

Children, just like adults, have emotions and experience stress. Unlike adults they may not understand these feelings or how to communicate them to others. Children's emotions often come out in the form of crying, tantrums, hitting, biting, yelling or screaming or running away. Other children internalize their emotions and we see stomach aches, headaches, anxiety, excessive sleepiness or an inability to sleep as much as needed.

As adults it is our responsibility to help children learn to understand and regulate their emotions. Emotional regulation does not mean stopping or controlling a child's feelings, but rather teaching them the purpose of their feelings, ways to express them and how to deal with these feelings in constructive ways.

Through grant from United of Way of Jefferson and North Walworth counties Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare has been able to construct an emotional regulation space (the Zen Den) where children can go to learn about and deal with their emotions in a positive way. The equipment in the room was recommended by child psychologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists and early childhood teachers with whom the preschool consulted.

The Zen Den is also used by the therapists from Fort Atkinson School District as an area where they can work with children who need occupational, physical, speech or early childhood services.

In conjunction with the Zen Den, Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare teaches Strong Start, a social and emotional curriculum designed for pre-K students. This curriculum teaches children about emotions, managing anger, reducing stress, solving interpersonal problems and more.

Research has found notable connections among social and emotional skills and academic success, behavioral health as well as social-emotional development in school and later in life. For example, based on a 2015 longitudinal follow-up study of 753 kindergarteners for 13 to 19 years, Pennsylvania State's Damon Jones and his colleagues found that participants' social-emotional skills in kindergarten were associated with their employment status, criminal activity, substance use and mental health when they grew into young adults. (<https://hechingerreport.org/opinion-many-teachers-see-social-emotional-learning-as-the-missing-link-in-student-success/>)

Fort Atkinson Preschool and Childcare is committed to helping children develop the social and emotional skills they will use for the rest of their lives and are proud to partner with United Way of Jefferson and North Walworth County to provide this space for our children and families.



