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## The Emotion Experiment

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### **Purpose:**

To show how a child's emotions are influenced by events in their life and to show children how they can cope with their emotions and the event.

### **Materials Needed:**

Baking Soda  
Vinegar  
Food Coloring  
Disposable Kitchen Cups  
2 Measuring Spoons (1 teaspoon and 1/4 teaspoon)  
Large Bowl  
Paper Towels  
Trash container of some kind

### **Procedures:**

Explain the components of the Experiment and what they represent:

Disposable Kitchen Cups (5 ounce size)-You  
Vinegar-Emotion (with food coloring)  
    Red-Mad/Anger  
    Blue-Sad  
    Yellow-Happy  
    Green-Can represent any other emotion (e.g. jealousy, disgust, fear, etc.)  
Baking Soda-Event  
Large bowl to catch the excess liquid

The client chooses a cup to represent themselves.

Method 1: To Show a Maladaptive Way of Coping with an Emotion:

Fill the cup halfway with vinegar.

Add 3-4 drops of food coloring and swirl it around to fully color the liquid.

Ask the client to assign an event to the baking soda.

Add 1 teaspoon of baking soda and watch the mixture overflow out of the cup.

**Method 2: To Show a Positive Way of Coping with an Emotion:**

Fill the cup a little less than 1/4 full with vinegar.

Add 1-2 drops of food coloring to the cup and swirl it around to fully color the liquid.

Ask the client to assign an event to the baking soda.

Add 1/4 teaspoon of baking soda and watch the mixture come to the top of the cup without overflowing.

**Method 3: To Show How Two (or more) Emotions Interact with Each Other:**

Combine colors, such as red and blue (mad and sad) to make purple, to show how emotions are connected.

To make the mixture overflow, fill the cup halfway with vinegar and add 1 teaspoon baking soda after coloring the liquid.

To make the mixture bubble up but not overflow, fill the cup 1/4 full with vinegar and add 1/4 teaspoon baking soda after coloring the liquid.

### **Process Questions and Follow-Up:**

Have you ever felt so much emotion that it felt like you were going to explode like the liquid overflowing out of the cup?

Have you ever been mad but could handle the anger before it turned into a tantrum or outburst? How were you able to prevent your anger from turning into this outburst/tantrum?

When have you felt two emotions at the same time? Were these emotions strong like the liquid overflowing out of the cup, or did your emotions stay under control like the liquid that stayed in the cup?

We usually think of strong emotions like anger that can make us feel like we are going to explode. What about happiness or sadness? When would people experience so much happiness or sadness that they felt like they would explode?

**Theoretical Rationale and/or Research Base:**

This activity is grounded in a hands-on, play therapy technique that incorporates elements of CBT and REBT. Children are able to be interactive with the activity and apply coping skills to real or fictional situations. Based on the stories the children tell to accompany the experiment, they learn how their emotions impact their behaviors and thoughts. They are then able to experiment with different ideas and learn how they can implement coping/calming skills in a variety of situations.

**Limitations:**

This experiment is not intended to be used with children under 8 years of age. Also, children who are interested in science or experiments may be able to better understand the experiment. Unless the therapist is bilingual and can effectively translate the material into the child's first language, these children may experience difficulty understanding the concepts due to language barriers and the use of metaphors. Lastly, this experiment is best performed in a large, open space so the child can move around freely to look at the experiment from different angles.

**Practice Settings:**

- ☐ College Counseling
- ☐ Counselor Education and Supervision
- ☒ Mental Health Agency/Private Practice Counseling
- ☐ Rehabilitation Counseling
- ☐ School Counseling