

MY INNER HEROES™



Ice Cream Explosion



EDUCATOR GUIDE

DIG DEEPER: ICE CREAM EXPLOSION

KEY CONCEPT: EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Experiencing the full range of emotions is an important part of being human. Despite what many of us have been taught, there are not “positive” emotions and “negative” emotions. Emotions are just natural responses to what we encounter and they all give us important information about our experience and what is important to us. Yet, some emotions can lead us to unhelpful actions, such as yelling at someone in anger or hiding ourselves away in sadness. We cannot choose what we feel, but we can choose what we do. This is part of what it means to emotionally regulate – to recognize, feel, and manage our emotions in a helpful way.



Imagine yourself in a moment where you are particularly calm and at peace. You are feeling capable, secure, engaged, curious, and able to think clearly. You are alert but relaxed, ready to handle anything that comes your way. In this zen space, your body and brain are feeling safe. Now imagine that something happens that suddenly knocks you out of that space. These triggers can be physically dangerous, like a car in the wrong lane heading your way, or they can be emotionally dangerous. These emotional triggers can vary from person to person, but it may be the sound of your child whining, a driver cutting you off, or your partner pulling away from your touch.

All of a sudden, your body is overwhelmed by what you have encountered. It has sensed a threat, is no longer feeling safe, and starts taking action for you in order to protect you. You may experience physical tension, and feel angry and ready to fight (verbally or physically), like an electrical current is streaming through your body. Or you may feel anxious and overwhelmed, with a racing mind and an urge in your body to physically leave. Or you may feel powerless, discouraged, numb, lethargic, or unable to move. Or any combination of these things. Your body is in a state of chaos and you are dysregulated.

In these moments of dysregulation, part of our brain shuts off. This part of our brain (the prefrontal cortex) allows us to communicate clearly, listen to others, problem solve, plan, use logic, and make decisions – and suddenly it’s offline! Though the body does this on purpose so it can divert all our energy to escaping the threat, it often leads us to knee-jerk reactions that are unhelpful.

Things like movement, breath, and certain body-centered techniques can reconnect us to our bodies, relax our nervous system, and remind us that we are safe in this moment. Once the prefrontal cortex is back online, we can think more clearly, have curiosity and empathy,

and choose how we want to respond. As adults we all grapple with emotional regulation at one time or another, and for students it can be a struggle every single day. This is partly because they haven't learned emotional regulation tools yet and partly because their bodies and brains are still developing.

IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

The indicators below can help you identify whether a student is struggling with emotional regulation. It is important to underscore that we all experience strong emotions from time to time. What's essential is that we recognize and strengthen our ability to regulate our emotions so that our emotions do not control our actions.

Indicators of emotional regulation:

- ✓ Students can recognize and name the emotions they are feeling
- ✓ Students can recognize whether the emotions they are experiencing are pleasant or unpleasant
- ✓ Students practice strategies to calm their bodies and manage their actions (breathing, counting, visualizing, etc.) when they are experiencing unpleasant emotions

Indicators of emotional dysregulation:

- ✓ Emotions change quickly in response to external stimuli, resulting in behaviors that make it difficult for the child to remain in class
- ✓ Students respond to situations with a disproportionate reaction or without communicating their needs
- ✓ Students struggle to calm down when they are upset

Strategies to help students regulate emotions:

- ✓ Teach students to recognize and name their emotions. This can be done in the moment as you coach students through any challenging interpersonal situations. You can also teach students to recognize and name emotions as you read stories together. Any time a character in a book is experiencing an emotion, ask, "What word would you use to describe how the character is feeling? How do you know?"
- ✓ Teach students to categorize emotions as pleasant or unpleasant, and high energy or low energy. This will help them distinguish between emotions such as sad and angry, and calm and excited.
- ✓ Teach strategies for students to use when they want to change an unpleasant emotion. Taking deep breaths is a very simple but powerful strategy. Other strategies include counting, drawing, and visualizing a calm place. With time, students will notice that they have the power to notice, name, and regulate their emotions. By regulating their emotions, students will be able to better control their responses to challenging situations.
- ✓ Prompt students to do a "body check" after applying any of the strategies above. Help

them notice differences they feel in their bodies from applying the strategies. This will let them recognize the tremendous power we have to regulate our physical and emotional responses to stressful situations. This is especially impactful when practiced while a student is actively working to regulate a strong emotion.

ICE CREAM EXPLOSION: STORY SUMMARY

This story follows a girl named Brooke, who is having a very difficult time regulating her emotions. It begins when her teacher reprimands her for calling out the answer without raising her hand, and escalates from there — eventually landing her in the principal’s office. Faze, the Con in this story, fuels the fire inside Brooke by telling her that her situation is completely unfair. The principal tries to offer some strategies to help Brooke calm down, but Faze is relentless. Finally, Sol, this story’s Hero, arrives to help Brooke recognize and implement strategies that can regulate her emotions.

Learning these regulation skills doesn’t mean Brooke will never feel overwhelmed again. We all experience this sometimes, as it’s a natural part of being a human. But now Brooke has skills she can utilize when she starts to feel the “flash of heat” in her body, which may help her prevent a full-blown volcanic eruption. She can now get back in the driver’s seat of her body and decide where she wants to go.

power to choose how she wants to respond. When another tough situation arises, Sol invites Brooke to try out her new skills and experience her true power.

MEET THE MAIN CHARACTERS



BROOKE

Brooke is having “one of those days” where everything is going wrong and she is subsequently on edge. Things are feeling unfair (a common struggle for kids) and she begins to experience emotional flooding, in which she is no longer in control of her responses. She is causing disruptions in class, yelling at others, and being physically aggressive. In the intensity of her flooding, these reactions may seem justified to her, even though they are not very helpful.



