



“Expected and Unexpected Behavior”—a helpful concept included in recent classroom counseling lessons at AES

Robin Gregg, School Counselor

Several AES teachers and other staff members (as well as teachers in other schools in our district) have been teaching students a number of concepts from The Zones of Regulation curriculum. Written and created by Leah M. Kuypers, an Occupational Therapist, this curriculum contains lessons that help students identify their own emotional and sensory states, and equally important, provides students with strategies for developing emotional self-regulation. (Other terms for self-regulation include impulse control, self-control, and self-management. Among the many helpful ideas in the book is the distinction between **expected and unexpected behavior**.)

Expected Behaviors: Behaviors that result in other people feeling comfortable when they are around you. Expected behaviors reflect formal rules as well as informal, unwritten social “rules.” For example, some expected behaviors for being in control in the classroom and ready to learn include having a calm body, facing the teacher or other speaker, raising one’s hand to ask a question. Expected behaviors while playing with a small group of friends during recess include taking turns, including everyone, and respecting other people’s personal space.

Unexpected Behaviors: Behaviors that result in other people feeling uncomfortable when they are around you. For example, some unexpected behaviors in the classroom setting during a lesson include blurting out comments not connected to the lesson, getting up from one’s chair and running around the classroom, talking and laughing loudly. Unexpected behaviors while playing with a group of friends during recess might include refusing to take turns, bossing everyone around, and breaking the rules of the game.

Third and fourth graders at AES learned about expected and unexpected behaviors by discussing specific situations and routines that are common at school such as lining up to take turns at the water fountain; going on a walking field trip with the class; taking a computer test; arriving late to school following a medical appointment; noticing a younger student crying on the playground. Working in small groups, the students listed both expected and unexpected behaviors in a particular situation or routine. They shared their ideas about some possible unexpected behaviors and performed brief skits for the entire class illustrating the expected behaviors.

Learning and talking about unexpected and expected behaviors reminds students that other people notice our behaviors and notice whether or not we are following the rules (including the informal, social rules that help people get along with one another), and other people have good or uncomfortable feelings about us as a result.

Future classroom lessons based on and consistent with the Zones of Regulation will focus on the difference between big and little problems, and tools and strategies useful for emotional self-regulation.