Activities and Worksheets for Teachers Supporting Vulnerable Students with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

By: Frances Sage BSc
The activities and worksheets contained within this document have been compiled to supply teachers with quick and affective resources for use with students suffering with emotional or behavioural difficulties.

As these students’ teacher, you have a tremendous opportunity to help them navigate through their fight by supporting them, by holding their hand when required, and by guiding them through everyday situations which they struggle to react to in an adaptive manner.

Students’ emotional and behaviours difficulties present in different ways. Some children or young people are quite and withdrawn, while others actively seek attention, either through negative argumentative behaviour, or consistently wanting to please those who they perceive to be in authority such as their teacher. However the student displays it, the core reason for their behaviour is the same: they are struggling with their internal emotions, which are interfering with their ability to react effectively outwardly to situations in their day-to-day environment.

Through understanding your student and their specific difficulties, you will be able to select the most effective methods from this document. In doing so, through your support and guidance, they can be shown how to recognize and adapt their behaviours.

This process can take time, but with support they can make their energy work for them, thus changing them from a child who is always in trouble or upset and withdrawn to a happier child who can work and socialize well with others.

- The following activities and worksheets have been separated into defined sections. However, it is recommended that you read through all of the methods, as you may find one that would be effective for your use which has been placed in a different section by the author.

- Furthermore, if the is the first WACIT resource you have looked at, it is recommended that you also read ‘Supporting Vulnerable Children in Schools’ and ‘Helping Vulnerable Students with Emotional Dysregulation through Schooling’, which will assist you in assessing your student and building a care plan.
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Quick Guides for Teachers
Identifying Students’ Use of Coping and Regulating Strategies

When supporting a student with emotional or behavioural difficulties, it is important for you to gain an understanding of the coping and regulating strategies they are already using.

By doing this, you can then either focus and fine tune the strategies they are currently using, so that they work more effectively for the student, or work on new strategies with them, which will help them reduce their use on negative strategies and gradually replace them with adaptive ones.

Use the check list below to help you identify which coping and regulating strategies your student is currently using, how often they use them, and which strategies they are not using, but may be more beneficial for them to learn.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is able to find and use a solution in a difficult situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Asks a member of staff to sort the problem situation on their behalf</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Removes themselves effectively from the difficult situation</td>
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<td>4. Accuses others for the situation / is unable to see their part</td>
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<td>5. Is able to find the positive in a problem situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Finds others to help with their emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Does not display their emotions</td>
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<td>8. Lashes out negatively in difficult situations</td>
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<td>9. Is able to see others’ points of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Seeks attention for their emotions by displaying them loudly</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Seeks support from others who are able help give clarity to a problem situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Will only try to resolve a difficult situation once and then gives up</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Is able to use relaxation methods to regain clarity in a problem situation</td>
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<td>15. Refuses to believe that there is a problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Seeks out a member of staff to be near to</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Approaches peers who will listen and help with problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Retaliates at a later time to others involved in the difficult situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Seeks comfort from staff members or peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Reacts instantaneously to problems situations without prior thought</td>
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Giving Instructions to Students with Difficulties

Often students with emotional or behaviours difficulties struggle to concentrate at the times they need to the most, such as when an instruction is being given to the class or to themselves. This means that these students frequently miss the important information you, as their teacher, have given them.

**NOTE:** A common reason these students do not follow directions is that they are often unaware that the directions have been given.

By following the advice below, you will be able to ensure that ALL of the students in your class have heard and understood your instructions.

- **A.** Before giving any instructions, make sure you have the attention of the full class. You can achieve this by simply changing the tone of your voice or using cue phrases like ‘may I have you attention please?’ If using a cue phrase, be sure to use the same one every time, this way your students will become used to this and their reaction time will increase.

- **B.** When you have the whole class’s attention, give the directions that you wish them to carry out and ask them to start.

- **C.** Write a summary of the directions on the chalkboard for easy reference and then ask the students to copy this in to their books, so they have a quick guide if they lose track of what they should be doing.

- **D.** Once the class has started on the work you have given, you should then check that your student with concentration difficulties has understood what you wish them to do.

**NOTE:** You may need to give the instructions to students with these difficulties in a different way to the rest of the class, for them to fully understand what is required of them.
E. Speaking directly to a student with difficulties.

