SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Lauren Gerken Teachers College, Columbia University SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

CHILD PROTECTION, WELL-BEING & INCLUSION

SESSION 1

Session 1: Child Protection, Well-Being & Inclusion

Training session summary | Duration: 3 hours

In this session, participants are given a training overview and introduced to learning disabilities. Participants complete a reading activity designed to simulate the feeling of reading with dyslexia and debrief with a discussion on the effects of classroom environment on learners' motivation and academic performance. Finally, participants practice strategies for creating positive classroom environments and teaching learners to productively expressing stress and frustration.

Session Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Demonstrate empathy when responding to the needs of learners with learning disabilities;
- Explain how teachers' attitudes and the classroom environment affects the motivation and performance of learners with learning disabilities;
- Describe strategies for creating positive classroom environments;
- Demonstrate how to productively express negative emotions by using a frustration chart.

Session Outline

Activity 1: Introduction

Activity 2: Dyslexia Simulation

Activity 3: Simulation Debrief

Activity 4: Encouraging Self Acceptance

Activity 5: Expressing Frustration

Activity 6: Reflection



Pre-work for facilitator

- Prepare PowerPoint presentation or copy information to flip chart paper
- Prepare Participant Handbook.
- Prepare <u>Appendix 1A</u> Cut out the question slips. Make sure that there is at least one question slip for each participant in the training.
- Prepare <u>Appendix 1B</u> Write one sentence at the top of each flipchart paper. Hang the flipchart papers on the walls around the classroom.

Materials

- Whiteboard & markers or blackboard & chalk
- Flip chart paper
- PowerPoint presentation & projector
- Green, yellow, and red squares of paper (one of each per participant)
- Appendix 1A Discussion slips
- Appendix 1B Discovering strengths
- Key words (2 pages)
- Handout 1.1 Reading Task
- Handout 1.2 Positive and Negative Messages
- Handout 1.3 Encouraging Self Acceptance
- Handout 1.4 Expressing Frustration
- Handout 1.5 Reflection
- (Next Steps) Handout A Making mistakes (2 pages)

Slides

• 1-10

Activity 1: Introduction

Time: 20 minutes | Grouping: Whole class

Slides: 1-7

Materials: Participant Handbook, flipchart paper and markers

Activity Summary: This activity is the opening activity of the Supporting Learners with Learning Disabilities training. The main purpose of this activity is to welcome participants to the Supporting Learners with Learning Disabilities training and connect this training to the Training for Primary School Teachers in Crisis Contexts (TiCC). It is important to briefly review the four main competency areas from the TiCC because this training builds off of the material presented in the TiCC, and aims to provide additional, specialized support for teachers as they continue to develop these competencies post-training. Several "housekeeping" activities will also take place (i.e. distributing the participant handbooks, pointing out the keywords of the day, reviewing the training schedule...etc.).

Steps:

- Welcome participants to the training.
- **Provide** background information on the Training for Primary School Teachers in Crisis Contexts.
 - 4 core competency areas: 1) Teacher's Role and Well-being; 2) Child Protection,
 Well-being and Inclusion; 3) Pedagogy; and 4) Curriculum and Planning (Slide 2)
- **Review** the training agenda and objectives (Slide 3-5)
- **Review** Session 1 Objectives (Slide 7)
 - Demonstrate empathy when responding to the needs of learners with learning disabilities;
 - Explain how teachers' attitudes and the classroom environment affects the motivation and performance of learners with learning disabilities;
 - Describe strategies for creating positive classroom environments;
 - Demonstrate how to productively express negative emotions by using a frustration chart.
- **Distribute** participant handbook.
- **Call** participants' attention to <u>Handout 0: Key Words</u> and **explain** that we'll review these keywords throughout the training.
- As a whole class, brainstorm some rules/expectations for the training.

• Write down the expectations or rules that the participants chose on a piece of flipchart paper, then **post** them in a visible place for the duration of the training. Make sure that all participants agree on the rules before beginning the training.

Example Answers:

- Be on time to all sessions and respect the length of breaks
- Silence cell phones for the duration of the training sessions
- Raise your hand to speak
- Ask questions
- Participate in group discussions and activities
- Be open to new ideas and opinions
- Provide support to other participants and facilitators

Activity 2: Dyslexia Simulation

Time: 20 minutes | Grouping: Whole class

Slides: None

Materials: Handout 1.1

Activity Summary: In this activity, participants will complete a short reading task designed to slow down reading speed to simulate the feeling of reading with dyslexia. The purpose of this activity is to put participants in the shoes of learners with learning disabilities, so that they can experience first hand the frustration felt by learners with learning disabilities.

