

Kimochis™ for Students with Special Needs



Students with Social-Emotional Challenges



The Kimochis™ Feeling Lessons can provide students who experience significant challenges in social-emotional development an opportunity to learn the essential skills needed to navigate a complex and sometimes difficult social world.

At all ages (preschool through secondary school), these are the students who stand out as not “fitting in” with their peers (Klass and Costello 2003). They don’t seem to understand their own feelings and are often confused about the emotions of others. Their difficulties with interpersonal skills, emotional regulation, flexibility, perspective-taking and communication competence can lead to problems forming and maintaining relationships with peers, teachers, and parents. Not all students who struggle with social-emotional development will have a special education diagnosis. Other students may have a diagnosed handicapping condition such as:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder–High Functioning
- Asperger’s Syndrome
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder–Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)
- Nonverbal Learning Disability
- Learning Disability
- Pragmatic Language Disorder
- Specific Language Disorder
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Early Childhood A child with social-emotional challenges in the early childhood years may not have a special education diagnostic label, unless he shows clear physical characteristics or indicators of a specific disability (e.g., cerebral palsy, visual or hearing impairments, severe intellectual disabilities,

or multiple disabilities). However, the child may struggle to use language to express his feelings and may have difficulty regulating his emotions, resulting in behavioral issues. All young children, whether they have a diagnosis or not, can benefit from the skills learned in the Kimochis™ program.

Elementary Students with more significant social-emotional challenges may have a special education diagnosis by the time they reach the elementary grades. Some students may spend much of their day in a general education classroom with support from special education professionals, like speech-language pathologists, resource specialists, and occupational therapists. Other students may have a specially trained paraeducator who helps the student with learning and behavioral regulation. Students with more intensive disabilities may be educated in a special day classroom taught by a special education teacher.

The characteristics for children with social-emotional challenges who qualify for special education services can vary widely depending on the diagnosis. Students may demonstrate uneven skill development with significant strengths in some areas of functioning and challenges in others. As you review the characteristics below, keep in mind that most typically developing children will show some of these behaviors. When qualified professionals make a decision about the appropriate diagnosis for a child, they look at many areas of functioning and use valid, reliable, standardized assessment tools to guide their final diagnosis. For that reason, this list is not intended to be used as a “diagnostic tool.” Rather, it can

help you understand your students' behaviors. If you have a student who is demonstrating many of the characteristics listed below and that student does not respond to the typical management strategies you use with the rest of your class, you may want to consider talking to a special education professional at your school.

- Difficulty developing and keeping meaningful friendships with peers. Example: When John plays games with his friends, he insists on using his rules; then he doesn't understand why kids don't want to play with him.
- Inability to recognize and interpret nonverbal cues. Example: When Angela's teacher gives "the look" to students to quiet down, she starts talking to her neighbor; then doesn't understand why she gets in trouble.
- Problems recognizing and responding appropriately to the emotions of others. Example: Jose sometimes laughs when he sees kids get frustrated; he doesn't intend to be mean, he just doesn't seem to understand their emotions.
- Difficulty recognizing and regulating their own emotions and feelings. Example: Mika gets mad and says hurtful words when she thinks peers are saying things about her, even though they are not.
- Difficulty understanding and using language effectively in a social setting. Example: Ricardo has an amazing vocabulary and is a whiz in math, but when kids say "Hi" to him each morning, he looks away and doesn't respond.
- Literal, concrete interpretation of nonliteral (figurative) language. Example: When the teacher says, "Be sure to do only the odd problems," everyone laughs when Lee responds, "How do I know if they are odd or just normal?"
- Limited ability to take the perspective of others, leading to misunderstanding and confusion about what others think, feel, and do. Example: Tommy loves to talk about cars,

but when kids ask him to stop because they are tired of hearing the same monologue, Tommy gets upset and calls them names.

- Limited awareness of the effect of their actions on others. Example: When Latisha is asked to partner with a certain student in class, she whines and says, "No, not him, he can't do anything," which leads to hurt feelings.
- Limited problem-solving in social situations. Example: When Maria tries to join a group of girls at recess and they say, "No you can't play with us," she starts crying and runs to tell the yard duty teacher.
- Difficulties with impulse control and attention. Example: Annie blurts out answers during discussions and needs constant prompts to stay on task.
- Inflexibility with change and events that occur unexpectedly. Example: Anton gets very upset when his teacher tells the class that they need to go to an assembly instead of having math class.
- Sensory sensitivities (sound, sight, touch, taste, smell, balance, body awareness). Example: Minh is sensitive to touch and doesn't like it when peers get too close to him during floor time and in line.

