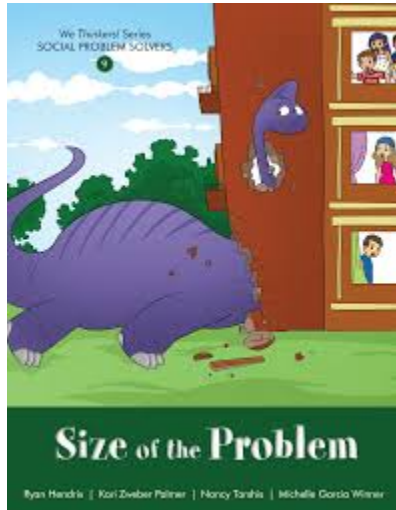


Social Thinking Concept 9: Size of the Problem



Why do We Teach this Concept?

To help our students become better problem solvers in the moment. We teach children to self-regulate and come up with logical solutions to their problems by identifying:

- 1) size of the problem
- 2) size of the feelings
- 3) that our reactions come from feelings
- 4) that our reaction size needs to match the size of the problem

Materials:

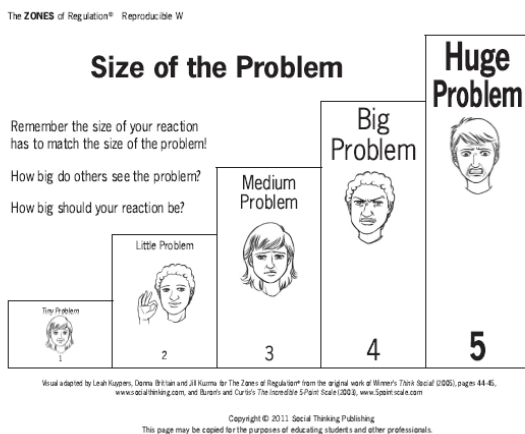
- Book 9: Size of the Problem and Unit 9 Plan
- Family Letter and At Home Activities
- Optional Music Activity: Music CD Track 10 Size of the Problem
- Previous Social Thinking concepts, such as expected/unexpected, and flexible thinking
- Visuals: Google is your friend! There are many resources when you Google “Size of the Problem” and “Zones of Regulation”

Activities:

- Read Book 9 Size of the Problem
 - See Unit Plan handout for ideas to discuss at each “stop and notice” icon.
- Brainstorm as a class:
 1. Discuss some common classroom scenarios and the size of typical classroom problems. Sort problems into sizes:
 - **Small problems** - can be taken care of quickly in a few minutes and can be solved by the student alone or with the help of another person
 - **Medium problems** - can take more time (minutes to hours) to solve and require help (usually adults help kids solve medium problems)
 - **Big problems** - take a long time (days, weeks, months) to take care of and many people to help (even adults need help from other adults)
 2. Generate solutions to the problems you have brainstormed (e.g. asking for a break, asking for help, being flexible).
 3. Role play and demonstrate different reactions to different problems. You might be surprised by how your students overestimate what the size of the problem is and what reaction they should have! Show how other people might feel uncomfortable when you have a reaction that is too big or too small for the problem size.

- Deliberately mismatch your reaction size to problem size during a lesson to demonstrate how uncomfortable people feel when the size of your reaction does not match the size of your problem (e.g. during book reading, drop the book then stomp your feet/pout. Ask the students immediately how this made them feel and what they were thinking.)
- Deliberately make mistakes during lessons so students can see you problem solving appropriately and can know that it is normal to have many problems during a day (“oops, I forgot.... Hmm, I can [solve it]”).

This is a good point of connection for the Zones of Regulation curriculum by Leah M. Kuypers: <http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>.



Size of the problem and size of the reaction tie in well with the Zones of Regulation.

Understanding size of their feelings will help students regulate the size of their reaction.

We expect different reaction sizes as we move between Zones or intensities of feeling (e.g. “nervous-scared-terrified” and “uncomfortable-upset-furious” increase in intensity from the yellow to red zones).

Language to Reinforce the Concept

After teaching the concept, use these words in everyday activities:

- Small problem, medium problem, big problem
- Specific words to describe different reactions (“you are folding your arms and stomping your feet and talking loudly. That is a medium reaction”)
- Specific labelling of feelings (e.g. “you are feeling nervous” and avoid the temptation to just say “you are Yellow”)

Teachable Moments

- Highlight the size of the problem during naturally occurring moments when you may encounter a problem at school. Think out loud about your own problem so the students can hear their teacher’s thought process:
 - “I really wanted to wear my green shirt today, but I spilled yogurt on it. I was disappointed and I thought about washing it but I didn’t have time so I just changed my shirt - small problem, oh well.”
 - “Oh no, we’re going outside and I forgot my rubber boots. I still want to go outside. That’s a small problem and I won’t get upset. I can go outside and stay under the covered area”

Social Thinking® concepts are introduced to early learners ages 4-7 through the Social Thinking curriculum, We Thinkers! Volumes 1 and 2, written by Ryan Hendrix, Kari Palmer, Nancy Tarshis, and Michelle Garcia Winner. (www.socialthinking.com)

- Frontload times when your students may need to deal with a problem:
 - *“We’re going to do a craft. I have different coloured papers. Now everyone is going to get a different colour and you might not get the colour you want. That’s a small problem and we can fix it quickly. Maybe you can trade with a friend or you can be flexible and use the colour you get...”*
 - *“We have the school performance tomorrow. I’m really excited and I want to go over what might happen if you forget your lines. You might feel very panicked, but that is a medium problem because it won’t take too long to solve and....”*
 - *“Okay guys, today we are going to finish our drawings. Are they supposed to be perfect? No! If the picture you draw doesn’t look exactly like the picture in your head, is it a big problem? No. So what size reaction will you be showing if the drawing isn’t exactly how you imagined it?”*
 - *“We are going to play the same game today as yesterday. What can you think to yourself if you lose? You could think “it’s just a small problem, I can stay calm if I lose my turn”.”*

- Highlight times when your student has a problem and help them think through it:
 - *“Hey, great job! I know you wanted to keep building when it was time to go to music. I am impressed with your flexible thinking and keeping the problem small”*
 - *“Louisa, I know you like sitting in the red chair but Will is sitting there. Let’s think about the size of this problem, you can solve it your own and sit in the blue chair. What size is it? ... that’s right it’s a small problem. Now we can start the game.”*
 - *“Oops, Bobby knocked over the tower. How long will it take for him to put it back together? Not very long, it’s a small problem”.*

- During book reading, ask students to make a smart guess about the size of the problem and the size of the character’s reaction. This can be done with most books, but try:
 - Pete the Cat - James Dean
 - Stuck - Oliver Jeffers