Steps:

- **Call** learners attention to <u>Handout 1.1</u>.
- **Explain** that participants have 10 minutes to read the text and answer the comprehension questions individually.
- **Give** participants 10 minutes to complete <u>Handout 1.1</u>.

Facilitator Note: The purpose of this activity is to simulate the feelings of frustration and inadequacy that are often felt by learners with learning disabilities in unsupportive classroom environments. The facilitator should model an unsupportive teacher by reminding participants that the reading activity is easy, telling them to hurry up, and being generally impatient.

• When 10 minutes have passed, regardless of whether participants have completed the activity, quickly **call on** individual participants to answer the questions in <u>Handout 1.1</u>.

Activity 3: Simulation Debrief

Time: 30 minutes | Grouping: Mingling

Slides: 8

Materials: Pre-prepared question slips from Appendix 1A

Activity Summary: In this activity, participants will reflect on and discuss their experience of the dyslexia simulation. The purpose of this activity is to develop empathy with learners with learning disabilities, and to encourage participants to think critically about how their teaching practices affect learners motivation and ability to learn.

Steps:

- **Explain** to participants that they will now discuss their reactions to/feelings about the reading activity they have just completed.
- **Give** each participant 1 question slip from <u>Appendix 1A</u>.
- **Explain** to participants that they will stand up, find a partner (preferably with a different question) and discuss the questions for 3 minutes. When time is up, the facilitator will clap their hands to indicate that time is up. Participants should exchange question slips with their partner and then find a new partner with whom to discuss the new questions.
- **Model** the activity in front of the class with a confident participant.
- **Clap** your hands every 3 minutes to indicate to participants that it is time to switch papers and find a new partner.
- **Repeat** until participants have talked to 6 different people, then ask participants to return to their seats.
- Display <u>Slide 8</u>.

Questions from Slide 8/Appendix 1A:

- 1. How did the reading activity make you feel?
- 2. How did the facilitator make you feel?
- 3. What was the most frustrating part of the reading activity?
- 4. Why do you think we did this activity?
- 5. What could the facilitator do to make the reading activity less stressful?
- Encourage participants to share their reflections.

• While participants are sharing their reflections, write their responses on the blackboard

Example Answers:

If participants do not give these answers, bring them up yourself.

- Frustrated, angry, sad, anxious, nervous, stupid...etc.
- Frustrated, angry, sad, anxious, nervous, stupid...etc.
- Answers will vary
- We did this activity so that participants could experience how it feels to be a learner with LDs in a classroom setting; So that participants could think critically about how their teaching practice/attitude affects learners with LDs
- The teacher could: not call the activity easy, when it may not be easy for everyone; Give learners more time to finish; Be more patient; Allow learners to check their answers in pairs before sharing their answers with the whole class



Connect to the TiCC: Day 2 Child Protection, Well-being, and Inclusion, Session 2 Safe Spaces - SEL

"As you experienced, it is really important to maintain a welcoming environment in which all learners feel valued and supported. The attitude of the teacher has a huge impact on the classroom environment, so it is important to notice how you are react to learners who may be struggling in your classes."

Activity 4: Encouraging Self Acceptance¹

Time: 50 minutes | Grouping: Individual, small group

Slides: 9

Materials: Handout 1.2, Handout 1.3, Appendix 1B

Activity Summary: In this activity, participants will brainstorm the positive and negative messages that they have heard about themselves and think about how those messages have impacted how they think about themselves. Participants will work in small groups to identify the messages learners with learning disabilities hear about themselves, how those messages affect their sense of self and their actions, and how participants can change those negative messages to encourage learners to focus on their strengths and accept their weaknesses. Participants will then model a mingling activity in which learners share their strengths with their classmates.

Steps:

Facilitator Note: Before beginning this activity, make sure to prepare the flipchart papers from <u>Appendix 1B</u> and hang them up on the walls around the classroom.

• Call participants' attention to <u>Handout 1.2</u>.



Ask participants:

• Who are some people who have (positively or negatively) influenced you or how you see yourself?

