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*Emotion coaching  
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### **Scripts for Emotion Coaching**

The following is a list of emotions and scripts that can be commented upon when interacting with your students during the day. Use this checklist to reflect on the type of emotion words you focus on with your students and practice using some different emotional vocabulary than you normally use. Think about the needs for individual students' behavior plans for target emotion vocabulary you will try to coach them.



## TEACHER EMOTION COACHING CHECKLIST

Check which kinds of emotions you typically model, prompt or coach. Identify any you want to strengthen for specific children.

Emotions	Examples
<input type="checkbox"/> Happy	“You look like you are having fun playing with your friend, and he looks like he is happy and excited doing this with you.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated	“That is frustrating and hard to do but you are staying calm and patient and keep trying again to figure out how to it. I think you are going to get it.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Proud/Pleased	“You look proud of that drawing, I know that you worked for a long time to get the details just the way you wanted them!”
<input type="checkbox"/> Confident	“You seem confident and calm when reading that story. You seem like you feel very sure about your reading!”
<input type="checkbox"/> Patient	“You are so patient. Even though it fell down twice, you just keep trying to see how you can make it taller. You must feel pleased with yourself for being so patient.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Disappointed	“I can see you are disappointed that he wouldn’t share with you. But you stayed so calm and were just so brave by going to ask someone else to play. That is a very strong thing to do.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Worried/Fearful	“You look afraid to do that. Sometimes that can be scary. I think you have the courage to try that out.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Jealous	“I can see you are a bit jealous and wish you had one of those. I wish I had one too. Maybe we can ask him to show us how it works. You are getting braver every day.”

<input type="checkbox"/> Forgiving	“You are forgiving of your friend because you know he made a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. I am proud of you for still being his friend.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Curious	“You are so curious. You are trying out and discovering every way that can work.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassed	“It is embarrassing to spill that everywhere. Sometimes I drop things too and get paint all over my clothes, and then I am a bit embarrassed too.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Caring	“You are so caring and thoughtful. You are thinking about your friend’s feelings and are really helpful and kind. Your friend looks like she feels calmer now because you helped her.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Mad	“I can see you are really mad that he grabbed that away from you. I am really proud that you kept your body calm and used your words.”
<input type="checkbox"/> Nervous	“I can see you are nervous the whole thing will fall down. You are being careful and patient and staying calm.”

### Coaching Positive Emotions

Coaching positive or pleasant emotions is straightforward. Practice noticing and labeling each emotion that you see, along with the reason a child may be feeling that way. For example, “You look like you are really excited about finishing that project! Your whole body is bouncing!” or, “Your face looks so proud right now. It was hard to finish that problem together but you did it!” or, “You’ve got the biggest smile on your face. You wrote that word neatly and carefully,” or, “You read that book to your friend and that made her feel happy.” “It looks like your hard work paid off. You seem really satisfied with the way that



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this project turned out. I know it took careful and patient planning.” If teachers provide the name for the emotion and some information about what behavior led to the emotion, they are helping the student link the feeling with the cause. Teachers can also include information about the clues they used to guess the emotion (smile, bouncing body). This will help the teacher tune the child into physical cues about feelings. Try to coach as many positive feeling states as you can. If teachers pay attention to a range of positive feelings, children will actually start to be in a positive feeling state more often. In other words, teacher attention to these feelings can make children feel happier, more joyful, and more proud of themselves. A good rule of thumb is to try to notice five times more positive than negative feelings in children.

### **Pair Negative Emotion Coaching with Coping Responses**

Coaching children’s negative or unpleasant emotions is a little trickier because excessive teacher attention to negative emotions can make children feel more frustrated, angry, or sad. However, if done skillfully, coaching of unpleasant emotions can help children feel validated and understood, as well as help them regulate their mood and calm down and learn that these unpleasant feelings are normal reactions and change with time. To do this it is important to pair teacher comments about children’s negative feelings with positive coping statements. For example, a child is having trouble learning to add two-digit numbers together and the teacher says, “That is frustrating, but you are staying so patient. I see you working hard. You keep trying and I think you are going to get it right!”

Or, a child is disappointed because he wanted to finish a project, but it is time to move on to another activity. The teacher says, “That must be very disappointing for you. I’m really sorry. Even though you are unhappy about having to stop, you are staying calm and starting to put things away. Let’s make a plan to give you some time to work on this project later.” Note that the goal is not for children to immediately change unpleasant feelings into happy ones, but rather to suggest that the child has the ability to cope with the unhappy



*Teachers validate the unpleasant feeling, avoid giving it too much attention, and focus on a coping response.*

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feelings. In this way, teachers validate the unpleasant feeling, avoid giving it too much attention, focus on a coping response to the negative feelings, and predict an eventual positive change in the negative feeling. This may even pre-empt a negative response, such as a temper tantrum.

