



FEELINGS CIRCLE: AN SEL KERNELS PRACTICE FOR SIXTH GRADE

"When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, less scary."

-Fred Rogers

OVERVIEW

In a group meeting, students share their feelings while also building their feelings vocabulary and emotion knowledge.

LEVELS

- Middle School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHY DO THIS?

- If students talk about feelings, then they can better understand themselves and others. This helps them to regulate and use their emotions to learn and socialize with others.

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Integrated into your class schedule as part of a reflection routine
- During a designated SEL block of 10-15 minutes per day for Kernels practice or as time allows
- During an advisory period, transitions between classes, or at the end of the day

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

MATERIALS

- N/A

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify their feelings and how they feel in their bodies
- Build their feelings vocabulary
- Discuss how they know what someone else is feeling

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to notice how you feel right now. Are you feeling more than one emotion? Can you identify those emotions? How do they show up in your body? If you're feeling one or more challenging emotions, take a few deep breaths to relax and let the emotions go.

Note: Click [here](#) to download and print a card version of this practice that can be added to the other [SEL Kernels practices](#) to make an easy-to-use hand-held collection. See the [Brain Games pack](#) for additional activities.

THE BIG IDEA

- Coming together to talk about our feelings helps us learn about emotions and build our feelings vocabulary. Talking about feelings helps us to better understand ourselves and build stronger relationships.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Choose a time to do this 15-minute routine (suggested: morning meeting, pre-academics, after recess).
- Gather students to sit or stand in a circle and greet them as they join. You might begin the circle with a mindfulness or visualization activity.
- Start by saying **The Big Idea** and then take a few minutes to discuss the following:
 - *What are feelings?*
 - *How do you know how you're feeling?*
 - *What does it feel like in your body?*
- After some discussion, ask:
 - *How are you feeling today? Ask volunteers to share why.*

MUST DO

- Go around the circle and give everyone the opportunity to share.
- Expand feelings vocabulary by introducing more complex feelings words over the year (e.g., trepidation, shame, uncertainty, glee, enamored, elated).

CAN ADAPT

- Use emotion words (e.g., happy, sad, scared, mad) or metaphoric expressions (e.g., weather metaphor: sunny, cloudy, partly cloudy, etc.), or rate your mood on your fingers (5 fingers = excellent mood; 1 finger = terrible mood).

AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF

- What was it like to share your feelings? Are there times you don't want to share your feelings?
- What times at school or home do you need to share how you're feeling? Why is this important?
- Do your feelings affect your behavior? What can they make you do?
- Did [historical figure] have feelings? How do you think he/she/they felt during [historical event]? What did those feelings cause him/her/them to do?

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Allow or encourage responses in home languages.
- For those who might need extra time, share the prompt ahead of time so they can think about their answer.
- students to share or pass on their turn depending on their level of comfort.

OVER THE YEAR

- Sixth grade is a time to continue to weave emotions into other learning activities and understand their links to broader conversations about the world and events.
- **To start, focus on building familiarity with different feelings words.** Have students write feelings poems:
 - Using a metaphor, have them describe their feeling, comparing it to a person, place, or thing that is meaningful to them. Give a few examples (e.g., _ is a train; _ is a pillow; _ is a lion on the prowl, etc.).
 - Then, list characteristics of the second noun, place or thing. Example: "Excitement is a train (fast, moving, destination, track)."
 - Then, extend the metaphor by answering the questions: Who? What? Where? And Why? Or How? About the comparison. Example: "Excitement is a train / Moving fast along the track / Its destination anticipated / Quickly reaching impact."
- **Explore how emotions provide fuel or motivation for individual behavior and group events.** Add into your circle time a discussion about how feelings influence words and actions. Have the group brainstorm different examples of how emotions motivate social, political, civic, and historical events. For example, when learning about history, science, or social studies, ask how individuals might have been feeling in moments of discovery, change, revolution, tragedy, etc. Ask about the feelings of different characters at different moments in the story/narrative - and how those feelings were tied to behavior or action.

SOURCE

This practice is part of the SEL Kernels project developed by the [EASEL Lab](#) at Harvard University.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice students talking about how they feel more frequently? Are they noticing how other students might be feeling, or how book characters or historical figures are/were feeling?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Young children who can accurately read facial expressions and assign an appropriate emotion to a situation [perform better academically](#), have [fewer behavior problems](#), and demonstrate greater [prosocial \(kind, helpful\) behavior](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Knowledge about emotions is key to student success, and learning about emotions early helps students in the long run. Children must use these skills whenever faced with tasks that require emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal regulation. Emotional skills allow children to recognize how different situations make them feel and to address those feelings in prosocial ways.

Consequently, these skills are often fundamental to positive social interactions and critical to building relationships with peers and adults; without the ability to recognize and regulate one's emotions or engage in empathy and perspective-taking, it becomes very difficult to interact positively with others.

Indeed, first graders who showed [little knowledge of emotions](#) were more likely to report feelings of loneliness, sadness, and anxiety in fifth grade. Teens, too, who score high in [emotional intelligence](#) have greater academic success, fewer mental health issues, and better attitudes towards teachers and schools.

TERMS OF USE

Thank you for downloading this resource! Please feel free to share it with friends, teachers, colleagues, and anyone else who might benefit from it.

Greater Good in Education is a free online resource produced by UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. Visit our website at ggie.berkeley.edu to choose from more than 300 practices that can be incorporated into all aspects of a school community, from academic instruction to staff meetings to engagement with parents.

Please email us at ggsceducation@berkeley.edu with any questions about our programs and resources for educators.

With gratitude,
Greater Good in Education