

Social Emotional Learning Facilitator Guide

All Grade Levels: For use with parents, teachers, and students



Facilitator: a person responsible for leading or coordinating the work of a group, as one who leads a group discussion

Connect with Kids resources are designed to support classroom teachers, counselors, community leaders, parents/guardians, and other involved adults in facilitating courageous conversations about the social and emotional issues facing young people today. Connect with Kids does not expect facilitators to be experts in all fields of social emotional learning. Instead, CWK provides the resources teachers and facilitators need to help groups explore, analyze, connect, build, and construct their own learning.

Research shows that children and adults who emotionally connect with an experience are more likely to make life-long behavioral change than those who just receive information about that experience. Business experts call it “see-feel-change,” fueling action by sparking emotion. Connect with Kids calls it educating the heart: using the power of storytelling and peer-to-peer connections to create heart-felt associations.

Effective methods for teaching and facilitating group work in social and emotional learning skills are active, participatory, and engaging. Connect with Kids programs feature “real” children and teens sharing their stories and talking about today’s issues along with the latest research on the topic at hand and advice from experts. Students relate to the peer-to-peer programs that touch on the social, health, and behavioral issues that they face in their own lives. The award-winning videos and cross-curricula activities offer proven methods with practical, solution-oriented learning experiences.

SEL: What is it and why is it important?

It is fair to say that all of us — children and adults, alike — function better when our emotions are in check and we positively approach the task or challenge at hand. **Social and emotional learning (SEL)** is the process through which we acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to **understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy** for others, **establish and maintain positive relationships**, and **make responsible decisions**. Research confirms that SEL as a part of the school curricula (pre-school through high school) plays a critical role in supporting academic performance and curbing risky behaviors (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out).

Five SEL Core Competencies



CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, outlines the following five core SEL competencies, which are addressed throughout Connect with Kids curriculum.

- 1. Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- 2. Self-management:** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- 3. Social awareness:** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
- 4. Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
- 5. Responsible Decision Making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

The Connect with Kids SEL Platform: Make it Work for You



Connect with Kids has designed resources as a dynamic, interactive social and emotional learning platform. Make the platform work for you! You can modify discussion questions and activities to meet your own teaching/facilitating strengths, to focus on the specific needs and developmental levels of your students, and to address key challenges or issues in your school and/or community. You may need more than one session to complete each

activity and its elements, especially allowing for ample discussion and interaction among your students.

Please keep in mind that the content of many video segments, and the topics themselves, explore sometimes tough-to-discuss themes. As educators, we must be sensitive to students in the class who may be experiencing or struggling with those challenges. Always review the video, topic and lesson plan, and involve your school counselors and/or social workers as you see fit. Only begin the activity if it seems the class has adequately processed each video segment.

Lesson Blueprints (MS/HS)



The Lesson Blueprints resources further provide academic programming options and have been provided to help you enhance and modify the video curriculum with additional lessons, assessment rubrics, and other helpful information. These materials are open ended in that they leave room for the teacher to specify the topic to debate, the subjects of current events to be analyzed, the focus of the film to be created, the theme of the

discussion, the quotations to be dissected, the details of the project, etc. Teacher support materials for discussions, question building, and writing prompts can be found in this section as well as lessons introducing students to the core competencies of SEL.

While the **Lesson Blueprints** are primarily designed for middle school and high school levels, many of the resources can be adapted for elementary school aged students. (Please note that elementary school Lesson Blueprints are in the process of being designed.)

The First Steps of Teacher/Facilitator Prep: Watch, Read, Make it Your Own

Prior to each session, it is imperative to objectively prepare: **read** the lesson plan/activity, **view** the video material, **open** links, **listen** to audio selections (where indicated), and **read print resources** to **make adjustments** based upon your student population, current issues, developmental levels, and challenges. We are aware that depending upon the make-up of your group and/or community, some topics may be too challenging or deemed inappropriate. Connect with Kids' best practices encourages teachers to choose to omit or to modify a lesson or use the activity without the video component.

This particularly applies to the **PK-Grade 2 Character and Life Skills** lessons. These lessons have been designed so that teachers/facilitators can choose to show the video and use the pre-viewing and discussion activities that deepen the experience, or they can choose to do the activity without the video.

Additionally, each student has his or her own unique life experiences. The discussion questions that accompany each video segment are designed to assist students with sharing their experiences and beliefs about the topic at hand. By encouraging their participation in the learning process, you can help students listen to each other while correcting any misinformation that the students may have. The curriculum provides students with the opportunity to receive support and validation from you and each other as they participate in activities and discussion, which ask them to explore their struggles and need to make wise choices. As appropriate, guide your students toward supporting their peers by asking them to react and give feedback.

