

Understanding Our Emotional Triggers

Lesson Objective:

- Students will identify emotional triggers and understand how their brains predict emotional responses based on past experiences.
- Students will learn to use the S.T.A.R. strategy (Stop, Think, Act, Reflect) to manage their emotional triggers.
- Students will engage in group discussions, do an activity, and reflect on their emotions and responses.

Materials Needed:



- Copy of Chapter 6: Understanding Our Emotional Triggers
- Paper and pencils
- S.T.A.R. Strategy Poster
- S.T.A.R. Decision-making Worksheet
- Home Connection Letter

Introduction to the Topic (10 minutes)

Greeting Outline:

- Welcome the children and have them sit in a circle (if applicable)
- Briefly discuss our emotions and why we have them.

Greeting and Circle Time Teacher Script

1. Warm Welcome and Opening Discussion:

- "Today, we're going to talk about something very important—our emotions and what triggers them. Have you ever found yourself getting upset or frustrated and wondered why you felt that way? Our emotions often follow patterns, and those patterns can be linked to something we call 'triggers.' A trigger is something that causes us to feel strong emotions. For example, you might feel really upset when you think you're running out of time to finish a project, or you might get frustrated if you make a mistake in a game."
- Wait for the children to settle.



2. Discussion Starter

- "Has anyone ever noticed feeling triggered by something? Maybe when things don't go as planned, or when you're nervous about something new?"
(Encourage a few students to share their experiences.)

Read the Chapter (15 minutes)

Story Time Outline:



- Read chapter 6 aloud.
- Ask questions during key parts in the story.

Story Time Teacher Script:

1. Prepare the Children for the Story:

- "Now, we're going to read *Chapter 6: Understanding Our Emotional Triggers* from *The Star Squad: Navigating Fifth Grade Adventures.* Let's see how Ollie, Harriet, Buzz, and their friends handle their emotional triggers and what they learn about managing their feelings."
- (Read the chapter aloud, pausing at key moments to ask questions and engage the children.)

2. Read the Chapter with Emphasis on Key Moments:

- **While reading**, pause during key moments.
- **Ask Questions:**
 - Why does Ollie feel anxious when deadlines approach?
 - What triggers Harriet's frustration in soccer games?
 - How does Buzz feel when his projects don't go perfectly?
 - What causes Sammy to feel stressed when plans change?
 - Why does Maya feel nervous in new situations?
 - What does Benny notice about how noise affects him?
 - What does Mr. Jenkins say about how our brains predict what might happen?
 - How does Harriet use the S.T.A.R. strategy during soccer?
 - How does Ollie manage his stress when deadlines get close?
 - How does Buzz use the S.T.A.R. strategy in art class?

Chapter 6: Understanding Our Emotional Triggers

It was mid-November, and as the leaves continued to fall, the fifth graders were preparing for a big class project. Mr. Jenkins had assigned a group task that required each student to present a part of their research on a topic they had chosen. The idea of presenting in front of the class made some students excited, while others felt nervous, even overwhelmed.

During one of their group discussions, Mr. Jenkins introduced the class to the idea of recognizing emotional patterns. “Today, we’re going to talk about emotional triggers,” he said. “A trigger is something that causes a strong emotional reaction. By learning to recognize patterns in our emotional responses, we can understand why we react the way we do.”

He continued, “Our brains are always predicting what’s going to happen next based on our past experiences. Sometimes, these predictions can cause us to feel a certain way before we even realize why. If we can identify our triggers, we can better manage our responses.”

The friends listened closely, intrigued by the idea that their emotional reactions might be linked to patterns and predictions their brains were making.

Identifying Triggers

After class, the group gathered under their favorite tree to discuss what they had learned. Ollie, who liked to understand how things worked, was eager to start figuring out his emotional patterns.

“I think my biggest trigger is when I feel like I’m running out of time,” he admitted. “Whenever a deadline gets close, I start to feel really anxious.”

Harriet, who always seemed confident, confessed, “I get really frustrated when things don’t go perfectly, especially during soccer. If I miss a goal, I get upset, and it throws off the rest of the game.”

Buzz nodded, adding, “I feel discouraged when I can’t figure out how to make something work the way I imagined it. It’s like my brain is expecting things to be perfect, and when they aren’t, I get frustrated.”

Sammy, always in tune with his emotions, spoke up. “I think my trigger is when plans change suddenly. When I’m not prepared for something, I get really stressed.”

Betty thought for a moment. “For me, it’s when I don’t understand something in class right away. I feel embarrassed, like I should get it the first time.”

Maya, who was still adjusting to her new school, shared, “I get nervous when I don’t know what to expect, especially in new situations. It’s like my brain is predicting that something will go wrong because I’m not familiar with what’s happening.”

Benny, steady and calm as always, said, “I notice I get uncomfortable when there’s a lot of noise or chaos. It’s hard for me to focus.”



