

# SPIILT MILK

THE IMPROV TOOL FOR HANDLING BIG FEELINGS!

Lesson Seven: Rights & Laws





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## Rights? Laws? Huh?

The places where we live - America, New Jersey, our town - all have different rules that we have to follow. Just like the rules at home, school, or work. These rules are called **laws** and they tell us how to behave and act in order to keep ourselves and the people who live around us safe.

Some laws tell us that we can't take something that's not ours.

They tell us that we can't put our hands on other people unless they say it's ok.

They tell us that no one can walk into our house unless we tell them they can.

**Rights** are freedoms that no one can take away from us. Like laws tell us what we can't do, rights tell us what we can do!

Some rights let us know that we can say what we believe!

They tell us that we can enter any public place we want.

They tell us that we can love whoever we love!

So, why do we need to know the laws and our rights?

Basically, so we can know what not to do (so we don't get into trouble) and what we are allowed to do (and no one can tell us we can't!).

It's also important to know the laws and our rights so we can figure out how to interact with others.

For instance, what if someone wanted to take someone else's wallet when they weren't looking? If we know the law, we'll know to say "NO" to stealing someone's wallet! It could get us into really, really big trouble!

But what if someone told us that we were not allowed to go hang out at the mall? Knowing our rights lets us know that we CAN go to the mall! ...We can even get a soft pretzel and new socks, if we want!





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So what are some of the most important rights and laws to know?

Glad you asked!

The most important laws to know are the ones that could get you in trouble with the police if you were to break those laws.

Here are some of the big ones:

- You cannot take anything that is not yours without asking (and getting a “yes!”)
- You cannot hurt another person’s body on purpose
- You cannot drink alcohol until you are 21 years old
- When you drive, you need a license, and you must be awake, aware, and not have taken any drugs or alcohol
- Private parts and behavior can only be shown and performed in private places
- You cannot scream and run around and upset everyone around you in a public place

Now, there are so many more laws than these, but this is a great place to start to keep yourself and others safe and happy!

And what about the big rights to know?

- You have the right to privacy - that means that others are not allowed to know our health information, listen to our phone calls, read our mail, or demand to know our private thoughts and feelings. And we are not allowed to make others tell us their private information!
- You have the right to home and family - that means you can love whoever it is that you love, and you are allowed to get married if you are over the age of 18 (although it’s always good to talk to a trusted adult with big decisions like that...).
- When questioned by the police, you have the right to have a lawyer or attorney with you, and the right to an interpreter or communication aids if you have hearing impairment.

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- You have the right to receive health care, education, and employment if you so choose.
- You have the right to participate in community events, voting and other political action, recreational activities (like, the fun stuff!), and to have the same protection from the police as everyone else.

That's a lot of rights!

So, how do we let others know our rights when they try to tell us that we don't have these rights? This is known as *self-advocacy*.

Self-advocacy is the ability to speak up for yourself, and to let others know what you need.

Have you ever been in an argument or faced someone who was giving you a hard time or making you feel bad? Did you look around for someone to stand beside you, to explain to the person why they are wrong, and to make sure you were safe and had what you need?

When people step in to make sure we are ok, that is known as "advocacy."

So, SELF-advocacy is when we, ourselves, make sure we are ok!

We tell people what we need.

We tell people when they are being unfair to us.

We let people know our rights (because WE know our rights!).

We make sure we are ok, because we are strong enough to make sure we are ok!

Learning about rights and laws helps us know what people can and can't tell us to do. And doing improv helps us work on our strong voice, communication skills, and confidence so we can be self-advocates!



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What happens if a police officer wants to talk to me about a law that I may have broken or a right they don't believe I have?

First, know that the police are here to keep us all safe!

They are on our side.

They don't want to hurt us.

Second, stay calm!

Most of the time, we're not even in trouble when the police want to speak with us.

They just want information.

Or to hear our story of what might have happened.

It's their job to get all the information they can!

(By now, we've learned plenty of calming techniques - interacting with the police is a great time to use one! Just make sure to let them know that you are overwhelmed and would like a moment to calm yourself down.)

Third, listen when they talk and speak slowly, calmly, and clearly when they are ready to listen!

Don't yell.

Don't interrupt.

Don't panic - you'll have your chance to speak!

Finally, use your knowledge of rights and laws!

If they say you are not allowed to be in the store, you can remind them that you have a right to be in the store if you want.

If they believe you took something that wasn't yours, calmly show them the receipt that says you actually paid for it before taking it from the store!

Knowing rights and laws helps us self-advocate, even with the police!





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What happens if a police officer wants to talk to me when I have broken the law or done something that I do not have the right to do?

Once again, remember to use a calming technique! Let them know that you need a moment to get calm (and if you are willing, let them know about your disability so they can know that you need to emotionally regulate), and if they say you can, do some breathing exercises, body scanning, or any other tool you like! Then you can remain calm, your voice won't get too loud, and you can relax.

If you can't take an extra minute or two to get calm, remember to breathe slowly. Release the air from your lungs like you are gently blowing through a straw. Even this little change will help you stay calm.

Ask for an advocate:

Yes, you are an awesome self-advocate, but it's always good to have a trusted adult with you to help make sure you can communicate the way you need to. Your trusted adult should be someone who is over 18 years old and makes you feel safe!

You have the **RIGHT** to have an advocate come be with you whenever you have interaction with the police. It's important to know that and to tell them you know that!

You also have the right to say nothing at all - staying silent - if they ask you questions. Just first let them know that you are exercising your right! Then, stay quiet and wait for your advocate!

Finally, remember what you learned about laws.

