

CADRE Working Together Series:

Course 4

Lessons 1-2

Lesson 1

Slide 1

Narrator

Welcome to the first lesson in the *Managing and Responding to Emotions* course. This lesson will focus on key strategies family members and educators can use to help them understand and manage their own emotions.

Slide 2

Narrator

These strategies include: practicing self-care; becoming aware of your emotions, what triggers them and how you manage them; taking time to understand your feelings, and finding what strategies work best for you.

Slide 3

Narrator

Whether you are a parent, educator or a service provider, supporting a student with a disability can be an emotional experience. You may experience extreme highs and lows. Being aware of your own emotions and knowing how to best manage them so that the IEP team is strong and operates well is important for making decisions about the student's program and services. How we experience emotions and how we express emotions differs from person to person and depends upon our personality, experiences, background, and culture. Some people express emotions immediately without thinking first. Others would never consider expressing emotions without being very careful. Still others feel it is not appropriate to express emotions at all. For some people, especially families who might be experiencing a lot of stress in parenting their child with a disability, or school personnel who are under pressure to have their students achieve, experiencing strong emotions is common and makes coping difficult.

Slide 4

Narrator

Strong emotions are important signals. They help us identify any perceived threats, what is important to us, when someone violates our values, and when we need more information or support. Unfortunately, strong emotions can also interfere with successful working relationships.

Slide 5

Narrator

Have you ever felt so angry that you couldn't think clearly? Your hands shake, your heart starts to race, and your thoughts are running faster than you can process. Or have you ever been really worried? So worried that it was hard for you to say or do anything?

Slide 6

Narrator

Now imagine trying to have a meaningful conversation or make the best decision for a child while feeling angry or worried. Doesn't sound promising, does it? When emotions are high, our brains and body have automatic responses that we can't control. We can lose focus on the person right in front of us. When we are angry our brain's ability to think rationally and solve problems is significantly reduced. If emotions aren't understood and appropriately addressed, communication breaks down and we will no longer be able to meaningfully participate in the discussion.

Slide 7

4 Strategies for Managing Emotions

- 1 Practice Self-Care**
Deadlines
Schedules
Needs
Resources
Illnesses
- 2 Become Self-Aware**
What triggers your emotions?
How do you manage your emotions?
- 3 Take Time to Understand Your Feelings**
Why are you feeling this way?
What are you needing or valuing in the moment?
- 4 Use Strategies that Work for You**
Pay attention and keep track of what works and what doesn't.

Narrator

There are many strategies to help us manage our emotions. We will focus on four of these strategies. First, practice self-care. Deadlines, hectic schedules, competing needs, lack of resources, and illnesses can add significant stress to your life. When you experience significant stress, it impacts your health and well-being and also how you interact with others. It is hard to manage your emotions in the middle of a difficult

conversation. You might be able to manage emotions more effectively if you can find ways to take care of yourself.

Second, become aware of your emotions, what triggers them, and how you manage them. Do you recognize when your emotions are becoming stronger? Are there certain behaviors or words that annoy you? How do you typically manage your emotions? Do these strategies work for you? By becoming self-aware, you can plan ahead for situations, figure out what support you might need and how to effectively respond if your emotions feel overwhelming.

Third, allow yourself space and time to process the emotions you are experiencing. Strong emotions can stop us from thinking logically. Your brain needs time to recognize the emotion you are experiencing and to sort through what is behind the emotion. Why are you feeling this way? What are you needing or valuing in that moment?

Fourth, use strategies that work best for you and the situation. Pay attention and keep track of strategies that do and don't work for you. For example, you might find it helpful to remember that others on the IEP team are people with powerful emotions just like you. You might also try to assume that others have good intentions. By keeping these thoughts in mind, you may be able to manage your emotions better when a situation becomes tense.

Slide 8

Narrator

It's not selfish to practice self-care. You have to take care of yourself or you won't be able to take care of those who depend on you. What happens when you are too busy, too stressed, too tired to even think about what you need? Are you grouchy with those you love? Do you say things you regret later? You can see why it is important to take care of yourself. Practicing self-care is one of the most important elements in learning to manage your own emotions.

