



# CASEL *briefs*

## Social and Emotional Learning: A Framework for Success in School and Life

*Research clearly shows that students who receive instruction in evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) outperform their peers: they get better grades; graduate at higher rates; have more positive peer relationships; and demonstrate caring, empathy, and social engagement.*

Imagine walking through the main door of an elementary or middle school and being greeted by a poster: “Our School Is a Caring Community Where Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships Rule!” The principal greets you and explains that this poster reflects their shared school vision.

As you walk through the halls, you see colorful student-made posters with the words *self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, positive relationships, and responsible decision making* hanging in the halls, complete with descriptions of what those behaviors look like, sound like, and feel like. Student work is displayed throughout the school and classrooms.

During the morning announcements piped into classrooms, the principal and students remind everyone about the values and behaviors that create a safe and caring learning environment. As you visit classrooms, you discover that teachers and students have created shared agreements about how to treat one another respectfully, and students are helping each other stick to them.

You step into a language arts classroom where the teacher and students are actively engaged in a collaborative writing activity about what it means to express empathy. In a social studies class, the teacher and students are exploring the skills needed to live in a respectful, responsible, and caring way with people of different cultures. In a class called Advisory, students are learning about managing

anger and resolving conflicts effectively. Students in several science classes are in the process of generating ideas and thinking through possibilities for their service-learning project, which will launch a schoolwide recycling program and beautify the school grounds.

Parent and community volunteers are helping the School Climate Committee prepare for the upcoming Family Fun Evening. Throughout the school, the atmosphere is positive, creative, and energetic. It’s clear that people enjoy being there.

Does this scenario sound too good to be true? In fact, it is a reality in hundreds of elementary and middle schools throughout the U.S. that are implementing SEL as the framework for positive youth development and school improvement.

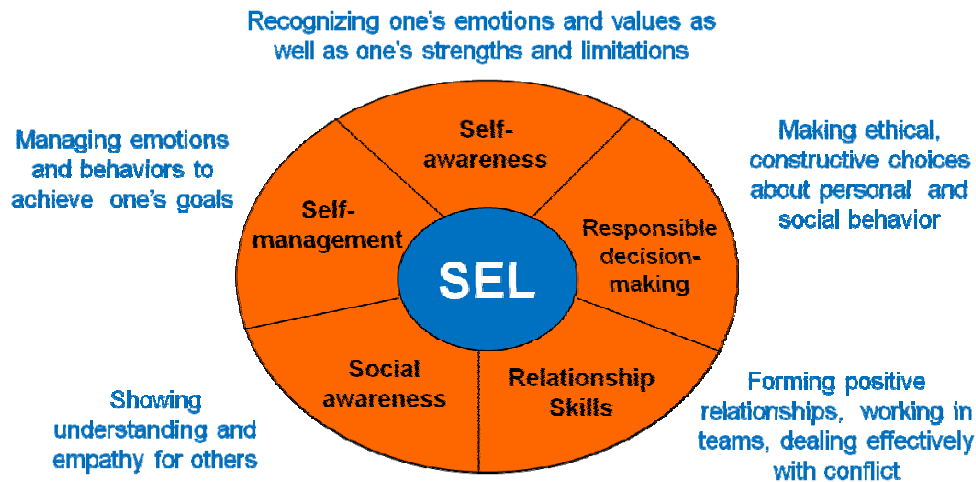
### What Is Social and Emotional Learning?

SEL is the process through which young people and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively. These are the skills that allow young people to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. Daniel Goleman, in his international bestsellers, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) and *Social Intelligence* (2007), reports that these skills are more highly correlated with success in school and life than IQ.

Research indicates that these skills not only can be taught, but also can be taught by teachers in schools of every type to students of every background. Research summarized by



# Core Social and Emotional Competencies



the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) clearly shows that students who receive instruction in SEL outperform their peers: they get better grades; graduate at higher rates; have more positive peer relationships; and demonstrate caring, empathy, and social engagement. These students also are less likely to use drugs, engage in violent behavior, or become delinquents.

Social and emotional learning seeks to build the knowledge and skills of children and youth in five core areas of social and emotional competency:

- **Self-Awareness:** They are able to recognize their emotions, describe their interests and values, and accurately assess their strengths. They have a well-grounded sense of self-confidence and hope for the future.
- **Self-Management:** They are able to regulate their emotions. They are able to manage stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles. They can set and monitor progress toward the achievement of personal and academic goals and express their emotions appropriately in a wide range of situations.
- **Social Awareness:** They are socially aware. They are able to take the perspective of and empathize with others and recognize and appreciate individual and group similarities and differences. They are able to seek

out and appropriately use family, school, and community resources.

- **Relationship Skills:** They have good relationship skills. They can establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation. They resist inappropriate social pressure; constructively prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflict; and seek and provide help when needed.
- **Responsible Decision Making:** They demonstrate responsible decision making at school, at home, and in the community. In making decisions, they consider ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and the likely consequences of various courses of action. They apply these decision-making skills in academic and social situations and want to contribute to the well being of their schools and communities.

Becoming socially and emotionally competent is a lifelong process so promoting this capacity in young people is appropriate at all grade levels, K-12 and beyond. Children in early and late elementary levels may or may not come to school with developmentally appropriate skills, so proactive instruction helps all students acquire the necessary skills for effectiveness throughout their lives. For example, for students to be effective problem solvers, they need to learn how their emotions influence their ability to think



through a problem. Being able to correctly identify their feelings and then calm themselves allows them to think clearly about their choices before acting. Advances in brain research document how this integration of emotions, thoughts, and actions actually shapes brain development and influences learning.

