

A Little book of **Wellness**



**Introducing Social-Emotional
Learning in the Primary Classroom**

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What Is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)?

SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

—Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2020)

Many people are aware that a toddler will often walk sometime between their tenth and eighteenth month. But when it comes to social-emotional development, few know that a person is somewhere in their mid- to late twenties before the social-emotional competencies defined here are fully formed.

Everyone is born with bones and muscles, and these are what help us walk; however, if a toddler doesn't practice tummy time, crawling, and pulling up on the furniture, they may be delayed in walking. The same is true for social-emotional development. We are born with the ability to build social-emotional tools like working memory, self control, and flexible thinking, but if a person is not taught and does not practice using these tools, the social-emotional competencies may not develop or be delayed or atrophied. There is no single school subject that

cultivates social-emotional development more than the others; SEL has a home in ALL subjects because we ask students to think critically and analytically, regulate their behavior, make decisions, and work with others, and because all students can benefit from the confidence and wellbeing it provides. Always remember: no one in elementary school has mastered any of the SEL competencies. They are still learning and practicing. Be patient and love them through the process.



Social- Emotional Competencies

Self-Management

is the ability to manage and tolerate emotional responses and triggers. It is understanding and being analytical of one's own thoughts and beliefs and the effects that they have. Self-management helps a person handle the normal stress responses created by the body.

Responsible Decision-Making

is the ability to analyze and understand rules, data, facts, and ideas to make clear decisions and to predict and plan the future. It is the ability to use morality and cause-and-effect for one's self, for another, and for a group in order to make a decision. When a person can make responsible decisions, they are likely asking themselves, *Why did I choose this?*, *What could I have done differently?*, and *What can I do next time?*

Self-Awareness

is the ability to understand one's own emotions and to process thoughts. This provides certainty and clarity of purpose and values. When a person is able to understand their emotions, analyze their thoughts, and know their purpose and values, they can then make decisions on their behavior and moment-to-moment responses.

Relationship Skills

are the ability to create and maintain healthy relationships. To do this, a person has to know how to work in a group and negotiate conflict, as well as hold compassion and empathy for others to relate, assist, and engage with them.

Social Awareness

is understanding the social norms, rules, values, and guidance of one's community and culture. It is understanding others and how they see their world. If a person is socially aware, they are able to empathize with the friends, family, partners, and other groups around them in order to make decisions on how to engage with them.

What would be the **benefits** of a Social-Emotional Learning program?

According to the study conducted by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), learning accelerates when students have supportive relationships and opportunities to develop and practice social, emotional, and cognitive skills across many different contexts.

27%
more

students would
improve their academic
performance at the end
of the program

57%
more

would gain in
their skills levels

24%
more

would have improved
social behaviors and
lower levels of distress

23%
more

would have
improved
attitudes

22%
more

would show fewer
conduct problems

Source:

<https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>

Practical ideas to help your learners manage their emotions

Delay of Gratification

The ability to manage and tolerate the actions, thoughts, feelings, and physical manifestations that come from waiting for an outcome or pleasurable experience.

If you see:

- Constant outbursts of emotions or thoughts
- Emotional outbursts when told to wait or slow down
- Lying, stealing, sneaking, and/or finding ways to attain what they've been asked to wait for

Try this:

- Play games with quick start-stop actions, like Simon Says, Freeze Dance, or Red Light Green Light (see Self Control).
- When telling a child a rule or what not to do, always give them alternatives to their actions. For example, if a student can't delay the need to yell out an answer in class, you can say: *If you want to yell your answer out, but you know it's not your turn, take a deep breath and hold it while raising your hand. Blow out the air slowly and wait to notice if the teacher has called you.*

Try this:

- Build emotional language by teaching feeling words. Many people have a hard time labeling what they are feeling. When a person can use a feeling word, it decreases their emotional distress.
- Get used to answering with Yes, and ... This helps the child who is stuck on a feeling, belief, or rigid thought to see that their thought/feeling is correct AND there are other ways to see it as well. For example, if a student says they don't want to try anymore because "they can't learn English," you can respond with: *Yes, and right now it is really hard and you feel disappointed when you get the answer wrong. I am here to help you practice and feel the hard feelings. With practice, your English will get better.*
- Give students time and space to calm down when they have a ★ BIG Feeling ★. Try to stay calm and breathe for them. Try not to speak or give direction when you see that their body and brain are overwhelmed with the emotion. Your loving response will help them learn that all feelings can be managed, no matter how big they get.