Example Answers:

- Family members
- Friends, peers
- Teachers, school staff

¹ Adapted from Burns, J. H. (n.d.). Great Anti Bullying Activities And Lesson Plans. Retrieved from https://bullyproofclassroom.com/great-anti-bullying-activities

- Neighbors, community members
- Media
- Politicians, government...etc.
- **Tell** participants to take 2 minutes and complete the mindmap in Part 1 of <u>Handout 1.2</u>, individually.
- When time is up, **ask** participants to share their answers with a partner, and then the whole class.
- While participants are sharing, **write** down the answers on the blackboard.

Ask participants: Handout 1.2

- What are some **positive** messages about yourself that you have heard from people in your life?
- What are some **negative** messages about yourself that you have heard from people in your life?
- Which of these messages do you still believe? How have they affected your actions or how you think about yourself?

Facilitator Note: It may help participants answer the questions above if you give a personal example. For example:

"When I was in primary school, I liked math but I found it very difficult. When I struggled in class, my teacher would get frustrated and say that I was bad at math and I would probably never understand how to do math problems. When my parents got my grades they would say the same things - I was bad at math and I should focus on other things. Eventually, I internalized the messages they were giving me. I decided that I was bad at math and I would never understand, so I stopped trying. I stopped going to math class and I avoided other subjects that required math skills. Even now, many years later I start to feel anxious every time I have to do simple math, like calculating change, because I tell myself that I am bad at math and that I will probably make a stupid mistake."

- **Tell** participants to take 5-7 minutes to answer the questions in parts 2-3 of <u>Handout 1.2</u> individually.
- When time is up, **ask** participants if anyone would like to share their answers with the class. **Do not force anyone to answer if they do not feel comfortable doing so.**
- **Tell** participants to form groups of 4-5.

• Explain that participants will have 15 minutes to answer the questions on part 4 of <u>Handout 1.2</u>. Encourage participants to give examples. When time is up, each group will have 2 minutes to present their answers to the class.

Ask participants: Questions from Handout 1.2

- 1. What messages do you think learners with learning disabilities hear about themselves in school or at home?
- 2. How do you think those messages affect how they see themselves?
- 3. How do you think those messages affect their actions?
- 4. How can you change the messages that your learners are hearing about themselves?

Example Answers:

- Positive messages: People may tell learners that they are creative, are excited for classes that they like, good leadership skills...etc. Negative messages: People may tell learners that they are slow, stupid, unmotivated, unteachable, badly behaved, not trying hard enough...etc.
- 2. Learners can internalize these messages and begin to think that they are stupid or unteachable, which can cause them to lose motivation in school, develop low self-esteem, and be at higher risk for bullying or being bullied.
- 3. Learners may give up on learning, miss classes or drop out of school. They may also develop behavioral issues or be disruptive in class.
- 4. Focus on the positive! Give learners positive messages to internalize. Encourage learners' parents and classmates to send positive messages and step in when they are being negative. Remind learners to focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses.
- When time is up, **encourage** participants to give brief presentations of their discussions.
- Say: "The reason learners with learning disabilities are bullied or hear negative messages about themselves is not because there is anything wrong with them; it is because of someone else's attitude towards the way they learn. The only thing that needs to be changed is other people's attitudes, not the learners. It is really important that learners with learning disabilities hear consistent messages of support so that they can develop self acceptance and positive self worth. It is also really important that you intervene when you hear other teachers, families, or classmates sending negative messages to learners with learning disabilities."

- **Call** participants' **attention** to <u>Handout 1.3</u>.
- Ask a participant to read the paragraph explaining "What is self acceptance?" Ask a different participant to read the paragraph explaining "How can learners build self acceptance?"
- **Call** participants' **attention** to the flipchart papers from <u>Appendix 1B</u> on the walls.
- **Tell** participants to read the unfinished sentences on the flipcharts and choose 1-2 to finish with a personal answer. Participants should stand up and write their answers on 1-2 of the flipchart papers on the walls. When participants have finished writing, they should walk around the room and read other participants' answers.
- Distribute markers.
- Once every participants has written at least one answer, **tell** participants to sit down.
- Display Slide 9

Ask participants: Slide 9

- 1. How did it feel to share some of your strengths?
- 2. How do you think doing this activity would help your learners develop self acceptance?
- 3. Are there any other sentences you would add?

Example Answers:

- 1. Answers will vary.
- The activity helps learners focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. It promotes positive self worth and self acceptance and can also let learners know which of their peers they can go to for help in different situations.
- 3. Answers will vary.

