

# Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

## OCCUPATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Social and emotional competencies (see Table 1) are required for successful participation in almost all areas of occupational performance. Examples include:

### Social Participation

- develop appropriate relationships with others
- resolve conflicts
- resist inappropriate social pressure

### ADLs

- understand social expectations and manners during eating
- recognize appropriate dress for the context
- use good judgment in personal safety and care

### Education

- participate in social groups
- respond appropriately to criticism and feedback
- understand social expectations
- maintain academic performance despite frustrations

### Work

- develop skills for obtaining and maintaining work
- set and make progress toward personal work goals

### Play and Leisure

- cooperate during play and leisure activities
- develop relationships based on mutual interests
- regulate emotions during competitive games

### IADLs

- set and make progress towards personal financial and transition goals
- recognize and use family, school, and community resources

**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PRACTITIONERS** use meaningful activities to help children and youth participate in what they need and or want to do in order to promote physical and mental health and well-being. Occupational therapy practitioners focus on participation in the following areas: education, play and leisure, social situations, activities of daily living (ADLs; e.g., eating, dressing, hygiene), instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs; e.g., meal preparation, shopping), sleep and rest, and work. These are the usual occupations of childhood. Task analysis is used to identify factors (e.g., sensory, motor, social and emotional, cognitive) that may limit or facilitate successful participation across various settings, such as school, home, and community. Activities and accommodations are used in intervention to promote successful performance in these settings.

**SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)** is defined as a process for helping children gain critical skills for life effectiveness, such as developing positive relationships, behaving ethically, and handling challenging situations effectively (Zins et al., 2007). Specifically, strategies that foster SEL help children to recognize and manage emotions, think about their feelings and how they should act, and regulate behavior based on thoughtful decision making.

**Table 1:** Below is a list of the five SEL competencies, adapted from the Collaborative For Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

### SEL Framework:

<b>Self Awareness</b>	identify one's emotions, thoughts, interests, and values; understand how internal characteristics influence actions; maintain a sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy
<b>Self Management</b>	regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors across contexts; cope with stress and manage impulses; set goals
<b>Social Awareness</b>	understand subtle social and cultural norms and rules of engagement; take others' perspectives; respect and empathize with others
<b>Relationship Skills</b>	establish and maintain relationships with others; resist inappropriate social pressure; work cooperatively; prevent and resolve interpersonal conflict; seek help when needed
<b>Responsible Decision Making</b>	accurately identify and evaluate problems; make decisions based on ethical and social norms; consider context in decisions; contribute to well-being on school and community

According to CASEL, research shows that embedding SEL strategies within school curricula promotes improved behavior, academic performance, and social skills (Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001; Greenberg, et al., 2003; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). SEL skills directly influence academic, social, home, and work participation. As a national leader in the field, CASEL focuses on the development of high-quality, evidence-based SEL as a necessary part of pre-school through high school education. For example, in 2004, SEL standards were developed in Illinois along with a plan to incorporate them into each districts' educational program.

With research to support its effectiveness, it is important for occupational therapy practitioners to: 1) become knowledgeable about SEL and its implementation (e.g. read CASEL training materials); 2) determine if the local school district or state has adopted SEL standards or a SEL curriculum, obtain information about such initiatives, and assist in implementation; 3) identify school committees that may address SEL programming and volunteer to become a member; 4) embed SEL strategies into occupational therapy services (group, individual, and consultative); and 5) collaborate with other disciplines who may be conducting skills training to enable opportunities for generalization and practice in natural contexts such as the classroom, cafeteria, and on the playground.

*continued*

# Occupational Therapy's Role in Addressing SEL

**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PRACTITIONERS** serve an important role in promoting SEL at the universal, targeted or intensive levels of intervention. Occupational therapy practitioners have specialized knowledge of the interaction of student contextual, psychosocial, and performance factors. Acquisition of SEL skills improves participation within and outside of the school setting. Teachers and occupational therapy practitioners can work together to infuse SEL strategies into the school day. For example, literature suggests that the school context (e.g. physical, virtual) influences SEL; Occupational therapy practitioners can help teachers modify and adapt the instructional materials and the environment so that students have more opportunities to learn SEL skills. Occupational therapy practitioners can also help school personnel create opportunities for SEL during non-instructional times (e.g. hallways, recess, after school programs, and lunch). This may enable increased contribution by occupational therapy in *Response to Intervention* and *Early Intervention* supports for students. School-wide and small group interventions across multiple authentic contexts have the potential to reach more students on a more comprehensive level than pulling students out for individualized, one-on-one therapy.

## LEVELS OF INTERVENTION:

### Tier 1: Universal, whole school approaches focus on promotion

- Help teachers infuse SEL interventions into instructional materials
- Implement interventions targeted toward all individuals. For example, have a 'theme-of-the-week' in which all teachers, staff, and students learn about and practice a specific SEL skill, like 'identifying emotions'
- Promote positive peer interaction during recess (for more information see "Recess Promotion" information sheet that is included in the School Mental Health toolkit )
- Modify and adapt the environment to support a safe "bully-free" zone, so students can learn and practice SEL
- Evaluate lunch, recess, and hallway factors that promote or impede student participation
- Provide in-services to faculty and staff on specific SEL interventions
- Communicate (via email, in person, letters home) to family members on SEL strategies and interventions
- Screen all children for behaviors that suggest risk for impaired social and emotional development
- Promote routines for identification of student strengths and positive youth development
- Develop school-wide visual supports (e.g. posters) that display specific interventions. Because SEL strategies often involve learning about oneself and others, providing concrete examples through the school and day can facilitate learning for all students
- Work with educators to implement positive classroom management strategies

### Tier 2: Targeted strategies focus on accommodations for students at-risk

- Develop groups that emphasize social and emotional skills
- Create a lunch-time group aimed at addressing the SEL framework
- Facilitate or co-facilitate a group targeted toward those who struggle with conflict resolution. Use strategies such as role-play, emotion identification, attribution, and other cognitive-behavioral interventions
- Identify student strengths and promote development of positive roles to create opportunities to generalize SEL successfully

### Tier 3: Intensive

- Alter assignments and interventions to increase student sense of self-efficacy and confidence
- Support strengths-based interventions to balance focus on deficit reduction with identification and development of positive traits
- Teach specific behaviors, pro social skills, and advocacy strategies
- Establish sense of self confidence through independence in daily living skills
- Use skills in task analysis to modify group activities to specific needs of each student

"Extensive evaluations have found that SEL enhances academic achievement, helps students develop self management and self control, improves relationships at all levels of the school community, reduces conflict among students, improves teachers' classroom management, and helps young people to be healthier and more successful in school and life" (<http://casel.org/>).

A 2011 meta-analysis found that participation in SEL positively impacts student SEL competencies and prosocial behavior (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

## CHECK THIS OUT!

- The Collaborative for CASEL <http://casel.org/> offers policy, programming, and state specific initiatives.
- Do to Learn offers free, re-printable resources that can be used to teach SEL. <http://www.do2learn.com/>
- The Whole Child offers professional development, capacity building, and educational leadership resources at <http://www.wholechildeducation.org/>

## REFERENCES & RESOURCES

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