

Hearts & Minds

How parents can support social
and emotional learning at home

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



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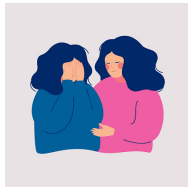


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The Definition of Student Success



Focusing on SEL at school and at home can help their adolescent children develop a stronger sense of self.

From bucket filling and “grit” awards to restorative justice circles, schools are expanding their definitions of student success.

Mission statements, curricula, and even report cards now include a constellation of non-academic skills and habits that speak to a broader idea of development—qualities like persistence, responsibility, and collaboration—known as “social and emotional learning.”

For parents, this may sound awfully familiar. After all, isn’t social and emotional learning what families do together all day long? Parents are forever reminding their kids to “get along with your brother” and “pick

up your socks,” or joining them in weekend activities like volunteering and attending religious services. What’s new about encouraging kids to, well, grow up?

Social and emotional learning, or SEL, is a little different. It refers to five interconnected qualities, abilities, and habits of mind that characterize children’s holistic development—all of which children can learn and develop, according to the Collaborative for Social Emotional and Academic Learning, or CASEL. SEL breaks apart big ideas like steadfastness and empathy into quick-take component skills, and gives fast-changing adolescents explicit, guided opportunities to practice them. ■

In this guide, we’ll explore the five major areas of SEL and highlight ways parents can encourage kids to flex those muscles during the course of daily family life. Focusing on SEL at school and at home can help their adolescent children develop a stronger sense of self. And that’s no small thing for kids lurching toward adulthood, as they navigate the difficult decisions, challenging coursework, and whipsaw emotions of the in-between teenaged years.

Why SEL Matters

Helping students master SEL skills like planning ahead, working with others, and keeping cool under pressure is not only a critical part of academic success, but also lays a foundation for success in adult life.

Rooted in research

Research shows that in school, students with core emotional strengths, trusting relationships, and a well-developed sense of self are far less likely to become disengaged. They are more likely to make the most of their education, by persisting through challenges, taking calculated risks, and setting and achieving goals. And studies show that children's non-cognitive behaviors are predictive of important markers of adult well-being, including career success, marriage, sound mental health, and lower rates of drug use and incarceration.



Teachable moments

So how do they do it? By breaking big qualities like empathy and collaboration into their component skills, kids can practice and get better at them. And so school projects and grading rubrics knit together academic goals with explicit expectations for thinking critically, working as a team, and recognizing and analyzing mistakes. Science labs, for example, often require students to delegate tasks, craft new solutions to unfamiliar questions, and document their decision-making to show whether respectful, evidence-based arguments won the day.

Educating the whole child

Even before it had a name and base of research, teachers knew that SEL is the foundation upon which all learning occurs. Kids who are derailed by frustration, can't get along with classmates, don't feel comfortable making mistakes, or can't ask for help are far less likely to master tough academic subjects. Schools are uniquely human environments, where caring and confidence go far to support fast-changing adolescent students as they stretch beyond what they already know to learn new things. SEL respects and formalizes that aspect of learning, too. ■



So what does this mean for parent?

How can families promote this type of development at home, and how might that look different from what they already do to support their kids?

Read on →

SELF-AWARENESS

From “I’m bad at that!” to working hard and getting better

Changing the conversation to help kids practice self-awareness

What does your teenager believe about him or herself? When their thoughts or feelings influence their decisions or behavior, can they step back, recognize what’s happening, and reset the situation?

These are the hallmarks of self-awareness, or one’s perception of their unique strengths and weaknesses. When skeptical adolescents learn to look honestly at their capabilities, take into consideration the feedback from others, and form a realistic, positive self-image, they build a solid foundation for personal growth and outward success.

Through self-awareness, teenagers also can separate out impulses and emotional thunderclaps from their true, core selves—a critical tool for staying the course amid conflict, unexpected challenges, and occasional setbacks. Schools often talk of having a “growth mindset,” in which students focus on effort rather than their perceived innate talents.



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Spot Art TK

SELF-AWARENESS

Buzzword: “growth mindset”

Recognizing strengths and weaknesses, understanding how thoughts and feelings influence behavior, approaching goals with confidence and optimism.

When your kid realizes a tough test is coming up and seeks out tutoring and extra study time instead of giving up, that’s **self-awareness**.

Praising the Process

Nurturing a child's self-awareness may take paying more attention to your own.



Nurturing a child's self-awareness may take paying more attention to your own. Think through your key strengths and weaknesses and include this thinking in your ongoing conversations.

Today:

Think “A” for effort. A kid who works hard and persists through a tough assignment or test deserves loving recognition—even if the grade isn't great.