Facilitator Note: If possible, leave these flipchart papers up for the rest of the session, so that participants have something positive to refer back to as they learn new information.

• **Tell** participants that the questions from the flipchart papers are on <u>Handout 1.3</u>, if they would like to refer back to this activity with their learners.

Activity 5: Expressing Frustration

Time: 40 minutes | Grouping: Pairs, Whole class

Slides: None

Materials: Handout 1.4, squares of colored paper (red, yellow, green)

Activity Summary: In this activity, participants will examine the effect of stress on a person's motivation and ability to learn. Participants will practice using a frustration chart to identify and express their levels of stress in different situations, and discuss how a frustration chart can be used by their learners.

Steps:

• **Remind** participants about the reading activity in Activity 1.



Ask Participants:

- Would the reading activity have been easy if I had been nicer or more supportive?
- Would you still have been frustrated by the activity?

Example Answers:

- Participants might have felt less frustrated if the facilitator was nicer or more supported, but the activity would still have been difficult and frustrating.
- Explain that even if their classrooms environments are supportive and they make sure that learners with learning difficulties are hearing positive messages about themselves, those learners will still struggle with some tasks and will sometimes still feel frustrated and stressed in class.



Ask Participants: (Pairs)

- Is it easy to learn when you are frustrated, stressed or upset?
- Can you think of a time when your stress level made it difficult to learn a skill or accomplish a task?

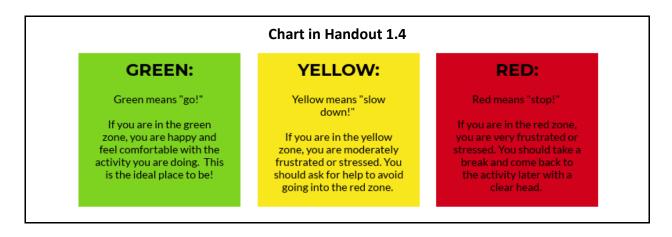
• Explain that when people are stressed, frustrated or upset it is very difficult for them to focus on a task or remember new information. In particular, learners with learning disabilities, may be constantly stressed and frustrated because it may seem to them that no matter how hard they try to complete a task or learn a skill they may still get poor grades or be labeled "stupid" or "lazy." This continual stress and frustration they feel at school makes it even more difficult for them to learn new skills and information, which puts them at higher risk of developing low self esteem, being bullied or bullying others, or dropping out of school. As a result, it is really important that participants are aware of how their learners are feeling at any given time.

Ask Participants:

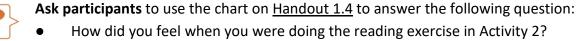
• What are some ways you can tell if your learners are stressed or frustrated?



- Learners may tell you that they are feeling happy, sad, frustrated...etc.
- Learners may tell their friends how they are feeling
- Learners may tell the teacher how their friends are doing, particularly if they are worried
- You can observe your learners' body language (example: hunching, frowning, a monotone voice might mean that your learner is sad)
- You can give a writing assignment asking them to describe how they are feeling in school, in their community, or in response to an event
- **Call** participants attention to <u>Handout 1.4.</u>



- **Explain** that sometimes learners may be embarrassed to explain their feelings in front of their peers or they may have difficulty explaining how they are feeling. Often, learners will act out if they are frustrated but don't know how to express that frustration productively. A visual aid, like the chart on <u>Handout 1.4</u>, can be helpful for learners trying to communicate their feelings effectively and productively.
- Distribute one green, yellow, and red square of paper to each participant.
- **Explain** that participants will answer the following question by holding up the square of colored paper that represents how they felt. (Green = good. Yellow = moderately stressed. Red = very stressed.)



Participants should choose the color that corresponds the most accurately to their level of stress or frustration.

- **Call** participants to attention to the questions on <u>Handout 1.4</u>. Ask them to take 3 minutes read the questions and use the chart to answer them.
- Once time is up, **read** the questions aloud and **ask** participants to answer the questions by by holding up the square of colored paper that represents how they felt. (Green = good. Yellow = moderately stressed. Red = very stressed.)



Ask participants to share their answers to the questions on <u>Handout 1.4</u>, pausing for participants to raise their hands to answer.

- How did you feel on your first day of teaching?
- How do you feel at the end of a long day?
- How do you feel on your birthday?
- How do you feel when a learner is struggling to understand a lesson?
- How do you feel right now?
- **Explain** that participants can teach learners to use the chart on <u>Handout 1.4</u> to selfassess their emotions and communicate how they are feeling in class.



