



# STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING THE USE OF SEL SKILLS

*"Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice."*

—Anton Chekov

## OVERVIEW

A list of strategies for making explicit connections to SEL skills throughout the day in order to reinforce students' practice of skills.

## PLANNING FOR IT

### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the school day where applicable (academics, unstructured time)

### TIME REQUIRED

- Varies

### LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

### MATERIALS

- None

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

School staff will:

- Help students practice the SEL skills that they have learned throughout the school day

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on when you might have used an SEL skill in the last few days. What skill did you use? What was the impact of using that skill?

### INSTRUCTIONS

Teaching specific social and emotional skills is only the first step toward the goal of students “living the skills”. The strategies below provide guidance and support to help students use their learned SEL skills in all settings.

Option: Create an explicit plan with times, dates, and lesson plans that you plan to use as a means of increasing the use of SEL skills for your students inside the classroom and school-wide.

**1. Consistency**

Be consistent with explicit SEL instruction; build it into your weekly plan on a regular basis at specific times.

**2. Model and name the skill**

Find opportunities to model and name SEL skills in front of your students. For instance, when getting upset or flustered yourself, practice calm breathing in front of students and name what you are doing by saying something like, “I’m feeling upset right now and need to take a couple of calming breaths before we move on”.

**3. Practice during academic group work**

In addition to having an academic task assigned during group work, also assign an SEL skill for the students to practice that may improve the group experience (e.g., cooperation, listening, problem-solving).

**4. Acknowledge the positive impact of students’ use of SEL skills**

For example, “I noticed that you are using (name of SEL skill.) That behavior will help you...” or “I observed that you were...because of your effort, your classmates will be able to...”

**5. During book discussions, make connections to SEL skills**

- a. Refer to feelings in the course of lessons. For example, let's say you are reading your students the book entitled: *When Sophie Gets Angry, Really, Really Angry* by Molly Bang, you may ask, "How might Sophie be feeling? Have you ever felt that way?"
- b. Ask questions to encourage connections to SEL skills. For example, while reading *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes you could ask, "How did Lilly use the problem solving process to address the situation in her classroom that has made her feel upset?"

**6. Expand SEL instruction beyond classroom setting into whole-school community**

- a. Display SEL vocabulary and skills in cafeteria, lobby, main office, nurse's office, and hallways.
- b. Include Specialists and Support Staff in professional development sessions, so they can use their unique relationships with students to reinforce and provide opportunities for students to practice skills. For instance, as students get on the bus, they can tell the bus driver how they're feeling that day with a "thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down." Cafeteria employees can "catch" students being kind to each other and compliment them on their actions.
- c. Use community-building activities and games during recess, such as Magic Tag or Crooked Circle.
- d. Spotlight SEL skills during morning announcements. For example, encourage students to practice empathy for one another throughout the day.
- e. Encourage the use of problem-solving skills on the playground or in the cafeteria.
- f. Use whole school gatherings/assemblies and family gatherings as opportunities for students to share what they've learned.

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice improvements in the classroom and/or school climate as students use their SEL skills more often?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A [2011 meta-analysis](#) found that well-designed and well-implemented social-emotional learning (SEL) programs can increase academic achievement and improve student well-being and behavior; however, based on further analysis, some [researchers](#) argue that the effect sizes are fairly modest.

To increase the impact of SEL curricula, Harvard's Stephanie Jones and Suzanne Bouffard point to [research](#) that strongly suggests integrating SEL skills into all aspects of school. For example, when skills are practiced on the playground, in the lunchroom, and elsewhere in school besides just the classroom, student behavior improves in these settings.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Life has a funny way of constantly handing us challenging situations that require SEL skills--no matter what our age and no matter what the context. In other words, cultivating these skills takes a lifetime of practice.

When SEL is expanded beyond the classroom into all areas of school, students have the unique opportunity to start practicing these skills, giving them a head start in facing the inevitabilities of life. The adults in the school benefit as well, as the [practice of SEL](#) skills may lower their stress and increase their work enjoyment.

## SOURCE

Open Circle provides evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum and professional development for elementary schools. This innovative program proactively develops children's skills for recognizing and managing emotions, empathy, positive relationships and problem solving. Open Circle helps schools build communities where students feel safe, cared for and engaged in learning. For more information please visit us at <https://www.open-circle.org>