Tomorrow:

Be a model. When sharing everyday stories from your past or present, think through your own self-awareness. Call out mistakes and discuss how you moved beyond the misstep. And if you felt temporarily frustrated, trapped, or annoyed, acknowledge those feelings, and how they passed by, too.

In the future:

Look for opportunities to talk about confidence and incremental effort or take on novel challenges together in relaxed, low-stakes settings. Watch a reality show together, like cooking competitions with winners and losers or “beastmaster” contests where athletes discuss their workouts. Go for a hike and ask your teen to keep tabs on the trailmarkers. Or bake a favorite treat together and let your teen take the lead—and don't forget to share your tales of burning the cookies when you were a kid.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Eyes on the prize

Stories and strategies to help teenagers keep calm and carry on

At times, it seems like adolescent emotions come in two temperatures: boiling hot and freezing cold. Through self-management, teenagers can learn to maintain happier mediums, not just by recognizing their feelings, but also by regulating those emotions, managing stress, and resisting impulsive behaviors.

Self-management allows kids to choose how they will react to a set of circumstances, based on their enhanced understanding of themselves. It is the active version of self-awareness, and allows individuals to apply their understanding of themselves, their core values and capabilities, and their ability to persist past a flare-up of frustration to progress toward a more important goal. These skills help teenagers choose constructive, positive actions and reactions.



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SELF-MANAGEMENT

Buzzword: “impulse control”

Keeping stress in check, being organized, setting goals and staying on track to achieve those goals.

A teenager who stays calm and focused on the future after losing a tough game or failing a test is showing good **self-management**.

Story Time for Teens



From Dickensian classics to the growing universe of superhero movies, sharing stories can give parents and kids a great way to talk about self-management without straying into lecture territory. **Try these conversation starters.**

Today:

In daily small talk, no matter the subject, be sure to mention how you felt at the time of your story in a neutral way. Mention your feelings in passing, like the weather.

Tomorrow:

The daily news cycle provides lots of examples of consequences for letting negative emotions rule. Next time a favorite celebrity gets into trouble, ask your child what they think is going to happen next. What could the celebrity have done differently? What would your teen do differently?

In the future:

Epic adventure movies are fun to watch together and can give parents and kids a chance to talk about strength and self-control in a fantastical realm. Ask why your teen thinks a certain hero won—what made him or her stronger than their adversary? What was the defeated villain's critical weakness? See if your child lands on examples of discipline and calm-headedness on his or her own. If not, pick an example and ask if it seemed important, and why.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

That's not fair!

Building on adolescent scorekeeping to promote social awareness

Teenagers are notoriously self-involved, but have a secret superpower when it comes to growing their sense of empathy: they are obsessed with fairness. That can be a powerful window into the feelings and perspectives of others—the key component of social awareness.



Learning to recognize the needs of others, especially people of different genders, races, and backgrounds, is a critical foundational skill for anyone looking to succeed in school or their broader community. Social awareness goes beyond that, to include appreciating and asking questions about differences rather than making judgments about them.

The feelings and perspectives of others is the key component of social awareness.



SOCIAL AWARENESS

Buzzword: “perspective taking”

Recognizing and respecting social norms, diverse viewpoints, and community supports, and using empathy to adjust behavior to accommodate and complement them.

Teenagers with social awareness often recognize and call out bullying or unfairness in their student communities.

Thinking Outside the House



Starting with small, lecture-free acts of empathy and kindness, parents can help build a bridge between teenagers' tendencies to tally privilege (and criticize discrepancies) and broader perspective-taking that celebrates diversity.

Today:

Intentionally notice and discuss clear evidence of differences in the course of daily life. One way to start: accommodations for people with physical disabilities. Next time you pull into a parking lot, for example, point out the blue accessible parking spaces and wonder aloud how those who use them might feel if someone else were parked there.

Tomorrow:

Volunteer activities or family charitable contributions can spark meaningful dialogue and provide concrete examples of fairness and empathy. Small efforts can start at home. Elderly neighbors might appreciate a swept walkway or having their garbage cans taken to the curb, for example. Teenagers can easily gather and bag outgrown clothing for donation and take them to the charity box to deposit it. If you participate in local charity appeals, set aside a portion of that budget for your teenager to allocate.

In the future:

Move beyond empathy to recognizing and celebrating diversity as well. Cultural exchange and family dinners are good places to start. Host a potluck where each family brings a dish that reflects their heritage, or attend an ethnic festival in your area. Talk as a family about current affairs like debates over discrimination and refugees, for example. Don't lecture, but make sure to mention traditional values and strengths of different cultures in the conversation.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Getting connected, but staying true to themselves

Kids who understand and value themselves are in a good position to understand and value others.

