

Embed evidence-based social and emotional learning strategies

Social and emotional development involves learning the values, knowledge and skills that enable children and young people to regulate their emotions, relate to others effectively and to contribute in positive ways to their family and education.

Embed

There are many opportunities for you to support children and young people in developing social and emotional learning (SEL). This could include planned activities across the early learning service or school, or activities within specific learning environments, as well as making the most of informal learning opportunities during unplanned activities and conversations.

Embed social and emotional learning

Embedding SEL starts with strong relationships.

Warm, responsive and trusting relationships between children, young people and educators provides a safe environment in which they feel confident practising these skills. SEL can be passed on through:

- **incidental learning** such as unplanned learning that occurs during other activities, when you respond to spontaneous opportunities
- **intentional learning** which is the persistent, proactive process of acquiring, understanding, and applying knowledge; the formal teaching of skills, and providing opportunities to practise them.

A strengths-based approach incorporates the underlying assumption that skills can be taught, practised, developed and mastered. Children and young people are likely to benefit from having opportunities to learn and practise social and emotional skills in everyday experiences with adults and peers. They may often still need support from adults to help them manage their relationships and interactions. Educators play a central role and can foster children and young people's social and emotional learning in different ways.

Self-awareness and self-regulation

Self-awareness is the ability to recognise one's own emotions, thoughts and values, and how they influence behaviour. You can teach this by talking to children and young people about their experiences, including encouraging them to notice body signals, encouraging them to notice and name their feelings and the feelings of others, and discussing how these relate to behaviours.

By acknowledging children and young people's emotional responses and providing guidance, you can help them understand and accept their feelings and develop effective strategies for managing them.

Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions, control impulses, and motivate yourself. Children and young people need adults to help them manage their emotions. They then gradually learn how to do this for themselves.

Social awareness and relationship skills

Social awareness is the ability to take the perspective of and empathise with others, and recognise, interpret and respond to social situations in ways that society sees as appropriate. The main skills for developing self-awareness include perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respect for others. You can teach this by role-modelling perspective-taking and compassion, celebrating diversity, promoting inclusiveness, and teaching the skills to work together effectively.

Healthy relationships are built on trust, communication, mutual respect and empathy. You can teach this by intentionally teaching children and young people about respectful and healthy relationships, role-modelling how and when to use a skill, and using formal SEL programs.

Responsible decision-making

The skills for making good decisions are learnt gradually, and guided by values.

Children and young people learn these skills when they're taught the steps and given opportunities

to practise using them. You can view children and young people as capable contributors to their world (for example, by providing tasks that require a meaningful contribution, letting them make decisions and experience consequences), while also helping them learn from mistakes, teaching values and using the curriculum.

Classrooms and communities

Policy and curriculum decisions have a huge influence on SEL opportunities. By reviewing and modifying curriculum, policies and practices with SEL in mind, you can support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Evidence-based resilience or SEL programs are ready-made lessons that seek to explicitly teach and strengthen skills for positive mental health and wellbeing. Effective programs improve student behaviour, attendance, learning and academic performance.

Effectively teaching SEL is grounded in respectful and responsive relationships. Your role is to guide learning.

Include families and communities. Children and young people learn social and emotional skills more effectively when they're reinforced at home. Many SEL programs include opportunities to involve the family and community, so they can learn what they can do to support SEL at home.

Modelling resilience

As an educator, you can model resilience while working with children, young people, families and communities.

Healthy thinking, problem-solving, talking about adversity and developing positive relationships are all helpful in building a picture of what resilience can look like. This can be a great starting point for conversations and continuing learning at home for children, young people and their families.