

Integrating Social-Emotional Literacy in Early Elementary: An Educator Resource Guide

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Social-emotional development affects how children experience, express, and manage their emotions in interactions with others and the environment (Social-emotional development, 2017). For elementary-age children, typical social-emotional development includes forming and maintaining positive relationships with teachers and peers, managing and recovering from emotional reactions, understanding their own and others' needs, and recognizing their own strengths and interests. While social-emotional skills are vital to student success, they are often ignored or brushed aside in the mainstream classroom; common core standards in language arts, math, and science precede supplementary lessons on social-emotional topics such as respect, listening, or recognizing emotions. In recent years, many educators and researchers are realizing this disparity and thus integrating social emotional learning into the mainstream curriculum.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) aims to integrate social-emotional learning in districts, schools, and classrooms nationwide. Based on research and practice, CASEL divides social-emotional learning (SEL) into **5 Core Competencies**: self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, and responsible decision-making. CASEL suggests a number of approaches for

teachers to implement social-emotional growth in their classroom. As opposed to explicit social-emotional instruction, teachers could integrate social-emotional learning within academic curriculum areas. While this may take extra preparation or intentionality from teachers, it does not add time to the school day. By integrating SEL into academic instruction, teachers can accomplish two goals at once.

This **educator resource guide** aims to start this integration process for teachers and tutors, specifically in English and Language Arts lessons. The guide compiles a list of activities that focuses on the growth and development of academic literacy and social-emotional literacy in early elementary (preK-3) classrooms. In terms of **academic literacy**, these activities and practices focus on enhancing reading, writing, listening, speaking, interpreting visuals, and reading body language. In relation to **social-emotional literacy**, each activity helps students develop and practice one of CASEL's 5 Core Competencies. The guide also includes a list of books covering these 5 Core Competencies.

This resource guide shows that students can learn how to read, write, and speak fluently **while at the same time** developing a healthy relationship with themselves, others, and their environments. As an educator, it is possible to develop and influence the **whole child** in the mainstream classroom.

Self-Awareness

The ability to identify emotions and thoughts, recognize strengths and limitations, and know your own interests and values (Core SEL Competencies, 2017).

Teach **feelings vocabulary** in a way that is accessible to elementary students. Basic understanding of feelings vocabulary can help aid student development in all 5 CASEL competencies. These words are likely appropriate for early elementary students: happy, sad, worried, angry, excited, proud, surprised, confused, tired.

Have a **daily check-in** in the morning to help students identify their emotions at the beginning of the day and give them a chance to share if they want to. Teachers could make a **feelings wheel** with certain words, colors, or pictures for students to put their clothespin on. This utilizes daily use of feelings vocabulary and the social aspect of sharing and listening to one another.

Respond to **writing prompts**:

When _____ happens, I feel _____.

I feel _____ because of _____.

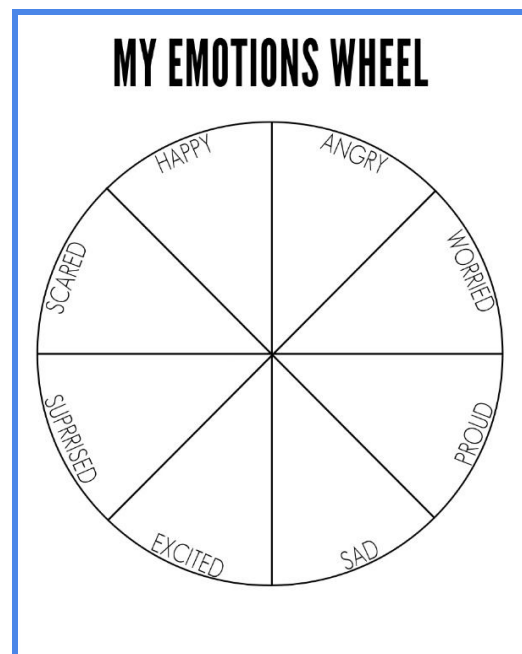
How would you feel if _____ happened to you?