Slide 9

Narrator

Figuring out self-care can be challenging. You might be working two jobs and taking care of your children and have no time. You might be managing school issues at night when you want to be with your family. Self-care doesn't need to be something big, and it doesn't need to be all by yourself. Some people have found exercise, meditation, or other relaxation activities helpful. Others say it helps to talk with someone who is a good listener.

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Narrator

What about you? What works for you? What would you like to do more?



Slide 11

Practice Self-Care

Select each person to learn about how he or she practices self-care.

Jill
Social Worker, Wife, Mother

John
Teacher, Coach, Father

Kiran
Provider, Father

Narrator

Select each person to see how others have found what works best for them. Maybe you can relate to one of their experiences and find some strategies that could work for you too.

Jill

Hi, I'm Jill. I'm a social worker at a large district and I'm supporting many more students this year. In order for me to keep up, I often have to put in extra hours. I'm so wiped out by the time I get home, I don't have much energy to do anything with my own kids. It's still hard for me to find time to practice self-care, but recently I've been waking up earlier to exercise. Since I've been doing this, I feel like I have more energy in the evenings for my family.

John

Hi, my name is John. I'm a high school English teacher and basketball coach. I also have three kids. My youngest son has autism and has a number of challenging behaviors. My family, job, and coaching are my priorities. I know that I can't put anything else on my plate - my time is maxed out. When I over commit, I get stressed and short tempered with everyone. My strategy for self-care is to say "no" to anything that doesn't align with my priorities.

Kiran

Hi, my name is Kiran. My son, Amal, has significant medical and educational needs. I know that if I don't take care of myself, I have less patience with Amal. I also tend to get sick more often which creates a number of issues for our entire family. It's taken me some time to figure this out, but I've found that if I get 7-8 hours of sleep every night and ask for help from family or friends when I need it, I'm able to manage my stress levels and feel so much better.

Slide 12**Narrator**

Our bodies automatically respond to situations that we find threatening. These physical responses are often our first clues that we are experiencing fear or anxiety. Imagine you have an important job interview, meeting, or presentation and a lot is at stake if you don't do well. You've spent time preparing. You're ready to go. Suddenly, ten minutes before the big event, you start to sweat. Next you feel your heart racing. Your brain starts to process what is happening to you. Anxiety is taking center stage. You become acutely aware of your anxiety. Next thing you know, you're pacing back and forth. This is worse than you thought. Now others seem to be noticing your anxiety too. You're giving non-verbal messages whether you want to or not.

Slide 13**Narrator**

We've all experienced some intense emotions in our lives. And many of us have probably experienced these emotions in situations where we needed to quickly get our emotions back under control. The sooner you are able to recognize the emotion by paying attention to your body's physical responses and non-verbal messages, the sooner you will be able to manage the emotion.

Slide 14**Narrator**

What physical responses do you have when you get nervous? How about when angry or sad?

Slide 15

Narrator

It is also helpful to become aware of what triggers a strong reaction from you. Do you feel angry or sad in response to certain behaviors, words, events or circumstances? Some people feel nervous when meeting new people or speaking in groups. Others may get upset when meetings don't start on time. Understanding your triggers does not make them go away, but self-awareness is a powerful tool. You can think about other ways you can respond and inform people around you in advance.

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Narrator

Let's take a look at a couple of people and see how self-awareness of their triggers helps them manage their emotions. First, let's learn a little bit about Mrs. Maxwell. She's worried about her daughter Sarah's future. She knows that Sarah will face many challenges as an adult and will likely always need support from others. For the most part, Mrs. Maxwell copes well with this. However, Mrs. Maxwell also knows how emotional she becomes when she sees Sarah's test results in writing and when the IEP team begins talking about them. Because Mrs. Maxwell is aware of this, at the beginning of Sarah's next IEP meeting, she lets the group know that she often becomes upset when Sarah's test results are discussed. She asks the team if they can take a break if she needs one. Mrs. Maxwell still finds herself getting upset, but surprisingly not as much as she normally does. She even notices that the school psychologist is sharing the information in a more compassionate way which leads to a meaningful discussion about what services and supports may help Sarah reach her goals. During one part of the conversation, Mrs. Maxwell finds it very difficult to stay calm. Ms. Fields, Sarah's teacher, leans over and quietly asks Mrs. Maxwell if she would like to take a five minute break. Although Mrs. Maxwell thinks she would have been able to manage without the break, she is relieved to get a few minutes to herself.

