

Self-Regulation Tips

The gamesroom is an exciting place with a lot going on. With multiple activities happening and young people moving freely between them – learning new games, and figuring out how to win and lose with grace – emotions can easily get heightened, or youth can become overloaded. Give them the tools, time and space to self-regulate.

Teach youth to identify their emotions. Help youth to identify and name their emotions. This helps them determine how best to cope with how they feel. Consider working with your members to create a chart. Use the chart as a reference in the following ways.

- List the emotions people can feel.
- Refer to the chart when asking youth how they are feeling.
- Ask youth to actively observe their peers and identify how they think they are feeling.
- Ask youth to reflect on times when they felt happy, sad, angry, frustrated, excited, etc.
- Prompt youth to share their experiences.
- Make up games, like Emotions Charades or Emotions Pictionary.

Teach young people calm-down techniques. This may include taking deep breaths, counting to 10, or walking a lap before reacting. Have young people share their own ideas and select the technique they each think will work best for them.

Offer self-regulation tools. Create several kits with self-regulation tools inside, and place them around the gamesroom for easy access. These kits could include play dough, markers and paper for drawing and coloring, and squeeze balls or other fidgets.

Create a chill zone. Dedicate a table or corner of the room as a self-regulation station. Tell youth when things get heated or their emotions start to run wild, they are welcome to go to the peace table. Keep the table stocked with fidgets; building materials, like Legos or Kinex; puzzles; art supplies, like water colors and paper; and other sensory items, like moldable sand or objects to squeeze.

Identify the signs for when individualized support is needed. It is important for you to distinguish the times when youth can learn and practice coping skills, versus when individualized staff support or intervention is necessary. Teach youth when to ask for support. For example, if a young person doesn't appear able to hear or receive the reminders to try a certain technique, or seems unable to, then provide individualized support by taking the young person aside or out of the room. Some clues that this type of support may be necessary are when youth appear overly worked up, seem as though they want to run away, or appear to be almost frozen. Note: In instances of bullying, staff intervention is always needed.

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