Managing My Big Feelings – Thinking Like a Turtle At School

Children can learn to manage their big emotions and increase impulse control when they are taught and supported to use effective strategies. The Turtle Technique is a strategy that provides children an opportunity to STOP, BREATHE, and THINK of ways to respond that work better for everyone.

Teaching children each step used in the Tucker Turtle strategy during planned, intentional and calm moments of the day AND practicing with them throughout all routines and activities will build children's skills to "think like a turtle" when experiencing big emotions.

Step 1:   **Recognize your feelings. – Teach recognition of emotions in self and others.**
- Pay attention to the emotions of the children in your care as well as your emotions, from happiness to sadness to anger. Identify emotions by naming them as the children or you are experiencing them.
- Describe how you recognize emotions throughout the day. Ex: "Your nose is squished like this, your fists are tight, you look like you are feeling angry."
- Throughout the day, find opportunities to point out emotions in stories you read, play games that teach emotions, and use pictures of emotions to support children to recognize and name emotions.

Step 2:   **Stop your body. – Teach children to slow down and use the thinking part of their brain to control impulse.**
- Play games where children become familiar with stopping like Red Light Green Light, Freeze Dance, Simon Says or Repeating Clapping Patterns, Duck Duck Goose, Ring around the Rosie.
- Provide activities that require **slowing** minds and bodies, like Yoga poses or walking slowly on a balance beam/line.

Step 3:   **Tuck inside your "shell" and take 3 deep breaths. – Teach children to breathe.**
- Use visuals to show children what a turtle looks like when they tuck inside their shell. Have children practice being a turtle throughout the day.
- Play games that teach belly breathing such as: blowing bubbles, laying on the floor with a breathing buddy on your belly watching it rise and fall as you breath, or use the visual [Take a Deep Breath](#)
- Tuck like a turtle before transitioning activities: everyone tucks like a turtle and takes 3 breaths before cleaning up toys, transitioning from large group to free play time, before lining up or going in the hallway.

Step 4:   **Come out when you are calm and think of a solution. – Help children think of possible solutions.**
- Use the [Problem Solving Story](#) and [Problem Solving Steps](#) to teach children how to solve the problem.
- Use the [Solution Kit](#) to think of possible solutions.

For infants and toddlers, you are their Tucker when they express big emotions. Name their emotion, model taking deep breaths by taking 3 deep breaths while you are providing them with comfort and supporting them to become regulated again.

Helpful Tips to Support "Thinking Like a Turtle"

- Provide a safe, calm space where children can use the Turtle Technique when emotions feel strong.
- Post the Turtle Technique cue cards at child height on wall or shelf, place cards on rings and hang in different spaces throughout the classroom so children have them when they need them.
- Support use of the technique by providing encouragement, taking time to walk through the steps in the pace that the child needs, and remaining comfortably close to support children to use visual cue cards.
- Provide reminders to "Think Like a Turtle" when a child is expressing anger or disappointment. Notice when young children are likely to experience strong emotion and plan to practice tucking like a turtle before these times.
- Model using the steps when you are feeling big emotions. As adults, we also respond to big emotions in a more regulated way when we can Stop and Breath. Pay attention to your own mindful self-regulation and find opportunities for you to incorporate breathing activities into your day such as using mindfulness meditation or quick drop in breaths.
- Provide recognition through positive comments when a child successfully stays calm.