



# Social and Emotional Learning in Practice

**A TOOLKIT OF PRACTICAL STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES**

Second edition



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**EXTENSION**



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# Introduction + Acknowledgements

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## About the Toolkit

Social and emotional learning (SEL) includes learning to be aware of and manage emotions, work well with others, and persevere when faced with challenges. Youth programs develop SEL skills by creating opportunities for young people to engage in real-world projects, work in teams, take on meaningful roles, face challenges, and experience the accompanying emotional ups and downs along the way.

This toolkit is a flexible set of practical tools, templates and activities that can be used with staff and youth to increase intentional practices that support social and emotional learning. It includes resources to:

- 1) enhance staff knowledge of SEL, how their program supports SEL, and their own emotional intelligence;
- 2) establish expectations, give feedback and integrate reflection;
- 3) infuse SEL into program activities; and
- 4) collect SEL data for improvement.

While the toolkit is designed primarily for those working with middle-school-aged youth, with slight modifications the activities are appropriate for other age groups.

The toolkit was developed as a companion to the 3-hour training, *Social and Emotional Learning in Practice*, which recognizes that while there are no cookie cutter methods that work with every young person, youth workers can influence how social and emotional skills are caught and taught within their program. The workshop results in participants 1) feeling comfortable explaining SEL to co-workers, 2) understanding how their program content can support SEL, and 3) having strategies to infuse SEL into their program content. We developed this toolkit to extend the training and support its application.

## Research-Based, Practice-Informed

Two issue briefs provide the foundation for the training and toolkit:

- *Ways of Being: A Model for Social & Emotional Learning* (Blyth, Olson & Walker, 2017) was developed out of conversations with thought leaders who recognized the need for a jargon-free teaching tool for practitioners, youth and families to deepen their understanding of social and emotional learning.
- *Intentional Practices to Support Social & Emotional Learning* (Blyth, Olson & Walker, 2017) outlines four strategies that serve as the organizational framework for our SEL trainings and toolkit. Research shows that the integration of specific strategies is likely more effective than implementing a new curriculum (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010).

An SEL Community Design Team of practitioners informed the toolkit development by providing feedback on the materials as well as sharing existing activities to use with staff or youth. Finally, practitioner perspectives were also gathered as part of the peer-review process.

## Culturally Responsive

Cultural values and identity are inextricably linked to social and emotional learning. Our Ways of Being model does not prescribe a definition of social and emotional success. Instead, the toolkit's resources are designed to engage youth's cultural values and identity in order to support a variety of SEL skills, and they encourage staff to collaborate with youth to determine which SEL skills are most important.

# Introduction + Acknowledgements

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## About the Authors

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### Designer

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### Suggested Citation

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## Acknowledgments

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The Social and Emotional Learning initiative was created by Dr. Dale Blyth, as Howland Endowed Chair in Youth Leadership Development, who led the work from 2013-2015. Dr. Blyth's career has focused on how we understand, improve, and support youth development. He continues to champion social and emotional skills as measurable outcomes for youth programs.

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### Community Design Team

An SEL Community Design Team was created to help shape and inform our professional development efforts to increase intentionality around building SEL skills in youth programs. Members met monthly for six months to consult on and contribute to the toolkit development. In particular, the activities in the Designing Impactful Learning Experiences section are credited to members of this team. Their insights, perspectives and expertise were critical to the toolkit development process.

