

12 Social and Emotional Skills Linked to Child Outcomes

Cognitive Skills

Attention Control	The ability to attend to relevant information and goal-directed tasks while resisting distractions and shifting tasks when necessary, such as listening to the teacher and ignoring kids outside on the playground.
Inhibitory Control	The ability to suppress or modify a behavioral response in service of attaining a longer-term goal by inhibiting automatic reactions like shouting out an answer while initiating controlled responses appropriate to the situation such as remembering to raise one's hand.
Working Memory and Planning Skills	Working memory refers to the ability to cognitively maintain and manipulate information over a relatively short period of time, and planning skills are used to identify and organize the steps or sequence of events needed to complete an activity and achieve a desired goal.
Cognitive Flexibility	The ability to switch between thinking about two different concepts to thinking about multiple concepts simultaneously, or to redirect one's attention away from one salient object, instruction, or strategy to another.

Emotional Skills

Emotion Knowledge and Expression	The ability to recognize, understand, and label emotions in oneself and others (emotion knowledge) and to express one's feelings in contextually appropriate ways (emotion expression).
Emotion and Behavior Regulation	The ability to use effortful control strategies to modify the intensity or duration of emotional arousal, both positive and negative (emotion regulation) as well as the ability to learn and conform to expectations for appropriate social behavior (behavior regulation).
Empathy and Perspective-Taking	The ability to understand another person's emotional state and point of view. This includes identifying, acknowledging, and acting upon the experiences, feelings, and viewpoints of others, whether by placing oneself in another's situation or through the vicarious experiencing of another's emotions.

Interpersonal Skills

Understanding Social Cues	The process through which children interpret cues from their social environment and use them to understand the behaviors of others.
Conflict Resolution/Social Problem-Solving	The ability to generate and act on effective strategies or solutions for challenging interpersonal situations and conflicts.
Prosocial Skills	The skills required to organize and navigate social relationships, including the ability to interact effectively with others and develop positive relationships. Includes a broad range of skills and behaviors such as listening/communication, cooperation, helping, community-building, and being a good friend.

Additional Skills

Character	A set of culturally determined skills, values, and habits required to understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values (e.g., respect, justice, citizenship, responsibility for self and others) and to perform to one's highest potential in achievement or work contexts, such as perseverance, diligence, and self-control.
Mindset	Attitudes and beliefs about oneself, others, and one's own circumstances that impact one's interpretation of and response to events and interactions throughout their day.

For a list of behaviors associated with each skill, please see p. 314-323 of the Coding Guide in Appendix C.

COMMON INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOR SEL

Effective SEL programs (like effective literacy programs) need to implement a set of focused, high-quality, research-based teaching strategies for developing students' SEL skills. The following activities describe the range of instructional methods typically found in evidence-based SEL programs as determined by a previous content analysis of leading SEL programs (Bouffard, Parkinson, Jacob & Jones, 2009).

17 Instructional Practices for Developing SEL Skills

Discussion	Discussions can occur in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class. Discussion can be used to introduce an SEL theme, pose questions to students regarding how a person may feel/act in a given situation, have students talk about how an SEL theme relates to their own lives, how an SEL theme is related to books they've read or things that have happened in the classroom, and more.
Didactic Instruction	Teacher provides specific instructions outside of an open discussion. This might include providing definitions, teacher modeling, or imparting specific information.
Book/Story	Teacher reads aloud a book or short story that may or may not include pictures. In some instances, this may be a story developed by the programmers to illustrate a particular theme.
Vocabulary	Activities used to teach language, words, or terms related to an SEL concept. For example, this might include working as a class to define a word related to an SEL theme, learning basic vocabulary necessary to talk about and solve problems, or coming up with synonyms for emotion words.
SEL Tools/ Handouts	Use of a tool or material to promote SEL strategies, often to help students visualize SEL concepts in a concrete way. For example, this might include using a conflict escalator to explore how certain choices can worsen or improve a conflict, using a feelings thermometer to talk about emotions, setting up a problem box to collect class problems for future discussion, or using student handouts such as planning templates.
Writing	Students are often asked to write about personal experiences related to an SEL theme or to the record the experiences of others. For example, students might be asked to write about a time they were angry with someone, what they did, and how it felt, or to do the same for a parent, sibling, or friend. Writing activities may also be collaborative, such as composing a poem together as a class. At younger ages, writing may take the form of drawing a picture that depicts an experience or event.
Drawing	Drawing activity with a goal other than depicting an event or experience. Drawing activities are distinct from writing exercises in that the focus is on artistic expression rather than on depicting a narrative experience. For example, asking students to draw a picture of something that makes them happy rather than drawing about a specific time they felt happy.

Art/Creative Project	Art or creative project other than drawing related to an SEL theme. May be an individual project, such as using clay to make faces that show different emotions, or a collaborative project, such as creating a logo to represent team personality traits.
Visual Display	Charts, posters, or other visual displays. Examples include classroom posters that break down emotion regulation strategies, a class rules chart, or a hanging circle that represents the connection between thoughts, actions, and feelings. Often used as a way to establish or reinforce routines in the classroom.
Video	Videos typically depict children in challenging classroom or playground situations and are often used to prompt discussion around emotions, conflict resolution, and appropriate behaviors.
Song	Songs (and music videos or sing-songy chants) are typically used to reinforce an SEL theme and often involve dances, hand movements, and/or strategy practice. For example, a song might lead students through the steps for a calm breathing technique or problem-solving process. Songs may be played once or repeated over the course of a unit.
Skill Practice	Students actively practice using SEL skills or strategies outside of a game or role-play scenario. For example, students might practice paraphrasing what their partner just said to practice good listening skills or use emotion/behavior regulation strategies to calm down during a tense moment.
Role-Play	At younger ages, this may involve a teacher role-playing a scene with puppets. At older ages, it may involve the entire class role-playing in pairs or two students performing in front of the class. It is often used to act out emotions, demonstrate/practice emotion regulation strategies and problem-solving processes, or to practice managing conflict/interpersonal challenges.
Game	Can be used to reinforce an SEL theme, build community, practice an SEL skill, or transition students into/out of a lesson, etc. Examples include playing feeling charades to help teach about emotions and social cues, using Simon Says to practice cognitive regulation skills, or cooperating during a relay game.
Kinesthetic	Activities involving student movement and physical activity. Examples include games like Freeze Dance and Feelings Charades or dancing and moving along to a song.
Teacher Choice	May include portions of a lesson during which teachers are instructed to choose their own activity from a range of options, such as choosing from a selection of different games or songs based on class preferences or SEL needs. May also include building a lesson around a template, such as selecting an SEL topic and related activities when the lesson structure is otherwise left open.
Other	Any activity not captured by the above descriptions. Common examples include poetry, visualization exercises, meditation, and more.