However, it is also possible that a child may be too dysregulated to listen to a teacher's emotion coaching. If a teacher has labeled the unpleasant emotion once and provided the coping strategy, and the child continues to cry hard or to tantrum, then it is a good idea for the teacher to back off, ignore it, and give the child some space to calm down himself before talking again. Additional attention or talking during the tantrum will likely prolong the fussing. When the child has finally calmed down, then the teacher can label that emotion. "Your body is looking much calmer now. You really tried hard to calm yourself down. You are getting strong at learning to do that. Come and join us at the reading table." When one student is out of control, unhappy, tantruming, or whining excessively, teachers can help the other students by labeling his feeling and then coaching them to give the student privacy. For example, "John is frustrated right now. The best way to help him is to give him some privacy to calm down and then we'll be able to help him feel better. You can help him by ignoring."

Sensitive teachers will be tuned in to the difference between tantrums or crying because things are not going a student's way and true unhappiness, hurt, or grief. A typical tantrum is best ignored, while a student who is truly heart-broken will need more teacher support and understanding. In these situations, a teacher can still label emotions and provide coping thoughts, but may also provide more support through the emotional reactions. For example the teacher may say, "Billy, I am so, so sorry to hear that your dog died. I know how much you loved him, and I see that you are so sad and maybe a little mad. Sometimes it's hard to keep our bodies safe when we're feeling so awful, and it can take a long while to feel better. Let's find a place where we can sit together, where your body can be safe."



*When one student is out of control, teachers can help the other students by labeling his feeling and then coaching them to give the student privacy.*

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### **Tailoring Emotion Coaching to Your Student's Temperament**

Once teachers have learned how to generally coach children's emotions, the next task will be to tailor emotion coaching to the particular temperament or emotional needs of each individual student. Remember we talked about how every child is different temperamentally and developmentally. For example, a withdrawn, anxious, isolated, or fearful child will benefit from focused coaching when he takes risks and tries something new. The teacher can say, "You are so brave, you put up your hand and shared something interesting" or, "That was really courageous to invite him to help you" or, "I could see it was scary to talk to that girl, but you did it and now you are enjoying playing together!" On the other hand, children who are angry and defiant should receive extra emotion coaching at times when they are calm, relaxed, patient, joyful and agreeable. For example, the teacher can say, "You seem happy and peaceful now. You went along with your friend's suggestion and it worked out well for you both." Children who are impulsive and inattentive need to be coached especially when they are staying calm, patient, and are able to wait and are thoughtful in their responses. The next example shows a teacher working with a preschool child who is often impulsive, inattentive, and quick to throw a tantrum when he doesn't get what he wants.

*The child is sitting at the lunch table waiting for the other children to come. The teacher says, "Gregory, you are waiting so patiently. Your body is calm and still! I can see from your face that you are excited that it is lunch time, but I appreciate that your hands are to your own body! Would you help me pass out these cups. As Gregory passes out cups, the teacher comments, "You are passing carefully and slowly, and each cup that you put down is staying right side up. I bet you are proud of being able to help your friends. I'm grateful to have such a calm, patient helper!"*

This teacher recognizes that it takes a great deal of self-control for Gregory to sit still, control his body, and pass out cups. She wants to highlight his calm body so that he associates the regulated feeling with the word, and with her approval for his self-control. She also gives him a special job to further reinforce her pride in his ability to stay regulated.



In the next example, think about the emotion coaching used by a 2nd grade teacher who is working with a girl who has a reading delay.

*Anna is trying to read the book out loud to her teacher. She is struggling with the words. The rest of the class are reading silently on their own. She tries to read a word and can't say the word, and her teacher responds, "This is frustrating and hard work but you are staying calm and keep trying. I think you are going get it, it starts with the letter bb.. bee" and Anna repeats the letter, "b..eev..er." The teacher repeats the word and says, "Wow, that's not easy but you were patient and you did it, you look proud. Each day you learn more words. Let's try the next word."*

As demonstrated in this example, the teacher supports Anna's insecure and frustrated feelings by pointing out her persistence and predicting her eventual success. She gives Anna a bit of scaffolding to help her be successful and to build her self-confidence and ability to stay focused on this difficult learning process.

