

Social and emotional learning: Suggestions for school staff

Effective support for social and emotional skills development builds children's understanding and abilities by starting from what they can do and encouraging them to take the next step.

Formal classroom teaching shows children what the skills are all about and encourages them to think about the kinds of situations they can use skills for. To get the most benefit out of this classroom learning, children need to apply their skills in all sorts of situations.

How school staff can help

Set the tone for positive, supportive relationships

Establish a trusting relationship with students and make the classroom an accepting environment by demonstrating respect, listening to students, and conveying positive expectations about respectful and caring behaviour. Show your students that everyone needs help occasionally by modelling this behaviour yourself and asking them for help.

Normalise social and emotional learning

Make talking about feelings, managing friendships, handling conflicts and thinking through problems part of the everyday conversation in your classroom and around the school. This sets an expectation that social and emotional learning is a normal and valued part of school life and that everyone benefits from applying the skills learned.

Support self-confidence

Children build self-confidence through seeing that they are capable and that their contributions are valued. Provide opportunities for all students to undertake responsibilities through special roles and tasks, ensuring that everyone gets a turn. Build their sense of capability as well as their motivation by appreciating effort and persistence, not just outcomes.

Appreciate individual and group differences

Promote inclusiveness by recognising and responding to the individual needs and cultural differences of students and families. Help children to appreciate diversity by talking openly and positively about differences and encouraging mutual respect and positive valuing of one another. Ensure that cooperative learning activities are well structured to enhance inclusive values and behaviour.

Foster emotional awareness

Learning to manage emotions first requires being aware of them. School staff can encourage children to notice body signals and to name or describe the associated feelings. Provide safe, supportive opportunities for children to notice how their bodies tell them about different kinds of feelings. Ask children to reflect on the feelings as well as the thoughts they have in response to different learning activities and events. Prompt them, when necessary, to think of coping strategies they might try.

Teach empathy

Model caring and compassion through your own behaviour and encourage students to consider the thoughts and feelings of others. Promote discussion of others' feelings and emotions when reading books to the class. For example, ask the class, "How do you think character X is feeling? How can you tell?"

Communicate effectively

Encourage students to use effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills while interacting inside the classroom by modelling this yourself. Demonstrate the use of appropriate body language and posture, eye contact, and tone of voice, and provide students with practice opportunities to try out the skills for themselves.

Require cooperation

Tasks that require students to work in pairs or small groups are a good way of building and reinforcing important relationship skills. To maximise the effectiveness of cooperative group work, the required communication skills and strategies should be taught in advance, and the group task needs to be made very clear. When allocating group membership, it is important to be alert to pre-existing student conflicts that can interfere with classroom cooperation and that may require extra support and intervention. Rotating group composition, so that students work with different group members, helps to build a range of social skills and fosters inclusiveness.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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