They can build rewarding relationships with peers and strong connections throughout their community.

Strong bonds are rooted in core skills, like listening, communicating clearly, cooperating, and negotiating conflicts. Kids and adults with strong relationship skills know how to talk and listen with diverse people, resist negative social pressure, and seek out and offer help when they need it. They can maintain their independence in a positive way, while also working in teams and sharing responsibility.



RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Buzzword: “engagement”

Building and maintaining trusting relationships, listening and communicating skillfully, navigating conflict, strengthening positive connections to resist negative social pressures.

Between social media, sex, and party invitations, kids are often at a crossroads. When they know how to defuse a fight or enlist adult advice, that’s evidence of their **relationship skills**.

Community

STARTS AT HOME



Teenagers need allies, and that starts with parents. Trust, open lines of communication, and regarding your teenager as an important member of Team Family can create a foundation for growing relationship skills. Families with more than one parent or caregiver should hold themselves to the same standard and model positive behaviors among adults, too.

Today:

Be a trusted resource—and show your teen trust as well. Promise they can always call for help or a ride home, no questions asked, and keep your word.

Tomorrow:

Create explicit opportunities for unstructured family activities and communication. Playing board or card games is a great way to practice relationship skills. If that's too much for a shy adolescent, consider leaving brief notes of encouragement or care around the house. Invite them to help with routine physical tasks that foster cooperation, like holding supplies during window washing or helping to rake and bag leaves.

In the future:

Communication is key: talk about the relationships in your life, and invite your teenager to discuss the relationships in theirs. Discuss your friendships and family relationships, including the mutual respect and understanding that protects those bonds. Ask about their feelings, but resist giving advice. If your teen resists the topic, look to other sources of content to color the conversation: binge-watch a TV series together and talk through the dynamics. Resources like commonsensemedia.org can point you towards shows with positive messages.

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

Choosing their own adventure

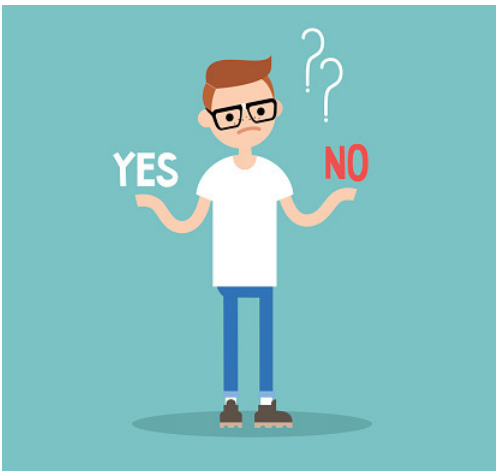
To support smart decisions, let teens take the lead

Responsible decision-making is where SEL comes together: kids need to understand themselves, others, and their social environment, look beyond their emotions, diagnose challenges and identify ethical solutions, and take action. It's a majestic feat, and it isn't going to happen overnight.

Making responsible decisions means choosing constructive solutions in the face of a challenge. Kids who can anticipate consequences and keep their personal goals and well-being in mind while resisting social pressures have mastered the skill.



Making responsible decisions means choosing constructive solutions in the face of a challenge.



RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

Buzzword: “smart choices”

Analyzing problems and making ethical decisions, anticipating short- and long-term consequences, advancing the well-being of self and others.

Kids who can tell their friends “no” when asked to cut school, get in an unfamiliar car, or hold a weapon are putting **responsible decision-making** to work.

Practice Makes Perfect



Kids can't make wise decisions if they never have the chance to practice, and they won't learn to choose wisely if they don't experience the consequences for failing to do so. Give your teen the room and responsibility to make decisions that affect his or her daily life.

Today:

If your child forgets their lunch, homework, or instrument, don't bring it to school. Let them identify, experience, and learn from their mistakes. Stay calm, and let them know you're confident they'll get it right the next time.

Tomorrow:

Take advantage of adolescent concerns to put some family decision-making power into kids' hands. If your teen criticizes meal choices, smartphone rules, or weekend scheduling, invite them to diagnose shortcomings and discuss or propose alternatives with the entire family's needs in mind. Ask questions that prompt thinking through causes and effects and whether their choices fairly affect others.

In the future:

Look for opportunities for kids to practice navigating risk and making ethical choices in a social context. Consider giving tweens a chance to balance personal freedom with responsibility to others by walking around town or the mall on their own or with a friend. If your child carries a smartphone, maintain an ongoing conversation about why or why not location tracking is turned on. Steer clear of teenage social drama, but ask your child how others have reacted to the social choices they've made—even if they don't answer you right away.