

A Social Emotional Approach to In-person Learning: Promoting Emotional Health and Wellness



CASEL Social Skill Domains

Self-Awareness: focuses on identifying and recognizing emotions, accurate self-perception, strengths, needs, values, and self-efficacy.

- Mindfulness skills
- Body awareness
- Emotional vocabulary
- Labeling and identification of emotions
- Grief and growth cycle
- Defensive/coping mechanism

Self-Management: includes impulse control and stress management, self-motivation and discipline, goal setting, and organizational skills.

- Stress management
- Calming/coping skills
- Distress tolerance (increasing your window of tolerance)
- Resilience
- Defensive/coping strategies
- Self-regulation/emotional regulation through co-regulation
- Self-care

Social Awareness: addresses perspective taking, empathy, difference recognition, and respect for others.

- Interpersonal effectiveness
- How our actions impact others (the ripple effect or butterfly effect)
- Accepting responsibility for own actions
- Accepting a no response
- Resisting peer pressure

Relationship Skills: encompasses communication, social engagement and relationship building, working cooperatively, negotiation, refusal, conflict management, and help seeking.

- Environmental awareness
- Interpersonal effectiveness
- Conflict management

- Difficult conversations
- Ross Greene's Plan B Collaboration
- Social greeting
- Conversation skills
- Self-advocating Skills

Responsible Decision Making: includes problem identification and situation analysis, problem solving, evaluation and reflection, and personal, social, and ethical responsibility.

- Problem solving
- Pros and cons
- Generating solutions
- Accepting difference of opinion, that there is always more than one approach (agree to disagree)
- Seek first to understand (asking questions)
- Assume positive intentions
- Speaker listener/reflective listening/active listening/paraphrasing (listening and communication skills)
- Understanding the crisis cycle

Anxiety, Stress, Grief, and Trauma

Expect an increase in all student behaviors with the return to in-person learning. The anxiety related to the uncertainty will result in behaviors that will look like non-compliance, manipulation, checking out, etc. Do not take these behaviors personally, this is a normal response to the situation.

With the increased likelihood of students returning to school with anxiety, stress, grief, and possible trauma, please keep in mind that this is a normal response to situational circumstances. COVID-19 is an event that can produce chronic stress or trauma. However, it is not the event itself that results in chronic stress and trauma, but rather the individuals' responses to the event. Individual responses will vary based on their relational connections, resources, and perception of risk. Students need to be provided adequate time for adjustment to the new method of education with the return to school before giving consideration for IEP and 504 development.

- Most students, even those who have not experienced trauma, will probably return to school in a state of hypervigilance, which means that they will not be in a place to learn.
- Students will need to be taught what calms looks like and feels like.
- They will need to be taught or know how to be mindful (have an awareness of their body - emotional warning signs, physical sensations that are produced by different emotional states) before they can be taught what it means to feel calm.
- One must experience what it is like to be calm in order to learn how to feel calm.
- Staff will need to have knowledge about the states of arousal and be able to read social cues to be able to assess if a student is in a state of hyperarousal, hypoarousal, or calm.

- Staff will need to know how to co-regulate to be able to bring students from a place of hyperarousal or hypoarousal to a calm state.
- Staff will need to understand the flight, fight, and freeze (limbic system) responses and how this relates to modern survival instincts and modern threats that trigger the brain's survival response.
- Staff wearing face masks will add to students' stress levels, as this will limit or inhibit students' abilities to read facial expressions, producing higher levels of anxiety or student worry. Staff will have greater struggles reading the social cues of students who are wearing masks, which might increase tensions.
- Teachers will need to be more intentional about having/scheduling frequent emotional check-ins with students.
- Academic instruction will need to be broken up into small chunks with greater/longer break times in between lessons. There will need to be a balance between SEL instruction and academic instruction. Think of this as a first then/if then/when then approach to education. First, we do some SEL learning, then we do some academic learning. With many breaks in between.
- The priority of all teachers will be to establish a positive, safe culture and climate in their classrooms; this can be done through trauma-informed practices approaches, PBIS approaches, and SEL approaches (Boys Town, Capturing Kids Hearts, etc.).
- Teachers will need to help each individual student find a way to belong to the class. They will need to help students find purpose within the classroom and purpose or meaning for learning.
- Teachers will want to focus on normalizing events related to COVID-19, continuing the social media concept that we are all in this together.
- Teachers will need to be vulnerable with their students, sharing (appropriately) their own fears and concerns and that they are figuring this all out as they go, communicating that they do not already have things figured out.
- Staff will need to validate students' feelings and experiences. Validation means communicating understanding, not acceptance.
- Teachers will need to have empathy, not sympathy.
 - Sympathy: looking down into a well at a student who has fallen in and saying to yourself it looks cold down there, it looks dark, it might be scary down there. Throwing a rope down to a student and expecting them to climb out.
 - Empathy: Climbing down into the well with the student, experiencing the cold, embracing the fear and darkness, and helping the student to climb out, climbing out together.
- The need for differentiation will be greater than ever and this might even need to be pushed to having different expectations for students, in place of having school-wide or class-wide expectations. Teachers will have to not only meet students where they are at academically, but also where they are at emotionally. Keeping in mind that their emotional place and their academic place might not be in alignment with each other.
- Teachers need to listen to student stories and not overreact and not make promises, but listen reflect and then offer problem solving, including who might need to be involved with the problem solving. Teachers would benefit from being taught Speaker Listener (paraphrasing skills). Easy to understand, but much harder to put into practice.