Ask participants:

• Why is it useful for learners to be able to assess and express how they are feeling?

Example answers:

- Learning how to assess how they are feeling develops self-awareness, which is an important life skill
- Learning how to express how they are feeling may help learners develop more positive relationships with their friends, teachers, families
- A learner who can tell the teacher when they are frustrated may get more positive attention and support from their teacher
- A learner who can express how they are feeling verbally may be less likely to express themselves by acting out in class

Ask participants:

- Would you use this chart in your class? Why or why not?
- How would you use this chart in your class?
- Would you adapt it to better fit your learners? How?
- **Explain** that it can be helpful for participants to work with learners to develop a plan to manage their stress levels. For example, if learners communicate that they are in the yellow zone, they should ask a classmate for help. If they are in the red zone, they should take a short break or switch to a different activity.

Connect to the TiCC: Day 2 Child Protection, Well-being, and Inclusion, Session 2 Safe Spaces - SEL. "Teaching learners how to use a strategy like a frustration chart can be a great way for them to practice social-emotional skills like self awareness and emotional regulation. Learners who are unable to identify or express their feelings or frustrations in a productive way are more likely to express themselves through disruptive behavior, which negatively affects both their learning experience and the learning experience of their classmates. These learners are at a high risk of dropping out or being expelled from school. Learners who are able to identify and express their feelings in a productive way are more likely to receive positive attention and help from their teachers, leading to a more positive association with school and a lower dropout rates."



Ask participants:

• Can you use this color system for anything else in your classroom?

Example answers:

• Yes. You can use the green, yellow, red system as a behavior management tool. Much like in football, you can give learners a "yellow card" as a warning to improve their behavior or a "red card" if they need to take a time out. A "green card" can be a sign that you see that their behavior has improved or a certain number of "green cards" can be turned in for a reward.

Activity 6: Reflection

Time: 20 minutes | Grouping: Individual, Whole class

Slides: None

Materials: Handout 1.5

Activity Summary: In this activity, participants will reflect on what they have learned in the session using <u>Handout 1.5</u>.

Steps:

- **Thank** participants for participating in the session.
- **Direct** participants' attention to <u>Handout 1.5</u>.
- Encourage participants to take 10 minutes to fill out <u>Handout 1.5</u> with 3 things they learned, 2 questions they still have, and 1 thing that they will try to implement in their classroom.
- To conclude, **ask** participants if they would like to share their questions from <u>Handout</u> <u>1.5</u>.
- **Respond** to any questions the participants may have. Be sure to leave enough time to answer all lingering questions and concerns.



Next Steps: Making Mistakes

Activity Summary: This activity gives participants the opportunity to reflect on what they have experienced and discussed in this session, and encourages them to continue exploring how their classroom environment affects their learners. This activity builds off of the SEL material in Session 1 and focuses specifically on making mistakes in the classroom. Participants are encouraged to reflect critically on their attitudes and reactions towards making mistakes in the classroom, and how that affects their learners' motivation and performance.

Steps

- Call participants' attention to <u>Handout A</u>.
- Ask participants to read the questions on Handout A.

- **Explain** that these questions are reflective and participants should use them to observe their own teaching practice and reactions towards making mistakes in their classrooms. Participants should answer the questions on <u>Handout A</u>.
- **Explain** that participants will share their answers with the class at the beginning of the next training session.

SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

Lauren Gerken Teachers College, Columbia University SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

CHILD PROTECTION, WELL-BEING & INCLUSION

SESSION 1

Handout 1.1 - Reading task

Instructions: Read the text and answer the questions below.

A Hare was making fun of the Tortoise one day for being so slow. Do you ever get anywhere?" he asked with a mocking laugh. "Yes," replied the Tortoise, "and I get there sooner than you think. I'll run you a race and prove it." The Hare was much amused at the idea of running a race with the Tortoise, but for the fun of the thing he agreed. So the Fox, who had consented to act as a judge, marked the distance and started the runners off. The Hare was soon far out of sight, and to make the Tortoise feel very deeply how ridiculous it was for him to try a race with a Hare, he lay down beside the course to take a nap until the Tortoise should catch up. The Tortoise meanwhile kept going slowly but steadily, and, after a time, passed the place where the Hare was sleeping. But the Hare slept on very peacefully; and when at last he did wake up, the Tortoise was near the goal. The Hare now ran his swiftest, but he could not overtake the Tortoise in time.