One of the most rapid periods of growth and development occurs during early adolescence which makes it a developmentally significant time to learn the skills of impulse control, emotional management, empathy, interpersonal communication, and responsible problem solving and decision making. In *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman points out that we have a unique opportunity in 10–14-year-olds to have the greatest impact in “rewiring” the brain to stop and think before acting, even if they may have not learned these skills previously.

## How Can SEL Be Implemented Effectively throughout the School?

SEL is most effective when it is part of a schoolwide initiative that:

- Creates a shared SEL vision for the school.
- Establishes norms for appropriate positive behaviors among staff and students.
- Promotes well-managed, safe, caring, cooperative, and participatory learning environments.
- Implements explicit, evidence-based, sequential, and ongoing skills instruction for all students.
- Integrates SEL concepts and skills into every subject and aspect of school life. (See CASEL’s *Safe and Sound* program rating guide for evidence-based SEL programs and its *Sustainable Schoolwide Social and Emotional Learning Implementation Guide and Tool Kit* for effective implementation. Both can be accessed at [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org).)

Programs, such as Lions-Quest ([www.lions-quest.org](http://www.lions-quest.org)), Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS – [www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/](http://www.channing-bete.com/prevention-programs/paths/)), Second Step ([www.cfchildren.org](http://www.cfchildren.org)) and other evidence-based programs teach SEL skills through step-by-step processes. These step-by-step processes can be especially helpful to teachers who have no previous experience

teaching social and emotional skills to students. Here are a few examples:

**Building Confidence: Three-Legged Stool of Self Confidence.** *Leg 1*– Skills/talents you’ve developed. *Leg 2* – Ways you show respect for self and others. *Leg 3* – Ways you act responsibly that support self and others.

**Listening.** The ART of Listening. Attend to the speaker. Respond with respect. Take time to listen and ask questions.

**Anger Management.** Get RID of harmful, angry feelings. Recognize your anger signals. Identify a positive calming thought. Do something constructive.

**Expressing Feelings Appropriately.** *What? Why? How? Messages* – When someone is bugging you, describe *what* is bothering you, *why* it is bothering you (share feelings), and *how* to make the situation better.

**Responsible Decision Making.** SOLVED – State the problem, Open the discussion to all sides, List possible helpful solutions, Veto those that are unacceptable to those involved, Evaluate, and Do the one most acceptable to everyone involved.

Effective instructional methods for teaching SEL skills are active, participatory, and engaging. Here are some examples of instructional strategies that can be used in a variety of subject areas:

- Modeling and coaching to help students recognize how they feel or how someone else might be feeling.
- Prompting the use of a skill, e.g. conflict resolution, and using dialoguing to guide students through the steps and help them apply a skill in a new situation.
- Practicing group decision making and setting classroom rules.
- Using cooperative learning and building teamwork through participation in team sports and games.
- Deepening understanding of a current or historical event by applying a set of questions based on a problem-solving model.
- Participating in cross-age mentoring in which a younger student is paired with an older one to build self-confidence and a sense of belonging and enhancing academic skills.
- Teaching reflective listening by having students work



in pairs and take turns describing a situation and repeating what was heard.

## What Can Principals Do to Promote SEL?

As the school's primary leader, principals have a major responsibility for implementing SEL programming. Principals can support SEL programming by:

- Demonstrating a commitment to schoolwide SEL.
- Developing and articulating a shared vision of students' social, emotional, and academic development.
- Creating opportunities for teachers and support staff to participate in developing an action plan for implementing SEL.
- Assuring that all staff members receive training and support for implementing SEL.
- Making sufficient resources available for implementing the SEL action plan.

## What Can Teachers Do to Promote SEL?

In addition to providing instruction in social and emotional skills, teachers' involvement in promoting SEL goes beyond the classroom and includes the following:

- Participating on a school team or committee that selects an SEL program and oversees the implementation and evaluation of SEL activities.
- Communicating regularly to inform families about SEL classroom activities and encourage reinforcement of SEL lessons at home.
- Modeling and providing opportunities for students to practice and apply SEL skills in the classroom.
- Using participatory instructional methods that draw on students' experience and engage them in learning.
- Using SEL skills in teaching academic subjects to enhance students' understanding. For example, in language arts or social studies lessons, students can be encouraged to discuss how characters or historical figures did or did not express understanding of others' feelings or use good problem-solving skills.

## What Can Parents Do to Promote SEL?

Parents can promote their child's SEL by learning more about their school's SEL initiative and modeling behaviors and adopting practices that reinforce SEL skills at home. Examples of such efforts include:

- Participating in family informational meetings at their school to learn more about SEL.
- Volunteering to assist in their child's classroom.
- Participating with their child in SEL-related homework assignments.
- Giving their child choices, discussing problem-solving strategies, and helping him or her identify pros and cons of alternative solutions.
- Encouraging their child to share and be helpful to others by participating in community service projects.

Our national commitment to education means we as a nation believe that every child and young adolescent deserves the opportunity to learn to his or her fullest capacity. To succeed in school, all students need to be engaged, interested, and excited to be there. They need to know how to focus their attention on their work, keep trying even when they get discouraged or face setbacks, work effectively with other students and adults, and be good communicators and problem solvers.

Educators have tended in the past to distinguish between the social and emotional and the academic aspects of learning. However, growing research-based evidence shows that these two kinds of learning are intimately connected. SEL provides the foundation for children and young adolescents to achieve academic success and life effectiveness.

## References

- Goleman, D. (2007). *Social intelligence: The new science of human relationships*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.