### **Combine Emotion and Persistence Coaching**

Remember the persistence coaching we discussed earlier? Emotion coaching can often be combined with persistence coaching because tasks that require persistence can often be frustrating and difficult at first. However if a child persists, then proud feelings of accomplishment and self-confidence may result. Notice how the teacher in this next example combines persistence and emotion coaching to help Soleil with the frustrating task of cutting and using large, sticky packing tape. The task is beyond the girl's developmental ability and could be quite frustrating. Most children would give up. Let's see how this teacher encourages the girl's need for independence as she continues to try to do this difficult task herself.

*Soleil is working hard on cutting some big sticky tape and the teacher comments, "You are being very patient with the tape and now you have cut three pieces of tape." Soleil starts to cut again and asks the teacher to hold the tape. The teacher holds the tape for her and*

*Soleil successfully cuts another piece of tape. The teacher smiles at her and appreciates her accomplishment by saying, “You look proud of your cutting.” As Soleil puts the tape on her picture, the teacher comments, “You have been so focused on this work. Do you like this picture?” And when Soleil says yes, the teacher says, “I am glad you like your picture, you have worked hard on it.” Soleil cuts another piece of tape but seems to be getting upset. The teacher asks, “Are you getting frustrated with the tape?” Soleil says “No” but looks more frustrated and asks her teacher for help. The teacher acknowledges her feelings by saying, “It is frustrating when the tape gets stuck together. You’re doing a great job of keeping your body calm even though you are frustrated. You keep working at it and are patient.” The teacher continues by saying, “You are working so diligently with the tape and you are feeling so...” The teacher leaves a pause here so that Soleil has a chance to identify her own feeling.*



Here is an example of how a teacher is combining the persistence coaching discussed earlier with the emotion coaching strategies. The teacher effectively helps her student keep working on this frustrating task by acknowledging the frustrated feelings but then moving on to her persistence at working hard, staying focused, and staying calm. The teacher gives her just enough support to keep her student going without taking over the activity and doing it for her. Soleil ends up feeling very proud of her accomplishment.

### **Using Pretend Play to Promote Social and Emotional Skills**

Pretend or imaginary play is a good way for teachers to help their students practice social and emotional skills by using all the coaching skills mentioned above: prompting, modeling, descriptive comments, and encouragement. Using a puppet, doll, or action figure can be a fun way to enter into children’s imaginary worlds. For example, through the use of a puppet teachers can ask a child, “Will you play with me?” These are

the friendly words a young child needs to learn to initiate an interaction with a peer. If the student ignores the puppet's overture, the puppet can ask again, modeling how one can keep trying. Or, if this still doesn't work, the puppet can say, "I'm disappointed but I'll be patient and wait until you have finished with that and then maybe you will play with me." On the other hand, if the student agrees to let the puppet play with him the puppet can reply, "Thank you. That makes me happy. You are a friend. What shall we do?" Teachers can also engage in imaginary play by pretending to be a hungry horse or happy cow or grumpy pig, or by making the noise of a tired airplane or train. For example, if some students are making play dough cookies, the teacher can pretend they are real and say, "I'm hungry, can I have a taste of your green cookie?" If one of the students offers the teacher a bite, the teacher pretends to eat some and then comments on how good they taste. "I'm so happy to enjoy your delicious cookies! Thank you for being such a kind cook." With pretend phones teachers can make up imaginary calls. Using doll houses or Legos with figures (e.g., doctor, policeman) a teacher can have a character pretend to be sick or model coming to the rescue when a house is burning down. By taking on the role of a character or action figure in pretend play, the teacher is helping her students practice social skills, express feelings with emotion language, and understand the emotions of another. It can be a powerful way to promote children's imaginary worlds as well as to help them experience the perspective and feelings of another character. This is the beginning of empathy development.

After kindergarten, there seems to be less time in school schedules for imaginary play. Teachers in these classrooms can try to foster students' fantasy world by asking them to write or tell stories about certain situations. For example, the teacher can present some typical classroom scenarios such as, a child wants to read a book someone else is reading and that person won't share the book with her, or a child who is accused by other children of cheating at a game.



*Imaginary play with  
teachers helps students  
learn empathy skills.*

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Then the teacher can ask the children to write or transcribe stories about the children's feelings or what things they can do to be friendly or feel better. Afterwards groups of children could work together to act out their plays taking on the various parts. Many children's books are written around social problems (sharing, bullying, friendship problems). These can be used as jumping off points for children to brainstorm, role play, or write about solutions.

### **Extending Coaching Skills to Other Times than Play**

Social, emotion, academic, and persistence coaching is a way of communicating and interacting that teachers can use most any time during the day – such as during lunch times, during work time, in the school hallway, or on the play ground. By using this coaching throughout the day teachers will be contributing to their students' optimal language, social and emotional development as well as strengthening their relationship with them. In the next example two teachers are using child-centered social coaching during breakfast with the children at their table. Think about what these children are learning.

