

Handling Disappointment

Tips for Teachers

The Main Event

This month our topic is **Handling Disappointment**. In this issue, Jill Pring, a preK-12 autism resource specialist, is the guest editor; she has written The Main Event.

Ideas for teaching students to better understand these social concepts include:

- Use squeeze balls to illustrate a flexible brain. This idea comes from Michelle Garcia Winner (www.socialthinking.com). Products for this activity are listed on Michelle's website.
- Have your group generate a list of disappointments they were not expecting. Put the list on a board and have the group think of options for handling each disappointment.
- Ask group members to explain why they think these situations were particularly upsetting.
- Use cartooning with "thinking bubbles" to illustrate both flexible thinking and "cemented thinking." Use different colors to designate which is which.
- Make a t-chart outlining *expected* and *unexpected* ways of handling disappointment (this comes from Michelle Garcia Winner's work as well).
- Have students create cartoon characters that illustrate ways of handling disappointment (like Mr. Rational Thinking or Madame Option).
- Use Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm and play the "Glad Game" (requiring students to say one positive thing for every negative thing said).
- Use movie or TV clips to illustrate how to handle disappointment in both positive and negative ways.
- Practice relaxation strategies as a way to get through the initial stress of disappointment.

I am Kari Dunn Buron,
a teacher from Minnesota,
and I just love this magazine!



You betcha.

Departments

I Second That Emotion!:

This issue's scale is about rating problems.

- Have students think of a variety of common problems and then rate them on the scale.
- Discuss how anxiety can make problems worse.

Coming to Our Senses:

The topic of Coming to Our Senses in this issue is called eye noise. It was submitted by Jennifer Veenendall, an occupational therapist.

- Discuss the concept of "eye noise." Explore if anybody in your group has problems with distracting noise.
- Discuss the fact that some movies are very loud and some have very fast-paced movement. Does this bother anyone?

Gets-It Knows!:

- Discuss the problem of forgetting names. Cover information such as:
 - Did you know that this is a very common problem?
 - Some scientists say that our brains are wired to recognize faces and some people are just better at it than others. Some people can remember names but forget faces and some people can remember faces but forget names!
 - Research has shown that practicing names does help.
- Create a game with faces and name cards that students are to match up. Try using both famous people and people from around your school.

Something to Talk About:

- Ask your group if anything like this has ever happened to them.
- Discuss everyone's "house rules" (the rules they have at home). Are they different? Are there some common rules?

The Cartoon:

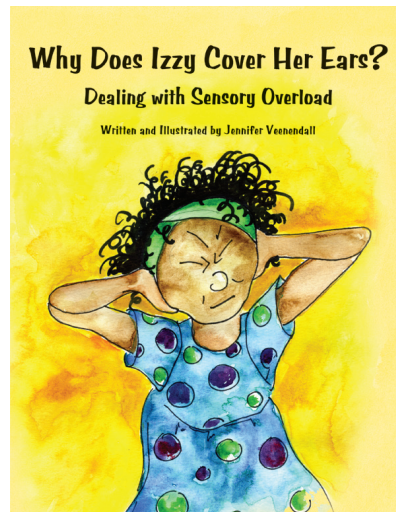
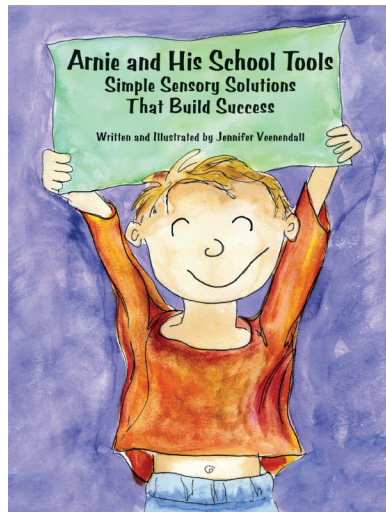
(NOTE: The abstract nature of the cartoon is purposeful. Social rules and faux pas are subtle, and this activity gives students and opportunity to analyze the social information, point by point. It is expected that the teacher or group leader will support the discussion using the following prompt questions.):

- Discuss what is happening in the cartoon.
- Explore with students why they think the student is upset.
- Explore with students how they think the teacher is feeling.
- Discuss whether his outburst will help the situation or hurt it? Why?

Contributors to This Issue

Jill Pring is the preK-12 autism resource specialist for the Carlton School District in northern Minnesota . She has over 15 years of experience working with children and young adults with autism spectrum disorders and was a recipient of the Teacher of the Year award for Carlton School District. Jill has led Camp Discovery, a summer camp for autistic youth for several years. Her special interest in the field of autism involves teaching strategies for social thinking and emotional regulation.

Jennifer Veenendall is a school-based occupational therapist in West St. Paul, Minnesota. Working with students with a wide range of abilities, she is especially passionate about creating learning environments that meet students' sensory processing needs. Jennifer received her occupational therapy degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her master's degree in human development from St. Mary's University of Minnesota. She lives in Hudson, Wisconsin, with her husband, Scott, and their two children, Anna and Benjamin. When she is not working, Jennifer enjoys spending time with her family at their cabin as well as drawing and painting. Jennifer is the author of *Arnie and His School Tools*, *Sensory Solutions That Build Success* and *Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Dealing with Sensory Overload*.