1. Move close to the student and get their attention (using their first name is a good way of doing this).
2. Establish and maintain eye contact.
3. Use short, simple sentences when speaking to the student, making sure that you have organized the directions in the sequence you wish them to be carried out to avoid confusion. (However, some students are only able to cope successfully with one instruction at a time. Be sure you know which method your student works with best).
4. Give examples of what you expect the students to do.
5. Check to be sure the student understands the directions. Ask students to repeat the directions back.
6. Make sure the student has copied the summary from the chalkboard to help them stay on track (they could use this as a tick list).
Whole Class Behaviour
Classroom Rules

Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties find the best classroom environment to focus and remain calm in is one that has structured and consistent rules. This endorses an environment where the teacher’s expectations of the students are clearly defined and understood by all.

As such it is very important to define and maintain classroom rules which will guide the student / teacher behaviour and interactions throughout the year.

The classroom rules are most effective when they are combined with teacher praise for displays of positive appropriate behaviour.

To create your classroom rules, follow the guidance below:

- **A.** Discuss appropriate classroom rules with the whole class (i.e. no talking when the teacher is speaking, no sitting on the tables, always speak to others in a kind way).

- **B.** Write the students’ suggestions on the chalkboard immediately as they are being communicated.

- **C.** When the students have exhausted their ideas, decide the six rules that are the most important by taking a whole class vote.

- **D.** Now phrase them positively on the chalk board (e.g. co-operate with others, raise your hand to ask permission to talk, complete work neatly and on time, work at your desk quietly, be prepared each day with your work).

- **E.** Finally, placing the students in groups of 2 to 4, ask them to create class rules posters displaying the six that have been chosen, and then put them on display round the class room.
Classroom Anger Rules

Students who have difficulties regulating their negative emotions (such as anger) need a helping hand in pointing them to adaptive and acceptable ways that they can display these feelings.

Expressing negative emotions is okay, it’s normal, and in fact is quite healthy. Imagine you had to keep in the anger and stress you felt, you were not allowed to express these emotions in any way, and you had to appear happy ALL the time. You would soon explode, and not in a positive way!

Help students to express their negative emotions in an expectable way, assist them in seeing that we all get angry or stressed from time to time, and as long as we deal with these emotions in the right way we do not need to erupt in an aggressive outburst.

Make a sign for the classroom:

![Anger Rules]

- A. Display the sign in your classroom.

- B. Put your students in groups of 2 to 4. Then ask them to thing about the ways in which ‘Others, Themselves, or Property’ may get hurt by individuals displaying their anger in the wrong way.
C. After 15 to 20 minutes, ask for feedback from the groups, continuing until all suggestions have been exhausted.

NOTE: You may also wish to write the suggestions under the three headings on the chalk board. This lets the students know that you are listening to them and like their ideas. However, if an idea is not quite right or practical, then make sure you discus this at the time with the whole class.

E. Once you have done this, you could ask your students to design their own posters listing the anger rules with the ideas they have generated.
Relaxation Strategies
Quick Relaxation Methods for Students

You may have previously heard of using relaxation strategies when supporting a student with emotional or behavioural difficulties, though you may not know exactly what they are or how to use them.

Relaxation methods can work well, helping a student to regain a calmness and clarity over a situation which has made them anxious or upset, angry or worried.

However, relaxation methods need to be practiced on a regular basis for them to be most effective.

By following the instructions below, it will be possible for you to teach your student the relaxation methods and to identify which ones work best for them.

**NOTE:** Relaxation methods are effective for everyone (just students with difficulties more so), therefore you could set some time aside in the day to teach these methods to your whole class.

- **A.** Practice all of these methods with your students until they are able to generate them by themselves when asked without any direction.

1. **Inhale very slowly. As you inhale slowly, lift your arms up over your head. Then, gently drop your arms back to your side. Think ONLY about relaxing.**

2. Count to 10 or count backward slowly from 10. If this is not long enough, count by 2s or 3s or 4s (forward or backward). The task needs to be a little bit challenging but not too hard.

3. **Practice blowing up a large balloon. Breathe in deeply. Blow out very slowly until the balloon is huge. Start with an actual balloon and then pretend to do the same thing without the balloon.**

4. Block your left nostril with one hand. Inhale deeply through your right nostril counting to 5. Block both nostrils and hold your breath for 5 seconds. Block your right nostril and inhale deeply through the left nostril counting to 5.
5. Pick a spot in the room to focus on. Stare at this spot. Think about getting heavier and heavier in the chair. Count five breaths backward. Think about feeling very, very heavy.

6. Place you left hand (palm down) in front of you. Relax the hand. Press your right thumb on the back of your relaxed hand between the thumb and the pointer or index finger. Massage this spot in a circular motion while slowly counting to 15. Switch hands and repeat it the other way.


