

1ST & 2ND CLASS

Parent Support Sheets – Lesson 4: Wise Owl

Lesson Summary:

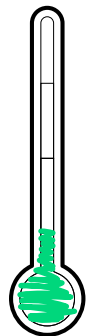
The aim of this lesson is to help children to understand their automatic physiological ‘Fight, Flight, Freeze’ response to threatening situations (see explanation you can share with your child below).

Children grow in understanding of the different ways humans respond when we feel scared or threatened, which results from our bodies producing stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Because we cannot access our rational brains when we feel threatened or unsafe, the children learn to call on their rational brain (or ‘Wise Owl’) to help them to calm down, so they can think more clearly to make a rational decision.

Try It At Home Activity: ‘Self-check-ometer’

In this ‘Try It At Home’ activity, your child is encouraged to look at the ‘Self-check-ometer’ with you. They colour in their ‘Self-check-ometer’ and read about what happens at each zone (i.e. green; yellow; orange; red). You could explore with your child how their body feels at each zone. This ‘Self-check-ometer’ encourages children to check in with themselves, name their feelings, grade them from green to red, and recognise not all feelings are equal.

For example, in the **green** zone, you are feeling good, have no fears at all, and can problem solve. In the **yellow** zone, you may be feeling worried and a slight loss of control. In the **orange** zone, you may be feeling quite anxious and you feel like you are about to lose control. Finally, in the **red** zone, you are overwhelmed by a big feeling (like fear) and you feel out of control: “I was so scared I was in the red zone, I had lost control and my body started to shake”, or “I’m in the yellow zone right now because I keep asking you to reassure me about the party. I should take a few deep breaths so I don’t go into the orange zone”.



Dr. Malie’s Top Tips:

- For the ‘Self-check-ometer’ activity, it is helpful for children to talk about feelings that might be felt at the green, yellow, orange, and red zones. For the green zone, children might say words like ‘relaxed’ or ‘zen’. If you feel comfortable, it can be worth explaining to your child that feelings like ‘excited’ can also exist in the yellow zone because being excited might mean a small loss of control also.
- Teaching children to rate the intensity of their feelings helps them to accurately judge the intensity of the feeling, to identify the current threat, and eventually choose an appropriate way to cope with the feeling. It is important to associate daily events with feeling intensity. This gives the child concrete reference points to associate with each level of intensity (e.g. “That loud noise put me in the red zone”).
- Here is more information on how to use the ‘Self-check-ometer’, which in this instance is called an ‘Anxiety Thermometer’, although it can be used with any feeling: <https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/2022/anxiety-thermometer.pdf>
- Within this lesson, children also learned how to support themselves when they enter the orange and red zones. One of the strategies that we practised in the lesson was “Shaking on Purpose”, which supports children to regulate their bodies by releasing built-up tension and adrenaline by shaking their bodies, which in turn helps to ground them, shift fearful thoughts and improve their sense of control. Try it together!

Fight, Flight, Freeze Explanation

Here's a good way for you and your child to understand the 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response ('Love in, Love out', Dr. Malie Coyne, Harper Collins Ireland, 2020):

Imagine you're allergic to wasps, and one flies straight into your bedroom through the window. What's the first thing you'd do? If you're feeling up to it, you might find something to kill it with or steer it back out of the window (that's 'fight'). You might run the heck out of the room to shout for help ('flight'). That would be me! Or you might stand totally still ('freeze') until the wasp flies away, because that's what your parent told you is the best thing to do.

The 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response is automatic – we do it without thinking. It's something we share with animals, and it makes us react immediately to danger without even thinking about it. When faced with a real or imaginary threat, we often feel like our power has been taken away from us. To get our power back, we react in one of these three ways:

- 1. Fight:** We might get angry, shout, or lash out. This is our way of controlling the threat.
- 2. Flight:** We might run away or avoid situations. This is our way of controlling what's around us.
- 3. Freeze:** We might go stiff and feel like our bodies can't move, or that we can't think clearly because our minds have gone blank. This is our way of controlling ourselves.

Resources:

To learn more about the 'Wise Owl' and what happens during the 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' response, check out the following helpful resources:

- This video explores 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' at an accessible level for children in 1st and 2nd class:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VQUOr-R3eA>
- A video on the 'Amygdala Hijack' from Irish author and teacher, Fiona Forman:
<https://vimeo.com/166080701>
- This article introduces the 'Guard Dog' and 'Wise Owl' which are helpful concepts:
<https://buildingbetterbrains.com.au/guard-dog-and-wise-owl/>
- HeySigmund.com by Susan Young has brilliant anxiety resources, like this piece:
<https://www.heyigmund.com/anxiety-in-children-anxiety-in-teens/>



Scan here for
'Try it at Home'
activities!