Now, let's take a look at Mr. Anderson. Mr. Anderson is a new Special Education teacher at Jefferson Elementary School. He has only attended a couple of IEP meetings so far and the last one he attended was very stressful for him. Mr. Anderson was

blamed for a student's lack of progress. He felt threatened and defensive during that IEP meeting, and reacted badly at the last meeting. After that meeting, he was embarrassed by his reaction. He doesn't want this reaction to happen again but knows that when someone questions his teaching abilities, he feels angry and he doesn't always manage it well. Because Mr. Anderson is aware of this, he talks to some veteran teachers to see if this has ever happened to them. He finds a couple of teachers who have also experienced this, especially earlier in their careers. He asks them how they were able to manage their emotions in these situations. They share some stories and a couple of strategies that worked for them. Mr. Anderson still is not sure exactly which strategies he will use but he is feeling better about going into the next IEP meeting.

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Narrator

It takes time to process intense emotions and calm down enough to be able to think clearly again. Many people find it helpful to take a few deep breaths and ask for a short break. During this break, try to understand what is behind the emotion. Strong emotions often signal what is important to you or what you are afraid will happen. Ask yourself, "What am I needing or valuing at this moment?"

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Narrator

Your needs and values, not the other person's behavior, create your emotional response. For example, let's say your boss wants you to do some research this week and report your findings to him or her at the end of the week. You, however, don't have time to get to it. The end of the week is here, but your boss does not ask for the information. How do you feel? Probably relieved or happy because you were not prepared and did not want your boss to notice that. Now, let's say you spend hours on this research and preparing a report. The end of the week is here, but your boss does not ask for the information. How do you feel? Probably frustrated or disappointed, because you had worked hard to be prepared and wanted your effort to be recognized. Your boss's behavior was the same in both scenarios but your need in each of those scenarios was different, so your feelings about your boss's behavior were different. Understanding how your needs and values create your feelings can help with de-escalation and can also help with collaborative problem-solving.

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Narrator

Learning to navigate your own emotions is critical to keeping the focus on the student. Learn what works for you and what does not work. Use strategies that work for you. Some people find that taking deep breaths helps calm them both physically and mentally. You may prefer a more internal process, like visualizing yourself looking at the situation as an outside observer, or from another person's perspective. Others may feel more comfortable relying on a trusted support person, like a colleague or an advocate, who can step in when additional support is needed. Tell others what helps you manage

your emotions and participate effectively in the conversation. Focus on the present instead of the past. When we believe that some harm has occurred, we may find it difficult to move forward. Dwelling on the past, however, may cause us to focus on the negative emotions and not the current problem. We can't change the past but we can improve the future by focusing on what the student needs *now*. If you are finding that you can't move forward because of some harm that has occurred in the past, it may be helpful to bring in a neutral third party, such as a mediator, to help facilitate your next conversation. No matter what skills and approaches you choose, the goal is to be able to manage your emotions so that you can continue to focus on the needs of the student.

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Narrator

You've completed Lesson 1 in the *Managing and Responding to Emotions* course. This course continues in Lesson 2: *Responding to Others' Emotions*.

Lesson 2

Slide 1

Narrator

Welcome to the second lesson of the *Managing and Responding to Emotions* course. We don't often spend much time discussing how our emotions, and the emotions of others on the IEP team, affect the IEP process. Conversations about our children, however, can be emotional for parents, educators and service providers.

