

Teaching Guide



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INTRODUCTION

In early childhood settings, RULER (a) integrates into the existing routines and learning goals of the classroom, (b) is play-based, and (c) is aligned to the Connecticut Early Learning Development Standards (CT ELDS), Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) Social Justice Standards, and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISB) Early Elementary SEL Standards. We have chosen to use the Connecticut Early Learning Development Standards because the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence is located in Connecticut where many of our collaborators teach, and because they are similar to each state's Early Learning Standards and Guidelines. While both the ISBE and Learning for Justice standards begin in kindergarten, we have identified standards that are developmentally appropriate for pre-school students. All of our work is informed by NAEYC Program Standards and Head Start Performance Standards and designed to be relevant across settings.

Lessons and activities are flexible in terms of length, sequence, and content, and can be adapted to fit your setting.

RULER starts with leaders, educators, and their skills—it is important for leaders and educators to be trained in key aspects of RULER before they bring it to the classroom (i.e., RULER's "adults first" approach). When educators believe that emotions matter and that they are key in supporting students' social and emotional learning, they use their own social and emotional skills to create and set an emotionally supportive tone for learning. They are more attuned to students' emotional needs, and they are better equipped to guide students through transitions and manage the classroom because they are responsive and sensitive to students' emotions. Educators who *live by* RULER are better able to *teach* RULER.

RULER's **Feeling Words Curriculum Units** introduce new emotion knowledge to build students' emotional intelligence while RULER's **Core Routines** regularly reinforce and strengthen the skills of emotional intelligence as well as use of RULER **Tools**. The magic of learning happens in students' interactions with their peers, educators, and families, and especially as they navigate the emotions they experience throughout the school day. It is during these times that educators reinforce students' emotional intelligence through modeling the skills we want them to have and being responsive and sensitive to students' emotional needs.

CORE ROUTINES

To assist you in embedding RULER into your classroom and reinforce learning, the early childhood curriculum includes RULER's Core Routines. These are simple and adaptable practices that require minimal preparation or planning.

The Core Routines are the following:

- The Mood Meter Check-In
- The Breathing Break
- The Community Circle

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These Core Routines reinforce the skills of emotional intelligence not only through daily practice, but as a foundation for the RULER Tools. These are not lessons or units, but rather best practices that can be incorporated into classroom culture. When implemented regularly, these practices can enhance a culture of emotional safety at the classroom-level, and ideally, at the school-wide level.

FEELING WORDS CURRICULUM (UNITS)

The Early Childhood RULER curriculum includes 13 units; the first unit introduces students to the Mood Meter and is followed by 12 units that each focus on one feeling word. Each of RULER's 13 units has four steps: (1) Our Stories, (2) Creative Content Connection, (3) Family and Trusted Adult Connection, and (4) Strategy Session. Through these four steps, units are introduced to students over several weeks to build students' knowledge and skills over time.

Bringing RULER to your early childhood setting is a commitment to deepening your understanding of your own and your students' emotions. With RULER tools and strategies, you will have everything you need to integrate emotional intelligence into everyday routines and conversations.

As you begin the Feeling Words Curriculum, we recommend that you introduce the four primary Mood Meter words first (happy, sad, calm, and angry) through the introductory unit: *Meet the Mood Meter*. Introducing these words helps provide students with a strong foundation for using the Mood Meter and expressing their basic emotions. After introducing these words, you can change the order of the remaining feeling words in a way that best aligns with your classroom curriculum and the interests and needs of the students in your classroom.

ADAPTATIONS FOR THE FEELING WORDS CURRICULUM

- **Adapting for mixed-aged classrooms with returning children:** If you are teaching in a mixed-age classroom, we recommend repeating the feeling words each year so that students have an opportunity to revisit words and engage in conversations that grow with their developmental stage. You might notice older students serving as role models for younger students, as they talk about feelings that they have learned about before. If you decide to change the order of feeling words each year or introduce new feeling words, we recommend starting with the four primary Mood Meter words first (happy, sad, calm, and angry) and then introducing other words.
- **12-month programs versus 9-month programs:** The Feeling Words Curriculum might be implemented using a 9-month program schedule. If you work in a 12-month program, you might modify this schedule to spread feeling words out across the entire year by introducing one feeling word per month, for example.
- **Integrating the feeling words into emergent curriculum:** Storybooks and activity ideas are provided for each feeling word, but if you are using an emergent curriculum approach, you might choose to use your own storybooks and activity ideas.

RULER TOOLS

RULER for Early Childhood includes 13 units, all designed around Feeling Words and use of the Mood Meter. The Charter is introduced to students through the Feeling Words. The Blueprint is not an explicit part of the Early Childhood Curriculum.

THE MOOD METER

The Mood Meter is a tool designed to support educators and students to build self- and social awareness. The Mood Meter takes abstract emotion concepts and makes them concrete with color and feeling words. Storybooks, conversations, and activities introduce the core concepts of the Mood Meter by linking these concepts to experiences and existing knowledge. For instance, students learn about the two scientifically based qualities of emotion: energy and pleasantness, by considering how their bodies feel, faces look, and how voices sound in different situations. They learn strategies for regulating emotions by learning from their own experience and the experience of others. These concepts are reinforced during regular lessons, activities, and check-ins, and through teachers' modeling.

While learning about new feeling words and concepts through the Mood Meter, students begin to identify more concretely with how they want to feel (e.g., "I want to feel Yellow, Green, happy, proud, calm, etc."), which reinforces proactive emotion regulation, a primary focus of the Charter.