If the law enforcement officer wants you to come to the police station, make sure you get a trusted adult to come and be with you. You should not say anything until you have that trusted person with you.

It is your **RIGHT** to have a lawyer (someone who knows the laws better than anyone!) with you when you talk to the police at the station, so do that!





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## Discussion questions and exercises:

1. Think of the following rights: privacy, home and family, participating in the community and leisure/sports, healthcare.
  - a. Have you ever felt one of your rights was violated? Which one? How?
  - b. How can we respond when someone is trying to deny us our rights? What are some things we can say? How should we say it? (Think back to Lesson 3, Communication, for ideas!)

*get up*  
**ON YOUR FEET**

Invite two volunteers to stand. Volunteer One will pretend to be in a store and Volunteer Two will approach them as another shopper. Volunteer Two will try to tell Volunteer One that they don't have the right to do something (think of the rights listed above! Don't have the right to have a child? Don't have the right to vote?). Volunteer One will have to use their best communication skills to inform Volunteer Two that they do, in fact, have the right! Discuss!

2. Choose one law to think about: stealing, touching hurting other people's bodies without permission, drinking alcohol under the age of 21, driving without a license, or screaming and making a "scene" in a public place.
  - a. Why do you think we have that law?
  - b. How would you feel if someone you knew broke that law?
  - c. How can you avoid breaking that law?

*get up*  
**ON YOUR FEET**

Invite two volunteers to stand. Volunteer One will pretend to be in a store and Volunteer Two will approach them as a police officer. They will want to talk about a crime they believe happened. Volunteer One will ask to get calm, use the calming technique, and then talk, deciding when to stop and ask for an advocate.

**BONUS:** Have Volunteer Two play with tone, attitude, and either agreeing to the calming technique/advocate or not.



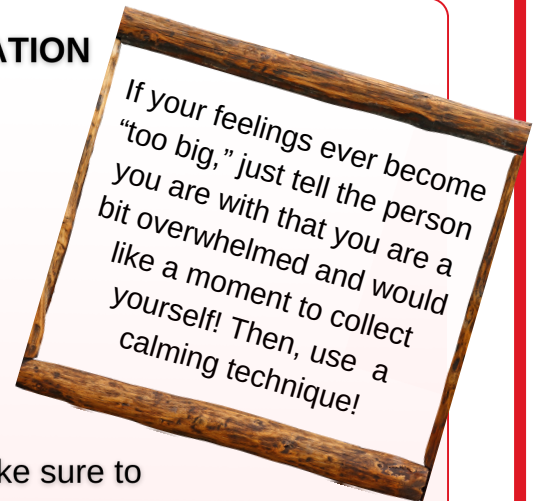
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Calming technique spotlight: **VISUALIZATION**

What is “visualization?”

It is a relaxation technique that involves focusing on a positive mental image or scene.

We choose images that help us feel relaxed and calm. It is great for relieving stress, managing pain, reducing anxiety, and even helping us sleep!



★ Before doing guided imagery in a stressful situation, make sure to ask the person you are with if you can take a moment to calm down. If they say “ok,” start your visualization!

How do we do it?

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable place.
2. Close the eyes.
3. Take a few deep breaths so the body can start relaxing.
4. Visualize a peaceful, calm setting, such as, a garden, lake, or somewhere by the sea.
5. Picture the scene and add more details. Explore the scene with all other senses, for example, imagine birds chirping, the scent of flowers, and the warmth of the sun.
6. Linger in the scene for a few minutes while trying to savor the calmness and sense of relaxation. A person can choose to stay in the scene for as long as they need to rejuvenate.
7. Open the eyes and stretch gently to reenter the present.
8. People should remember that they can return to the scene whenever.

This is the basic way that anyone can enjoy visualization.

But read on to find some scripts that might make it easier or more effective for you!



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## **Boat on the Water script:**

“Imagine you are a boat on the water. Sometimes we can feel like that, like we move and float to where the waves take us. Now imagine that the waves have gotten big, they are washing over the deck, rocking the boat to and fro. You are scared. You know that you need to drop the anchor in order to become still. Picture throwing an anchor overboard. It sinks through the rough water and lands in the sand. The boat rocks more slowly, then finally stops. It is still. The storm clouds begin to float away. The sun comes out. The air is cool and calm and still. Sometimes we all feel like that rocking boat, but we can also become still.”

## **Calming Colors script:**

“Make yourself comfortable. Notice how your body feels in this moment. Pay attention to the state of your body right now. Do not try to change anything, simply notice how your body and mind feel. Feel your body begin to relax slightly, as your shoulders drop a little lower.... your jaw loosens so your teeth are not touching.... and your eyelids start to feel heavy. Take a deep breath in.... hold it.... and slowly breathe out.... Create a picture in your mind of the color red. Imagine red of all shades.... roses.... bricks.... apples.... sunset.... Enjoy the color red. Now allow the color you are imagining to change to orange. Picture the color orange.... infinite shades of orange.... flowers.... pumpkins.... carrots.... Enjoy the color orange. Visualize the color yellow. See in your imagination all the various shades of yellow. Allow yellow to fill your vision.... lemons.... flowers.... fall leaves... Enjoy the color yellow. Meditate on the calming color relaxation once more.... Imagine the colors again, one at a time.... starting with red.... orange.... yellow.... green. Now picture whatever calming color you wish. Do you have a favorite? Or a color that suits your mood right now? Now it is time to return your attention to your surroundings.... Stretch your muscles.... and open your eyes. Fully alert and calm.”

Now, give yourselves a big round of applause and go do some improv!