Slide 2

Narrator

This lesson provides you with strategies to help. In this lesson you'll learn: The value emotions bring to a team; the importance of creating an emotionally safe meeting space; and strategies for responding to emotions.

Slide 3

Narrator

Family members and educators can have strong emotions when having conversations about a child. When people get emotional in meetings it is helpful to think about them as caring or passionate. Teachers care deeply about their students and often feel passionately about what is best for them. It may be that someone who is emotional is worried about something or afraid a bad decision will be made. All families may experience feelings like pride, worry, excitement, fear, joy, and sadness. The additional challenges of raising a child with a disability may impact the intensity of these feelings. When someone is being emotional, either by their words or by their behaviors, additional information is given to the team that can be helpful. Emotions can be like gifts to the team. They can help the team develop a greater understanding about someone

and discover what is really important as decisions are made. Learning how to respond to emotions will help teams move forward to provide meaningful IEPs for students.

Slide 4

Narrator

What are some of the emotions you feel at IEP meetings?

Slide 5

Narrator

Sometimes when we see someone acting upset, we don't know what to say or do. Many people who feel uncomfortable in these situations may try to ignore the emotions. If we are running a meeting, we might think it is important to keep to the agenda or ask the person to leave the room for a minute. How we respond may affect whether that person will be able to participate. Our reaction to others' emotions can show how much we value the other person.



Mrs. Hill is very worried about her son, Mitchell. Next year, Mitchell will be graduating and entering a program for students with disabilities who are over 18. The new program involves learning life skills to help him become more independent. He will learn to use the city bus system, and may get a part-time job. Mrs. Hill is concerned that this is too big of a change for Mitchell and is scared for him. At the IEP team meeting, the team is talking with Mitchell who is getting excited about leaving high school. The more excited Mitchell becomes, the more upset Mrs. Hill appears. Mrs. Hill has had enough and yells, "Quit telling him this is the plan. We haven't decided anything yet!" It is clear to the team that Mrs. Hill is angry and the topic has been upsetting for her. Mrs. Gowen, the Special

Education Teacher suggests the team skip the discussion about the job skills and talk about something else on the agenda.

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Narrator

What might Mrs. Hill be thinking and feeling after hearing Mrs. Gowen's suggestions?



Slide 7

Narrator

Mrs. Hill might think the team doesn't care about her feelings. When Mrs. Gowen tries to change the subject, Mrs. Hill will likely become frustrated that her concerns won't be addressed. IEP Teams should create a meeting environment that communicates that the participation of everyone is important, and that even difficult topics will be discussed, such as transition, where families may have some anxieties but also may have different cultural values than educators in regards to their child's independence.

Slide 8

Narrator

What makes a meeting feel safe to share our feelings about important decisions? How can we create a safe place for people to participate?



Slide 9

Narrator

When a member of a meeting is feeling strongly about something and appears emotional, there are valuable strategies we can use to help the team. In this lesson we outline four strategies for responding to high emotions. These strategies can be used together or separately to help work through emotional conversations. The first strategy is to observe without judging. The second strategy is to identify emotions and check for agreement. Third, you can ask for more information to better understand the speaker

and show you care. Finally, you can help the team move into solving the problem at hand by including what you've learned about the person's concerns.

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Narrator

People reveal emotions in a variety of ways. Some people are very direct and you will know right away how they feel. Others may not share their feelings with words. Non-verbal behaviors may be just as important as words. Pay attention to any physical responses a person may be experiencing as well as any other non-verbal messages being sent. For this strategy it is important not to judge or label the other person; you're just paying attention. It's also important to know that non-verbal behaviors are clues, not facts. For example, Jim sits down and crosses his arms in front of him. Does this mean that Jim is unfriendly or upset? No, of course not. It could be that Jim is just comfortable with his arms crossed. It could also mean that he is upset. At this point, we're just paying attention to behaviors that may provide clues to important emotional messages from Jim.

Know that non-verbal behaviors messages are often tied to our culture or upbringing. Some people use big hand and arm gestures when talking and this is not unusual. For another person, big hand gestures are only used when really upset or excited about something. By taking the time to observe, we can start to see what nonverbal messages may mean for a specific person.

