



Social and Emotional Learning - Facilitation Guide -



Introduction

This Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) learning series package describes three ways educators and youth-serving professionals can promote young adolescent SEL:

1. **Prioritize Developmental Needs**
Early adolescence is a unique developmental period and it is important that students' interactions and environments are well-designed to meet their needs
2. **Cultivate Student and Adult Skills**
Youth and adults can work to develop and practice skills that promote well-being and strengthen relationships.
3. **Build Classroom Community**
Strong social and emotional skills do not occur in a vacuum. Educators can build trusting relationships and supportive environments that encourage students to use these skills to be caring, kind, and respectful to others.

We begin by describing the role that each of these plays in adolescent SEL (and the research findings that underscore their importance). Next, we shift the focus from “why” these are important to “how” each one can be leveraged in the classroom. We provide key strategies and explicit action steps designed to support each area.



Key Takeaways

What we know:

- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to the process by which young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identity, manage emotions, achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (CASEL, 2020).
- SEL can improve students' well-being, performance, and conduct.
- The benefits of SEL can be long-lasting. There is evidence of the positive impact of SEL up to 18 years later.
- Strong relationships and supportive, inclusive environments play an important role in promoting SEL.
- Although transformative SEL alone will not fully address longstanding and deep-seated inequities in education, bringing SEL to the classroom can create the conditions needed to examine and interrupt inequitable practices, create more inclusive learning environments, and reveal and nurture the interests and assets of all individuals (CASEL, 2020).

Current challenges:

- Middle schools, in general, remain an under-addressed sector in education and often there are notable differences in how SEL within the school context has been viewed, defined, and approached.
- Adolescent SEL programs that teach skills explicitly are often not developmentally aligned and therefore are less effective when compared to similar elementary-level programs.
- Most middle school teachers did not receive explicit training in how to teach young adolescents.
- There is a false notion that only students need SEL. In fact, adults need SEL, too.
- There is a need for greater cultural competence and appreciation in learning environments.

What this learning series package focuses on:

- Engaging in teaching practices that **prioritize adolescents' developmental needs**. These practices support identity formation; offer opportunities for agency and collective decision-making; and seek cultural understanding and appreciation.
- Finding ways for students and adults to **cultivate skills collectively**. We recommend practices such as explicit instruction of skills that are useful in the classroom and beyond, modeling positive behaviors, practicing continuous reflection, and facilitating peer-to-peer interactions. We offer strategies for recognizing one's own biases, maintaining a growth mindset, and generating low-lift opportunities for both students and teachers to apply learned skills.
 - When cultivating **student SEL**, it is important to focus on student-centered approaches. Student-centered approaches emphasize building on students' strengths, developing skills through experiential learning, giving young people voice in the learning process, and supporting youth through positive relationships with adults over an extended period of time.
 - When cultivating **adult SEL**, it is important to lead and model social and emotional learning. This includes attending to adult well-being for teachers and other school staff. These efforts are critically important to facilitate the growth of students' social and emotional competencies.
- **Building a learning environment** that fosters trusting relationships and a strong sense of community. A positive classroom culture stems from cultural competence and appreciation of people who are from different backgrounds.



Reflection Questions

1. How much time do you think should be devoted to SEL in the classroom?
2. What SEL programs and/or approaches have you used? What has worked well with your students? What challenges have you experienced with your students when bringing SEL into the classroom?
3. How can you model SEL in meaningful ways in the day-to-day? Are there opportunities to model prosocial behaviors, validating emotions or acts of empathy while in the classroom with your students?
4. How can you communicate or demonstrate to your students that you are learning SEL, too. For instance, how can you model that you are not the “expert” on SEL?
5. We know that all humans have difficulty learning a skill in one situation and then using it in another. For instance, just because a student can choose where to sit to minimize distraction at school doesn’t mean they will be able to do this same behavior at home. The ability to apply a skill learned in one situation to another, different situation is called transfer. How can you design activities to help students transfer social and emotional skills across different environments?
6. Reflecting on your teaching practices, what are the implicit vs. explicit supports for SEL that students are benefitting from in your classroom?
7. What routines or rituals take place in your classroom that create a stronger sense of peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher connection?
8. What opportunities allow you and your students to get to know one another in deeper and more meaningful ways? For example, asking questions like “what’s been on your mind a lot recently?” or “what is something most people assume about you that is not actually true?”
9. When developing lesson plans, how often are you incorporating media and/or referencing diverse individuals to positively depict a wide range of cultures?
10. How do you show appreciation and celebrate the unique cultural assets your students bring into the classroom? For example, taking the time to learn how to pronounce each student’s name properly, referring to students by their preferred pronouns, celebrating diverse role models, providing opportunities for students to share their own traditions, etc.