THE CHARTER

The early childhood classroom Charter includes the same questions as the staff Charter, as it represents (1) how everyone in the classroom wants to feel and (2) what everyone can do to help each other and themselves to have those feelings. Many emotions, such as happy, safe, and curious, offer a direct link to the behaviors that students and adults often want to have in the classroom. Charters, in the early years of RULER implementation, are often built over time as students learn about new feeling words and concepts. We encourage educators to treat the Charter as a living document and continue to update staff and classroom Charters as needed.

THE META-MOMENT

The Meta Moment is a valuable tool for educators to pause and identify their Best Self qualities in order to respond and not react to students' behaviors. Preschoolers are not yet ready to master all four steps of the Meta Moment. The Breathing Break Core Routine is a scaffold that familiarizes students with the first two steps of the Meta Moment (Sense, Pause). The concept of Best Self will be revisited by students in kindergarten and first grade. The Breathing Break helps students to recognize intense feelings, use breathing to de-escalate that feeling, and choose a helpful response to the situation. The Meta-Moment can be a critical-thinking strategy used to discuss how characters in stories de-escalate strong feelings and handle difficult situations.

THE STEPS

The Feeling Words Units use a four-step process to teach RULER skills as they relate to each feeling word.

STEP 1: OUR STORIES

Students learn about each feeling word through stories from their teacher's real life. Teachers use a series of questions to help students build connections to their own experiences with the same feeling. Through the sharing of stories, teachers and students begin to build a common understanding of each feeling word. Students also begin to learn emotion-related vocabulary through stories and questions that stimulate thinking about their personal experiences related to the meaning of the word.

Tips for a great story: Choose a meaningful, true story, liven it up with details, and keep it short (under 3 minutes). As you tell your story, remember to use face, body, and vocal cues and explain how the feeling felt in your body. Be sure to mention how you regulated the feeling. Did you want to feel more, less or continue to have that feeling?

STEP 2: CREATIVE CONTENT CONNECTION

Read-Alouds help students to learn about Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotions through storybook characters so that with practice, they can begin to apply those skills to themselves and others. Role-plays and extension activities help extend shared reading to other contexts. Here we provide suggestions for embedding RULER Read-Aloud Questions and RULER skills practice into shared reading to help make every read aloud a RULER Read-Aloud.

Students attain a deeper understanding of the Feeling Word by exploring that word through large and small group learning and center-based exploration. Students can then demonstrate and continue to develop this understanding through a creative representation, such as art, short story, music and movement, puppets or a dramatization.

We encourage educators to read the same story at least three times. The first reading allows the students to get familiar with the characters and setting. The second reading allows them to better understand the plot and the third offers students the opportunity to look more deeply into RULER Read-Aloud Questions. We will ask you to read the same book again during Step 4: The Strategy Session.

Allow students to ask questions as you read. Provide them with context and explanations as needed.

- Read a book that highlights different feelings and ask RULER Read-Aloud Questions. Use the questions that you find most appropriate.
- We have offered suggestions for a happy Read-Aloud and Read-Aloud Questions; however, please choose the book and questions that make the most sense to you.

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- Encourage students to practice facial expressions from the book!
- Use a felt board or pocket chart Mood Meter to move pictures of the book's characters as their feelings change within the story.

You will find a series of **Read-Aloud Resources** to support you on the RULER Online platform (*located within Resources -> Early Childhood*). These include:

- Choosing a RULER Story Book
- RULER Read Aloud Questions
- Ten Tips for Story Time
- Supporting Dual Language Learners

STEP 3: FAMILY AND TRUSTED ADULT CONNECTION

Social and emotional development begins at home. Family engagement is a core component of the RULER and the Feeling Words Curriculum. For each unit, letters and extension activities are provided to share with families about each feeling word for continued engagement with this curriculum at home. During circle time or class group time, begin to invite students to share what they have learned from their families. Keep the sharing time brief: no more than three student stories each time. In this step, students share their learning about the feeling word with a trusted adult or older friend, and we ask that adults share their experience with that feeling with the student.

The School-Home Partnership Worksheet (located on the last page of each unit) provides an introduction with a definition of the feeling word that is being used in the classroom along with some talking points that may be helpful when exploring and engaging with this feeling word at home. Next, the worksheet instructs adults at home to share a story of a time when they felt the feeling word. Last, a family activity is detailed and may be completed at home.

Please allow time (a week, perhaps) for families to hold these conversations with their children. Be mindful that some families may not be able to have these conversations over the course of the unit and encourage students to speak with other adults at school.

Provide students with an opportunity to draw or write their family stories; this may be during Learning Center time. We offer multiple other resources on the RULER Online platform for families to support what students learn in school by sharing the tools, strategies and language being used in the classroom.

STEP 4: STRATEGY SESSION

Students think together about what kind of emotional regulation goal they would choose for a certain feeling: Is this a feeling they like to have, or don't like to have? Is it a feeling they want more, less, or the same amount of? Then, they brainstorm different ways to meet those goals and have an opportunity to practice their strategies! The goal is for students to hear from educators, classmates, and families to develop a range of strategies that they can use and help others to use for responding to various emotions.

CLOSING

The closing of each Unit typically requires educators to write down students' reflections on large paper. The reflections focus on the skills and concepts that were taught and ask students how these skills can or should be applied in their own lives or their communities. Closing reflections typically take between 5-10 minutes.

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