Slide 11

Narrator

Think about your upbringing and cultural background. In your experience, what non-verbal messages may indicate that a person is angry or upset? What about you? What happens to you when you feel strong emotions?

Slide 12

Narrator

The language a person uses can also be revealing. Pay attention to words that describe feelings. When our needs are *not* met, we may feel: afraid, concerned, disappointed, hurt, frustrated, nervous, overwhelmed, or confused. When our needs *are* met, we may feel: appreciated, eager, encouraged, fascinated, glad, interested, optimistic, or relieved.

Slide 13

Narrator

It isn't always easy to identify what a person is feeling. Sometimes people will start a sentence by saying, "I feel..." but they are going to share an opinion instead. For example, Kwame states, "I feel like you haven't been listening to me this entire time." Although he used the word "feel," there is no feeling stated. Kwame *thinks* or has the opinion that you haven't listened. Separating what one thinks from what one feels becomes very important when we check for understanding. Let's practice identifying feelings in the following scenarios.

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Narrator

Mr. Jacobs, the middle school resource teacher, wants to talk to Mrs. Richards, Patrick's mom, about some of Patrick's behaviors. Mrs. Richards hasn't returned any of Mr. Jacobs' calls. When Mr. Jacobs sees Mrs. Richards and attempts to talk to her about his concerns, she quickly changes the subject. Mr. Jacobs tries again. This time, Mrs. Richards does not change the subject. Her eyes tear up and she says, "I feel like you are always picking on Patrick. I'm sure he's not the only one acting like that in your class. What am I supposed to do? I can't do anything about his behavior at school. I can barely manage it at home." What might Mrs. Richards be feeling?

- A. [Like Mr. Jacobs is always picking on Patrick](#)
- B. [Embarrassed and overwhelmed](#)
- C. [Confident](#)
- D. [Astonished](#)

Slide 14 (Responses)

Answer A Response

Although Mrs. Richards said, "I feel like you are always picking on Patrick," no actual feeling was stated here. Sometimes, we use the words "feel" and "feeling" to describe our thoughts and opinions.

Answer B Response

Correct. Embarrassed and overwhelmed are some possible feelings that Mrs. Richards could be experiencing in this situation.

Answer C Response

Mrs. Richards doesn't show that she feels confident in handling her son's behavior, nor talking to Mr. Jacobs about it.

Answer D Response

Mrs. Richards shows that she isn't astonished or surprised by Mr. Jacobs' concerns about Patrick's behavior.

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Narrator

Principal McGregor is new to the school-community. The last principal at this school angered a number of parents of students with disabilities. A number of services and supports were not delivered according to their children's IEPs. Principal McGregor has a meeting with this group of parents in 30 minutes. He talks to a trusted staff member about his concerns. "I feel like I'm being pulled in many different directions. I want to make a good impression on parents." As he is sharing this he starts pacing back and forth. He continues, "I know the staff doesn't want me to make commitments to parents that I may not be able to keep. They are afraid that I will repeat the last principal's mistakes and agree to everything the parents want... not always what is needed to support the students." What might Principal McGregor be feeling?

- A. [Confident that he will convince the parents that he is committed to providing the resources needed to support their children](#)
- B. [Indifferent](#)
- C. [Conflicted and anxious](#)
- D. [Like he is being pulled in many directions](#)

Slide 15 (Responses)

Answer A Response

Principal McGregor doesn't show that he is confident he will convince the parents that he is committed to providing the resources needed to support their children.

Answer B Response

Principal McGregor does not feel indifferent. He is concerned about this meeting.

Answer C Response

Correct. Principal McGregor feels conflicted and anxious.

Answer D Response

Although Principal McGregor said, "I feel like I'm being pulled in many different directions," no actual feeling was stated. This statement, however, indicates how conflicted he feels.

