

Social & Emotional Learning

What Is Social and Emotional Learning?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) states that social and emotional learning (SEL) is “the process through which children and adults 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.” According to the CASEL, research shows that children who participate in programs that support SEL have significantly better school attendance records, less disruptive classroom behavior, like school more, and perform better in school.

Our emotions and relationships affect how and what we learn and how we use what we learn in work, family, and community contexts. On the one hand, emotions can enable us to generate an active interest in learning and sustain our engagement in it. On the other hand, unmanaged stress and poor regulation of impulses interfere with attention and memory and contribute to behaviors disruptive to learning. Moreover, learning is an intrinsically social and interactive process. It takes place in collaboration with one’s teachers, in the company of one’s peers, and with the support of one’s family. Relationships are the engine of learning. For these reasons, SEL is key to the school and life success of all children” (CASEL 2013).

What Skills Do Socially and Emotionally Competent Children and Youth Have?

The CASEL defines socially and emotionally competent children and youth as being skilled in five core areas:

- **They are self-aware.** They are able to recognize their emotions, describe their interests and values,

and accurately assess their strengths. They have a well-grounded sense of self-confidence and hope for the future.

- **They are able to regulate their emotions.** They are able to manage stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles. They can set and monitor progress toward the achievement of personal and academic goals and express their emotions appropriately in a wide range of situations.
- **They are socially aware.** They are able to take the perspective of and empathize with others and recognize and appreciate individual and group similarities and differences. They are able to seek out and appropriately use family, school, and community resources.
- **They have good relationship skills.** They can establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation. They resist inappropriate social pressure; constructively prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflict; and seek and provide help when needed.
- **They demonstrate responsible decision-making at school, at home, and in the community.** In making decisions, they consider ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and the likely consequences of various courses of action. They apply these decision-making skills in academic and social situations and are motivated to contribute to the well-being of their schools and communities (CASEL 2013).

Why Is Social and Emotional Learning Important for FoodCorps Service Members?

FoodCorps service members have the opportunity to use instructional methods that support SEL when leading hands-on learning activities with students. Ideally, these strategies are infused throughout all school time with students, and the broader school community

supports them. Reach out to school staff and families to share your interest in including SEL instructional approaches in your service. Explore how the broader school community might support these efforts.

What Teaching Strategies Support Social and Emotional Learning?

Evidence-based SEL approaches that educators can use to reach students include the following:

- ✓ Students can be taught through modeling and coaching to recognize how they feel or how someone else might be feeling.
- ✓ Students can practice group decision-making and setting classroom rules.
- ✓ Cross-age mentoring, in which a younger student is paired with an older one, can be effective in building self-confidence, fostering a sense of belonging, and enhancing academic skills.
- ✓ Students can learn cooperation and teamwork through participation in games.
- ✓ Students can deepen their understanding of a current or historical event by analyzing it through a set of questions based on a problem-solving model.
- ✓ Having one member of a pair describe a situation to his or her partner, and having the partner repeat what he or she heard is an effective tool in teaching reflective listening.

You will find many tips in this guide that support these approaches, including developing team agreements, FoodCorps lessons that include group decision-making, cooperative and project-based learning, and reflection questions that promote conversations about group process. Finally, one of the six FoodCorps lesson themes focuses on “living up to our full potential” to highlight SEL competencies while building skills in and knowledge of food and community-focused topics.

Recommended Resource

- The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

