



Using the Instructional Hierarchy in Learning to Feel Your Best Self

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In this brief, we explore application of the Instructional Hierarchy to learning emotion skills like those taught in Feel Your Best Self (FYBS). The Instructional Hierarchy offers a useful framework for showing how to vary instructional strategies based on stage of learning. When learning opportunities are put in place that match current skill levels, like beginning to acquire something new versus using established skills in new ways, it becomes easier to master skills. Just like academic skills, emotion skills can be learned and applied through life across situations. We use the Instructional Hierarchy to share examples that can promote use of FYBS strategies beyond an initial lesson.

What is Feel Your Best Self?

Feel Your Best Self (FYBS) is a toolkit that teaches 12 simple, emotion-focused coping strategies. Using effective coping strategies is an important life skill, and when used regularly, the FYBS strategies may promote emotional well-being. Although useful across life stages, the primary target in FYBS is elementary-aged children. Using FYBS, kids explore different strategies to find those that help them feel their best as they navigate different situations.

The FYBS toolkit includes multiple components: Feelings Forecast, short strategy videos with puppet friends, strategy step cards, discussion tip sheets, reflection sheets, and puppet-making options. Facilitator guidance is available for using the various components. Use of the toolkit is flexible – there is no need to implement a fully manualized program that includes every component, or even all the strategies. Users can choose the parts that work best for their target ages, settings, and contexts. For example, a classroom teacher might incorporate all of the components in their lesson plans, an afterschool setting might prioritize puppet-making along with the Feelings Forecast chart, or a family caregiver and child might select specific videos and strategy cards to use together.

The 12 strategies are demonstrated in fun videos that show 3 puppet kids as they help each other navigate everyday situations!

FYBS materials can be great for use in teaching. The scope of a lesson, for example, can include watching a strategy video, discussing the video and strategy steps, practicing the strategy, and reflecting on when and how to use it in your own life. But lessons alone may be insufficient for instilling independent use of these important life skills. This is where the instructional hierarchy can help!

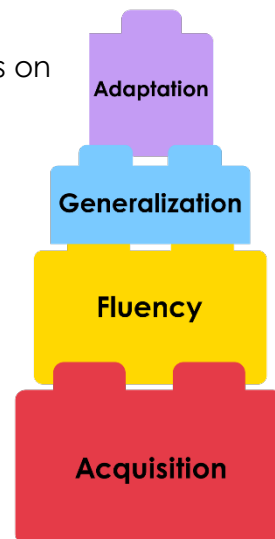
What is the Instructional Hierarchy?

The Instructional Hierarchy is a framework for conceptualizing stages of learning a new skill or concept.ⁱ Understanding a child's stage of learning can assist caregivers with quickly identifying effective ways to facilitate progression of skills. In other words, it helps match the what and the when for developing children's learning.ⁱⁱ It also can be useful in planning

forward to strengthen skills for the goal of independent use and adaptation across situations through life stages.

The Instructional Hierarchy framework includes four stages to learning: acquisition, fluency, generalization, and adaptation. Each stage builds on the prior one(s) and brings different characteristics to performance of the skill and instructional emphasis.

- **Acquisition.** This stage represents the beginning of learning a new skill. Performance is slow and often filled with many errors. Instructional focus is on modeling the skill and error correction.
- **Fluency.** This stage still represents learning a new skill, but performance is faster and less filled with errors. Mistakes still occur at times, but instructional focus shifts to opportunities to reinforce accuracy and speed.
- **Generalization.** In this stage, the skill has been learned and can be demonstrated with proficiency. Instructional focus moves to demonstration of the skill in new situations, like different settings from the initial instructional context.
- **Adaptation.** In this stage, the skill is fully developed and ready for adjustment to enable use across situations and settings. Flexibility to modify, extend, or integrate the skill to fit new contexts is the focus.



How can the Instructional Hierarchy promote FYBS learning?

When teaching FYBS strategies, instructional techniques can be matched to learning stage. Here are some examples as to what this can look like.

Acquisition

When first introducing a FYBS strategy, it is important to use explicit instruction to make sure that children have models as to what using the strategy should look like. In addition to modeling, instruction should include providing immediate feedback to let children know whether they are using the strategy accurately. Our [FYBS Facilitator Steps](#) offer a checklist to use during initial teaching of each strategy. Examples of instructional supports when acquiring skill in using the FYBS strategies include:

Strategy ⁱⁱ	Example
Demonstrate the strategy	Show children how to “Shake Out the Yuck” by demonstrating the strategy steps.
Use models and visuals	<p>Model using a strategy in real time. For example, if many students are off task during a lesson, consider pausing and saying: “I’m feeling frustrated that many of us are talking instead of listening. I’m going to try and Ground it Down to see if that helps calm me down to be ready for learning.”</p> <p>Post strategy cards around the classroom as a visual reminder to use strategies.</p>

Prompt use of a strategy	To help children understand the appropriate context for using a strategy, prompt use of a strategy. Prompting can include a verbal reminder (e.g., "It can be really frustrating when we struggle to solve a new math problem. Remember, you can take a belly breath to reset before trying again.") or a non-verbal reminder (e.g., pointing to a posted strategy card, using a hand motion to signal use of a strategy).
Provide performance feedback	When children practice a strategy, offer immediate corrective feedback when mistakes are made and praise for appropriate and accurate use.

