



SAFE-BRAVE SPACES FOR STUDENTS.

The world can be a scary place and without safe-brave spaces that support children, the damage can be hard to reverse. Schools and educators can adopt practices that promote healing, affective growth and support the healthy, positive development of children.

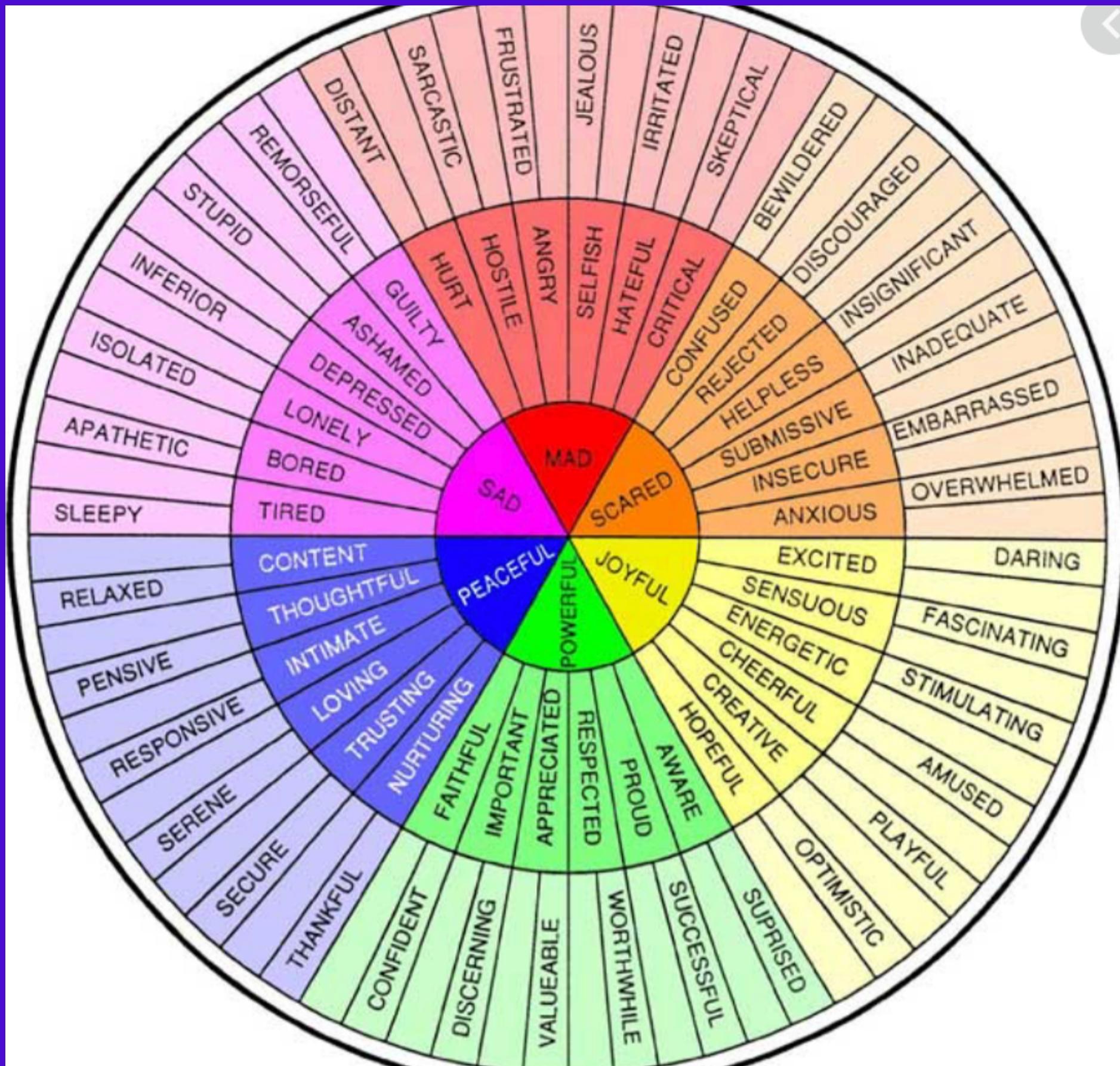
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Last year was hard for our students, families, and communities. A global pandemic, violence, terror, injustice, and unrest have become the norm and the cause of significant stress in the lives of many.

While educators are experiencing the same stressors as the rest of the country, we are also charged with supporting the development of young people. With winter break behind us and a New Year in front of us, we began with high hopes. Then January 6, 2021, reminded us there is a lot of work to do.

A Facebook discussion with a colleague reminded me that we can all use a go-to tool for difficult situations that challenge our sense of wellbeing. A mini-guide for supporting students after an emotionally challenging event.

I hope you find the ideas in this guide useful. They are easy to implement, but meaningful, supporting safe-brave spaces for students to process their experiences.



Reflect & Explore Feelings

We spend a lot of time teaching about thinking, but not feeling. After an emotional experience or stressful event, it is important to make time to reflect on and explore our feelings before we have discussions with students.

This prepares you to focus on your students and use emotional objectivity when listening to them when they share their feelings.

- Create a safe space by explaining that after emotional experiences it's common for people to have multiple feelings and all feelings are welcome.
- Encourage the use of affective statements, "I feel... followed by a feeling word, then an explanation."

This is a favorite tool of mine and I keep it handy on my phone to share during discussions with students, friends, and family.

Restorative Questions

To respond to challenging behavior...

- **What happened?**
- **What were you thinking at the time?**
- **What have you thought about since?**
- **Who has been affected by what ~~you have done~~?**
 - **In what way?**
- **What do you think you need to do to make things right?**



happened

To help those harmed by other's actions...

- **What did you think when you realized what had happened?**
- **What impact has this incident had on you and others?**
- **What has been the hardest thing for you?**
- **What do you think needs to happen to make things right?**

Restoring Community

Restorative Practices is an emerging social science, it emphasizes the use of restorative questions as a tool for restoring community following harm/conflict. These questions can be revised and used for the experience being discussed. The end goal of this questioning process is agreement on how to right wrongs and restore community.

- Tell your students that their thoughts and feelings are important and it is also important to work to understand the feelings of others. Using Restorative questions can help students better understand the way different people experience the same event.
- Create a brave space by allowing students to work in small groups to think about who has been harmed, the impact of the behavior or experience, and ideas for restoring community.



Social Problem Solving

Social Problem Solving is a tool for thinking and decision making that can be used to solve problems in social situations. There are six tools that can be learned and practiced by students when discussing emotionally charged events. Introduce these thought processes throughout the school year, so students are prepared to use them to engage in community-building dialogue when difficult times arise.

Alternative Solution Thinking: Generating as many solutions as possible to a particular problem.

Consequential Thinking: Practice linking actions to consequences, and explore the role of impact, separate from intention.

Means-End Thinking: Reflection on how and why an event causes the next event. Explore the role of obstacles in goal attainment.

Interpersonal Sensitivity: Increase awareness and sensitivity to the negative or positive impact behavior & actions have on others.

Perspective Taking: Acknowledge and explore different reactions and opinions to understand different responses to emotional experiences.

Too often Social-Emotional and Affective learning are viewed as add-ons to the academic curriculum. Given the documented increase in mental health needs for children, it is critical to child development that emotional coping skills, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and tools for wellbeing be included as a meaningful component of every instructional program. All of the strategies shared in this mini-guide can be embedded directly into classroom instruction and satisfy academic standards.



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