That means not following your thoughts or feelings, but just noticing what comes up.
- Let's be silent and pay close attention and see if we can do that. [Pause for 15-30 seconds, or more if your students are comfortable doing so.]
- When you notice an emotion, a thought, or a sensation, raise your hand silently. Then put your hand down when it goes away.
- If we get distracted or caught up in our thoughts or emotions, let's just remember that we're just watching them like an observer. We're seeing them come, stay, and go. Let's try to do that just a little bit more. [Pause for 15-30 seconds or more.]
- Now let's open our eyes and share.
- What did you notice?
- Could anyone watch thoughts coming and going? What was that like?
- Did anyone notice a feeling or emotion?
- Do you think you'd be able to notice emotions if they happened during the day?"

DEBRIEF | 3 minutes

- "What did we learn about risky emotions?
- How do we know if an emotion is risky or not?
- What might happen if we noticed risky emotions quickly?
- Have we learned anything that could help us notice risky emotions?"