Fluency

In the fluency stage, instructional emphasis shifts to opportunities to build proficiency. Explicit instruction is still useful when needed, but primary focus is on facilitating practice opportunities and providing performance feedback. Children have learned how to use FYBS strategies but are still developing proficiency. Examples of instructional supports to promote fluent use of FYBS strategies include:

Strategy	Example
Provide frequent opportunities for strategy practice in the classroom	Build in opportunities for strategy practice throughout the day. For example, pick a strategy of the week and review/practice during Morning Meeting, transitions between activities, and at the end of the day.
Provide performance feedback	When children practice a strategy, offer immediate corrective feedback when mistakes are made and praise for appropriate use.

Generalization

The generalization stage represents accurate and proficient use of FYBS strategies within the instructional context. For example, when faced with a challenging Math worksheet in the classroom, a child may recognize the need to use a strategy and accurately take a belly breath. However, they may still struggle with calling on and using strategies in other settings. If a child is left out of a game of tag at recess, for instance, they may start to feel upset and have difficulty selecting and using a FYBS strategy in the moment. Examples of instructional supports to facilitate generalization of FYBS strategies include:

Strategyⁱⁱⁱ	Example
Provide opportunities for strategy practice in new contexts	Encourage strategy practice across a variety of settings and contexts to promote generalization. For example,
Reinforce strategy use in new contexts	When children independently demonstrate a strategy in a context other than the classroom, provide verbal praise to acknowledge generalization. If other reinforcement systems (e.g., token economy, PBIS tickets) are in place, provide reinforcement using these modalities as well.
Post visual reminders across settings	Having strategy cards, pictures of the FYBS puppet kids, and other FYBS materials posted around the school

Post visual reminders across settings	building can serve as a stimulus to use a strategy in settings other than the classroom. Similarly, providing families with printed materials for use at home can promote strategy practice across settings.
Provide performance feedback	When children practice a strategy in new contexts, offer immediate corrective feedback when mistakes are made and praise for appropriate use.

Adaptation

In the adaptation stage, FYBS strategies can be demonstrated accurately and proficiently across settings. However, they may be rigid with respect to following strategy steps exactly. This is okay at first, but to promote lifelong use of FYBS strategies, flexible adaptations can be considered so that a strategy can continue to meet their needs regardless of the situation or developmental stage. For example, a child may be able to Shake Out the Yuck accurately using the steps listed on the strategy card across settings. But, the idea behind this strategy is simply to engage in physical movement to let go of heavy feelings. As children age, or in different settings, moving one's body around in a silly fashion might not be socially appropriate. However, engaging in physical activity—even just for a few minutes—can be a replacement that achieves a similar goal. Examples of instructional supports to facilitate adaptable and flexible use of FYBS strategies across situations throughout life include:

Strategy	Example
Model a variety of ways to adapt strategies	There are many ways beyond the examples shown in the videos that each strategy can be used. Brainstorm ideas for how to use each strategy as an adult, and then model adapted use in varied situations. For example, if class is interrupted by an unexpected fire drill, model “turning the dial” by saying something like: “The interruption to our day made me feel a little nervous and scattered, but if I turn my dial to look at the situation another way, we all get some extra time and fresh air outside!”
Have children continuously reflect on strategy use and applications	Using FYBS Reflection Sheets, children can continue to reflect on how using a strategy made them feel, and generate new ideas for when and how they might use that strategy in the future.
Provide performance feedback	When children practice a strategy in new contexts or adapt a strategy to meet their needs in the moment, offer immediate corrective feedback when mistakes are made and praise for appropriate use.

ⁱ Intervention Central. (n.d.). The instructional hierarchy: Linking stages of learning to effective instructional techniques. <https://www.interventioncentral.org/academic-interventions/general-academic/instructional-hierarchy-linking-stages-learning-effective-in>

ⁱⁱ Hanover Research. (2020). *Research brief: Matching interventions to student learning stages*. <https://wasa-oly.org/WASA/images/WASA/6.0%20Resources/Hanover/RESEARCH%20BRIEF---MATCHING%20INTERVENTIONS%20TO%20STUDENT%20LEARNING%20STAGES%20.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Strategies adapted from: Stokes, T. F., & Osnes, P. G. (1989). An operant pursuit of generalization. *Behavior Therapy*, 20(3), 337-355. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894\(89\)80054-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7894(89)80054-1)