Emotional Tolerance

The ability to feel an emotion, label it, tolerate its physical and psychological effects, and find a way to manage and recuperate from it.

It is not appropriate to look for deficits in this tool, since most people continue to work on emotional tolerance for a lifetime. But you can expect to see a range in students' abilities to tolerate and manage emotions based on their personalities, what they have already learned about what feelings are and how to manage them, and how they handle the physical manifestations of their feeling.

≡ Empathy ≡



The ability to sense another's emotions and to imagine and understand another person's experience and thinking. Empathy develops in three phases throughout childhood:



Practical ideas to help your learners manage their emotions

Phase 1 is Emotional Empathy: 0 to around 5.5 years old.

This is the ability to notice and sense what somebody else is feeling, but children under seven years old use this form of empathy for their own safety. If an adult is in a bad mood, they may check in with them, but then they take care of themselves only, either by ignoring the adult, demanding to be soothed and cared for by the “moody” adult, or by finding another safe adult to care for them.

Phase 2 is Cognitive Empathy: around 5.5 to 8 years old.

This is the ability to sense and identify another’s feeling (Emotional Empathy), and then to also imagine and wonder what could have happened that is making the other person feel that way. Children can also do this for themselves; they can sense their own feelings and know the cause. But in this phase, finding a solution to make themselves or the other feel better is sporadic and should not be expected from them. They need guidance on what to do and how to manage emotions.

Phase 3 is Empathic Concern: around 8 years old and up.

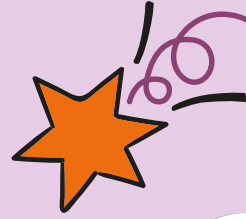
By this stage, children have Emotional Empathy, Cognitive Empathy and, finally, they desire to help and assist another person who is in pain or struggling. With younger children, most adults set rules and routines to help them remember to assist and be kind and supportive to others, but it’s not necessarily an intrinsic motivation. It is externally motivated by the positive reinforcement given by the adults around them. The desire to assist is a result of mastering sensing and knowing what they are feeling, identifying it in others, and imagining how they might help.

Not everyone develops all 3 phases. If a child lives in a stressful environment or has suffered trauma, they may get stuck using only Emotional Empathy. They do not progress through the phases because it is imperative for them to notice the feelings of others to stay personally safe in an otherwise dangerous scenario. This is why a student with especially challenging behavior or that has been labeled a “bully” may need more support in being empathic to others.

Try this:

- Empathy can be built with books/stories and having the students wonder if they have ever felt like the characters.
- Make it a point to let children know how other people are feeling or what they are thinking, and suggest or prompt them into discovering how they can help.

Flexible thinking



The ability to hold information in multiple ways; being fluid and not getting stuck on only one way of understanding something.

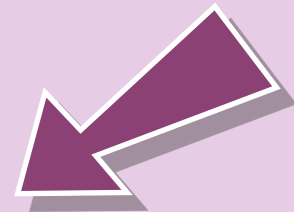
For example, if the usual route home has a detour, our flexible thinking helps us accept the detour and see that there is another route home. It also helps us have perspective on someone else's point of view. The concept of *What would it be like if I were in their shoes?* is part of flexible thinking.

If you see:

- Rigid thinking — refusing or unable to move to another way of thinking about a situation
- Constant outbursts or big reactions when things do not go as expected
- Difficulty identifying emotion
- Difficulty planning ahead and seeing multiple ways of getting a task done
- Unrealistic expectations — inability to compare and process own performance or behavior



Try this:



- Give students the chance to do some journaling. Some good questions to answer in the journal are *What am I thinking? What am I feeling? What can I do next time?* If students don't have the ability to write yet, they can always draw.
- Keep things predictable with routines.
- Plan tasks/activities together. Agree on and list the steps.
- Teach emotional language and encourage its use.
- Role play. Have students act out scenarios in which they notice others' points of view. Allow for creativity and self expression.

Practical ideas to help your learners manage their emotions



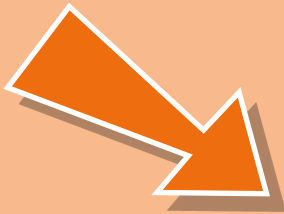
Self Control

The ability to stop or manage one's own behavior; the ability to self monitor.