These prompts can help students understand their feelings in a cause-and-effect pattern.

Play **emotions charades** during morning meeting to practice vocabulary, take turns sharing, and explore what the expression of certain feelings looks like. A student can pick a feelings vocabulary word out of a hat and act out the feeling with movements or facial expressions while other students guess the word (RAK, grab and go games, 2017).

Doing Words is a reading and writing program that brings students' interests and prior knowledge into the daily curriculum (Johnson, 1987). Each day, students choose a word that is meaningful to them. They write this word three times, draw a picture of it, and write three sentences about the word. This helps student build a word bank of vocabulary that is interesting to them, while at the same time honoring and exploring their backgrounds and interests in the classroom. Students at varying levels can participate and enjoy this activity; if they cannot form complete sentences yet, they can focus on the picture or the handwriting of the word itself (Works of Katie Johnson, 2017).

Give authentic, specific **feedback, compliments, and praises** to students. Instead of saying "Good job," teachers could say, "I really like how you took your time on your assignment. It shows that you are a hard worker." Specific feedback can help student realize what their strength and interests are.



Self-Management

The ability to regulate one's own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The ability to motivate oneself, set goals, and accomplish tasks (Core SEL Competencies, 2017).

Create a classwide **"Take a Break"** ritual. When a student is struggling to stay on task or be with the group, the teacher can ask the student to take a break in the designated spot (break rug, calming corner). Some students may also be able to self-regulate and decide when to take a break themselves. In order to return from taking a break, the student should be asked to articulate what happened. This communication of feelings will help students 1) practice self-reflection and 2) understand the cause-and-effect pattern of actions and consequences.

Teach healthy and **appropriate ways to express feelings** in the classroom. This can be modeled in teacher behavior and basic reminders: "It is ok to be mad in this classroom, but is not ok to hit. What is another way you could express your anger?"

Give students **clear, multi-step directions** for assignments and projects. ("First, read the story. Next, write two sentences about the story's main character. Lastly, draw the character. If you have time, color the drawing"). By following multiple steps to complete a task, students will practice engagement, persistence, motivation, and planning (Social-emotional teaching strategies, 2012). This practice and skill-building will help students reach goals in the future.



Schedule **independent reading time** for each day. This requires students to self-regulate and follow directions independently. Make it clear to students that it is up to them to motivate themselves to sit quietly, complete a book, and earn the chance to choose a different book.

Conduct a lesson on **goals and obstacles**. Read a book as a class and identify the character's goal, obstacle, and how he or she overcame that obstacle. Students can complete an activity where they list a goal, an obstacle, ways to overcome the obstacle, and how long it will take to accomplish the goal (RAK, Reach for the stars, 2017). Regularly ask the class what the goals and obstacles are of a given assignment, project, or activity.

Relationship Skills

The ability to form and maintain healthy, positive relationships. This includes communication skills, conflict resolution, and teamwork (Core SEL Competencies, 2017).

Create a daily **morning meeting** routine. This could include around-the-circle greetings, sharing activities, and games. For example, teachers could ask students to share their favorite food, summer activity, or book character. Morning meeting helps students practice communication skills such as listening, eye-contact, repeating information, and speaking clearly (Teaching skillful communication, 2014).

During sharing, teach students a **“me too” signal**, giving them a way to silently agree and note connections between people. For example, during morning meeting if one student says, “My favorite food is pizza,” students who agree can hold a thumbs up to their chests (Teaching skillful communication, 2014).

“All About” Shares give each student a chance to share something they know and care about (Teaching skillful communication, 2014). Students can bring a topic, artifact, or photo to share with the class, following a general format (see below) that allows them to share three main points about their topic. Caregivers and teachers can help students fill this out and prepare their “all about” share.

I know all about: _____

I know: _____

I know: _____

I know: _____

Concluding Statement:

Dialogic reading is a type of shared book reading that develops a meaningful social interaction between students and educators (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). This research-based program encourages verbal interaction between educators and students during read-aloud sessions. While reading together, educators and students ask questions to one another to enhance understanding and relate the book’s content to students’ lived experiences. To enhance comprehension, teachers are encouraged to read a book to students multiple times. Each time, students are able to pay more attention to details, unknown vocabulary words, and abstract story themes and motives. As students engage in dialogic reading, they practice communication and relationship-building skills in addition to improving academic literacy.

