



FEELINGS CIRCLE: AN SEL KERNELS PRACTICE FOR FIRST 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

- PreK/Lower Elementary

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 play with others.

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Integrated into daily schedules as a routine or used as-needed throughout the day
- During a designated SEL block of 10-15 minutes per day for Kernels practice or as time allows
- During a morning meeting, transitions, after recess, or at the end of the day
- At the beginning of the school year to create a classroom community where it's safe for students to share their feelings

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

MATERIALS

- [Feelings Face Cards](#)

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 song the class likes to sing together.
- 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 do feelings 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.

CAN ADAPT

- Use basic 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?*
- *Can you tell what another person is feeling? How can you tell?*
- *Do animals have feelings? How do you know?*
- *What times at school or home do you need to share how you're feeling?*

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.
- Allow students to share or pass on their turn depending on their level of comfort.

OVER THE YEAR

- First grade is a time to continue building awareness of basic emotions and the words we use to describe them. A learning objective for the first grade year is to begin to help kids think about what they feel and why they feel that way (i.e., what causes specific feelings). There are no right or wrong answers; students should explore these ideas in an open-ended way.
- **To start, focus on building familiarity with different feelings words.** Use the [Feelings Face Cards](#) to support learning. Focus on the basic emotions first: happy, sad, mad, and scared. Show the Feelings Face Cards and discuss how each emotion looks, sounds, and feels.
- **As students become familiar with feelings words, begin to encourage students to think about and describe why they feel the way they feel** (i.e., what happened to make you feel that way?).
- **When students are ready for more, begin to explore how we respond to feelings.** Add into your circle time a discussion about how we can respond to others' emotions in familiar classroom situations. Have the group brainstorm different ways to respond when others share their feelings (e.g., offer a hug, offer a listening ear, offer to play together, ask for help, etc.).

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 characters in a book are 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

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