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Build a Positive School Climate and Culture... One Feeling at a Time

The Kimochis® Feelings for Schools
Principals, Teachers, School Counselors, School Staff Members

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Feelings fuel behavior, and all behaviors are communication. For schools (and homes!) we recommend keeping the Feelings from the Kimochis® Mixed Bag of Feelings in a bowl or basket in a high-traffic area. These colorful Feelings will invite conversations and, with the strategies outlined here, will become a concrete tool to help problem-solve and resolve upset feelings while creating a caring, supportive and responsive school environment.

Guiding One Student Through Upset Feelings or Challenging Behaviors

When an issue arises with one student, resist the urge to ask, “*What happened?*” This question tends to put students in a position to deny or defend why they used a negative behavior. It can be more helpful to open the conversation by handing the student the bowl of Kimochis® Feelings and inviting the student to pull out the Feeling(s) that represent how he/she was feeling.

Step 1 Use positive communication habits.

- Use the student’s name and give gentle eye contact.
- Remember to be conversational by SLOWING down your own speech and using a considerate, yet serious tone of voice. Also consider your facial expression.

Step 2 Ask the student to choose Feeling(s).

- “*What were you feeling when YOU LET YOURSELF (push, kick, yell, grab, etc.)? Find a Feeling in the bowl and just show it to me.*”
- The student can simply show you the Kimochis® Feeling(s) rather than telling you with words. Students who are feeling scared, embarrassed or sad may find it easier to simply show you their feeling(s). This may be especially true of boys.
- Some students may have a difficult time opening up (they may be embarrassed; afraid of consequences; or intimidated by having to go to speak to an “authority figure”). Consider taking the student outside on a “walk talk.” Walking around while talking can help decrease anxiety for students who have a difficult time communicating in a formal, sit-down style, one-to-one with an adult. This also eliminates the intense eye-to-eye contact that is expected in one-to-one situation.
- For students with significant social-emotional challenges, sitting and talking or giving ANY eye contact can be extremely difficult, so the “walk talk” may be the best way to start. Help the student find the Kimochis® Feeling (especially if he/she has limited reading skills) and encourage him/her to carry the feeling on the “walk talk.” If the student has a calming strategy, remind him/her to use it.

Step 3 Connect by acknowledging the feeling(s) that fueled the negative behavior.

- “*Yes Amy, I would feel mad too if my friends were not following the rules.*”
- Remind the student of the behavior boundary, “*Amy, you can never let yourself (push, kick, yell, grab, etc.) when you are feeling mad.*”
- “*I’m going to give you some communication tools to use when you are feeling (name the feeling chosen) and then we will practice.*”

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Step 4 Teach new communication tools with a role-play

- **EYES:** Demonstrate how to use one's eyes as an effective communication tool then invite the student to imitate your model. *"People will listen if we use Talking Eyes (relaxed and friendly) or Serious Eyes (widen them) instead of Fighting Eyes (scrunched/mean)."*
- **STEP BACK:** Demonstrate how to take a step back. Stepping back can help the student gain control and set a boundary. *"When another student does something to upset you, start by taking a step back."*
- **GAIN ATTENTION:** *"Then, call the other person's name and WAIT for their eye contact before you speak."*
- **tone of voice:** *"When you have their eye contact, use serious eyes and a serious tone of voice and a slow and stretched rate of speech to say a very simple request. This will help others take you seriously and will help you stay in control."*
- **COMMUNICATION SCRIPTS:** Demonstrate this slow, stretched serious speech with some examples that the student can memorize for difficult moments.
 - "Jane... (wait for eye contact), please stop."*
 - "John... (wait for eye contact), I was first."*
 - "Sarah... (wait for eye contact), that's my book. Please give it back."*
- **DIFFERENTIATE:** For students with significant social-emotional challenges, write the below simplified steps on a small card (only if the student can read). Store the card in the student's desk or notebook for easy access. Initially, educators may need to prompt and guide the student to use the reminder.
 - 1) Step back.
 - 2) Say person's name and wait for eye contact.
 - 3) Use serious eyes and voice.
 - 4) Use slow speech.
 - 5) Say what you need.