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Narrator

Once you have identified the possible emotion, it is a good idea to hear that you are right from the other person. For example, you could say, "It looks like you are conflicted and unsure about how best to approach the parents. Is this true?" This validates the speaker's feeling and shows that you care. It also gives an opportunity to correct any misunderstanding. Principal McGregor may respond, "Yeah, I'm really kind of nervous here. Their first impression of me can have a big impact on any future relationships."

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Narrator

All of the work to observe the other and identify emotions brings us to the next step: asking questions to gain greater understanding. Strong emotions often signal what is important to us and others. Knowing what is important to us and to others is essential to establishing and maintaining relationships, encouraging meaningful participation and collaborative problem-solving, and resolving conflicts.

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Narrator

Learning what is behind the emotions requires active listening. To be a good listener, you need to learn what is driving the emotions. You may have to ask questions to find more information. For example, in the case of Principal McGregor, you may think he values being seen as a competent and responsive principal by both his staff and the students' parents. Just like before, it is helpful to be sure you have this right. You could say, "It sounds like you want to make a good impression and be responsive to the concerns of both the parents and your staff. Do I have this right?" Principal McGregor

may be less anxious now that you have listened attentively and named his feelings and what is important to him.

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Narrator

The last part of the process is to help the team focus on the important information learned. As you have used some of the suggestions outlined in the first three steps of the process, you've likely begun to respond to the emotions of others in ways that show you care and move the team into really focusing on the key points that are important to the other person. Make sure your responses acknowledge the emotion and the possible value or need behind the emotion. Avoid language or questions that could be taken as personal attacks.

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Narrator

To learn more about each type of response, click on the topic area below.

Focus on Information Learned

To learn more about each type of response, click on the topic area below.

Allow the person space and time to work through their emotions.

Acknowledge the emotion and the possible value or need behind the emotion.

Avoid language or questions that could be taken as personal attacks.

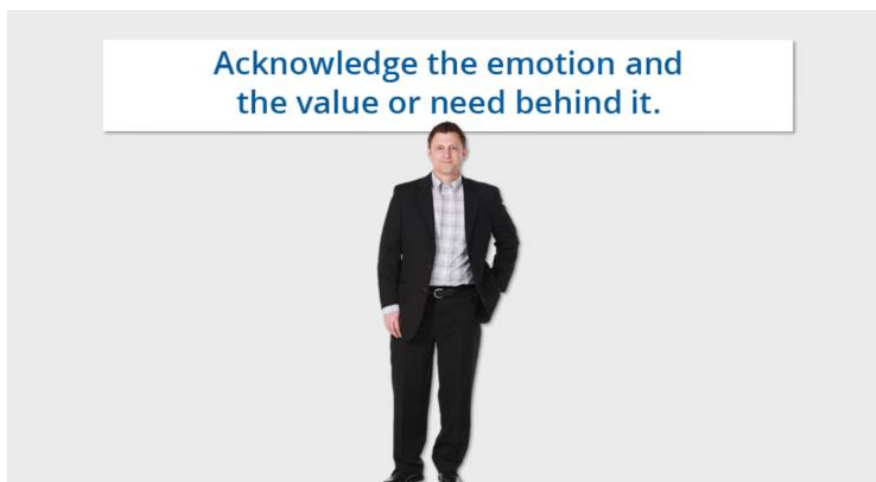
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Narrator

Remember not to rush a person who is still processing his or her feelings. You might ask the person if he would like a break, a glass of water, or some time alone. This will give him a chance to calm down and collect himself before continuing a conversation. This strategy may be especially useful if someone is crying or extremely angry.