- The pace of the classroom will need to start out slow and can then gradually be increased, focusing on community building.
- Regular classroom meetings might be a great approach (classroom circles, restorative practices have some great models on how to conduct classroom meeting). Classroom meetings allow students to practice SEL skills and express emotions, fears, and concerns.
- Use of the concept of Mix and Vary in the teaching process.
 - Mix easy task/activity with difficult tasks, starting with 80% easy tasks and 20% hard tasks, going back and forth between them, then over time slowly increasing the % of difficult tasks until you reach 80% hard tasks and 20% easy tasks.
- Teacher needs to create emotional regulation corners or spaces in their classrooms that have multiple sensory items that can be used to help with emotional regulation. This might also be considered a private space where children can go to have some alone time or space from others in the classroom, teaching everyone in the class that we do not bother, ask questions to, or speak to individuals who are in the private space.
- Teach/have students create safety action plans that are individualized to each student. These plans are for when students feel unsafe, scared, worry, or anxious. They will have a list of actions they can take to resolve, reduce, or make their feelings manageable. Taking some type of action is always important in promoting a sense of safety.
- Have staff available in an easy-to-access location that can talk to and listen to students, and a system or protocol for students to access this staff, that will help maintain social distancing and not overload the process.

Teaching Strategies That Promote SEL

- Think-Pair-Share
- Snowballing
- Jigsaw
- Carousel/Gallery/Museum Walk
- Scaffolder Socratic Seminar
 - Smaller groups with a leader of the discussion and recorder
- Literature Circles in a Socratic Seminar Format
- Socratic Seminar
- Group Rewards but Not Group Consequences (individual Consequences), group consequences for a few students' behaviors can undermine social emotional learning.
- Classroom Meeting
- Debating an Issue
- Problem Solving with Case Studies

- Conflict Resolution Facilitation
- Accountability Talk

Establishing Routines

Establishing school routines is important. Establishing these routines can be accomplished through the creation or usage of Behavior Matrix, a tool that is used with PBIS. If the Behavior Matrix is matched to an already existing school-wide expectation matrix, then this will create a level of familiarity that will help with the learning process.

Social Distancing

- Social Skills Training
 - Need to teach students the skill of social distancing:
 - Why this is important.
 - What it looks like.
 - How to determine if you have achieved social distancing.
 - The key social emotional competency needed for teaching and understanding of social distance is social awareness.
- Classrooms need to be set up to promote social distancing:
 - Think about desk arrangements.
 - Think about traffic flow to and from the teacher and needed materials.
 - Think about lining up procedures.
- Use of the restroom:
 - How many students will be allowed in the restroom at one time?
 - How will each classroom know how many students are in the bathroom, when multiple teachers will be sending student from multiple classrooms?
 - Will need to teach students to count the number of students currently in the bathroom, and to know when they need to wait outside. This would fall in the area of social awareness (being aware of your environment), self-regulation/emotional regulation (managing urges), and problem solving (decision making).
- Traveling through the hallways:
 - What will this look like when you have to pass other students from other classrooms?
 - Might need to develop a system for alternating or staggering passing times/transition times. This might require some creative scheduling.
 - Social skill that might need to be taught is personal space - teaching students to honor the personal space of others.
- Greeting of students and general social interactions:
 - Teaching replacement behaviors (fist bump, elbow bump) in place of handshakes and hugging. This will take lots of practice with many repetitions to build up enough muscle memory to get these replacement behaviors to be effective.