- Sam Olson of Banyan Community
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- Jason Brown of Project SUCCESS

# Introduction + Acknowledgements

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## Reviewers

The following youth program practitioners and professional development providers served as peer reviewers of this toolkit. In addition, there were also several anonymous reviewers from the National 4-H Peer Review process:

- Erin Buchanan, Youth Program Coordinator, CommonBond Communities
- Todd Coffey, Director of Operations, Build the Out-of-School-Time Network
- Martha Grave, Neighborhood Program Coordinator, Interfaith Outreach
- Barbara Hillaker Research Specialist, Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality
- Sam Olson, Program Director, Banyan Community
- Joyce Strand, Program Coordinator, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development
- Sara Zanussi, Founder and Executive Programming Director, ComMUSICation

## Contributors

The 2nd edition of the toolkit contains 18 new items. The following Extension Center for Youth Development staff developed or adapted items for the revised toolkit:

- Jan Derdowski
- Samantha Grant
- Nicole Pokorney
- Anne Stevenson

## To Download

For more information and to download a free version of *Social and Emotional Learning in Practice: A Toolkit of Practical Strategies and Resources*, visit the website:

<http://z.umn.edu/seltoolkit>

## To Purchase

*Social and Emotional Learning in Practice: A Toolkit of Practical Strategies and Resources* is available for purchase through National 4-H Council at <https://shop4-h.org/>

# How to Get Started

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This toolkit is a flexible and practical resource, created to support youth program leaders who are invested in supporting social and emotional learning. It is designed to complement the strategies and recommendations in the 3-hour training, *Social and Emotional Learning in Practice* and related issue briefs. See the Introduction for an overview of how the toolkit was developed.

While you can certainly read the toolkit from start to finish, it is NOT intended to be used as a sequential SEL curriculum. Instead, we anticipate users will select activities that meet their current needs and fit best within their program design. You'll get the most out of it if you take the **Readiness Inventory** first. Your responses will help identify sections of the toolkit that you may find most helpful.

## Strategies

This toolkit is organized around four strategies that youth programs can implement to increase their intentional support of social and emotional learning:

- 1) Equipping Staff,
- 2) Creating the Learning Environment,
- 3) Designing Impactful Learning Experiences, and
- 4) Using Data for Improvement.

Resources in the Equipping Staff and Using Data for Improvement sections are primarily designed for use with staff. Resources and activities in the Creating the Learning Environment and the Designing Impactful Learning Experiences sections are for use with youth.

## Resources

Throughout the toolkit, you'll find three types of resources:

- **Activities** - Activities are designed to fit in a single session and can be integrated into existing program plans. Each activity indicates the intended audience, time recommendations, required materials, and instructions for the facilitator. Use the activities in any order and modify them to meet your needs.

- **Tools** - Tools include questionnaires, guides, and other resources that can be used to spark reflection and conversation or gather feedback. Each tool includes background information and suggestions for discussion.
- **Templates** - Templates are ready-to-use forms, plans, and resources that can be tailored for your program context. Each template includes suggestions for use.

## Features

Additionally, there are key features that will support your use of the toolkit:

- **Questions** - Thoughtful questions and the resulting conversations are essential components of social and emotional learning. Throughout the activities, tools, and templates, we include suggestions for conversation starters and reflective activities.
- **Culturally Responsive Design** - Cultural values and identity are inextricably linked to social and emotional learning. The toolkit resources do not prescribe a definition of success in SEL. The resources are designed to engage youth's cultural values and identity in order to support a variety of SEL skills, and they encourage staff to collaborate with youth to determine which SEL skills are most important.

Ready to go? Take the **Readiness Inventory** now.

# Readiness Inventory

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This is an informal inventory designed to help programs evaluate how well their current practices support social and emotional learning. The inventory will help identify program practice strengths as well as areas for improvement. While all four strategies do not need to develop sequentially within your program, all areas are important components of programs that are intentionally supporting social and emotional learning in youth.

## Why This Matters

- Program practices can greatly influence how youth develop social and emotional skills.
- The inventory will help customize users' experience of the toolkit by identifying sections that may be of greatest benefit.

## Getting Started

- Ask several people within your program to complete the inventory.
- Materials: A copy of the Readiness Inventory for each person
- Time: 60-90 minutes

## How To Use It

- 1) Get together to compare your responses.
- 2) Use the following conversation starters to begin a reflective discussion on your program practices.
  - Where did our team have consensus in our responses? Where did we diverge?

