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# Introduction

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has become the new focus point in the world of education. But what exactly is it, and how do we teach it? SEL entails providing students with the necessary tools needed to help them manage their emotions and make good decisions. When students are self-aware, they know how to talk about their feelings. When they feel comfortable talking about emotions, they can build stronger and healthier relationships with others. Students are able to manage their emotions and in turn, regulate those big feelings in positive ways. Students who are emotionally perceptive will feel empathy for others. This empathy eventually expands their social awareness as they grow up. They will learn to appreciate and relate to others, regardless of cultural and background differences.

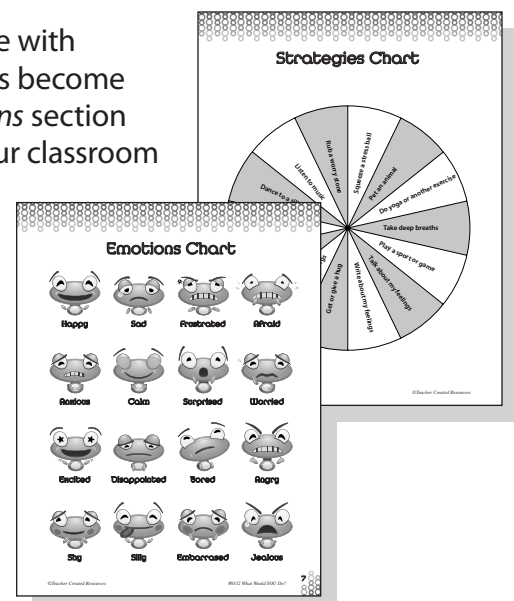
The ultimate and most significant goal of SEL is to teach students to make wise and responsible choices. Students will learn to consider ethics, risk, safety, and emotional health before making decisions. In the past, social-emotional learning tended to be either glossed over or never truly addressed. However, studies are showing the importance of learning social-emotional wellness and how it relates to students' future happiness and success.

One of the greatest benefits of social-emotional learning is knowing that you are teaching young children real-life skills that will help them become successful, emotionally healthy adults. They will learn to handle stress in constructive and healthy ways. Students will have a higher rate of lifelong happiness and success in their academics, careers, and relationships. Students who learn coping skills and strategies tend to have fewer behavioral problems in school and even less criminal behavior later in life. Social-emotional health equates to better lifelong mental health. Sounds beneficial, right? So now, let's learn how to successfully teach SEL!

## How to Use This Book

This book provides tips and tools for strengthening your students' social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. Teaching SEL skills to students enables them to be successful adults. By providing them with coping strategies, they will be better equipped to manage and understand their own emotions and the emotions of others. Most importantly, students will be learning how to make wise and healthy choices in a variety of difficult situations.

To begin, make a copy of the *Emotions Chart* (page 7) to share with students. Display the chart in your classroom so that students become familiar with the different emotions. The *Dealing with Emotions* section (pages 5–6) provides helpful guidelines for how to set up your classroom as a safe and comfortable place to openly discuss emotions. The *Strategies* section (pages 8–9) includes a variety of coping skills and ideas for teaching students how to deal with these big emotions. The *Strategies Chart* (page 10) is a practical sheet to display or distribute to students so they can have these strategies on hand.



# Understanding the Emotion: Sadness

## Summary

In this unit, students will read a story about a girl named Zoey who feels sad when her friend moves away. One day, Zoey finds a lost dog. Her parents agree to let her keep the dog until they find the owner. Zoey realizes that she doesn't feel sad anymore because having the dog has cheered her up! At the park, Zoey sees a lost dog sign with a picture that looks just like the dog she found. She needs to make a choice: tell her parents about the poster or say nothing to try to keep the dog.

## Class Discussion

Spend a few minutes discussing the social-emotional vocabulary for this unit. Write the word *sadness* on the board. Ask students to define the word for you and write their responses on the board. If time permits, have students share their prior knowledge and experience with the class regarding this emotion.

