

Affirm the importance of social and emotional learning and resilience

Learning how to manage feelings, manage friendships and solve problems supports mental health and wellbeing.

Social and emotional learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to learning the values, knowledge and skills that help children and young people relate to others effectively and contribute positively to their environments. Children and young people who have developed these skills find it easier to manage their emotions, relate to others, make decisions, resolve conflict, and feel positive about themselves and the world around them. They're also likely to have enhanced motivation to engage and achieve.

The developing brain

Social and emotional development is associated with brain development.

The brain's architecture (or structure) provides a foundation for children's SEL and motor skill development. Brain development is a dynamic process that's influenced by genes and the environment. While genes provide the biological basis for the formation of neural

connections, these connections are reinforced by a child's environmental experiences.

Many of these experiences occur within a child's family relationships or with other significant adults, including educators. In your daily interactions with children and young people, you can help to influence their brain architecture and social and emotional skills to develop in a positive way.

Developing social and emotional skills

Children are born communicators – from infancy, they're motivated to relate to other human beings and develop socially in the context of relationships.

However, a person's ability to understand others and take their needs and views into account develops over time. Young children are naturally self-focused. As they get older, they learn that others may see things differently to them. Then, as their thinking skills develop, they're more able to understand another person's point of view, and, finally, to appreciate multiple ways of looking at the same event or situation. Children and young people develop socially in the context of relationships. Warm, responsive and trusting relationships help them feel safe and secure to explore the world around them.

As an educator, you can affirm children and young people's SEL skills related to the following:

- **Development of social values:** Children and young people learn to make ethical judgments by practising putting themselves in other people's shoes and being encouraged to reflect on social values. You can work with families to help children and young people understand and learn to act on values like respect, responsibility, caring for others, honesty, cooperation and acceptance of people's differences.
- **Development of emotional skills:** Emotional development is a complex task that begins in infancy and continues into adulthood. It involves learning about feelings, understanding how and why they happen, recognising one's own feelings and those of others, and developing effective ways of managing these emotions. Families and educators have an important role to play in supporting emotional development by responding effectively, talking with children and young people about feelings and how to manage them.
- **Development self-concept:** Children and young people base their self-concept on feedback they receive from others as well as their own judgments. It's very important for strengths and efforts to be recognised to support the development of a positive self-concept and to motivate children to be positively engaged in relationships. Poor self-concept can contribute significantly to emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- **Puberty:** An added complexity for older children and young people is the onset of puberty, which can impact the development of social and emotional skills and sense of self due to hormonal, physical and emotional changes.

Developing resilience

Resilience shares a close relationship with mental health because being able to bounce back from challenges or adversity is a significant protective factor that supports children and young people's mental health.

Resilience is not something a person is born with – it can develop and change over time, and is best expressed on a continuum. People may have

more or less resilience to draw on at any given time depending on their circumstances. We also know that some children and young people experience more significant challenges, and, in those cases, resilience takes on quite a different meaning. For some individuals, particularly those subjected to abuse or neglect, life can be uncertain and threatening and their basic human needs may not easily be met.

Children and young people develop resilience through a combination of individual, family, community and societal factors. Building a child's resilience involves both improving their skills and capabilities and improving the environments around them.

Supporting social and emotional learning

SEL is as an effective way to foster resilience and promote children and young people's mental health.

Children and young people benefit from having plenty of opportunities to learn and practise these skills in their everyday experiences, but they'll develop these skills at different paces due to having different temperaments, skills, opportunities, experiences, and a variety of risk and protective factors, in their lives. Regardless of what they're capable of right now, they'll continue to develop and learn these skills over time. Your role is to make the most of opportunities to model, teach and support them to do so.