8. Count the fingers on your right hand slowly. Do it again. Do it again. Repeat using left hand if you need more time.


10. Shut your eyes. Drop your head forward. Feel your shoulders lifting as you breathe in slowly. Think ‘I’m feeling as light as a cloud’. Think ‘I’m floating like a cloud’. Think ‘I can see my favourite place. I feel much better’.

B. Now that your students have practiced these methods, ask them to identify which two methods they feel work the best for them. These will become their own ‘special’ relaxation methods to use at times when they need to bring themselves back to a calm and clear state.

**NOTE:** It is necessary to continue to practice using the strategies frequently, Bear in mind that some students may need a visual cue from an adult to use one of the strategies at first.
For Quite and Withdrawn Students
Positive Reinforcement Worksheet for Teachers

Students suffering with emotional and behaviours problems are also often suffering with low self-esteem. This in turn can bring about further emotional and behavioural problems.

To help your student out of this cycle, the use of positive reinforcement instead of negative comments and punishment will assist them to gain a greater liking and belief of themselves, thereby, reducing their negativity.

➢ **A. List below the ways in which you currently praise the positive behaviour of your students. Can you think of any new methods you could use?**

Examples: verbal praise ‘thank you for listening so well’ or ‘you’re trying really hard with that work, well done’.

1. __________________________________________________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________________________________________________
4. __________________________________________________________________________________________
5. __________________________________________________________________________________________
B. Thinking about the specific student you wish to assist through their difficulties, identify two of their emotions or behaviours you wish to help them with.

With these in mind, fill in the section below with the current target emotions or behaviours that you have identified, and then the new emotions or behaviours which you would like to help your student display instead.

Example: Current – Gets angry when they are stuck on a piece of work.

New – Is able to ask for help when stuck.

1. Current: ________________________________________________________________

   New: ________________________________________________________________

2. Current: ________________________________________________________________

   New: ________________________________________________________________

C. Now put together the two sections above by planning how you are going to reinforce the student each time the target emotions or behaviours listed above are displayed, helping you to assist your student in altering to their new strategies.

1. Every time the student: ________________________________________________________________

   I will reinforce by: ________________________________________________________________

2. Every time the student: ________________________________________________________________

   I will reinforce by: ________________________________________________________________

D. When strengthening the new emotions or behaviours it is best to use your planned reinforcement immediately and frequently.

Remind yourself to look for the student using the new target emotions or behaviours and immediately use the positive reinforcement which you have identified above.

Catch the student being good, this will raise their self-esteem. They will feel happy and wanted with the praise and positivity you are giving them.
Teaching Students to Ask For Help

Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties often also struggle with low self-esteem, i.e. lack of confidence in themselves. As such they have a barrier when it comes to asking for help. They feel that they should not be getting stuck on work, or finding it hard to do something. Instead they feel that it is their own fault and that they should be able to do these things by themselves.

In actual fact, asking for help when we are stuck, needing extra information, or support to do something is a crucial part of life and an important skill to have and use. Teaching students that asking for help is a strength and not a weakness, and who to ask for help from will thus assist them for the rest of their lives.

- A. Have a discussion with your students about why it is good to ask for help, when should people ask for help, what should they ask for help with, and who should they ask for help from?

- B. After your discussion, ask your students to fill in the worksheet on the next page. Placing their names in the face at the bottom, they should then complete each bubble with the name of the person they can go to for help for, and what things this person can help them with.

**NOTE:** Some students (particularly those with self-esteem problems) may struggle with this activity. You will therefore need to proactively look for these students and give them extra support.
Who to Ask for Help
Esteem Stones

(A positive and discreet method for children to release their emotions)

Students struggling with emotional or behavioural difficulties often respond well to having a positive and discreet way of releasing these feelings.

An esteem stone is a very good way of helping your student achieve this.

- **A.** Use the below dialog as a guideline for introducing esteem stones to your student. You may want to use wording that is more specific to the student you are supporting, but don’t lose the meaning or context.

  **NOTE:** Make sure you have gathered several different shaped and textured stones before you begin.

  ‘Feeling intense emotions is difficult for us. When we have these feelings we can get tired, feel very low in ourselves, and become distracted from the other positive things that are going on around us.

  At times like these, we all need a ‘friend’ we can rely on and share these feelings with, to help ease them and raise our self-esteem again.

  An esteem stone can be such a friend, at your side all the time ready to help when you need it.

  It is very important to choose an esteem stone that fits your fingers perfectly. Some people like ones that are very smooth, others prefer them to be rough. People can like esteem stones that are thick and strong, or like them to look thin and slippery. It’s up to you!

  Let’s find an esteem stone that is perfect for you and that can help you in difficult to handle situations.