Step 5 Turn up the seriousness, but not the meanness

Have the student practice for times when the above first strategy isn't enough to get someone to respect their words. Demonstrate the following communication pattern which uses three attempts to turn up the seriousness, but not the meanness. Show students how to start with a talking face and voice and to move on to more serious voice and eyes for the second and third attempt. For students with significant social-emotional challenges, write these steps on another reminder card.

For example, if someone grabs something from the student, the student can say:

"John... (wait for eye contact), please give it back." (first attempt)

If that doesn't work, they can say, "I asked you nicely." (second attempt)

If that doesn't work, they can say, "Do I have to get the teacher?" (third attempt)

Step 6 Hopeful Reminder and Positive Feelings

Remind students that we all have to practice values such as respect, responsibility or honesty. We need to practice those values in real life before they can become habits. Show the Hopeful Feeling as you let the student know that you are hopeful that the practice they had today will help guide their behavior the next time they are feeling (state feeling that was picked). Show the Proud Feeling to admire this student's courage in sharing feelings and practicing positive ways to handle upsets. Invite

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the student to end the session by picking the Feeling they are having now that they have had a chance to work through the challenging situation. Many students will choose Happy, Loved, and/or Grateful.

Step 7 Home Link

When calling a child's parent or caregiver to share information, consider using language that lets the caregiver understand that the student may still be "learning." Use a statement like, "*Amy doesn't know how to use her communication tools yet. Today we worked on what to do, instead of hitting, when she is feeling frustrated.*" This sends a message that you are assuming the best and helping their son or daughter learn positive strategies. It lets the caregiver know that the child is capable of learning, but has not learned the skills **yet**.

A parent may say, "*My student never does that at home.*" Acknowledge their perspective by saying, "*At school, we see a second grader who (simply state the problem by saying the behavior) doesn't follow directions right away.*" And WAIT for the parent to respond.

Remind the caregiver that there is an important connection between feelings, communication, and behavior. Let them know that their child is working hard to manage his/her emotions and use effective communication to express upset feelings.

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Using Restorative Practices to Guide Two+ Students Through Conflict

The fundamental premise of restorative practices is that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them. A restorative approach to conflict resolution consists in asking four key questions.

1. What has happened?
2. Who has been affected?
3. How can we involve everyone affected in finding a way forward?
4. How can everyone do things differently in the future?

Step 1 Use the Kimochis® Feelings to Ask “What Has Happened?”

- Call each student by name using gentle eye contact and say, “I’d like you each to pick a Kimochis® Feeling(s) to name what you are/were feeling inside.”
- Students pull the Feeling(s) and place them on the table in front of them. (No talking necessary.)
- Have the Kimochis® Keys to Communication handout available (page 10 of this document). “What Key to Communication do you wish you handled better?” The student can point, show you the number with their fingers, or read the Key aloud.

Step 2 Use Active Listening, Empathy, and Curiosity to Ask “Who Has Been Affected?”

- “It makes sense to me that you feel (name feeling each picked). What do you want to tell each other and I about that feeling?”
- “You are being brave enough to listen to how (name other student) feels. Choose a feeling to show how you feel now that you understand how your actions made (name other student) feel.”
- Some students may prefer writing rather than speaking to one another. You can create a back and forth journal. Begin the written conversation with the prompt, “I felt.....when.....”

Step 3 Encourage Problem-Solving, Apologizing, and Forgiveness to Involve Everyone in Finding a Way Forward

- Hold the Brave Feeling and say, “Give me a head nod if you wish you had handled this upsetting moment more positively. Is anyone willing to be brave and SAY what you wish you would have done differently?” Admire this student’s courage and ask if they are willing to reenact the scene using the positive idea. For students with significant social-emotional challenges, give a simple starting phrase, “I wish I would have...” (This can also help any student who is feeling afraid, embarrassed and/or shy.) Move to the next step if students do not have ideas for how they could have handled things differently.
- Provide a positive role model through role-playing. “You and I can reenact the situation so that I can show you an example of what I’ve seen some kids do to make things better.”
- Ask students to pinpoint the positive model. “What did I do and say that you think made things a little better?”
- Let the students practice. “Ok, now I’d like to have you two re-do the moment in a way that you can each feel proud of.”