Understanding the Brain's Predictions

As the group reflected on their triggers, Mr. Jenkins' words about the brain's predictions started to make sense. They realized that their emotional responses were often linked to what their brains were expecting to happen, based on past experiences.

"When I feel like I'm running out of time, my brain is predicting that I'm not going to finish my work," Ollie said. "So I start feeling anxious, even if I'm not actually behind."

Harriet nodded. "And when I get frustrated during soccer, it's because my brain is expecting me to play perfectly. If I miss a goal, it's like my brain thinks I've already failed."

Buzz added, "I guess my brain predicts that things should go exactly as planned. When they don't, I get frustrated because it's not matching what I expected."

Sammy thought about how his brain reacted when plans changed. "My brain predicts that everything will go according to plan, so when it doesn't, I feel thrown off."

Using the S.T.A.R. Strategy to Manage Triggers

The friends decided to use the S.T.A.R. strategy to help manage their emotional triggers. The strategy—**Stop, Think, Act, Reflect**—would give them a way to slow down their reactions and consider what was really happening.

1. Stop: When they noticed themselves reacting to a trigger, they would pause and take a deep breath.
2. Think: They would remind themselves that their brain was making a prediction based on past experiences. They could then question whether the prediction was accurate or if it was causing them to overreact.
3. Act: They would choose a response that helped them manage their emotions, whether it was taking a break, using calming techniques, or finding a new way to look at the situation.
4. Reflect: After the situation was over, they would think about how they had handled it and what they could learn from the experience.

Putting It into Practice

The next day, Buzz found himself facing his usual frustration in art class. He had a picture in his mind of how his project should look, but it wasn't coming out the way he wanted. He could feel his frustration rising and remembered the S.T.A.R. strategy.

"Stop," he told himself, taking a deep breath. "My brain is predicting that this project should be perfect, but maybe that's not realistic."

Buzz then moved on to **Think**. "Just because it's not perfect doesn't mean it's not good. I'm still learning."



For ****Act**** He decided to take a break and then come back with fresh eyes.

Later, when he ****Reflected**** Buzz realized that recognizing his trigger had helped him stay calm. His brain's prediction had been strong, but he had managed to change his response.

The Group Learns Together

As the week went on, each friend faced their own triggers and practiced using the S.T.A.R. strategy.

Ollie, when feeling anxious about a deadline, reminded himself that his brain was predicting he wouldn't finish. He broke the work into smaller tasks to make it feel more manageable.

Harriet, when she missed a goal in soccer, used the S.T.A.R. strategy to remind herself that one mistake doesn't define her whole game. She focused on doing her best, rather than being perfect.

Sammy, when plans changed unexpectedly, took a deep breath and reminded himself that he could adapt, even if things didn't go exactly as planned.

Maya found that using the S.T.A.R. strategy helped her feel less nervous in new situations. She reminded herself that just because something was unfamiliar didn't mean it would go badly.

Betty used the strategy when she felt embarrassed about not understanding something right away. She told herself that learning took time and it was okay to ask for help.

Benny, when feeling overwhelmed by noise, took a break to find a quiet space where he could regain his focus.

Reflecting on Their Progress

At the end of the week, Mr. Jenkins asked the class to share their experiences with recognizing triggers and using the S.T.A.R. strategy. The friends realized that their emotions didn't just appear out of nowhere—they were often connected to what their brains were predicting would happen. By understanding these predictions, they could better manage their responses.

Harriet summed it up. "It's like our brains are telling us stories about what might happen, based on what's happened before. But we don't have to believe every story."

Ollie nodded. "And the S.T.A.R. strategy helps us take control of those stories. We can choose how to respond, even if our brain is predicting something that isn't true."

Mr. Jenkins smiled. "You've all made great progress in understanding your emotional patterns. Remember, emotions aren't something that just happens to you—they're something you can influence."

Moving Forward

The friends left school that day feeling more aware of their emotions than ever before. They knew that understanding their triggers and using strategies to manage their responses would help them not just in school, but in all aspects of their lives.



As they walked together, they felt more prepared to face whatever challenges lay ahead, knowing they had the tools to recognize their triggers, question their brain's predictions, and choose how they wanted to respond. And with every step, they were growing stronger, more self-aware, and ready for whatever came next.

3. Post-Chapter Teacher Script

- **Teacher:** “Well, I predict that we now understand our emotions a bit better.”

4. Post-Chapter Questions

These questions encourage children to think deeply about what they listened to, and how they can understand their emotions, how the brain uses prediction, and how the S.T.A.R Strategy can help..