If you are a teacher with a student who has a documented special education diagnosis or other students who struggle with aspects of social-emotional learning, the strategies and enhancements included in this guide (see next page) will be useful.

Strategies and Enhancements for Students with Social-Emotional Challenges



Students with significant social-emotional challenges learn and acquire social-emotional skills differently than their typically developing peers. Teachers will benefit from the strategies included here to adjust the Feeling Lessons so they are comprehensible and accessible to all students. Enhancements are more specific techniques that can be used to “enhance” the Feeling Lessons and help accommodate the unique learning needs of these students.

STRATEGIES

Use Repetition A high level of repetition is essential to learning for these students. The repeated experience of hearing the Kimochis™ language and practicing the newly learned skills in role-plays will help students use these strategies when needed in real-life situations.

Promote Active Engagement Students with social-emotional challenges may struggle with attention and impulse control. Think about how these students can be actively involved in the Feeling Lessons so they will be less likely to blurt out or lose their attention. Strategies to try:

- Student stands at the front of the room and holds the Kimochis™ character during the lesson
- Student passes out the Kimochis™ feeling pillows
- Student writes brainstormed ideas on the whiteboard (with adult assistance, if needed)
- Student is involved in the role-play
- Student turns to a peer to share a response to a question in a Feeling Lesson
- Student sits near teacher so she can easily prompt the student to attend
- Teacher prompts students to respond chorally (students answer all together)

Make Instructional Language Comprehensible

Some may have delays or deficits in language comprehension and expression. They may struggle with slow auditory processing, limited vocabulary, and grammatical difficulties. During the lessons, it will be important to monitor how you deliver the message. Remember these tips:

- Slow down to improve comprehension
- Speak using simplified language
- Repeat when necessary
- Pause to allow students “think time”
- Check for understanding

Adjust Sitting Requirements for Lessons Students with social-emotional challenges often struggle with sitting still and keeping their bodies quiet. They may need more movement opportunities than other children. Some suggestions to help these students when seated on the floor for the Feeling Lessons:

- Provide an individualized carpet square that is “reserved” for that student
- If possible, have the student sit up against a wall, table, or desk
- Allow the student to sit in a chair or stand at the back of the circle
- Allow the student to lie on stomach, propping his head on his elbows
- Encourage the student hold or squeeze a large pillow held in lap

Provide predictable routines Whenever possible, try to do the Feeling Lessons at the same time of the day and on the same day(s) of the week. Predictability and routine help students organize

themselves because they can predict what will happen next. As a result, it is easier to let go of anxious feelings and be more available for learning. If you need to cancel or reschedule a lesson, let students know beforehand. Show students on your daily or weekly planner when the lesson is rescheduled. Taking the time to provide this will be worth it.

Guide Positive Behavior Students with social-emotional challenges will need extra assistance to generalize the skills they have learned to everyday life in the school. Therefore, they will require frequent and gentle reminders to guide their behavior. The “Teachable Moments” section of the Early Childhood segment of this guide (see page 65) presents suggestions on how to help younger students be successful in various activities of the school day (Circle Time, learning center, playground). The “Commitment to Character” section of each Elementary-Age Feeling Lesson has tips that teachers can use to prompt students when they need extra assistance in social situations throughout the day.

Acknowledge Positive Choices When students with social-emotional challenges make good choices, they need to be acknowledged. Because students with special needs can be keenly aware they are different, they can struggle with self-confidence and may be quick to give up when trying to use their newly learned skills. Recognize and remember that they will need more acknowledgement when they “get it right” than their typically developing peers. It is important to remember the following when giving positive verbal acknowledgement:

- State the specific behavior. For example, “You used your talking hand. That’s great.”
- Move beyond “Good job” or “Good work.” These statements are not specific enough to let the student know what was positive.

