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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.

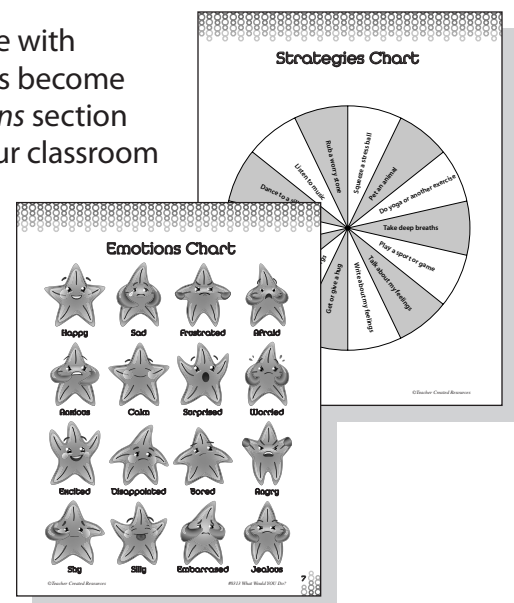
The ultimate and most significant goal of SEL is to teach students to make wise and responsible choices. Students will learn to consider ethics, risk, safety, and emotional health before making decisions. In the past, social-emotional learning tended to be either glossed over or never truly addressed. However, studies are indicating 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 learn 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: Frustration

Summary

In this unit, students will read a story about a third grader named Lily. She struggles with getting frustrated when things are not easy for her. During a surprise math quiz, Lily is tempted to copy her best friend's paper in order to pass the quiz and has to decide what to do.

Class Discussion

Spend a few minutes discussing the social-emotional vocabulary for this unit. Write the word *frustrated* 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.

Tell students that everyone gets frustrated. When we expect things to go a certain way and they don't, or when we find a new skill to be really difficult, we often get frustrated. Our bodies will react to this emotion. We might feel hot as our hearts beat faster. Our hands get sweaty. Our bodies tense up, and we might clench our jaws. The best way to deal with this emotion is to find ways to calm down. This will help us refocus on the activity with less frustration.

Tell students that they will be reading a story about a girl who is frustrated with a math quiz and is tempted to cheat to get a good score. Read the story (pages 36–37) aloud or distribute copies of the story to students to read on their own. Have students choose an ending (page 38) either as a group or individually. (See page 4 for additional ideas for working with the stories and endings.)

Coping Skill Activity

Grounding exercises are similar to focused breathing. Helping children feel grounded when they are feeling big emotions like frustration is an excellent way to calm them quickly. The tree grounding meditation is a simple one that benefits both children and adults! Tell students to pretend they are trees. Have them firmly plant their feet shoulder width apart. Then tell students to firm up their tree trunks (bodies) by holding their breath and tightening all their muscles, making fists, and even tightening their faces. Then let all the tension go with a big exhale. Have them sway and shake their tree branches (arms) and feel all the energy and tension flow through their roots (feet) and into the ground. Once students have mastered the tree grounding, tell them that they can practice this skill when they are feeling frustrated. When they release all their energy into the ground, have them picture the thing that is frustrating them being let go of and taken deep into the ground. Tell students they can teach this grounding exercise to their family members or friends if they catch them feeling frustrated. (See page 78 for a bonus poster illustrating the tree grounding exercise.)

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 frustration. Have them reflect on how they have dealt with this emotion in their lives or have seen someone overcome this emotion.

Practice Makes Perfect

“Down, up, right, left, step, step, boom, boom!” Miss Patti, the dance teacher, called out loudly over the music. Sasha followed her best friend Lily’s lead in the dance and tried her best to copy every move. But her left foot got caught on her right foot and she tumbled to the ground. Lily ran over to help her up, but Sasha just giggled. “I’m fine! I try my best, but I can never keep up with the steps,” Sasha said with a smile. “It’s okay, though. I’m having fun.”

Lily loved Sasha’s carefree attitude about dance. Lily was very focused on having every dance move be perfect. Dance was easy for Lily. Her body moved and responded with the beat of the music. Dancing made her happy. She felt good when she performed well. Unlike Lily, Sasha struggled with the dance moves. Her body never seemed to move with the same ease of motion that Lily’s did. But dancing still made her happy.

After dance class, Sasha and Lily sat in the gym waiting for their parents to come pick them up. “Can you believe I fell again in dance class?” Sasha laughed. “This new dance is so hard. And you seem to know it perfectly.”

Lily shrugged. “I like this dance. The music makes me happy and my feet just seem to follow along. The dance steps make sense to me. Unlike our homework tonight. Ugh. Did you finish the math homework?” Lily asked.

“Oh, the one on multiplication? I finished that in class today. Do you want me to help you?” Sasha asked. “I am much better at math than at dancing,” she said with a grin. “I can’t trip over numbers!”

Sasha sat with Lily and went through the math problems one by one. Lily felt her body start to tense up as she stared at the math equations. The numbers just seemed to swirl on the page. Multiplication did not make sense to her. Sasha patiently explained each problem step by step and it seemed so easy for her. This only made Lily feel more frustrated. Her fingers gripped the pencil tighter. She started pressing down on the math worksheet so hard that the tip of the pencil broke off. “Argh! I am never going to be good at this,” Lily cried out.

“Yes, you will,” Sasha said with encouragement. “Practice makes perfect.” Just then, their dads both pulled up at the same time. “See you tomorrow,” Sasha said with a smile as she bounced happily over to her car.

“Yeah, see you tomorrow,” Lily mumbled as she packed up her homework and shuffled her feet over to her car.

“What’s wrong, dear?” asked Lily’s dad that night at the dinner table.

Lily didn’t want to tell her dad about her frustration with learning multiplication. “Nothing, Dad,” Lily said as she took a bite of pasta.

What Do You Think?

Choice 1

- 1 Why do you think Lily chose to cheat?
- 2 Why do you think Sasha was upset with Lily?
- 3 What did Lily learn about practice?
- 4 Do you think Lily will feel less frustrated the next time she struggles with learning something new?

Choice 2

- 1 What did Lily do to calm her frustration?
- 2 Why do you think Lily felt better after knowing Mrs. Hart got frustrated as a child too?
- 3 Think about Sasha's positive attitude when learning the dance moves. Why do you think this helped her to not get frustrated?
- 4 What did Lily learn about the need to practice?