Handling Disappointment

Teacher Handout

Understanding and addressing problems involving *handling disappointment* in students with social cognitive problems:

Emotional regulation is the ability to think clearly when faced with an emotional response. Many autistic students have great difficulty with emotional regulation. These problems often lead to very little tolerance for everyday disappointments, resulting in a loss of emotional control.

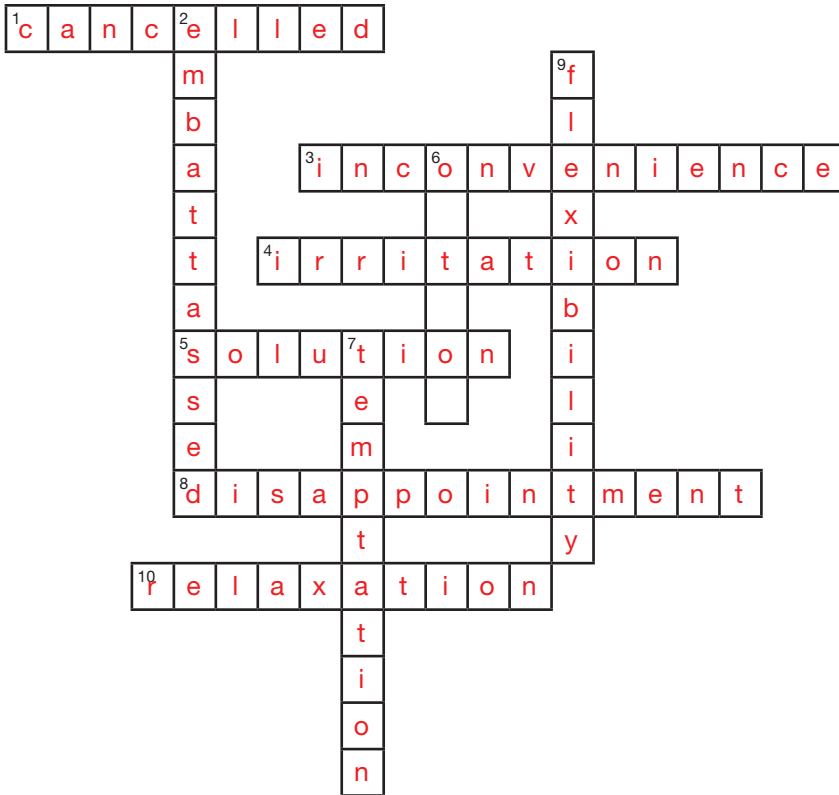
- **Recognize low tolerance for frustration for what it is**, a part of the developmental delay involved in having a problem with social cognition. Students who have challenges in this area often need help learning how to handle even small disappointments.
- **Don't take a poor response personally.** Students who have problems in this area do not "think through" their responses, so any verbal response is likely to be rude or insulting. Try not to personalize these words. Dr. Ross Greene (<http://www.livesinthebalance.org>) calls these words "mental debris," because they tend to be the fallout from an immature cognitive system.
- **Come up with a plan that both you and the student can agree on.** The plan should be reasonable and doable within the demands of your schedule. Such a plan might include a prearranged routine for delivering disappointing news. Perhaps set up a daily "check-in" where the student checks in with either you or another adult in the school. This could be very simple, just a few minutes every morning to review the schedule and process any changes. It is best to do this in a quiet spot without an audience of peers, just in case the student's response is negative.
- **Consider also developing an emergency plan.** This might look a big yellow yield sign that you can post on the wall that signals a last-minute change that could be disappointing. Just seeing the visual prompt rather than hearing you talk about it can help the student deal with it.
- **Teach students with social anxiety issues relaxing activities.** Relaxation is good for all students, so if you can integrate even deep breathing practice into your classroom routine, it can benefit anyone with anxiety, depression, or anger issues.

Handling Disappointment – Word Search Answers



Word Bank: BRAIN, DISAPPOINTMENT, FACTS, FLEXIBLE, OPTIONS, POSITIVE, RUBBERBAND, SOLUTION, UNEXPECTED

Handling Disappointment – Crossword Answers



ACROSS

- 1) ended; stopped for some reason
- 3) something that gets in your way or makes it harder to do what you want
- 4) a small worry or thought
- 5) an answer to a problem
- 8) the way you feel when something doesn't go as you were expecting
- 10) something you do to calm your body and mind

DOWN

- 2) a way you might feel if you think other people are thinking bad things about you
- 6) an alternative
- 7) something that makes it hard to resist
- 9) the ability to move in many directions and think in new ways

Handling Disappointment – Quiz

Name: _____

- 1) True or False? Handling disappointment can be a really difficult thing to do.
 - A) True
 - B) False

- 2) True or False? Taking a deep breath when you are upset can help you relax.
 - A) True
 - B) False

- 3) True or False? There are no solutions to being disappointed.
 - A) True
 - B) False

- 4) In order to be able to handle disappointment, it helps to have a _____ brain.
 - A) big
 - B) flexible
 - C) hard
 - D) round

- 5) Which of the following is not a recommended response to disappointment?
 - A) stick with the facts
 - B) stop and take a few deep breaths
 - C) shout at the first person you see
 - D) look for a solution that makes everyone happy

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