FAZE

Faze is a Con who makes it hard for us to think clearly when we get flooded. He keeps us from seeing what’s really going on around us and sends us into knee-jerk reactions that are not always helpful. Faze jumps to the worst-case scenario, saying things to Brooke like “Everyone ALWAYS blames you” and “Your day is already ruined.” He tries to convince Brooke that those who are trying to help her are not on her side, and that she should protect herself by staying in a defensive position. Following Faze means that we are stuck — stuck in a flooded body that feels out of control, and stuck with our automatic reactions instead of choosing how we want to respond.



SOL

Sol is a hero who helps us slow down in tough moments. He helps us calm our bodies and think more clearly so that we can make better decisions. Sol helps Brooke to learn about the special powers she already possesses — the power to calm her body, the power to get her full brain back online, and the

WITH YOUR STUDENTS

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

Below, please find some questions you can ask your students to stimulate conversation and connection as you read *Ice Cream Explosion*.

This is not a quiz! Let students know there is no right or wrong answer; you just want to hear what they have to say. This section is about discussing possibilities, ideas, experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Try to be open and curious; don’t assume you know how your students will respond or you might miss something. You do not need to discuss all the questions (though you can!). Feel free to choose which ones feel right for you and your students, ask follow-up questions that are not listed here, or ask some questions now and some questions another time. You can also share some of your own experiences of learning to regulate your emotions. It can be very helpful for students to know that they are not alone in experiencing strong emotions, and you can provide powerful real-life examples of how emotional regulation strategies make a huge difference.

Tier 1 (Whole Class) Questions

NOTE: Tier 1 questions focus on students' developing understanding of the key concepts in the book. In a whole group setting, the teacher will likely not be able to effectively support students in navigating their individual challenges. Because of this, Tier 1 questions asking students to connect to their own experiences are kept at a surface level. Tier 2 and Tier 3 questions are designed to support students in connecting their personal challenges with the challenges faced by the characters in the book.

Pre-Reading Questions

1. This story is called "Ice Cream Explosion." What do you think it might be about?
2. Look at the cover. Does it give you any clues?

Text-Based Questions (ask while you are reading the book with the students.)

1. *(after Brooke thinks, "Colin ALWAYS gets called on. And I ALWAYS get in trouble.")* What is one word that could describe how Brooke is feeling? What clues in the story tell you that she is feeling that way? Have you ever felt that way?
2. *(after Colin and Miles cut in front of Brooke and Sam in the ice cream line)* How is Brooke feeling now?
3. *(after Brooke shouts, "THE STRAWBERRY IS GONE?")* Now Brooke feels like a "volcano about to erupt." What does that mean?
4. *(after Principal Cobb tells Brooke that she felt lasers inside when she got upset)* Everyone gets upset sometimes. When Brooke gets upset her body feels like it has hot lava inside of it, and when Principal Cobb gets upset her body feels like it has hot lasers in it. What do you notice in your body when you're feeling upset or angry? If you had to draw a picture of it, what would it look like? What color would it be? Where in your body do you feel it the most?
5. *(after Brooke shoves Faze away)* Sol and Principal Cobb help Brooke recognize the warning signs that she is losing control of her emotions and her actions. What were the warning signs for Brooke? What warning signs have you noticed in your body that tell you you are losing control?
6. *(after Brooke almost yells at Colin for cutting a second time, but does spider fingers instead)* What does Brooke do this time when she notices the warning signs? Have you ever tried a strategy like spider fingers? What other strategies could we use to help us when we notice the warning signs? [Try doing Spider Fingers with your class.] What is that like for you? You might not notice much if you're already calm, but it's good to practice tools when we're calm so we know how to use them when we're upset. How could you remember to do them when your body starts to feel out of control?

General Questions (ask after reading any Inner Heroes book)

1. What was the problem that the main character was facing in the story? How did the Cons try to sabotage the main character? How did the Heroes help the main character solve the problem?
2. Have you ever had a similar problem? How did you solve it?
3. If you look back through the story/pictures, what feelings might the main character be having in different parts of the story?
4. Is there any part of the story that you're confused about or seems strange to you? What questions do you have about the story? Is there anything you want to ask me?
5. How can you use the examples in this story to help you if you have a problem like the one in this story?

Tier 2/Tier 3 (Small Group) Questions (ask after reading the book)

NOTE: Tier 2/Tier 3 questions more directly ask students to share their own experiences and emotions. These questions are more appropriate for small group or one-on-one sessions where the teacher/clinician can support students in identifying emotions and generating helpful approaches to navigating those emotions.

1. Brooke's body felt so out of control that she smacked the ice cream out of Sam's hands, which caused Sam to stumble and Ms. Soto to end up covered in ice cream. Can you remember a time your body felt so out of control that you did something you didn't really want to do? Would you like to tell me about it?
2. Sometimes when we're really upset, we react very quickly; we're not really choosing what we do, we just start doing or saying things. Sol reminds us that if we slow down and help our body calm down, we have the power to choose what we want to do next. Think again about that time your body felt out of control. If you could have slowed down, what might you have chosen to do instead?
3. Brooke feels a flash of heat inside of her first, and then later her body feels like an erupting volcano. When you're upset or angry, what happens in your body first? As you get more angry, what happens next?
4. In the story, Sol says, "Sometimes moving your body helps you see things in a new way. It gives your mind extra space to think." What do you think of this idea? Have you ever experienced this when you've moved your body? What are some ways that you like to move your body? Do you like riding your bike, dancing, doing yoga, or playing a sport? What else?