Remind students that everyone feels sad at times. It can be due to a situation like a pet dying, a loved one moving away, or a team losing a game. Other times, we may feel sad for no specific reason. We all get the blues from time to time. A helpful way to manage sadness is to know that just like any other emotion, it will pass. It may take a few minutes or a few days, but sadness will not last forever. When we are sad, our bodies feel different. Our hearts might ache, or we might cry. Sadness can make us tired or even change our appetite. As with every emotion, there are things we can do to help manage sadness. Talking about sadness is helpful because it releases some of the emotion. Also, doing things that we enjoy can make us feel less sad. Lastly, exercise is another great way to help with sadness. Moving our bodies helps to distract us from the sad feelings and can build our energy and joy.

Tell students that they will be reading a story about a child who is sad. She finds ways to help with her sadness and is faced with an important choice. Read the story (pages 24–25) aloud and/or distribute copies of the story to students to follow along or read on their own. Have students choose an ending (page 26) either as a group or individually. (See page 4 for additional ideas for working with the stories and endings.)

## Coping Skill Activity

Exercise can help with many emotions and sadness is one of them! Often when we feel sad, we search for ways to cheer ourselves up. This coping skill combines laughter, joy, and exercise all in one: lead a silly dance party! Find a list of silly songs that you can play for students. (Parry Gripp is a musician whose songs will get your students moving and laughing.) Tell students that for the duration of the song, they need to move their bodies in silly, goofy ways. The goal is to keep moving continuously until the song ends. After the laughter and dancing ends, ask students how they are feeling. Did the silly dancing make them smile? Laugh? Did the exercise give them energy?

## Personal Application

Have students come together as a whole group or in small groups to answer the discussion questions verbally. To conclude the unit, assign the written-response questions and the journal writing as a way for students to relate the story to their own understanding of feeling sad and how they have dealt with this emotion in their lives.

# The Lost Friend

Zoey woke up with the sun streaming in through her window. It was Saturday. She had the whole day to do whatever she wanted. But she felt like staying in bed. She rolled over and hugged her favorite stuffed animal. It was a kitty named Roo. As she cuddled Roo, she looked out the window. Zoey saw kids riding their bikes. They looked happy and were laughing. Zoey wanted to feel happy. But her heart felt sad. Her best friend Lizzie had just moved away. Zoey didn't know what to do without Lizzie around. They spent all their free time together. Every weekend they would practice softball in the park. They would ride bikes and eat dinner at each other's houses. They would swim all summer long. Without her best friend, Zoey felt lost. She didn't want to hang out with anyone else. She didn't feel joy doing things without Lizzie.

"Zoey, it's time to wake up," her parents said. They knocked on her bedroom door. "Let's go get pancakes for breakfast. Pancakes are your favorite," Zoey's dad said.

Zoey mumbled, "No thank you." She pressed her face into her pillow. She hugged Roo tighter.

"I know you are sad," her mother said. She sat on Zoey's bed and rubbed her back. "I know you miss Lizzie. But you need to start doing things that make you happy. Let's start with a yummy breakfast." Zoey pushed off the covers and got out of bed. She did love pancakes, and spending time with her parents made her feel happy.

On the drive home from breakfast, Zoey was staring out the car window. She was thinking about Lizzie and wondered what she was doing. She started to feel sad again. But, all of a sudden, Zoey saw a dog running down the street. He had white curly fur and was all alone. "Stop the car!" she cried.

Zoey and her parents got out of the car and the dog ran right up to Zoey. "Be careful!" Zoey's mom warned. But the dog was friendly and licked Zoey's hand and wagged his tail happily. The dog looked up at her with his big puppy eyes. She patted his head, and he laid down across her feet.

"Mom, we have to help him," Zoey said.

# What Do You Think?

## Choice 1

- ① Why do you think finding the dog made Zoey feel happy?
- ② How do you think the owners felt to get their dog back?
- ③ How did Zoey feel after returning the dog?
- ④ Do you think Isabel and Zoey became friends? Why or why not?

## Choice 2

- ① Why did Zoey decide to not tell her parents about the sign?
- ② Do you think the dog was sad to be away from his family? Why or why not?
- ③ How did Zoey feel when she came home and the dog was gone?
- ④ What are some things Zoey could do to not feel so sad?

