

Develop Social-Emotional Competencies

Introduction

Building social-emotional competencies such as self-awareness, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and more can support student mental health and well-being. These competencies help young people understand and exercise control over their thoughts and feelings, direct their actions in daily life, and navigate both their relationships with others and the larger context around them. Cultivating social and emotional competencies involves a combination of explicit skills instruction; adult modeling; and opportunities to practice skills across many contexts, reflect on one's own progress, and receive feedback.

Guidance to Get You Started

- **Consider your context** and which mental health supports align with the specific strengths, needs, and cultural considerations of your community. You may want to conduct a formal needs assessment to identify existing programs and practices you can build on, identify gaps where programs are needed, and pinpoint which resources will help move your school towards its goals.
- **Develop or identify standards** that will become your school's blueprint for social emotional learning. You may want to identify specific goals for what students should know and be able to do at various points in their development of the standards. This will enable you to measure success and to determine where there is room for the program or implementation to be improved.
- **Consider using an existing evidence-based program** shown to support social-emotional competencies. You can also develop your own by stitching together resources from various programs. Whatever you use, it's important to monitor student progress and refine the program if it's not achieving excellent results. Here are some evidence-based SEL programs to learn from:
 - Student Success Skills
 - Competent Kids, Caring Communities
 - Caring School Community
 - PATHS
 - RULER Approach
 - Mindful Schools
- **Provide some explicit instruction** on social-emotional competencies aligned to school-wide goals. Instruction should be:
 - Focused on specific knowledge, skills, and mindsets with learning objectives that are clear to students.
 - Thoughtfully paced and sequenced so that learning

A Look at Some Benefits

Environment Within and Beyond School

Prepares students to navigate the world around them by improving ability to manage stress and confront societal norms and expectations.

Individual Factors

Directly cultivates some of the individual factors that promote mental health, such as self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision making.

Relationships with Others

Strengthens ability to form and maintain positive relationships by developing relationship skills such as empathy, communication, collaboration, and more.

Research suggests that social-emotional programs may promote:

- The development of social-emotional competencies (CASEL, 2017; Durlak, Wesiberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011)
- Reduced problem behaviors (CASEL 2017; Committee for Children)
- Better attendance (Committee for Children)
- Academic performance (Durlak, Wesiberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; CASEL 2017; Committee for Children)
- Improved health-related behaviors (CASEL 2017)
- Greater enjoyment of school (Committee for Children)
- Citizenship and decreased criminal activity (CASEL, 201; Durlak, Wesiberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011)
- Accelerated developmental range of students (Hammond, 2016; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Osher et al., 2016)

goals feel manageable and connected to prior knowledge, and so that there are opportunities for practice with feedback.

- Active and hands-on, so that motivation is supported, learning is memorable, and students have opportunities to engage in metacognitive thinking related to their use of social-emotional competencies.
- **Create opportunities to practice** social-emotional competencies across a range of contexts throughout and beyond the school day. This can be done by weaving SEL standards into your existing academic standards and, more generally, by using pedagogical approaches that encourage collaborative learning and self-direction, so that students can apply their social-emotional learning.
- **Provide students with feedback** on their use of social-emotional skills. This feedback can come from adults or expert peers. It is important to frame mistakes and struggles as part of learning and to provide feedback that goes beyond right or wrong to how a student could improve (e.g. next time you feel upset could try taking three deep breaths versus you did manage your emotions well). It is also important to set goals with students and use those as targets to plan toward and reflect against.
- **Ensure adults model social-emotional competency** through their words and actions. This requires teachers, school leaders, families, and other adults that students engage with to learn about the school's social-emotional learning objective, build a common language for discussing social-emotional learning with young people, and routinely reflect on their own social-emotional competency. Adults can also share their use of, and their challenges with, social and emotional skills in order to model decision making and even failure.
- **Foster a school culture that supports social-emotional learning** through its routines and policies. For example, use restorative justice practices versus punitive approaches, so that students have a chance to self-reflect and learn from their mistakes.

Additional Resources to Explore

CASEL Program Guides

The CASEL Guide provides a systematic framework for evaluating the quality of social-emotional programs and applies this framework to identify and rate SEL programs. The guide also shares best-practice to help districts and schools select and implement SEL programs.

SAMHSA's Evidence-Based Practices Library

A resource library that aims to provide communities, clinicians, policy-makers, and others in the field with the information and tools they need to incorporate evidence-based practices into their communities or clinical settings. It contains a collection of scientifically based resources for a broad range of audiences, including treatment improvement protocols, toolkits, resource guides, clinical practice guidelines, and other science-based resources.

The Hexagon Tool from the National Implementation Research Network

A tool communities can use to better understand how a program or practice fits into their existing work and context. It can be used at any stage of implementation to assess fit and feasibility. It is most commonly used during the exploration stage, when identifying and selecting new programs and practices to implement.

Transforming Education's Educator Resources

Transforming Education is committed to sharing what they're learning in order to help educators act on what is known today about social-emotional learning and whole child development. To do this, they translate findings from day-to-day work on multiple projects with an extensive network of partners into scalable tools and resources that can help school systems improve outcomes for all students.

Teaching Social Emotional Competencies within a PBIS

This brief describes how school personnel can teach social-emotional competencies within a PBIS framework to support systematic, school-wide implementation through one system, rather than trying to improve student outcomes through separate, competing initiatives. Recommendations for how to adjust the PBIS framework to support instruction of social-emotional competencies are included.

Equity Connections to SEL Competencies

Through an equity lens, CASEL's five SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making can support the development of justice-oriented, global citizens. This web page elaborates and provides links to many resources.