Regularly engage students with **partner and group work**. Match partners together with similar learning levels. Partner and group work helps students practice taking turns, using patience, communicating and explaining concepts to one another, and working together towards a common goal.

Experiment with **storytelling exercises** (Figueroa-Sanchez, 2008). Students could draw a picture, mold a scene with Play-Doh, act it out, or write it down. Afterwards, students could practice sharing their story with a partner. This helps students with oral communication of ideas, vocabulary growth, and sequencing skills (beginning, middle, end).

Social Awareness

The ability to empathize, understand, and engage with others, especially those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. This includes perspective-taking, having respect for all people, and learning “the social and ethical norms for behavior” (Core SEL Competencies, 2017).

Encourage students to **relate to book characters**, especially those that are different from them. Educators can ask students in a group setting, or students can respond to writing prompts: *How would you feel/react/ behave if you were in character x’s position? Why?* Emphasize to students that they may not know exactly how that character feels, but they can try to understand.

Read books with **diverse characters, places, cultures, and ideas**. Books that portray realistic and non-stereotyped diversity should be incorporated into a teacher’s weekly routine. Teaching with diverse resources shows students that all cultures and people are recognized and important in their classroom. Furthermore, this practice ensures that all students have a book character to truly relate to: a character that looks like them, speaks their language, or likes what they like. Importantly, while reading, teachers do not need to explicitly point out the diversity or single out their students from that culture. Treating a book with diverse messages as “the norm” models acceptance, respect, and equity.

Ask students, “**What makes you different?**” in a group sharing format, a project, or an individual writing activity. This can help

students understand how everyone, including themselves, is unique for different reasons. When students share their differences with the class, teachers are modelling that differences are meant to be celebrated.

Play **Kindness Bingo** (RAK, grab and go games, 2017). Use the board from Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, or create your own. Students can cross kind acts off their boards once they do them, seeing how many they can complete in a week. Some of the kind acts include:

“Smiled at another student.”

“Said ‘thank you’ to someone.”

“Cleaned up a mess that wasn’t mine.”

“Made a new friend.”

Encourage students to **speak and utilize their home language in the classroom**.

Include students’ first languages in your greetings, room decorations, book collections, newsletters, and more. This shows students that their teacher values and honors all students’ backgrounds.

Do not use competitive language to describe students’ ability levels. Instead of saying a book is easy, medium, or hard, say that a book is “**just right**” for a specific student. Emphasize that every student needs different resources to be successful. Some need an educational assistant, some need a sensory manipulative, or some need to sit far away from others. Every student’s “just right” level will be different, but what matters is that everyone has the same goal: to learn and get smarter. In a competitive culture, these messages are important and empowering for young students.

Responsible Decision-Making

The ability to make safe and considerate choices based on ethical and social standards/norms. The act of evaluating consequences, reflecting on actions, and considering the well-being of self and others (Core SEL Competencies, 2017).

Helps students **write and decide the classroom rules and expectations**. This gives students agency and helps them realize how rules benefit everyone by creating a safe and fun learning environment. Since they wrote and created the rules at the beginning of the year, students are more likely to understand the “why” as they evaluate their actions and consequences during a conflict or mishap.

Encourage students to reflect on the **cause-and-effect pattern** of their actions. Ask students why they broke a rule and what happened as a result. Was someone else hurt or disrupted? Are they now behind on their own work? Show students that all actions, good and bad, have a consequence or an effect. This cause-and-effect can also be modeled in stories that the class reads; “If you Give a Mouse A Cookie” by Laura Numeroff is a great example.