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- Facilitate apologies. *“Peter, you can ask your friends to forgive you.”*
- Facilitate forgiveness. *“Kate, Peter has asked for forgiveness. Is that something you are ready to do?”* (If a student cannot forgive yet, ask the student what more they need to make things better.)
- Some students may need more time before apologizing. Acknowledge that time is a healthy thing to ask for and help the students set a date in the near future to get back together.

Step 4 Show Pride for Effort and Resiliency (Hold Proud Feeling) and Ask “How Can You Do Things Differently in the Future?”

- *“Georgia, I admire your courage for owning your mistake.”*
- *“Thomas, I admire how you were able to listen to why Georgia was feeling mad. That is not easy to do.”*
- Show students that you care and foster accountability. Check-in later that week with both students.
- *“How is it going with (name student who they were in a conflict with)?”*
- If you tell students with significant social emotional challenges that you will check in with them by a certain date or time, be sure to keep the agreement. Some students will be hyper-vigilant about the date and might be disappointed or angry if you do not follow through on the agreed check-in.
- Activate peer mentoring by inviting a student back to your office (who visited for discipline reasons) to coach or mentor another student who is just learning what to do in this same moment. *“I have two students who (name challenge) and I am hoping that you would be willing to join me and give some tips and tricks for how they can make things better between them.”*

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Using the Kimochis® Feelings for Regular Class Check-ins

- Do a Kimochis® Check-In with your classroom once a week.
- Sit students in a circle and spread Kimochis® Feeling pillows in the center of the circle word side up.
- Tell students this is a no talking allowed game. Ask student volunteers to go into the circle and take a Feeling they have experienced on the playground or in the classroom this month.
- Ask students to show the Feeling they chose. The teacher verbally names the Feelings, *“I see frustrated. Clap your hands if you also experienced frustration this week.”*
- Ask students, *“If you are willing to talk about the Feeling you chose, hold it in the air.”*
- Ask a student who is holding up the Feeling to begin the conversation. *“I felt frustrated when...”*
- Ask other students who have also experienced this feeling this week to put their hands out. Have the first student toss the Feeling to those students to share their feeling experience. *“I felt frustrated too when...”*
- Keep tossing this Feeling for students to share their best tips and tricks for managing this feeling. *“What I do when I feel frustrated is...”*
- Invite students to SHOW rather than TELL you what they do that helps in this situation. Create role-plays where you or a fellow classmate recreates the upsetting situation so that they can show how they managed their emotions and expressed their thoughts and feelings.
- Let each student know that you are available for Kimochis® Check-Ins when feelings get complicated or challenging. Reassure students that it is better to make time to talk about feelings and think about ways to make things better than to let things carry on in upsetting ways.
- Students with significant social-emotional challenges may find it very difficult to express themselves or engage in a role-play in front of their peers. Consider asking them to have an observation job during role-plays, such as watching to be sure the students in the role-play use serious eyes and voice. Some students may find it difficult to regulate their silliness or meanness during role-plays. Stand behind that student and whisper what to do and say so they do not need to rely on their memory or self-management skills. (You may find this strategy helps other students as well. Role-playing is not easy for everyone.)

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Build Emotional Vocabulary in the Classroom!

Here are some easy brain breaks for small or large groups.

Simon Says “Feelings” Play “Simon Says” with the children giving feeling directions. Each person gets a turn to pull a Feeling from the bowl and give a feeling direction. For example, say: “*Simon says, look happy.*” In between commands, you can ask them questions about those feelings, such as “*What makes you feel happy?*”

The Kimochis® Hunt Hide the plush feelings around the room. Turn on some fun music and let the feeling hunt begin! When the music stops, sit in a circle so each person can take turns acting out the feelings they found.

