



MODELING SEL FOR STUDENTS

"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."

— James Baldwin

OVERVIEW

Staff members collectively brainstorm how they can model each SEL competency in their interactions with students.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- After staff members have had the opportunity to engage in [foundational learning on SEL](#)
- When developing [Shared Staff Agreements](#)
- When engaging staff in [Reflecting on Personal SEL Skills](#)
- At the beginning of the school year to help create a positive school climate
- During a strategic planning and/or visioning meeting with staff

TIME REQUIRED

- 45 minutes

LEVEL

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

MATERIALS

- Poster/chart paper: Write each of the five social and emotional competencies, i.e., Self-Management, Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making, on large poster paper and hang them up around the room
- Markers
- Handout: [Social and Emotional Competencies](#)
- Post-it notes
- Writing materials

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Staff members will:

- Brainstorm a list of social-emotional competencies that they can model for students

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- If you are leading this exercise with staff members, take a moment to look at the [chart of competencies](#) and reflect on how you model social and emotional competencies for students. Which ones do you already do well? As a form of self-care, identify one or two that you would like to cultivate this year and find a colleague to help you regularly reflect and stay on track.
- Have all staff members received training in social-emotional learning?
- Are all staff members participating in this practice? If not, whose voice is missing?
- Is the school leadership privileging their view of SEL competencies over that of staff and/or students?
 - For example, are staff members expected to adhere to a specific way of enacting social-emotional competencies, or does the school acknowledge and provide space for sharing different groups' beliefs and expressions of these competencies?
 - For instance, asserting oneself—a common SEL skill taught in the U.S.—is not viewed as mature behavior in [all cultures](#).

- How is this practice relevant to staff and students' lives, both in and out of school? Would they agree with you?

INSTRUCTIONS

SUBHEADING 1

Note: This activity can be adapted or expanded to include considerations for how staff will model SEL in their interactions with other staff, families, community partners, etc.

- Welcome staff and ask them to reflect on the quote: "Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them." (James Baldwin in "Fifth Avenue, Uptown" published in Esquire, July 1960).
 - Ask staff to find a partner and share what this quote means to them and how it relates to promoting students' SEL.
- Review each of the [five core social and emotional competencies](#) and [how they connect to student outcomes and lifelong success](#).
 - Prompt staff to think about how students learn these competencies in many ways – through classroom lessons, through afterschool groups, and by "imitating" the way that adults model these competencies.
 - Ask staff to do a 1-minute free write to reflect on one way they demonstrated a social and emotional competency when interacting with students in the previous week.
- Divide staff into five groups and assign each group to one of the SEL competency posters (i.e., "Self-Awareness," "Self-Management," "Social Awareness," "Relationship Skills," "Responsible Decision-Making").
 - Give staff 5 minutes at their poster to collectively brainstorm how staff can model this competency in their interactions with students.
 - As they brainstorm, a notetaker in each group should record their ideas on the poster paper.
 - After five minutes, ask the group to move to the next poster, read what the previous group has written, then add on to the existing ideas.
 - Rotate until each group has gone to every poster.
- Provide an opportunity for staff to do a "gallery walk" around all five posters.
- After staff return to their seats, ask them to write on a post-it one specific way they will model SEL in their interactions with students in the coming week.
 - Ask staff to share what they wrote in small groups, then close out the activity.
- After this activity, your SEL team can synthesize and type up the ideas to create printed posters or one-pagers that can be distributed to all staff, used in team meetings, and/or hung in classrooms.
 - You can use [this template](#) to create this.
 - [This handout](#) has additional examples of how staff might model each of the competencies.

SEL Competency	Modeling examples for staff
Self-Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use feeling words: "I feel _____ when things like this happen." • Ask students for feedback on your instructional practices. • Admit mistakes and say how you'll make things right: "I'm sorry I was in such a rush that I forgot to greet you this morning. If you have a few minutes after class, I'd love to hear how your baseball game went yesterday." • Reflect on your own cultural lens and identify biases that may exist as a result of that lens. • Build awareness of how your emotions impact students. • Notice events and ideas and how your body responds to them. • Notice personal behaviors, tone of voice, and personal affect that arise with various emotions/situations.
Self-Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how you set and plan to achieve personal goals and how you improve your own practice. ("My teaching goal this year is to design lessons that let you have more opportunities to collaborate with one another. Will you help me brainstorm how I can reach this goal?") • Demonstrate self-regulating and calming strategies in age-appropriate ways ("I'm feeling a little frustrated, so I'm going to stop and take a breath before I decide what to do next.") • Ask students for help when appropriate. • Approach new or unexpected situations as learning opportunities. • Use and return school materials with care. • Model respectful and restorative language when addressing challenges with students.
Social Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider students' perspectives and understand that everyone has their own set of truths and beliefs based on their own experiences. • Actively support the school's mission and goals. • Model upstanding behaviors. • Be willing to compromise. • Model appreciation and acceptance of others' beliefs and cultural differences. • Treat students' families and community organizations as partners who can support your work with students.
Relationship Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greet students by name daily. • Build a connection with someone in your school with whom you do not normally interact. • Take time to reflect on potential outcomes before responding to challenging students. • Allow students to get to know you within your individual comfort level and appropriate boundaries. • Be willing to give and receive constructive feedback from students. • Model fairness, respect, and appreciation for others. • Acknowledge the efforts of others with encouragement and affirmation.
Responsible Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model problem-solving strategies, like gathering all relevant information before drawing a conclusion. • Consider legal and ethical obligations before making decisions. • Place the needs of students ahead of personal and political interests. • Consider how your choices will be viewed through the lens of students.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do you notice a shift in school culture as staff members begin to intentionally model SEL for students? If so, is it a positive shift or did this practice unearth some opportunities to grow, such as positive communication and/or conflict resolution?
- What is your plan to continue modeling SEL skills for students?
- What adjustments were made to the practice based on staff and student input? How did it go? (We encourage you to share your experience with other users in the comments section.)
- Were staff members given the opportunity to discuss different groups' beliefs and behaviors around the SEL competencies? If so, how will these differences be honored in a way where none are viewed from a deficit lens?
- Were all staff members able to participate in this process? If not, how might they be supported in this work?
- Did staff members discuss how the practice may or may not be relevant to their or their students' lives? If so, in what ways?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Ongoing training and support of educators in cultivating their social-emotional competencies is key to successfully implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) into schools. Indeed, researchers have found that [SEL program implementation](#) is more successful when all stakeholders in a school are committed to SEL as part of their professional development.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When staff model SEL in how they interact with students throughout the school day, they offer positive examples of how to navigate stress and frustration, build and maintain healthy relationships, take on different perspectives, and reflect on how their decisions impact others.

In addition, classroom teachers who model SEL effectively can positively influence the learning climate in their classroom. For example, teachers who model self-awareness and social awareness when responding to student questions help to minimize anxiety and contribute to an equitable classroom where all students feel comfortable making their voices heard.

SOURCE

Adapted from the [CASEL Guide to Schoolwide SEL](#), developed by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#). CASEL, a nonprofit founded in 1994, defined social and emotional learning (SEL) more than two decades ago. Today, CASEL is a trusted source for knowledge about high-quality, evidence-based

SEL and collaborates with leading experts and supports districts, schools, and states nationwide to drive research, guide practice, and inform policy.