- Lunch time routines:
 - Think about having students go to the lunchroom in small groups, get their food (previously self-served stations such as condiments and salad bars will now need to be served by staff), and then return to their classroom. Or, the number of students that eat in the lunchroom will have to be restricted, and the lunchroom set up to allow for social distancing.
 - A plan for cleaning up after lunch will need to be developed so that not all the students are at the trash cans throwing away their trash at the same time.
 - Students might need to be socially grouped for lunch to allow for them to have time to socially interact with their friends. This social interaction time is important, this is where students practice the SEL lessons that they have been taught.
- Students will need to be taught conversation skills, how to establish appropriate boundaries, and how to resist peer pressure. This might fall under the effective decision making SEL domain.
- Recess or after lunch free time:
 - The outside gathering area/playground might need to be divided up into sections with a rotation schedule where each class has a designated play area to limit the number of students in any one area.
 - What will the process for lining up be afterwards to continue to promote social distancing?
 - Social skill area would be to teach age appropriate play activities, decision making, social awareness, other awareness.
 - Might need to set up a system of grouping students into free time activity groups. Examples: four square group, tether ball group, card playing group, etc.
- Before and after school routines:
 - What needs to happen when students get off the bus or are dropped off?
 - What happens when the bell rings at the end of the day for dismissal? How do you prevent a mass exiting where students are not going to be thinking about social distancing?

Basically, all daily routines within the school environment will need to be re-evaluated and re-designed to allow for social distancing.

- What will social distancing look like for classroom aids who are assisting specific students?
- What will be the general rule of thumb for physical contact for students, teachers, and classroom aids? There will be times when physical touch will happen, be necessary and unavoidable. There will be times when social distancing will not be possible. What are the processes and procedures that need to take place before touch, during touch and after touch?

Infection Control (Cleaning)

- Students will need to be taught proper hand washing skills.
- Students need to be taught how and when to wipe down used items, or how to use a clean bin/dirty bin system. This will be especially critical if there are community supplies such as markers, color pencils, crayons, scissors, etc. It is important to teach the student these skills as the adults in the classroom cannot reasonably monitor all the classroom activities. This is also a good skill for students to have that they can make use of and apply when they are in the community and at home.
- Hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes will need to be strategically placed around the classroom and throughout the school to prevent large gatherings of students at a few locations waiting to access the hand sanitizers.
- All staff will probably need to have access to portable bottles of hand sanitizer that they can keep on their person.
- Staff need to get into the habit of wiping things down both before and after usage.
- Staff will need access to gloves, that need to either be changed frequently or disinfected frequently much the way health care professionals in hospitals conduct business.
- Some students might be tempted to touch their face, put hands in their mouth, touch their eyes after the use of disinfectant, routines or rituals might need to be developed and taught to prevent this behavior.
- Use of face masks:
 - Generally encouraged.
 - Some students might not be able to tolerate wearing a mask due to sensory issues. It might be possible that these students will need to be in a different classroom where no students are wearing masks.
 - Might need to have paperwork that parents sign stating that they approve of their student not wearing a face mask and accepting a higher level of risk for their student.
 - Some students, for sensory or tactile reasons, might also refuse to engage in frequent hand washing.
 - Schools will need to think about what consequences, if any, will be assigned to students if they refuse to wear a mask, wash their hands regularly, etc.
 - ***It would be recommended that for student who refuses hand washing or to wear a mask, that this not be considered a disciplinary infraction, but rather investigation is needed to determine why. If there are missing skills, then the skills need to be taught and problem solving needs to be started.***
 - Social skill that might need to be taught is distress tolerance, to increase students window of tolerance.

Crisis Intervention Training

What are districts/BOCES/schools going to do about making sure that an adequate number of staff have been trained and are skilled with crisis intervention (CPI QBS)? Have staff training certifications lapsed with the stay home order and switch to remote learning? How will we get staff training and skills up to speed for the return to in-person learning?

- What will be the guidance provided to staff about social distancing and crisis intervention?
- If in an emergency for the purpose of safety, a physical intervention is needed, what will be the protocol or expectations (business as normal or something different)?
- What infection control measures need to be taken if staff physically intervene?
- Do staff need to wear gloves when they physically intervene with a student?