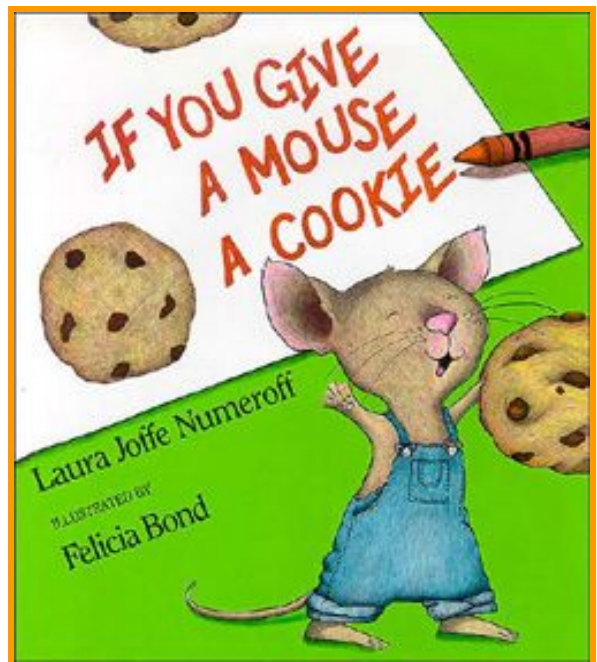
Read books with characters who display **integrity and responsibility**. Since these are very abstract concepts for early elementary students, it is important to give concrete and memorable examples.

For popular activities, reading corners, or class chores (the coveted line leader), teach students to **create sign-up lists for taking turns** (Social-emotional teaching strategies,

2012). This can teach students simply how to responsibly take turns, share, and be considerate of others’ wants and needs.

Give choices to students every day so they can practice responsible decision-making in lower pressure situations. For example, “you can either take this time to clean your desk or silently read.”

Role-playing activities can help students practice important scenarios such as conflict resolution, responding to peer pressure, or treating someone kindly and respectfully. Students could pick a scenario out of a hat and choose how to act it out, or the teacher could provide a more structured script for students to act out and other students to respond to as audience members. This action-based learning may help students better understand situations or concepts that they have not encountered before.



Book List

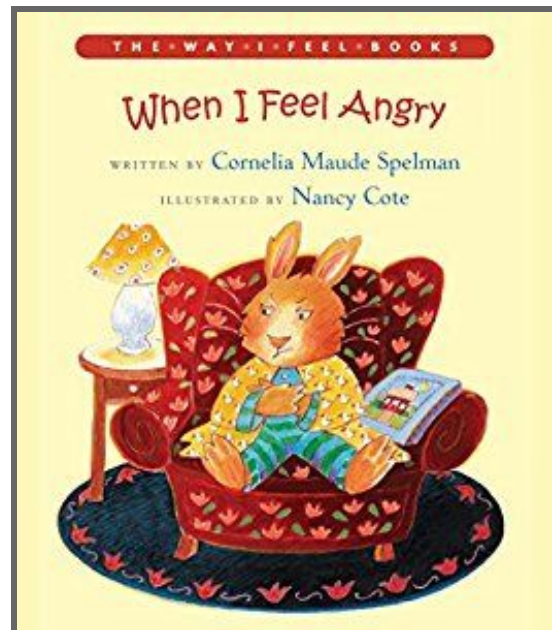
Reading and teaching books with social-emotional themes are a great way to model important concepts for students. The characters, events, and stories can serve as a reference for students when they think of certain abstract feelings or ideas such as disappointment, kindness, or responsibility. The books on these lists (categorized into the 5 Core Competencies) are appropriate for students in Pre-K through 3rd grade.