- Give the immediate acknowledgement as soon as possible after the student’s behavior. They need to make the connection between their behavior and what you say to them.
- Be sincere and enthusiastic. Remember that many of the skills you are teaching are not easy for children to use. Any attempts they make to use the skills need to be recognized and acknowledged. The “Commitment to Character” section of each Elementary-Age Feeling Lesson has example statements that teachers can use to acknowledge effectively.

Use Visual Supports Visual supports facilitate the comprehension and learning of new concepts. They can be tools to give information, manage behavior, provide communication choices, or prompt students to do the right thing. Visuals are powerful learning tools because they:

- Help students understand what they hear
- Support verbal explanations by staying stable over time
- Make abstract verbal concepts more concrete
- Engage student attention
- Help students remember what they’ve learned

Visual supports can be objects, pictures, icons, photos, schedules, printed routines, reminder cards, highlighted words, labels, and more. Kimochis™ characters and feeling pillows can be considered visual supports. However, some students may need more support to learn and remember the communication tools taught in the Feeling Lessons. Therefore, the enhancements described on the next pages contain a supplemental visual component (in addition to the Kimochis™ characters and feelings).

ENHANCEMENT STRATEGIES

#1 FEELING WORD DEFINITIONS

Feelings can sometimes be vague and subtle. As a result, they can be difficult to comprehend and define in words. In each Feeling Lesson, the feeling is initially discussed in the “Self-Awareness” and “Self-Regulation” sections. Presenting a visual “definition” will give the educator and students a place to refer back to when the feeling needs to be reexplained. There are two different ways to do this:

Student-Friendly Definition Poster

Make a poster that looks like the one below. It needs to be big enough for students to see from the back of the room. Brainstorm with students how to write a student-friendly definition for the word. This is not a definition from the dictionary, but from their own minds. These definitions often have the words “somebody” or “something” in them. Then ask students when they might feel the emotion (this is the “real-world connection”). See if students can think of synonyms. Draw a simple picture of the feeling or copy the face from the corresponding Kimochis™. Leave this poster up in a visible place in the room and refer to it often as you work through the Feeling Lesson. Add definitions, words, or real-world connections when they come up in class.

CRANKY		
OUR DEFINITION	PICTURE	OUR REAL-WORLD CONNECTIONS
When someone is in a really bad mood		I feel cranky when... I don't get enough sleep! I'm hungry!
Other words that mean the same: grouchy, crabby, irritable		

Feeling Chart

Make a chart like the one shown. Brainstorm with students words that fit into each section as a way to understand the feeling word better. Leave the Feeling Chart up in the room and add to it as students have additional suggestions. Refer to the chart when you observe students looking, sounding, or feeling like the words on the chart.

HAPPY		
LOOKS LIKE	SOUNDS LIKE	FEELS LIKE INSIDE
Big smile	Laughing	Warm inside
“Smiling eyes”	Nice tone of voice	Great!

#2 FACE AND TONE OF VOICE

If students with social-emotional challenges can actually “see” the way a face and voice looks for a specific feeling, it may help them understand the concept more easily. A number of Feeling Lessons compare a “positive” face and voice with a “negative” face and voice as a way to help students differentiate between the two (for example, the friendly face/voice vs. the unfriendly face/voice). These concepts can be easily drawn by using the Kimochis™ feeling face (i.e., Friendly) paired with a speaking bubble that looks relaxed and gentle. Compare the friendly face/voice with the opposite face and voice by drawing an unfriendly face with a speaking bubble that looks scary and mean. Place words in the bubble that also reflect the emotion. For example:



#3 NONLITERAL LANGUAGE

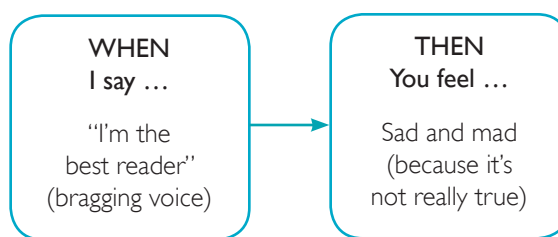
When talking about feelings and emotions, we often use nonliteral (or figurative) language ("look on the bright side"). However, students with special needs may interpret nonliteral language in a literal way. They can then become quite confused or even upset about what they think the meaning might be. Imagine what they might think about the phrase "Curiosity killed the cat"! When these phrases occur in the Feeling Lessons, call students' attention to them. Explain how sometimes words don't mean what they say. Talk about how there is a meaning we would expect (the literal meaning) and there is also a meaning that we don't expect (the nonliteral meaning). Talk about how the words are used in the lesson to talk about the specific feeling. Make a poster as shown below for your classroom and add phrases as they occur in the lessons. Some of these phrases may be too abstract for young children (under third grade) to understand even with discussion. Use your judgement to determine if it is worth the time to teach the concept or save it for older students.