Who are the main characters in the story? .1

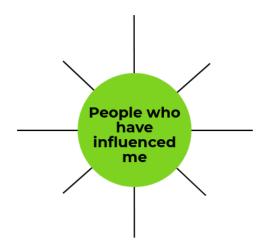
What happens in the story? .2

What is the moral of the story? .6

What do you think happens next? .4

Handout 1.2 - Positive and Negative Messages

Part 1: Who are some people who have influenced how you see yourself (positively or negatively)? Complete the mind map below:

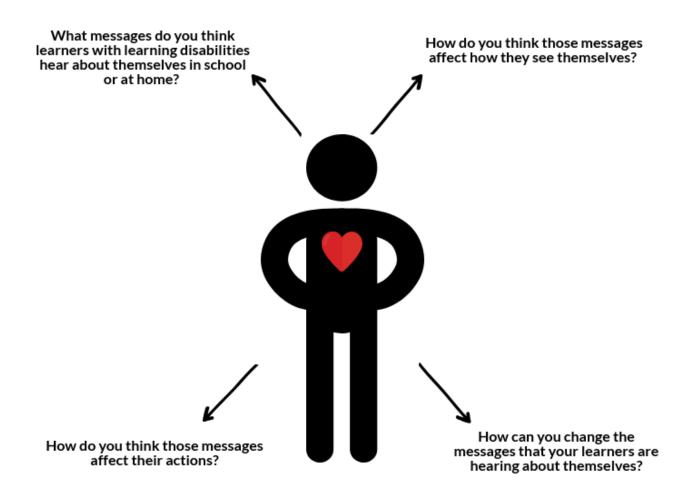


Part 2:

What are some positive messages about yourself that you have heard from people in your life?	What are some negative messages about yourself that you have heard from people in your life?

Part 3: Which of these messages do you still believe? Circle those messages. How have they affected your actions or how you think about yourself?

Part 4: In small groups, answer the questions below. Make sure to give examples.



Handout 1.3 - Encouraging Self Acceptance

What is self acceptance?

Self acceptance is being able to recognize your value as a person and feeling comfortable with yourself regardless of your faults or weaknesses. Self acceptance is a reflection of beliefs you gained as a child. It usually comes from messages you get about yourself. These messages can come from other people (like caregivers, teachers, or friends) or from yourself.

How can learners build self acceptance?

If learners are used to hearing negative messages from other people, chances are they will send themselves negative messages too. Things like "I'm so stupid," "I'm not good enough at this..." or "It's my fault this happened" are examples of negative messages. One way for learners to build their self acceptance is to train them to send themselves positive messages. You can do this by focusing on their strengths and positive qualities and reminding learners that they are a good and valuable people.

Examples of positive messages:

- "You are a good and caring person and deserve to be treated with respect."
- "You are capable of success."
- *"There are people who love you and will be there for you when you need them."*
- "You deserve to be happy."
- "You are allowed to make mistakes and learn from them."

Finish the sentences below:

1. I am talented. Two things I am really good at are...

2. I am brave. An example of a time I was brave is...

3. I am a good friend. One time I was there for a friend was...

4. I am capable of making good decisions. One time I made a good decision was...

5. I am loved and cared about. People who care about me are...

Handout 1.4 - Expressing Frustration

Instructions: Use the chart below to assess how you felt in the situations below. Read the questions and circle the color that best describes how you felt.



Green means "go!"

If you are in the green zone, you are happy and feel comfortable with the activity you are doing. This is the ideal place to be!

YELLOW:

Yellow means "slow down!"

If you are in the yellow zone, you are moderately frustrated or stressed. You should ask for help to avoid going into the red zone. **RED:**

Red means "stop!"

If you are in the red zone, you are very frustrated or stressed. You should take a break and come back to the activity later with a clear head.

1. How did you feel on your first day of teaching?

GREEN YELLOW RED

2. How do you feel at the end of a long day?

GREEN YELLOW RED

3. How do you feel on your birthday?

GREEN YELLOW RED

4. How do you feel when a learner is struggling to understand a lesson?

GREEN YELLOW RED

5. How do you feel right now?

GREEN YELLOW RED

Handout 1.5 - Reflection

Instructions: Answer the questions below.

What are 3 things that you have learned? What are 2 questions that you still have? What is 1 thing that you will try to implement with your learners?