*The teacher praises Rebecca for good eating. She is eating yogurt, and the teacher says, "That is very healthy food." Can you pass the bowl of yogurt to your friends to see if they want any more?" (Prompting a share.) She says, "Okay" and the teacher thanks her, "You are a good yogurt sharer." (Praise for sharing.) Another child observes this sharing and imitates it by passing the cookie plate and the teacher responds, "Malcolm, thank you for passing those, you are really helping your friends and they look pleased." (Modeling a polite response.) Another child says, "Anyone want some carrots?" The teacher responds, "Wow sharing points all around. You can dip your carrots in the yogurt." (Descriptive praise.) The teacher says, "Food tastes better when you share it, don't you think?"*

Coaching can be used during work time in older students' classrooms, perhaps as the teacher circulates around the room to monitor students' progress. See how this next teacher combines all the different types of coaching.

*“John, thank you for taking your time to check your work.” (persistence) “Maya, I’m so proud of you for figuring that out. I can see it was hard, but you stuck with it. You must be feeling really good about your accomplishment.” (persistence and emotion coaching) “Let’s see Andrew. It looks like you’re stuck on that part. You’ve got the first part of the word right. I’m going to let you work with your buddy to get that next part.” When he gets some help, the teacher says: “Thank you two for working together on that—it’s important to be able to get help from a friend.” (social coaching) “Simon, I see you are using alliteration in that sentence—so many words that start with ‘V’. That sentence is fun to say!” (academic coaching) “Sally, I appreciate the way you are sitting quietly and calmly in your seat while you work.”*

We can see that this teacher is tailoring her comments to the needs of each student. She is also able to fit in this coaching as part of her regular teaching routine.

### **Teach and Encourage Parents to Use Descriptive Commenting and Coaching Strategies at Home with their Children**

Encourage your students’ parents to do this child-directed descriptive commenting and coaching during their play and reading times at home with their children. Teachers can offer workshops to parents to train them in these coaching skills at monthly parent night meetings or by sending home regular newsletters. Incredible Years has a specific 4- to 6-session School Readiness Parent Program that teachers can use for showing preschool and kindergarten parents video examples of coaching methods. If English is not the parents’ first language, encourage them to speak in the language that they know best because when they do so their rhythm, cadence and tone of voice will be more natural and fluent. This commenting has the same effect regardless of what language it is done in. Encourage parents to find books in their own language or tell them stories about their culture and help them feel proud of their language. For children in a



*Teachers can offer workshops to parents to train them in these coaching skills or send home regular newsletters.*

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bilingual environment, the number of words the child can speak will be split between the two languages s/he is learning. Also help parents understand that sometimes children who are exposed to more than one language are initially a little slower to use either language because they are sorting out the different sounds and meanings. Tell them not to worry because these initial delays will go away eventually and their child will be able to distinguish between different syllables and use the two languages with ease after a while.

## CONCLUSION

When teachers interact with their students using a child-directed approach coupled with academic and persistence coaching they are showing students they are interested in what they are thinking and doing and that they appreciate their curiosity, discoveries and exploration of ideas. This approach strengthens the teacher-student learning relationship as well as supporting students' cognitive and language development and process for learning academic skills. By doing this teachers are scaffolding children's attention and beginning to help them learn how to stay focused, calm and to persist with their work despite many classroom distractions and feelings of frustration as they try to learn something new or explore an idea. As teachers support this learning and cognitive brain development, they are still allowing for children's developmental need for autonomy and independent exploration, which further enhances their motivation to learn.

When teachers use social and emotion coaching with students, they are modeling empathy and understanding and helping their students develop specific social skills and emotional literacy. This approach enhances teachers' emotional connections with their students as well as setting the stage for promoting supportive friendships with their classmates. In so doing, teachers are strengthening their students' social and emotional brain development because understanding and expressing feelings is the first step toward self-regulation and eventual development of empathy for others' point of view. Understanding and using specific social skills such as asking, waiting, cooperating, sharing, complimenting

and forgiving are core to successful friendships, increased sense of security and self-confidence and better cooperative learning processes among children. By scaffolding students' negative feelings with emphasis on their coping responses (waiting patiently and trying again in contrast to whining or giving up) teachers are giving more focused attention to students' positive feelings and coping strategies, and are helping them learn how to stay calm despite feelings of frustration as they try to learn something new. Academic, persistence, social and emotion coaching are tools at the bottom of the teaching pyramid that help to build a stable classroom foundation that optimizes children's ability to learn.