Self-Awareness

1. Wemberly Worried (2000) by Kevin Henkes.
 2. The Chicken-Chasing Queen of Lamar County (2007) by Janice Harrington. Illus. by Shelley Jackson.
 3. Each Kindness (2012) by Jacqueline Woodson. Illus. by E. B. Lewis.
 4. Invisible Boy (2013) by Trudy Ludwig. Illus. by Patrice Barton.
 5. I'm Not Happy: A Book About Feeling Sad (2011) by Sue Graves.
 6. When I Feel Angry (2000) by Cornelia Spelman. Illus. by Nancy Cote.
 7. When I Feel Sad (2002) by Cornelia Spelman. Illus. by Kathy Parkinson.
 8. When I Feel Scared (2002) by Cornelia Spelman. Illus. by Kathy Parkinson.
 9. When I Feel Good About Myself (2003) by Cornelia Spelman. Illus. by Kathy Parkinson.
 10. When I Feel Worried (2013) by Cornelia Spelman. Illus. by Kathy Parkinson.
 11. When I Care About Others (2002) by Cornelia Spelman. Illus. by Kathy Parkinson.
 12. When I Feel Jealous (2003) by Cornelia Spelman. Illus. by Kathy Parkinson.
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Self-Regulation

1. The Kissing Hand (1993) by Audrey Penn.
 2. Where the Wild Things Are (1988) by Maurice Sendak.
 3. All in a Day (2009) by Cynthia Rylant. Illus. by Nikki McClure.
 4. Beautiful Hands (2015) by Kathryn Otoshi and Bret Baumgarten.
 5. One (2008) by Kathryn Otoshi.
 6. Zero (2010) by Kathryn Otoshi.
 7. Two (2014) by Kathryn Otoshi.
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Relationship Skills

1. A Ball for Daisy (2011) by Chris Raschka.
2. Be a Friend (2016) by Salina Yoon.
3. Bully (2013) by Laura Vaccaro Seeger.
4. Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons (2006) by Amy Krouse Rosenthal. Illus. by Jane Dyer.
7. Dee Dee and Me (2013) by Amy Schwartz.
8. If You Plant a Seed (2015) by Kadir Nelson.
9. Albert the Fix-it Man (2008) by Janet Lord. Illus. by Julie Paschkis.

10. Before Morning (2016) by Joyce Sidman.
11. A Chair for My Mother (1982) by Vera Williams.
12. Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No Digas Nada, Mamá (2013) by Joe Hayes. Illus. by Esau Andrade Valencia.
13. The Gardener (1997) by Sarah Stewart. Illus. by David Small.
14. The Kindness Quilt (2006) by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace.
15. Mouse & Lion (2011) by Rand Burkert. Illus. by Nancy Burkert.
16. A Sick Day for Amos McGee (2010) by Philip C. Stead. Illus. by Erin E. Stead).
17. The Song of Delphine (2015) by Kenneth Kraeger.
18. What Does It Mean to Be Kind? (2015) by Rana DiOrio. Illus. by Stéphane Jorisch.

Social Awareness

1. Jamaica's Find (1986) by Juanita Havill.
2. Leo the Late Bloomer (1994) by Robert Kraus.
3. Margaret and Margarita (1996) by Lynn Reiser.
4. Stلالuna (1993) by Janell Cannon.
5. All the World (2009) by Liz Garton Scanlon. Illus. by Marla Frazee.
6. Because Amelia Smiled (2012) by David Ezra Stein.
7. Kindness Is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler (2007) by Margery Cuyler. Illus. by Sachiko Yoshikawa.
8. Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes (2008) by Mem Fox. Illus. by Helen Oxenbury.
9. The Golden Rule (2007) by Ilene Cooper. Illus. by Gabi Swiatkowska.
10. Last Stop on Market Street (2015) by Matt de la Peña. Illus. by Christian Robinson
11. Those Shoes (2007) by Maribeth Boelts. Illus. by Noah Z. Jones.

Responsible Decision-Making

1. How to Heal a Broken Wing (2008) by Bob Graham.
2. Little Ducks Go (2014) by Emily Arnold McCully. .
3. Destiny's Gift (2004) by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley. Illus. by Adjoa J. Burrowes.
4. Elmer and the Hippos (2010) by David McKee.
5. Estela's Swap (2002) by Alexis O'Neill. Illus. by Enrique O.Sanchez.
6. The Teddy Bear (2002) by David McPhail.
7. The Three Questions (2002) by Jon Muth.

Book lists were compiled from Random Acts of Kindness Foundation (RAK): Book List (2017) and Doyle and Bramwell (2006).

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