- What is a trigger, and how does it affect our emotions?
- How can recognizing our triggers help us manage our emotions better?
- What does it mean when Mr. Jenkins says our brain is “predicting” emotions?
- How did Buzz’s brain predictions affect him in art class?
- How did Harriet handle her emotional trigger during soccer?
- What are some strategies the characters use to manage their emotions?
- How does the S.T.A.R. strategy help when you’re feeling upset or stressed?
- What might your brain be predicting if you’re feeling really anxious before a test?
- How can understanding your emotional triggers help you in other parts of your life, like sports or friendships?
- How can you use the S.T.A.R. strategy the next time you feel triggered by something?

Do an Activity (20 minutes)

- Students will reflect on their personal emotional triggers and practice using the S.T.A.R. strategy to manage them.



Activity: S.T.A.R. Decision-Making Worksheet (20 minutes)

1. Introduce Activity

- "Think about a time when you felt upset, frustrated, or nervous.

What caused those feelings? Now, let's use the S.T.A.R. strategy to walk through how you can manage those emotions next time."



2. S.T.A.R. Decision-Making Worksheet

- Pass out the ****S.T.A.R. Decision-Making Worksheet**** to each student.
- Ask them to think about a time they felt triggered by something. It could be anything—feeling nervous before a test, frustrated during a game, or upset when plans changed.

"Think about a time when you felt upset, frustrated, or nervous. What caused those feelings? Now, let's use the S.T.A.R. strategy to walk through how you can manage those emotions next time."

- - Guide them through the S.T.A.R. worksheet:
 1. Stop – What was the situation?
 2. Think – What was your brain predicting? Why were you feeling this way?
 3. Act – How did you respond, or how do you wish you had responded?
 4. Reflect – What did you learn from this experience? How can you manage your emotions next time?

3. Sharing

- After students complete the worksheet, invite a few students to share their reflections if they feel comfortable. Discuss how identifying triggers and using the S.T.A.R. strategy can help in different situations.



4. Wrapping it Up

- "You've all done a great job today, learning about emotional triggers and how to manage them using the S.T.A.R. strategy. Remember, emotions are a natural

part of life, but you don't have to let them control you. When you understand what's causing your feelings, you can make better decisions about how to handle them."

Wrap Up the Lesson (5 minutes)

1. Review and Reflection Overview:

- Review what they learned about emotions and triggers and how S.T.A.R. can help.
- Encourage students to share one key thing they learned today about emotions or triggers.

Review and Reflection Teacher Script



1. **Gather in a Circle for Reflection:**

- "Let's all come back together in a circle."
- "I'd like a few of us in the class to share some of the challenges you've faced, the emotional triggers that you felt, and how working through the S.T.A.R. Strategy can help."

2. **Closing**

- "Great job on exploring your emotional triggers and understanding where they come from - your brain's predictions."

Home Connection Letter

1. **Sending Information Home:**

- "Before you go, I have a letter for you to take home to your caregiver. It explains that we learned about emotional triggers and how to manage these emotional responses by using the S.T.A.R. Strategy."
- Hand out the letters as the children prepare to leave. "Great job, everyone! I'm so proud of how well you learned this new strategy."

Parent Letter

Sending Information Home:

- Provide each child with a letter to take home to their parents explaining the lesson.



Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Today, your child learned about emotional triggers and how to manage their emotional responses using a strategy called S.T.A.R. (Stop, Think, Act, Reflect). We discussed how different situations can cause strong emotions and how understanding these emotional patterns can help us make better decisions.

In class, we explored how our brains predict emotions based on past experiences, and your child practiced using the S.T.A.R. strategy to manage their feelings in challenging situations. This skill is valuable for both school and everyday life, as it teaches students to slow down, think about their emotions, and choose a thoughtful response.

We encourage you to ask your child about their emotional triggers and how they can use the S.T.A.R. strategy at home or in other situations where they feel upset or frustrated. Thank you for supporting their emotional growth!



Best regards,



S.T.A.R. Strategy



Stop -Take some deep breaths.

Think -What solutions are there?

Act -Pick the best solution.

Reflect -How did it go?



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S.T.A.R. Decision-Making Worksheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scenario:

S.T.A.R. Strategy

1. Stop

- What decision do you need to make?

Write down the decision you need to make.

2. Think

- What are the options?

List the choices you have.

Option 1: _____

Option 2: _____

(You can add more options if needed.)

- What are the short-term benefits of each option?

Think about how each choice would make you feel or benefit you right now.

Option 1 Short-Term Benefit: _____

Option 2 Short-Term Benefit: _____

- What are the long-term consequences of each option?

Think about how each choice might affect you in the future.

Option 1 Long-Term Consequence: _____

Option 2 Long-Term Consequence: _____

3. Act

- What will you do?

Based on your thinking, what action will you take?

I will choose: _____

Why? _____

4. Reflect

- How do you feel about your decision?

After making your decision, take a moment to reflect on how it makes you feel and how it might impact your future.

I feel: _____

Why? _____