WORDS DON'T ALWAYS MEAN WHAT THEY SAY

THIS DOESN'T MAKE SENSE	THE REAL MEANING	REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE
"Owning up to"	Taking responsibility for your actions and behavior	"I needed to own up to my behavior."

#4 WHEN-THEN BOXES

WHEN-THEN boxes are an explicit way to show students how their behavior can have an effect on other's feelings. Draw the WHEN-THEN boxes on the whiteboard and fill in the boxes as you discuss how students can react in ways that may or may not reflect the Kimochis™ Way. An example of WHEN-THEN boxes:



#5 THINKING AND SPEAKING BUBBLES

Some students with social-emotional challenges struggle with differentiating between what to think (keep in their head) and what to say out loud. This difficulty can lead to communication misunderstandings and hurt feelings. It can be helpful to actually draw the differences between what we think and what we say. This can be easily accomplished by drawing a simple face on the board. One side of the head has a "thinking" bubble. This bubble contains what needs to stay in the mind of the student (do not say it out loud!). The other side of the head has a "speaking" bubble. This contains the words that the student can say without sounding hurtful. This strategy can really help students learn that sometimes we cannot say what we are thinking. An example:



#6 AFFIRMATION CARDS

Students with social-emotional challenges may benefit from affirmations that can prompt them to stay positive and guide them to do the right action. Write the affirmations with students so they have input about what they want on the card. Write the title of the card in an affirmation statement (“I can bounce back when left out”). The cards can be small (size of an index card or business card). Decide where the student will keep the card. It could be taped on the student’s desk, placed in their desk, binder, or backpack. Initially, students will need to be reminded by the teacher or other adults to say the script or do the prompt.

#7 REMINDER CARDS

When students with social-emotional challenges learn a new skill, it can be hard for them to remember to use it when needed. Reminder cards are just words, phrases, or statements that are written on a card that will cue the student to do the behavior noted on the card. For an issue that is frequently occurring—for example, cutting in line—tape the card to his desk and call his attention to the card before students line up. Peer buddies can also look at the student’s reminder card and prompt the student to do the appropriate behavior.

#8 SOCIAL NARRATIVES

Social narratives can teach new social skills and encourage students with social-emotional challenges to regulate their behavior through simple stories. Involve the student in writing the narrative and use the first-person. Include a sentence describing the thoughts and feelings of others to help the student learn perspective-taking. Prompt students to review the narrative frequently. Here is an example for Mad:

Sometimes I get mad about things that happen at school. When I’m mad, I might use fighting words. My teacher and classmates

can get upset when I use these words. I will try to use helpful words like, “I better cool down a little” or “I’m really mad right now, but it’s ok.” When I use helpful words, my problem will get better.

Go to www.kimochis.com for more examples of social narratives.

#9 CALMING STRATEGIES

Many students with social-emotional challenges have difficulty reading their stress levels and can respond to stress in very unproductive and disruptive ways. As you talk with students about how their bodies feel when emotionally charged, consider that these students may need more help in learning how to self-regulate. Brainstorm with the students a list of ways to calm themselves in school. Calming strategies could include:

- Count to 10
- Take three deep breaths, close my eyes
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Relax tight muscles in my arms and hands
- Knead clay
- Hug a Kimochis™ character
- Visualize a peaceful place
- Put a calming Kimochis™ feeling pillow on my desk
- Rub my worry stone (in my pocket)
- Go to the Kimochis™ Corner (see page 47)
- Take a Kimochis™ Moment (see page 49)
- Wiggle a pipe cleaner
- Write in my Kimochis™ Journal (see page 50)
- Write a Kimochis™ HELP! Note (see page 50)
- Take a note to the office
- Go to a calm place

Help the students choose two or three strategies that they think would work for them. Write the strategies on a cue card for the student to use as a reminder when needed.