

Understanding the Constructed Theory of Emotion

Lisa Feldman Barrett's Constructed Theory of Emotion emphasizes that: Emotions are constructed: They don't happen to us but are built by our brain using past experiences, predictions, and current context.

- Body budget matters: Our physical state influences how we experience and respond to emotions.
- Emotion vocabulary expands understanding: Knowing precise emotional terms allows students to differentiate between feelings and respond effectively.

Why it matters for Character Development:

The Constructed Theory of Emotion aligns perfectly with Character Development goals by teaching students to:

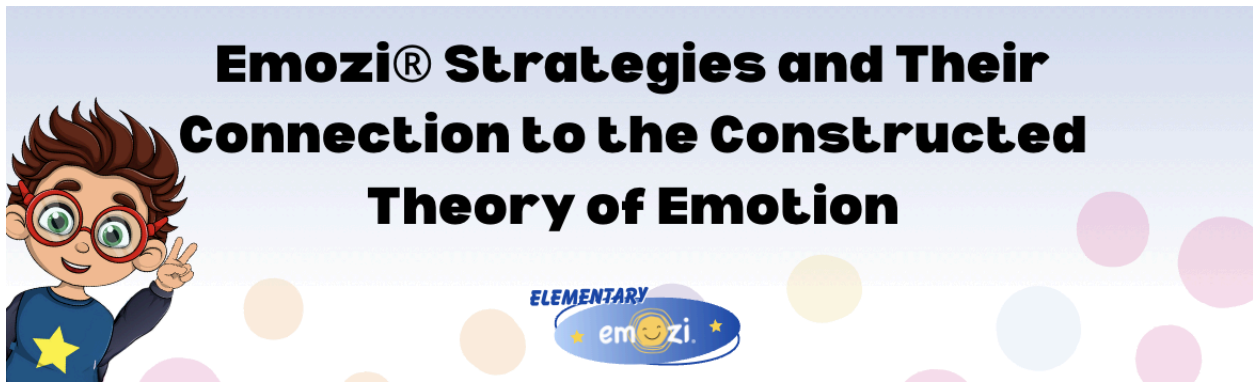
- Recognize and name emotions accurately.
- Understand how their body and brain collaborate to create emotional experiences.
- Learn strategies to regulate their emotional responses and make thoughtful decisions.

1. The S.T.A.R. Strategy

Steps: Stop, Think, Act, Reflect

Application of the Theory:

- Stop: Helps students interrupt automatic emotional responses, giving their brain a moment to recalibrate predictions.
- Think: Encourages reflection on their body's signals (e.g., increased heart rate) and the context of their emotions, reinforcing awareness of constructed experiences.
- Act: Enables thoughtful decisions by selecting responses aligned with their goals, instead of reacting impulsively to predictions.



- Reflect: Builds a cycle of learning, helping students analyze how their actions impacted the situation and refine their emotional predictions for the future.

Classroom Application Example:

During a disagreement, students can pause (Stop), analyze their emotions (Think), choose a respectful response (Act), and later evaluate the outcome (Reflect).

2. You're a Star Strategy

Focus: Positive self-talk, recognizing strengths, and celebrating progress

Application of the Theory:

- Constructing Positive Emotions: By focusing on personal achievements and strengths, students construct feelings of pride and confidence.
- Reinforcing Predictions: Positive self-talk helps the brain predict success in challenging situations, reducing stress and anxiety.
- Celebrating Progress: Recognizing small wins encourages the brain to associate effort with positive outcomes, fostering motivation.

Classroom Application Example:

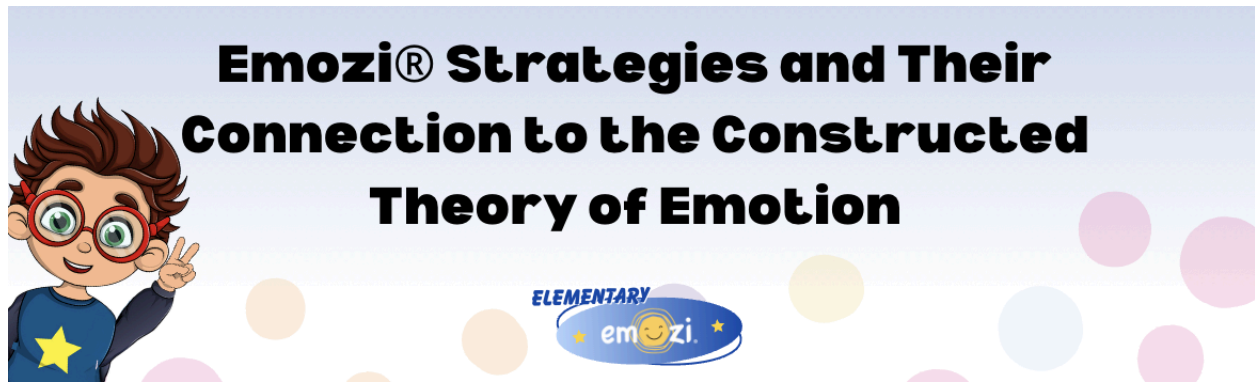
Students write "You're a Star" cards highlighting a peer's strength or effort. This activity reinforces their emotional awareness of gratitude and positivity.

3. Body Budget Awareness

Focus: Physical well-being as a foundation for emotional regulation

Application of the Theory:

- Physical State Drives Emotions: Teaching students to notice hunger, fatigue, or tension helps them link physical states to emotional experiences.



- Proactive Regulation: Encourages actions like drinking water, taking deep breaths, or getting enough sleep to maintain a balanced body budget, preventing emotional overwhelm.

Classroom Application Example:

Incorporate short breaks for movement or mindfulness to help students recharge their body budgets during the day.

4. Expanding Emotional Vocabulary

Focus: Teaching precise emotion words and their meanings

Application of the Theory:

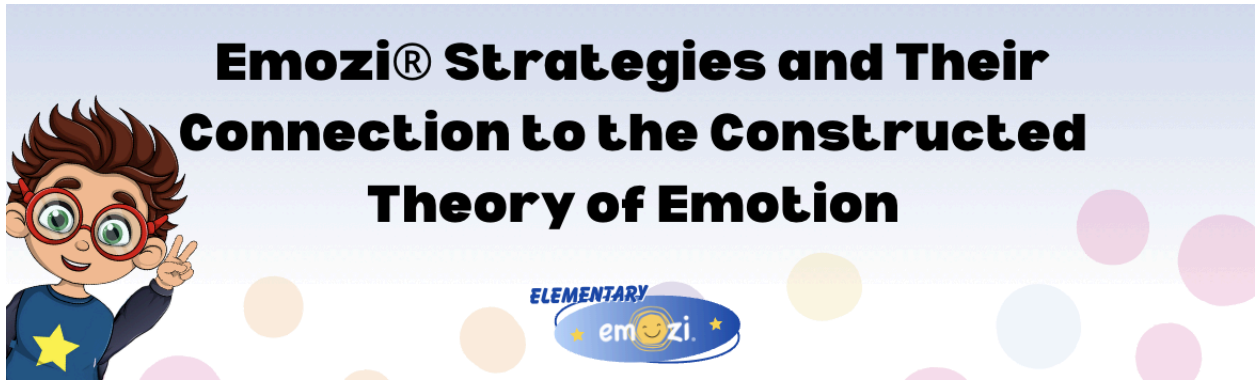
- Granular Labels: Specific emotion words (e.g., frustration vs. disappointment) help students distinguish subtle emotional differences, enhancing self-awareness.
- Refining Predictions: A larger emotional vocabulary allows the brain to make more accurate predictions about experiences, reducing emotional intensity and impulsivity.

Classroom Application Example:

Introduce emotion journaling, where students write about their feelings using a wide range of emotion words. Discuss scenarios from Emozi® stories to expand their vocabulary.

Key Takeaways for Teachers

- Emotions are dynamic and constructed: Character Development strategies help students build healthier predictions and responses.
- Body and brain work together: Physical well-being is crucial for emotional regulation.
- Precision matters: A rich emotional vocabulary empowers students to navigate emotions more effectively.
- Use Character Development tools regularly: Integrating strategies like S.T.A.R. and You're a Star strengthens students' emotional intelligence and decision-making.



Resources

- Recommended Activities: Emotion journaling, "You're a Star" cards, guided S.T.A.R. reflections, and body budget check-ins.
- Supporting Emozi® Stories: Use high-interest stories from the curriculum to illustrate how emotions are constructed and managed in real-life scenarios.

Encourage your students to see emotions not as fixed reactions but as experiences they can understand, manage, and grow from with practice and awareness.