  (Encourage the student to try out several and select one).

  The best safe place for your esteem stone is in your pocket or somewhere it can be close to you.

- **B.** Ask the student to place the esteem stone in their pocket, close their eyes, and think about how it feels.
C. Once they have closed their eyes and thought about the texture of the stone, ask the student to put all of the problem emotions they are feeling at that time into the esteem stone and let it take on the problems for them. Remind them that the esteem stone is there for them to take their problems whenever they need it.

E. Finally (and most importantly) remind your student to take deep breaths, in and out slowly, so that the worries can go into the stone, and ask them to smile.
Raising a Student’s Self-Esteem and Happiness

Students low in self-esteem often think and feel the worst about themselves, which in turn makes them unhappy and suffer with low emotions.

Helping students with low self-esteem to recognise the good and positive aspects of themselves and their lives is a good way of helping them to understand themselves better, appreciate themselves more, and become happier.

➢ A. Ask your student to fill in the blanks below with their honest thoughts and feelings.

Tell them that there are no right or wrong answers, and that you will not be angry or upset with what they write.

Tell them that this is a fun exercise for them, as they can use their creativity and it gives them a chance to show you what they are really thinking.

1. I can show my creativity best when

2. I use my imagination most when

3. I am really good at

4. My really good ideas are

5. The best idea I have had about something that needed to be improved is

6. One thing I do differently from everyone else is

7. I do this differently because

8. I can use my skills to help others by

9. The thing I like most about myself is

10. I am liked by others because
➤ B. When your student has completed these sentences, you should then talk to them about what they have written.

- Validate emotions that they have spoken about
- Expand on things you did not know about them
- Ask for more detail
- Be interested in them and their experiences
- Help them to action the ideas they have written about

**BUT MOST OF ALL:** Help them see that all of these things make them who they are, that they are special, and loved.
Changing Students’ Negative Thoughts to Positive ones

By providing vulnerable students with strategies in changing their negative thoughts to positive ones, you will be helping them to approach life in a brighter and more fulfilling way.

- **A.** Ask your student to read the negative thoughts listed below, fill in the blanks with other such thoughts they have, and then write next fill in the positive thoughts that the negatives could be replaced with.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative thought</th>
<th>Positive thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No one likes me</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t do this</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll never learn this</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t handle this</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m no good at this</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t control my anger</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
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- **B.** Once your student has completed this activity, discuss their ideas. Take a copy of their work, keeping one for yourself and giving one to them. This will allow both of you to remind yourselves and each other at times when the student is in a low negative mood of the positive thoughts they could be having instead.
For Emotionally and Behaviourally Challenging Students
Managing Students’ Problem Emotions or Behaviours outside the Classroom

Often students display problem emotions and behaviours to a great intensity in settings other than the classroom (e.g. in the playgroup or lunch hall). At these times, the structure and routine of the classroom is not maintained, and therefore the student has no distraction from their difficulties.

To help your students manage at these times, use the strategies below, which will guide you through teaching them the skills they need.

- **A.** Plan what strategies you will use (or direct others to use) if the student displays their problem emotion or behaviour outside of the classroom.

  For example: Remove them from the current environment to a time-out area, remove them from the current environment and give them jobs to do in the classroom, or ask them to do a breathing exercise to help them calm down.

- **B.** Talk with your student and explain how you would like them to behave when they are out of the classroom, and the strategies that will be used if they display problem behaviours.

- **C.** Have a practice session with them. One of the best ways to do this is during games / sports lessons where there is some structure and routine to the session, but not as much as in the classroom. Use your identified strategies if the student displays their problem behaviour in this session. BUT also praise them for good behaviour and management of their emotions every time you see them doing so.

- **D.** Having identified that these ‘out of the classroom’ times are more difficult for your student, you could also think of ways to keep their attention focused in a positive way.

  For example: Start a games or drawing club at lunch time for them to be involved in, ask them to act as games leader for younger children, or give them a note book to make drawings in.
Helping Students to Recognise Their Emotional and Behavioural Triggers

Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties often react instantly in problem situations they are faced with (and usually in a very negative and disproportionate manner). Often students with these difficulties react without knowing what has actually triggered this outburst of emotion or behaviour.

Assisting a student such as this, to recognise their triggers in advance of similar situations occurring, will help them to use coping and calming strategies in advance of a display of negative behaviour. It will also aid the student to increase their positive relationships with peers and siblings.

By working through these instructions, you will be able to help your student identify their triggers and produce adaptive strategies at these times.
A. Ask your student to tick the situations in the list below that make them upset. Then ask the student to fill in the blank sections with other situations they have thought of that make them react in this way.