If you see:

- Very poor impulse control
- Inability to process the thought
If I do this, then ...
- A messy room, desk, backpack, etc.
- Inability to complete tasks in a timely manner

Try this:



- Set clear expectations through routines.
- Repeat familiar skills or tasks.
- Play games like Freeze Dance or Red Light Green Light.

Freeze Dance: Play some music and have students dance to the rhythm. Stop the music. Have students freeze and hold the position they are in until they hear the music again. Repeat as many times as you wish.

Red Light Green Light: Have students stand at the back of the class. Hide one red and one green piece of paper behind your back. Show the green paper and say Green light! Have students move forward. Then show the red paper and say Red Light! Have students stop. The first student to reach you becomes the teacher and gets the cards to continue playing the game. Alternatively, use papers that say the words "Red/Green" or "Stop/Go."

Social Reciprocity

The ability to engage in social interactions with the understanding that there is a give and take in the interaction.



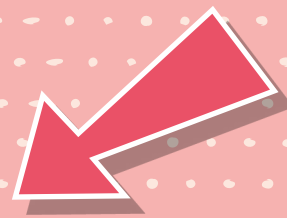
Most elementary school children have a very poor awareness of how to give and take in a relationship. This is because this is the time in social-emotional development where they are still learning and practicing social norms and social rules. With children ages 11 and younger, adults need to be specific about social norms and rules. This way, they have the scaffolding needed to make good decisions in their relationships with others.

If you see:

- Difficulty seeing another's point of view, even when given guidance and information
- Constant lack of impulse control when playing or communicating with another child
- Avoidance of social interactions, even with guidance and support
- Constant attempts to overpower or control social interactions



Try this:



- Be specific about the rules and values of the classroom around friendship and supporting one another.
- Teach them to resolve conflict by giving them opportunities to listen to each other and find solutions to their conflicts with your assistance.
- Stop looking for who is the victim and who is the perpetrator. Teach that in friendship, we always have choice: the choice to be kind and respectful, or the choice

to control, manipulate and only think about ourselves.

- Role play. Have each child take on a role in a friendship and act out scenarios together.
- Work with students to create plays or stories where the characters have to manage social situations.
- Read books and have books available that model and tell stories about how people manage relationships.

Practical ideas to help your learners manage their emotions

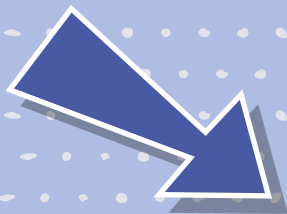
Working Memory

The ability to remember what one is doing in the moment, holding in mind what the goal is; this supports the ability to plan, organize, and act.

If you see:

- Needing constant cues or reminders
- Inability to identify own emotions or avoiding emotions
- Inability to start a task on their own (they can do it with a cue, but not without)
- Inability to do sequential tasks
- Lack of attention to small details, such as needing a sharpened pencil to write
- Losing school work or forgetting to turn it in
- Inability to plan ahead

Try this:



- Increase familiarity through routines.
- Do multi-sensory activities. One of the senses is more prone to build and keep memories.
- Help make and follow to-do lists.
- Play memory games like Simon Says, memory card games, or chain stories/sentences



Would you like to find out more?

Watch the Wellness Day webinar

By Lina Acosta Sandaal, MA, LMFT
and Lorena Peimbert



By the end of the webinar, you will ...

- Be able to identify when your students feel stressed in the classroom
- Be able to recognize why they might feel stressed, and what you can do to help them feel safe and relaxed
- Understand the nervous system, define co-regulation and what the cycle of the caregiver is

webinars



When They Say They Can't, You Say Yes...

Blogcast by
Lina Acosta Sandaal, MA, LMFT

Tune in or read!

Blog



Lina Acosta Sandaal, MA, LMFT is a psychotherapist, development expert, writer, and founder of Stop Parenting Alone, a parenting education, social emotional learning and consulting program in Miami, FL. She is a writer on social emotional learning for Macmillan Education, the human development expert for Telemundo's national broadcasts and consultant for MomsRising an advocacy group for family rights in United States. Her mission is for all parents to fall in love with their parenting journey.

Lorena Peimbert studied Pedagogy at the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico City and became an English teacher in 1995, specializing in early childhood stimulation, learning disabilities, psychomotor skills, and logical-mathematical thinking. With more than 20 years of experience in teaching and working in schools, she now trains and coaches teachers, content edits, manages educational projects, and writes in collaboration with Macmillan. She has written different books to teach English to students in different levels from preschool to high school. Her mission is for educators and students to become the best version of themselves.