Developing Social and Emotional Learning Skills

While that goal may sound lofty, it’s possible for anyone to achieve. Like any skill, social and emotional skills can be explicitly taught and intentionally learned. It takes time, practice, and patience to improve your skills, but it makes a difference, not just in your own life, but in the lives of the people around you, from your family to your colleagues to your students. If we don’t model, live by, and believe what we say, nothing will change for our students. We know that social and emotional skills are crucial for our students, and they are just as important for us.

Just as we would do with our students’ learning, when we focus on our own learning, it’s helpful to start with a sense of the skills and competencies we aim to develop. Over time, there have been many different definitions and terms applied to these skills and competencies. Two organizations that have been committed for decades to bringing social and emotional learning to the forefront of education are Center for Responsive Schools, founded in 1981, and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), founded in 1994. Both organizations have identified five core social and emotional learning competencies, and while the two organizations use different terms to describe these competencies, the terms correspond closely to each other.

The chart that follows provides definitions of each of the terms and shows how the Center for Responsive Schools competencies (in the left-hand column) and the CASEL competencies (in the right-hand column) connect to each other. In the center column are anchor standards that connect to each one of the Center for Responsive Schools competencies. These standards encompass the abilities an individual needs to exhibit to successfully demonstrate social and emotional competence. They provide a solid grounding for considering learning goals for your students as well as yourself.

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**Cooperation**

The ability to establish new relationships, to maintain positive relationships and friendships, to avoid social isolation, to resolve conflicts, to accept differences, and to be a contributing member of the classroom and community in which one lives, works, learns, and plays.

- Able to make and keep friends
- Works with others toward a common goal
- Resolves differences quickly
- Cooperates as a group leader or a member of the group
- Exhibits helpfulness

**Assertiveness**

The ability to take initiative, to stand up for one’s ideas without begging or negating others, to seek help, to persevere with a challenging task, and to recognize one’s individual self as separate from the environment, circumstances, or conditions one is in.

- Expresses strong emotions and opinions effectively
- Able to seek help
- Shows openness and honesty
- Persists through challenging events
- Takes the initiative to do what is right, fair, and just
- Makes choices one feels good about later

**Responsibility**

The ability to motivate oneself to act and follow through on expectations, to define a problem, consider the consequences, and choose a positive solution.

- Selects the best option among choices for a suitable outcome
- Holds oneself accountable
- Demonstrates social, civic, and digital responsibility
- Takes care of property

**Empathy**

The ability to recognize, appreciate, or understand another’s state of mind or emotions, to be receptive to new ideas and perspectives, and to see, appreciate, and value differences and diversity in others.

- Recognizes and manages one’s own emotions and recognizes the emotions of others
- Respects and values diversity in others
- Respects differing cultural norms
- Aware of the impact of one’s actions on others

**Self-Control**

The ability to recognize and regulate one’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in order to be successful in the moment and remain on a successful trajectory.

- Adheres to social, behavioral, and moral standards
- Manages overwhelming thoughts or emotions
- Controls impulses and delays gratification
- Shows hope and perseverance

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**CASEL Core Competencies**

**Relationship Skills**

The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.

- Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
- Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.
- Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of others and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.
- Self-Management: The abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.