**NOTE:** Do this at a time when they are calm.

1. I get upset if I lose a game
2. I get upset if people are mean to me
3. I get upset if my friends lie about me
4. I get upset if someone takes something that is mine without asking
5. I get upset if people won’t give me space
6. I get upset if someone in my class tells the teacher on me
7. I get upset if someone pushes in front of me when I’m waiting
8. I get upset if I get picked last for an activity
9. I get upset if the teacher tells me my work is wrong
10. I get upset if the teacher tells my to do my work again
11. I get upset if ____________________________________________________
12. I get upset if ____________________________________________________
13. I get upset if ____________________________________________________
14. I get upset if ____________________________________________________
15. I get upset if ____________________________________________________

B. Once your student has completed the section above, talk to them about why they feel these situations make them respond the way they do, and what they may do in future to calm down before they react.

Make sure you listen to their suggestions, praise them for their ideas, and help them to think of possible solutions if they seem stuck.
C. Now that you have talked over the possible strategies with the student, you may use ask them to complete the section below with these strategies. Each number corresponds with the ‘I get upset if’ statement number above. Therefore, the strategy the student has chosen to use with: ‘1. I get upset if I lose a game’ would be written next to the number one below.

1. ______________________________________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________________________________________
6. ______________________________________________________________________________
7. ______________________________________________________________________________
8. ______________________________________________________________________________
9. ______________________________________________________________________________
10. ______________________________________________________________________________
11. ______________________________________________________________________________
12. ______________________________________________________________________________
13. ______________________________________________________________________________
14. ______________________________________________________________________________
15. ______________________________________________________________________________

D. Finally, make a copy of both the student’s situations and strategies lists. Give your student a copy to keep, so that they have it to remind themselves of what they have agreed to do. Keep the other one for yourself, so that you can also refer back to it if you need to help the student deal with one of these situations.
Power Cards
(Refocusing Strategy for students)

Students often struggle to control their emotions or behaviours in negative situations. However, sometimes all that is needed is a little helping hand to remind them how to regain their calm and clarity of thought.

The power card, or refocusing strategy, is quick to deliver and fun for the students, whilst also providing them with a method they can carry with them. They can then use it in difficult situations to remind them what to do.

- **A.** Copy the wording from the template on to your chalk board.

- **B.** Then using the template (which you can either copy or have the students draw) ask your students to draw themselves as a super hero with special powers in the blank space.

- **C.** Explain to the students that whenever they find themselves in a difficult situation they should look at their power card, thinking of themselves as the hero they have drawn (able to conquer any negative emotion or behaviour they are feeling). Then ask them to write the wording you have placed on the chalk board in the bottom section of their card.

- **D.** Finally explain that the students are to keep these in their pockets, so that they can look at the card when in situations they feel they need a helping hand. Tell them that at these times, when they are thinking of themselves as their super hero self, they should read the wording on the card and feel their power to be able to follow the instructions.
Take a deep breath. Let it our slowly.
Say to myself, ‘I do not have to get upset’
Think, ‘I have a choice’
Look away from the situation for a few seconds
Think, ‘I am ok, I can be in control’

Remember to take a deep breath, talk to yourself, take a few seconds to look away from the situation, and remind yourself that you have control over your feelings and reactions.
Response Card
(Refocusing strategies for students)

The response card is another refocusing strategy, which is also quick to deliver whilst also providing students with a method they can carry with them to remind them what to do in difficult situations.

- A. Give your student a copy of the card below and ask them to keep it with them all the time.

```
Response Card
4. Move away and get help
3. Talk to your teacher today
2. Use a strategy
1. I can do this
```

- B. Explain to your student that the numbers represent how difficult they feel it is to remain calm when in the middle of a problem situation. Therefore, 4 would mean that they are struggling not to display their negative behaviour, whereas 2 would mean that they are in a situation but they are able to remain calm with a little persistence and use the strategies they have been taught.
C. Finally talk them through what they should do to successfully carry out each of the four methods.

At level 4: If their feelings are intense, the student needs to find and talk to you regularly during that day.

At level 3: If their feelings are bearable but they are struggling to control them, the student will need to talk to you at some point that day.

At level 2: If their feelings are bearable and they are able to control them, the student should have enough clarity to use the relaxation strategies they have been taught.

At level 1: Their feelings will have been reduced to a calm level and the student needs to congratulate themselves.

NOTE: For the first few weeks, you will need to regularly remind your student to use their card, and what method to use at each level while they are getting used to using this new technique.
For more information on WACIT (www.wacit.org), please contact:

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