Preparatory Empathy

At the core of effective social and emotional learning is the notion that the leader must understand the population that he/she is teaching, referred to as "preparatory empathy." It is important for you to prepare for your audience by considering:

- What young people are thinking and feeling about the many issues addressed in SEL, such as peer pressure, social media, bullying, and developing the character and life skills to handle adversity and build lifelong resilience.
- What it is like to be a young person in today's online, digital world.
- How adults tend to respond when students express their thoughts and opinions—and how you will respond.

Source: Alex Gitterman , Ed.d. and Carel Germain, Ed.d The Life Model of Social Work Practice

Facilitator Tips: Setting the Tone and Climate for Learning

Experts agree that a most important variable in conducting sessions can be how the adult facilitator relates to the students in the class. Your challenge: to create an emotionally safe environment for honest dialogue and sharing without relinquishing your role (and control) as a leader. As an effective facilitator, young people need to know that you are both in charge of the group/classroom and that you are a truly caring person who is interested in the social, emotional, and academic challenges they face.

To effectively involve students, work with the group to develop a set of class participation guidelines or “norms” (a MS/HS level lesson on norms is provided in the Lesson Blueprints section). Each session, encourage participation by asking for feedback and responses from the students, and an atmosphere of acceptance by encouraging students to listen to differing viewpoints. It is your role to remain neutral and to be supportive and encouraging of all points of view.

Create a platform for open communication at the start of each session. Experts suggest:

- Rearranging seating to allow students to sit in a circle facing each other; this can help to encourage open and direct communication.
- Keeping the discussion on topic. If participants get off-topic, it is your job to bring them back on task. Find a moment in the conversation to gently remind participants of the goal and topic.



Navigating Difficult Conversations and Creating a Climate of Sharing

Students will learn and adopt new behaviors from adults and their peers when a climate of honest and thought-provoking discussion and sharing is fostered. This climate of sharing often leads to questions that can be difficult to address. The following guidelines and responses are offered:



What should I say if students ask challenging questions?

When encouraging an open and trusting dialogue to support social and emotional learning,

students may ask challenging questions, such as “Do you use drugs?” “Have you ever used

drugs in the past?” “How have you dealt with

prejudice?” “Have you ever broken the rules?” “Do you text while driving?” While they may simply be curious, more often the questions are asked because they want to see if you, as the adult program facilitator, really understand what it is like to be a teenager faced with handling these situations.

Generally speaking, **self-disclosure is best kept to a minimum, or not shared at all.** All things considered, it is best to follow your school or agency’s guidelines.

What should I say if a student discloses highly personal information about family members, friends, or him or herself?

The resources are designed to have students watch videos about “real people” and react to their stories. Therefore, it is likely that students will share personal information. Prior to discussions, it is important to tell students that they should not use names or identifying information. It is equally important to monitor if the disclosures are relevant to the discussion.



What should I do if the students do not seem to connect with the stories or people in the video?

Although a diverse group of children and teens are represented in the video segments, not everyone can relate to all of the people featured in the stories. Some students may get distracted if the kids in the video “don’t seem like them” and will need help to refocus. It is important to redirect the discussion

to the issue and how they would handle the situation at hand. Ask students if there is anyone in the video that they were able to relate to, or transition the discussion to relating to the overall situation depicted rather than the specific individuals featured in the video.

The “All-in-the-Same-Boat” Phenomenon

A potent force in social and emotional learning is the discovery that one is not alone in his or her thoughts, feelings, and emotions. There is something special in hearing others articulate similar feelings and experiences. Such mutuality produces support that energizes learning. As students respond to key questions in the lesson, the facilitator can establish connections by acknowledging the students' experiences, including academic stress, social anxiety and peer pressure.

The “Strength-in-Numbers” Phenomenon

Research tells us that young people often feel overwhelmed by everyday stress and the pressures. Media, peers and communities often contribute to this. The pressure is less overwhelming and frightening when students are able to deal with these pressures as a large group. When students collectively address this in a group setting, they can learn from each other and garner the support needed to manage these pressures.

Source: Lawrence Shulman, Ed.d The Skills of Helping Individuals and Groups

SEL At Home: Parent Involvement

Students, families and educators must work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision and academic and lifelong success for its students and children. Similarly, SEL goals are best achieved when students, families and educators work toward a common goal. That said, Connect with Kids can provide you with a suggested letter for parents and guardians of your students. A letter to parents/guardians can both reinforce school goals, social and emotional learning at home, and encourage parental involvement, even (perhaps especially) during the high school years.