I Spy Kimochis® Leave only one Feeling in the Kimochis® Bowl. This is the Feeling that you want everyone to observe in both themselves and others throughout the week. At the end of the week, sit in a circle and give everyone a chance to report back the feeling observations. “*I saw a man who was so mad at the grocery store.*” Allow everyone to ask questions and discuss what they admire about the way people managed upset feelings or created happy ones.

Kindness Matters Sit in a circle and pass the Kind Feeling pillow around and share:

Who is a person you admire for kindness?

What is something kind that was said or done for you today?

What was something kind you said or did today?

What kind deed have you done that you did not tell anyone about?

Have you ever received a kind act from an anonymous person?

Feeling Grateful Sit in a circle and pass the Grateful Feeling around and give each person a turn to share an appreciative moment. This is a great activity to kick off Thanksgiving celebrations.

Feeling Curious Sit in a circle and pass the Curious Feeling pillow around to help your class get to know each other better. Ask some of these fun questions:

What was the best time you ever had and why?

What are two things you really worry about?

How do you get over being sad?

What are your feelings about nature?

What do you want your life to be like?

Who do you admire?

Sorry After recess occasionally sit students in a circle with the Sorry Feeling in the middle. Invite anyone who feels regretful about an interaction with anyone in your class to do a public apology and/or take the time to find this student privately to apologize for words and action. Teach students that an apology with action is a valuable way to make things better. It means you not only say you’re sorry, but you do something to make things right again.

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Using the Kimochis® Feelings at Staff Meetings (and more ideas for Class Meetings)

Boost morale, and ultimately your school culture and climate, by periodically using your Kimochis® at staff meetings. Below are a few suggestions. It is usually most successful if the principal takes the first turn. Your bowl of Kimochis® Feelings can help your staff to:

- **Share gratitude:** Toss the Grateful Feeling to anyone who wishes to make an appreciation statement, *“I am grateful for...”*
- **Share pride:** Pass the Proud Feeling as a tool to invite teachers to share both personal and professional accomplishments. *“I feel proud that I...”*
- **Look forward to upcoming events:** Pass the Excited Feeling for teachers to share what is exciting them in their classroom or what they are looking forward to. *“I am excited for...”*
- **Share teachers’ wealth of knowledge and experience:** Pass the Hopeful Feeling as a tool for teachers to share concerns they have for a student who might be struggling. *“I am hoping for some ideas on how to...”*
- **Apologize and ask for a Kimochis® re-do:** Pass the Sorry Feeling around for teachers to have a safe, shame-free way to share regrets. *“I am sorry...”*
- **Pinpoint and problem-solve frustrations:** Pass the Frustrated Feeling to teachers who wish to describe a frustration. Move your faculty towards solutions by having each teacher who shares a frustration follow-up with what they want or need in order to help with frustration. *“I want... I need...”* If you can facilitate this teacher’s request, hopefully, things will get better quickly. If you can’t honor their request, share why you can’t while still acknowledging the teacher’s frustrations. Acknowledging upset feelings is as important as being able to come to an agreeable solution.
- **Provide an overall feeling check-in:** Toss the Feelings on the table and ask everyone to choose one that reflects how they feel at that moment. Allow those who wish to share a time to verbalize. *“I feel...”* Ask this teacher what they want or need. If you can make these adjustments, say so. If you can’t, explain why, while also acknowledging feelings.
- **Connect to the person in the teacher:** Pass the Happy Feeling as a way for teachers to share some of the happy experiences they are having outside of school. Learning that someone is going to become a grandma, has just become engaged, or is taking night classes helps your school community remember that everyone has an outside life that matters. Sharing our joys and sorrows helps to create a caring school culture and climate.

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Keys to Communication



Call someone's name, wait for eye contact, and give a communication tap, if necessary, before you speak.



Use a talking tone of voice instead of a fighting tone of voice.



Use a talking face and relaxed body language instead of a fighting face and tense body language.



Choose words that help instead of hurt.
("I feel mad because ..." instead of "I hate it when ...")



Be brave and redo hurtful moments.



Be kind and let people try again.



Assume the best.
("He probably isn't mad at me, maybe he is mad because he lost the game.")