**To continue the gardening metaphor, by carefully selecting coaching tools according to students' individual developmental needs, teachers are training and gently supporting weaker branches of the plant until they have the strength to flourish amidst a variety of other types of plants.**



## TO SUM UP...

### Teacher Academic and Persistence Coaching Skills

#### Academic and Language Coaching

- Use many more descriptive comments than questions.
- Describe children's actions, objects, positions (inside, beside, next to), colors, numbers, shapes.
- Notice and talk about what students are interested in.
- Prompt children with language difficulties to communicate by modeling words and suggesting sentences to repeat.
- Praise and give positive feedback to students for expressing their ideas (that is a great suggestion you gave!).
- Use new and more complex words to expand children's vocabulary.
- Listen to, imitate, or mirror student's words and sentences.
- Describe your own actions to your students (e.g., "I'm putting my folder in my desk now").
- Share your feelings of joy with your students.
- Avoid correcting or criticizing a child's exploration process; praise self-discovery and creativity.

#### Persistence Coaching

- Describe when students are working hard, concentrating, being calm, staying patient when doing an activity, being curious or engaged in the discovery process.
- Describe students' persistence with a frustrating activity by trying again, sticking with it, thinking of a new way to do it, and staying focused.



- Listen carefully to your students and try to understand what they are telling you about their thoughts, ideas and discoveries.
- Comment and praise your students for listening to their peers or to you.
- Use puppets to make up stories and model persistence coaching using the puppets words.
- Use make-believe games such as toy telephones or hand puppets or dramas to encourage communication.
- Encourage students to discover, explore, experiment and provide support when mistakes are made.
- Curb your desire to give too much help—give just enough support to avoid frustration but not so much you take over the exploration—encourage students’ problem solving thinking process.
- Inform parents about academic and persistence coaching methods which they can use at home in their play interactions; tailor coaching to students’ particular learning needs.

## TO SUM UP...

### Teacher Social Coaching

#### Teacher-Child Interactions

- During play interactions, model social skills for children such as offering to share, waiting, giving a compliment, taking turns, asking for help.
- Prompt children to ask for help, take a turn, share something, or give a compliment and then praise them if it occurs; let it go if the child does not respond to your prompt.
- Praise children any time they offer to share with friends or help them.
- Participate in pretend and make-believe play with children by using a doll, action figure, or puppet to model skills such as asking to play, offering to help, taking a turn, giving a compliment, calming down with a deep breath and waiting, and apologizing.

- Model and prompt children with a suggestion of the appropriate friendly words to ask for what they want or to make a suggestion.
- Try to give enough help so children are successful, but not so much help that you take over.

### **Peer Group Teacher Social Coaching**

- Occasionally prompt students to notice what their peers are doing or to help another student in some way.
- Help children understand that when they have shared, that the other person felt happy; this helps them see the connection between their behavior and another's feelings.
- Praise and encourage children's teamwork and cooperation.
- Use descriptive comments instead of asking questions.
- Prompt, coach, and praise children's friendly behaviors whenever you see them (e.g., sharing, helping, taking turns, being polite).
- Laugh and have fun with your students.
- Help parents know about specific social skills you are working on in the classroom throughout the year.
- Help parents know about good friendship matches in the classroom so they can set up play dates.

## **TO SUM UP...**

### **Teacher Emotion Coaching Skills**

- Try to understand what the students are feeling and wanting.
- Describe children's feelings when teachers see them ~ avoid asking a child what they are feeling or why they are feeling that way because they may not have the words to tell you.
- Label children's positive feelings more often than their negative feelings.
- When naming negative feelings such as frustration or anger, point out the coping strategy the child is using: "You look frustrated, but you are staying calm and trying again."

- Praise children's self-regulation skills such as staying calm, being patient, trying again when frustrated, waiting a turn, and using words.
- Support children when they are frustrated, but recognize when a child is too upset to listen and just needs space and privacy to calm down.
- Model the words and encourage children to use words to use to express their feelings and needs.
- Help students learn ways to self-regulate such as taking deep breaths, saying "I can calm down" or, "I can wait" or, "I can solve the problem" when getting frustrated.
- Praise and encourage children when they stay calm in a frustrating situation.
- Cuddle and soothe younger children when they are hurt or frightened.
- Model as a teacher staying calm and patient when responding in frustrating situations.
- Help parents know about emotion words teachers are promoting in the classroom and specific ones targeted for their children (e.g., being brave for anxious student; or being patient for impulsive student; or being happy for sad student).









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