Attendance

- When does an assessment need to be conducted to determine if a lack of attendance is due to anxiety, fear, or anticipatory grief?
- If lack of in-person attendance is due to anxiety, what will be done to support the student, helping them to deal with their anxiety?
- Do they need to be assessed through the MTSS Process, 504 plan or IEP process?
- How will an assessment be completed, given the possible lack of access to the student?
- Will an alternative type of learning be offered to these students, such as continued remote learning, and what will this look like? Does the school have the needed resources to accommodate?
- What will the process be if it is the parent who has the anxiety about the student returning to in-person learning? Will remote learning continue, will it be defined as home schooling, what resources will be provided?
- Staff skill needed: knowing the difference between an emotional disorder and social maladjustment.

Remote Learning: Creating Meaningful Connections

Families will need to be taught/provided with the skills to:

- Verbally and non-verbally (no physical intervention) de-escalate children.
- How to deal with intense emotions (self/emotional regulation).
- Manage stress/self-care/coping skills/relaxation skills to prevent burnout during the process of helping their child through the educational process.
- Create structure/routines within the home environment.

Remote learning can be used to prepare the student for in-person learning, teaching mindfulness, teaching what calm will feel like, and preparing the student for what to expect when they return to in-

person learning. Teaching coping skills for anxiety management. All of the above CASEL and Anxiety, Fear, Grief suggestions for in-person learning can also be done or conducted through remote learning.

- Needs to be synchronous, not asynchronous, or a combination of both (just not asynchronous by itself).
- Confidentiality: Need to engage in authentication, verification of person and their location.
- Need to select a telehealth platform that is HIPPA/FERPA Compliant:
 - SKYPE
 - Better Help
 - Simple Practice
 - Thera Soft
 - Doxy
 - VSEE
 - Thera-link
 - Theranest- Mobile APP

HIPPA Telehealth:

- Privacy Rule (Confidentiality):
 - Need to make sure that no one else can hear the conversation on both the staff side and the student side.
 - Policies around usage of personal smart phones as it relates to student personal information.
 - Establish hand signals or emergency phrases, to communicate that they are not alone and have a code word that is included at the beginning or the end of each e-mail and text for the purpose of authentication.
 - What information is and is not allowed to be sent through text and e-mail?
- Telehealth checklist to start sessions:
 - Where are you?
 - Anyone else in the room?
 - Can anyone overhear you?
 - Background noise?
 - Emergency information review.
 - What will happen if you get disconnected.
- Security Rule (end to end encryption, 256-bit encryption for video and audio)
- Breach notification systems/alerts/policies.
- BAA (Business Association Agreement)
 - Technology contractors/computer support/platform.
 - Employees.
 - Admin staff.
 - For consultants.
- Administrative safeguards (staff Training, policies, and procedures).
- Digital security.
- Risk assessment related to breaches.
- Have a crisis protocol ready, establish a crisis plan with the student, have a family member that can be called who can check on the student. Always know the student's location and address.

- For students who are suicidal, a safety plan needs to be developed.
- Need informed consent for technology usage.
 - Must have parent consent to work with children.
- Informed consent parts:
 - Disclose nature of service and professional qualifications.
 - Competency for decision making (student/parents check for understand).
 - Voluntary decision (they decided to participate voluntarily). This can be the consent for services that is signed through the IEP Process.
- Risk of technology usage/benefits of technology usage.
- Staff will never hang up/disconnect, the student is always the one that disconnects. If the screen goes blank, then this is a tech issue, and you need to have a plan B that will then be put into place.
- E-mails are part of the record (e-mails back and forth with the student). E-mail needs to be on an encrypted system.
- Must have student/parent permission to record (recording is protected client information).
- Policies for e-mail and texting (establishing boundaries), response times expectations (all communication must be documented). Misunderstandings will happen with text and e-mail, what will be the policy/procedures for resolving misunderstandings?
- Need to have an annual assessment of possible breach risks.
- Need to back up any electronically kept records.
- It is a good idea to pair telehealth with an app usage for depression and anxiety.
 - Apps:
 - Calm
 - Social Work Helper
 - CBT-I Coach
 - Panic Attacks
 - Head Space
 - Suicide Safe
 - Virtual Hope Box
 - Simple Habit
 - Mindfulness