

Tips for Parents

By working together schools and parents can promote children’s social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL includes some key skills:

- ◆ **Self-awareness**—recognizing feelings and managing anger.
- ◆ **Understanding others**—developing empathy and taking the perspective of others.
- ◆ **Making responsible decisions** and following through. This includes considering long-term consequences of your actions for yourself and others.
- ◆ **Understanding yourself**—handling emotions, setting goals, and dealing with obstacles.
- ◆ **Building healthy relationships**—saying no to negative peer pressure and working to resolve conflicts constructively.

When young people master these skills, they are more likely to succeed in school and life. They become happier and more confident. They are better students, family members, friends, and workers. They are less prone to drug and alcohol use, depression, or violence. Social and emotional learning is like an insurance policy for a healthy, positive, successful life.

The Role of Parents

Long before children can say their first word or take their first step, they respond to the touch, tone of voice, and moods of their parents. This is the beginning of learning about emotions and relationships. It happens as naturally as their bodies grow and develop.

“Family life is our first school for emotional learning,” states author Daniel Goleman. In the family, he says, “we learn how to feel about ourselves and how others will react to our feelings.” This learning happens both through what parents say and do to their children and how they treat each other.

Some Key Points to Consider

- ◆ Children learn important lessons about emotions from their parents. When parents threaten or punish children for a display of emotion, children learn emotions are dangerous, to be held inside. This can lead in later life to depression or unchecked rage. When parents do not teach their children acceptable ways to express anger, the children may think it’s okay to strike out at others or have tantrums.
- ◆ Parents should think of themselves as “emotion coaches.” They can encourage their children to use feeling words, such as “I feel sad” or “That made me really angry” to express emotions.
- ◆ When children learn to express feelings and respect others, they become happier and healthier. Such children are less likely to have problems with depression, violence, or other mental health issues as they grow older.
- ◆ Many SEL programs for schools include activities for parents. When parents and students practice SEL skills at home, the effects are even greater. Children also come to see learning as a lifelong process, not something that stops when they leave school.
- ◆ Children want their parents to guide and teach them. A recent poll found that 86% of young people 10-17 years old said their parents were very important influences on their lives. Only 22% said television, movies, and popular music were so important. No one can take the place of parents in raising caring, confident, capable children.