- Are your YES items primarily in one strategy area or are they spread out?
- Looking at the items we scored SOMETIMES, is there one in particular that we could easily move into a YES? What could we do to create more consistency in these areas?

## Take It Further

- Make a list of your relative strengths (items with YES responses). Make a list of all of the environmental actions and programmatic elements that are currently in place to support your SEL strengths. These strategies are part of your SEL toolbox that you can use as a foundation to build additional practices into your program.
- Identify one area to target for improvement. Read the corresponding section of the toolkit and mark items that might help you improve your program practices in this area. Pick one strategy to focus on first, and make a plan to measure its effectiveness.



# Tool: Readiness Inventory

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EQUIPPING STAFF	NO	SOMETIMES	YES
Do we comfortably talk about the components of social and emotional learning and why it matters?			
Can we identify the specific SEL skills our program is designed to support?			
Do we spend time exploring our own social and emotional skills as staff?			
Are we explicit about how the cultural experiences + values of staff and youth influence social and emotional learning?			

CREATING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	NO	SOMETIMES	YES
Do we regularly have feedback conversations with youth about their social and emotional skills?			
Do we communicate with parents about their child's social and emotional skill growth?			
Do we integrate SEL opportunities into our routines and behavior expectations?			
Do we integrate SEL into our conflict resolution and behavior management practices?			

# Tool: Readiness Inventory

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LEARNING EXPERIENCES	NO	SOMETIMES	YES
Do we have a planned set of activities that progressively challenge youth to build social and emotional skills?			
Do we incorporate active opportunities for youth to engage in SEL?			
Do we create opportunities for youth to reflect on their social and emotional learning?			
Do we integrate young people’s cultural values around SEL into our activities?			

DATA FOR IMPROVEMENT	NO	SOMETIMES	YES
Do we have tools and strategies in place to track youths’ progress in social and emotional skill development?			
Do we use data to improve our social and emotional learning practices?			
Do we incorporate SEL-related data into our dashboard and data review processes?			
Do we have formal tools to measure social and emotional learning outcomes in our program?			

# Equipping Staff

Effective staff need to be fluent in the concepts and language of social and emotional learning. The toolkit activities can enhance staff knowledge of their own social and emotional skills and those of youth.

This section contains resources to help staff build their understanding and fluency of SEL, attend to their own SEL skills and cultural values, consider how their program sequence supports SEL skill building, and how their program aligns with the features of high quality youth programs that support SEL skills.

# Ways of Being Model

Use this simple teaching tool to guide conversations about social and emotional learning, regardless of the specific framework or set of SEL skills your program is using. This model is designed to facilitate discussions that deepen understanding of what social and emotional skills look like in action.

## Why This Matters

- The lingo of social and emotional learning can be confusing and intimidating to youth, parents, and practitioners who are unfamiliar with the concepts.
- Multiple frameworks exist to describe social and emotional skills. The Ways of Being model is a flexible way to explain social and emotional learning.
- The Ways of Being model describes identity (Ways I Am) as central to the development of social and emotional skills. Most frameworks do not account for the role of identity. By including Ways I Am, the model is able to account for diverse interpretations of social and emotional success based on culture, beliefs, and life experiences (see [Mapping Cultural Values](#)). Yet the focus on the individual has implications and gives privilege to western values. To open up the conversation, we intentionally use “we” instead of “I” for the Ways We Are Aware, and Ways We Navigate.

