



DRAWING AS A WAY TO MANAGE EMOTIONS

"Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life."

—Pablo Picasso

OVERVIEW

Students take a few minutes to draw anything they like, learning an emotion regulation strategy that can help shift unpleasant emotions to calmer, more pleasant ones.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year
- To cultivate a positive mood in the classroom
- To help students feel better when something challenging has happened (NOTE: This practice should not take the place of more appropriate interventions needed for deeper emotional issues and/or traumatic incidents.)
- As a "Peace Corner" activity (A Peace Corner is a designated spot in the classroom or school where children can go to calm their physical and/or emotional state in a healthy way. Other names may be used, such as Chill-Out Corner, Calm Down Corner, Classroom Zen Zone, Quiet area, etc.)

TIME REQUIRED

- 15-20 minutes

LEVEL

- Pre-K & Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- Drawing/writing materials

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Experience drawing as a way to feel better emotionally

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a deep breath and notice how you feel.
- Now, spend a few minutes drawing something--anything. Don't worry about how it looks.
- After finishing, notice whether your emotional state has changed. Do you feel calmer or uplifted?

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

- Ask students:
 - *What are some things we can do to calm down when we feel sad or angry or upset?*
- Optional: If you'd like to create a reminder for students about what they can do when they get upset, record students' answers on a large piece of chart paper and post it in the classroom or in the class peace corner.
- Tell students:
 - *Another thing that can help us calm down and feel better is to spend some time drawing, especially if we draw something that isn't about what made us upset. We can draw about something that makes us happy, something or someone we love, something we like to do, a place we like to go, or anything we want.*
 - *Let's try it!*
- Optional: If students have been introduced to mindfulness, you might want to start with a Mindful Moment to help children calm and focus their bodies and minds. To deepen the experience of the

activity, you might ask students to notice how they feel, both physically and emotionally, before they begin drawing. You might ask:

- *How does your body feel right now? How do you feel right now? (If students have an emotion chart, you might ask them to choose which emotion they're feeling.)*
- Hand out drawing materials to students and give them 10-15 minutes to draw anything they like.
- Optional: When students have finished drawing, ask them to take a moment and notice how they feel, both physically and emotionally. Again, you might ask them to choose an emotion on an emotion chart that shows how they feel.

CLOSURE

- Ask students:
 - *What did you think of this activity?*
 - *Did it change how you feel? If so, how?*
 - *Is this an activity that you might do when you're feeling sad or angry or scared?*

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do you notice whether students' physical and emotional states changed after doing this activity? If so, how?
- If this activity was helpful, how might you incorporate it into your classroom?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A [study](#) of mostly white, middle class children ages 6-12 asked them to first think of a situation that had caused them a lot of disappointment in order to bring up unpleasant emotions. The children were then divided into two groups: the first group was asked to draw a house (distraction) and the second about the situation that had disappointed them (venting). Researchers found that the children who drew a house showed the greatest improvement in their mood, suggesting that using drawing as a distraction is more effective than drawing as a form of venting—at least in the short-term--which may reinforce the unpleasant emotions.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students who are able to [manage their emotions](#) in a healthy way are more academically successful, potentially because the inability to regulate emotions inhibits students' executive function skills, e.g., working memory, planning, and attention. They also have stronger social skills and fewer behavior challenges, both of which lead to more positive relationships with teachers and peers.

And healthy emotion regulation skills will serve students in the long-run. Studies have found that [adults](#) who can manage their emotions in a positive way have greater mental and physical well-being, and stronger relationships.