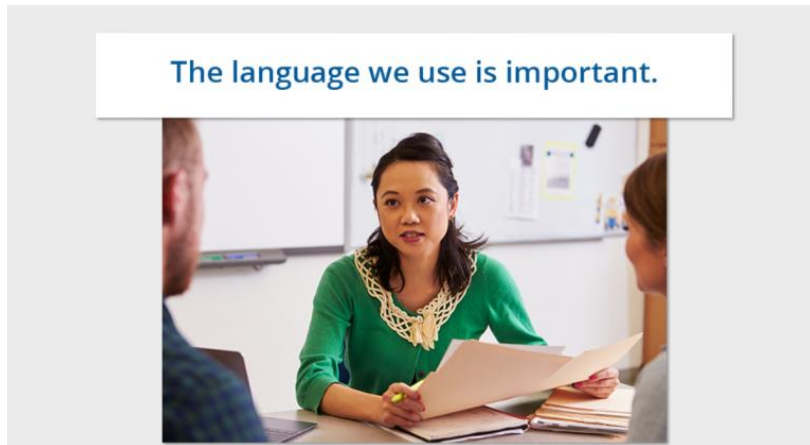
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Narrator

Just like in the example with Principal McGregor, by acknowledging the emotions someone is experiencing and what is behind those emotions, we are showing him that we understand. We are empathizing with him as he shares his concerns. Listening and responding with empathy is one of the best ways to help someone work through their emotions. Remember to give the person an opportunity to clarify the emotion and any needs and values driving the emotion. Restating or summarizing what someone says can also show greater compassion and understanding.

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Narrator

The language we use can interfere with our ability to respond with compassion. When we use language that is judgmental or suggests that someone is bad or wrong, we are not responding in a way that shows we care. When we blame, criticize, or insult others, the situation is likely to get worse and result in ineffective communication. Beginning questions with “what” or “how” instead of “why” can also be helpful. When questions begin with “why”, they are more likely to be seen as a personal attack and the person may become defensive. Let’s go back to the situation with Mrs. Richards and Mr. Jacobs. Mrs. Richards is avoiding Mr. Jacobs. Things play out a little differently this time though. When Mr. Jacobs has a chance to talk to Mrs. Richards, she quickly tries to shut down the conversation by saying, “I don’t want to talk about Patrick’s behavior again.” Mr. Jacobs then asks, “What makes it difficult for you to talk about Patrick’s behavior?” How do you think Mrs. Richards would respond? *(Pause)*

Let’s now change things up again. This time, Mr. Jacobs asks her, “Why is it difficult for you to talk about Patrick’s behavior?” How do you think Mrs. Richards would respond now? *(Pause)*

Do you see how she might take the phrasing of this second question as a personal attack, that something is wrong with her because she doesn’t want to talk about Patrick’s behavior?

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Narrator

Having productive IEP team meetings and developing appropriate and effective educational plans for students with disabilities can be challenging because IEP team members can have many emotions in the process. In addition, there are many different types of people on IEP teams who deal with emotions differently. Responding to emotions effectively also requires that you respect people’s different ways. Generally, even if you are not sure, if you respond in a genuinely caring way, most people will respond well. Blaming, criticizing or insulting each other doesn’t help the IEP Team

work together. Ignoring how someone feels also hurts the team. It's critical that we consider the individual and how they may feel as we respond to their feelings.

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Narrator

How would you like someone to respond to you when you are having strong feelings?

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Narrator

Conversations about our children can become emotional for everyone involved. This course provided a number of strategies to help families and educators manage and respond to emotions in order to effectively work together and through conflict. In lesson one, several key strategies were given to help family members and educators manage their own emotions. Practice self-care. Become aware of your emotions, what triggers them, and how you manage them. Allow yourself space and time to process the emotion you are experiencing. Use the strategies that work best for you and the situation.

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Narrator

One strategy offered for managing your own emotions is to identify a trusted person you can rely on when needed. Can you remember other strategies that were offered? What strategies will you use to help you manage your emotions?

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Narrator

In lesson 2, we explored the value emotions bring to a team. We also learned the importance of creating an emotionally safe meeting space. Finally, we learned strategies for responding to emotions, by observing, identifying emotions and getting

confirmation, seeking to understand what is behind the emotion, and responding in a way that shows you were listening and that you care.

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Narrator

One strategy for responding to others' emotions in a way that shows you care is to allow the person space and time to work through their emotions. Can you remember the other strategies that were offered?



Slide 30

Narrator

You've completed Lesson 2, the final lesson in the *Managing and Responding to Emotions* course.