## Getting Started

- Materials: A copy of the Ways of Being model for each participant.
- Time: 30 minutes

## How To Do It

- 1) Make a list of SEL skills that are a natural fit for your program (or see your [SEL + Program Map](#)).
- 2) Pass out a copy of the Ways of Being model for every person in the group. Write the skills from your list on the areas of the model that seem to be the best fit. (For example, the skill of identifying one’s emotions might be written in the Ways of Feeling area).
- 3) Staff share their models with the group. Compare and contrast the results. Note that there is no right or wrong place to put a skill. It’s often in the areas where people disagree that the most insightful discussions occur.
- 4) If your team is having difficulty identifying specific skills or is stuck talking about broad clusters of skills (like leadership), consider sharing the [SEL Skill Bank](#) to jumpstart the discussion.
- 5) Use the following conversation starters to debrief the activity:
  - What part of your model was most full or sparse?
  - What area of skills (Ways I Am, Ways of Feelings, Ways of Relating, Ways of Doing) is our program strongest?
  - What skills were difficult to place? Why?
  - What happens if you change “we” to “I”: Ways I am Aware, and Ways I Navigate?

# Ways of Being Model

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## Take It Further

- Get more practical and concrete with your team by breaking down a cluster skill set into all of the component skills. (Example: Conflict Resolution is a cluster of skills such as self-awareness, empathy, communication skills, etc.)
- Use this model to spark a conversation with youth. See [Meet the Wobblers](#).
- See the [Ways of Being Factsheet](#) for an overview of what SEL is, why it matters for youth programs, how adults can support SEL in youth program, and four strategies for incorporating SEL in youth programs.

# Tool: Ways of Being Model

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## Tool: SEL Skill Bank

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Self-awareness  
Self-regulation  
Self-control  
Emotional competence  
Emotional intelligence  
Emotion management  
Coping  
Social awareness  
Relationship skills  
Social skills  
Empathy  
Teamwork  
Connection  
Cooperation  
Collaboration  
Communication skills  
Active listening  
Conflict resolution  
Getting along with others  
Understanding others' feelings  
Accepting others  
Self-confidence  
Self-efficacy  
Self-reliance  
Responsible decision-making

Grit  
Perseverance  
Persistence  
Tenacity  
Leadership  
Autonomy  
Advocacy  
Attention  
Critical thinking  
Goal setting  
Time management  
Planning for success  
Resilience  
Problem solving  
Focus  
Drive  
Assertiveness  
Motivation  
Initiative  
Responsibility  
Determination  
Agency  
Flexibility  
Contribution  
Strategic Thinking

Note: This is not a complete list of skills — just common ones intended to spark your thinking.

# Ways of Being Quick Guides

Use the Quick Guides to teach staff about SEL and spark a discussion about social and emotional learning in your program. Quick Guides provides a concise summary of one dimension of the Ways of Being (WOB) model. Each Quick Guide contains a short description of the WOB, social and emotional skills associated with that WOB, discussion questions to guide staff, and practices to support youth.

## Why This Matters

- Staff awareness of social and emotional learning is important when effectively supporting social and emotional development with youth.
- Learning about the Ways of Being can give staff helpful language and skills to improve their conversations with youth.

## Getting Started

- Materials: Copies of the Ways of Being Quick Guides
- Time: 20 minutes for each Quick Guide
- As a facilitator, consider reading *Ways of Being: A Model for Social & Emotional Learning*, an issue brief about the Ways of Being model, ahead of time to enhance your own understanding of the Ways of Being model.

## How To Use It

- 1) Focus on a single Quick Guide at a time.
- 2) Have staff read over the sheet and then use the discussion questions to reflect on each Ways of Being within your program.
- 3) To expand on the discussion, use the conversation starters below.
  - What other SEL skills would you add to [you're your specific Ways of Being area]?
  - How do we support youth in this area? What other strategies might we use to support youth in in this area?
  - Once all Ways of Being have been reviewed, Which Ways of Being do you see as strongest in the program? Which Ways of Being do you see as in greatest need for improvement?

## Take It Further

- Consider sharing the Ways of Being Quick Guides with youth or parents in your program to spark a conversation about SEL.
- For an activity with youth, try adding in the characters from [Meet the Wobbies](#) as examples of each Ways of Being.



