



Emotional Thermometer

Purpose

Students often lack the ability to recognize when they are about to be overpowered by their emotions. They also tend to have an insufficient emotional vocabulary to understand the many nuances in their feelings—for instance, misinterpreting loneliness as anger. Teaching students to take their emotional temperature is the first step toward helping them learn to keep their reactions under control.

Breaking It Down

- Emotions run on a continuum from low-key to intense. Before students can control their response to anger and other emotions, they first must be able to identify the feeling and gauge its intensity.
- Just as a thermometer measures rising temperatures, an emotional thermometer measures rising levels of emotion.
- Create an emotional vocabulary word bank with the students to introduce or review a variety of ways to describe different levels of a particular emotion. (For example, annoyed, bothered, frustrated, irate, livid, resentful, furious, and outraged are different levels of anger.)
- Have the students label their thermometers with words from the word bank and then write down—or simply discuss with their teammates—situations that might make them feel each of these emotions.
- Thereafter, a student can refer to the emotional thermometer and use it to gauge his or her level of emotion. Recognizing when emotions are heating up and acknowledging the intensity of those emotions are important steps toward peaceful conflict resolution.

WORD BANK 1 Nervous _____		
terrified	a little nervous	worried
anxious	horrified	frightened
kind of scared	scared	fearful
afraid	very nervous	

E. _____

D. _____

C. _____

B. _____

A. _____

Fine-Tuning the Technique

- The students need regular practice and encouragement in taking their emotional temperature. It is not an easy skill to master. When you see tempers flare in the classroom, have the students involved check their emotional thermometers. If tempers are too hot, the students must cool down before attempting to resolve the problem. If you have sufficient wall space, post a thermometer for easy reference; the students can then point to their anger level.

Review the COOL-DOWN STRATEGIES, CONFLICT STOPPERS, and ROADBLOCKS sections for additional information on helping your students bring their emotions under control.

- Work on building the students' emotional vocabulary over time. Vocabulary alone is not a remedy, but without it the students cannot come to a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of contributing factors in an emotional situation. Begin with words that the students intuitively understand (slang and colloquial expressions are fine), but as the year progresses add words appropriate to school or a more formal work setting.
- People who study emotions generally recognize seven basic families of emotion: happiness, sadness, love, disgust, anger, fear, and surprise. Beginning with anger, create different emotional word banks for each of these families, and have the students develop emotional thermometers to measure their range of emotion in each.
- Help the students connect emotions to something they can see, hear, or feel. Use a Looks Like/Sounds Like/Feels Like chart to explore the manifestations of a particular emotion and to help the students sense the subtle differences between their many moods.
- Reveal your own emotions to the class. If you are frustrated by something they are doing (or not doing!) refer to your emotional thermometer, and talk with the students about what cool-down strategies you might try. Use a Think Aloud to show your mental processes. The more examples you can provide for your class, the better they will understand how to use these techniques on their own.
- Remember that emotions can run high in middle school. Begin and end class each day by taking the students' emotional temperatures. Not only does this alert you to potential problems, but it also gives the students a safe venue to share their thoughts and feelings. On days when they are particularly worked up, you might need to attend to their emotional well-being before picking up your lesson plan.