# WAYS OF FEELING



Ways of Feeling includes all the skills, experiences, and capacities a person has to identify and make sense of their emotions.

## Skills include:

- Self-control
- Emotional intelligence
- Emotional awareness
- Self-regulation
- Coping skills

## Questions to guide staff

- In what ways does your program culture or activities encourage or discourage the expression of youth and adult feelings?
- To what extent is the culture of your program emotionally safe for youth express their feelings?

## Practices to support youth

- Develop routines for youth to practice naming and expressing emotions (i.e. daily check-ins or reflection).
- Create program expectations to facilitate a safe, non-judgmental space.
- Model naming and expressing your own emotions.

# WAYS OF RELATING



Ways of Relating includes the skills youth need to understand and navigate their interactions and relationships with others.

## Skills include:

- Social skills
- Teamwork
- Cooperation
- Communication/  
Active listening
- Conflict resolution

## Questions to guide staff

- How do youth get to know each other in your program?
- In what ways do you ensure the emotional safety of your participants and foster healthy interactions?
- How do youth in your program handle conflict?
- What processes are in place to support peaceful conflict resolution?

## Practices to support youth

- Provide structured time for youth to get to know each other and work together.
- Develop consistent practices for resolving conflict.
- Incorporate teambuilding games with reflection.

# WAYS OF DOING



Ways of doing includes skills to approach tasks and achieve goals.

## Skills include:

- Grit
- Perseverance
- Goal setting
- Problem solving
- Focus
- Motivation

## Questions to guide staff

- In what ways do you give youth opportunities to set goals, make plans, and follow through?
- Do program staff take time to offer meaningful feedback to youth regarding their social and emotional skill development? If not, how could you create opportunities for these conversations to happen?

## Practices to support youth

- Provide activities for youth to practice goal-setting.
- Incorporate appropriate challenges to encourage persistence and determination.
- Organize your program activities around youth voice and choice.

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# WAYS I AM



Ways I Am includes the attitudes and beliefs youth have about themselves in relation to their feelings, relationships, and goals.

## Skills include:

- Self-efficacy
- Agency
- Hope
- Sense of self
- Cultural identity

## Questions to guide staff

- In what ways does your program allow youth to express and share their identity?
- To what extent do staff engage in discussions about culture?

## Practices to support youth

- Provide time for youth to share important aspects of their lives.
- Engage in a discussion about culture with youth.
- Create activities that allow youth to teach others about their background, culture and interests.

# Ways of Being Scenarios

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Use this activity with a group of staff to start a conversation about the Ways of Being (WOB) model and youth. Each scenario describes the story of an individual youth (Wobbie) with discussion questions about best practices for working with that youth. This activity will strengthen staff understanding of the Ways of Being model and SEL skills. The Wobbies were created in partnership with a team of diverse young people as part of the Youth Voice Project on Youth Ways of Being (YWOB).

## Why This Matters

- Thinking about how to support the SEL skills of youth allows staff to reflect on their past practices and plan for the future.
- A group discussion allows staff to exchange best practices and learn from each other.

## Getting Started

- This activity is most effective after staff already have a shared understanding of the [Ways of Being Model](#). Try starting with the [Ways of Being Quick Guides](#) as a way to introduce the Ways of Being model.
- Time: Plan for at least 30 minutes for each scenario. Discuss all Wobbies in one activity or split up the discussions over several sessions.

## How To Use It

- 1) Make copies of the individual scenarios or read aloud among a group of staff.
- 2) Use the discussion questions under each scenario to begin a conversation about the Wobbie.

## Take It Further

- Have staff think about a particular youth that they are working with and discuss their areas of strength and growth in the Ways of Being model.
- After you have discussed each Wobbie, consider the following questions:
  - Is there a Ways of Being that you feel most comfortable supporting youth in?
  - Which Ways of Being are you strongest in? Which Ways of Being are you working to improve?
  - How do your own social and emotional skills affect how you work with youth?