



Curriculum

Philosophy and Classroom Set-Up



SUPPORTING CARING, CONFIDENT
AND RESILIENT STUDENTS





Dear Educators and Counselors,

We are so honored you have chosen to join our Slumberkins team in offering our new and innovative approach to social-emotional learning. As a Special Education Teacher and Marriage and Family Therapist, we started Slumberkins to bring social-emotional learning into as many homes and schools as possible, beginning with tools for the family and expanding our approach to support the home-school connection.

Our approach to curriculum is based on the foundational tenets of education and therapy as well as our lived-experiences with students with a variety of needs and backgrounds. In our experience in the schools, we noticed that social-emotional curriculum was not always readily available, and even when it was, it was not always appropriate or useful for a diverse student body. We knew that social-emotional learning was the foundation of all other types of academic success. We knew there was a better way to support teachers and students with these important lessons, and we set out on a mission to create what we wished we had.

In 2019 we began gathering a team of experts in the field of social-emotional learning to help us build a comprehensive social-emotional curriculum for early elementary students. Now, in 2021 we are excited to share our curriculum with classrooms around the country. Teachers using the Slumberkins curriculum report that students are engaging well with the creatures, and stories show excitement as each activity is offered. Curriculum can be purchased separately based on topic and creature collection, or together as a set. Visit our website (www.slumberkins.com) for a complete list of available resources and offerings. We have various collections that we recommend for starting your classroom set.

Today we are continuing to create and add to the existing curriculum with additional elements and classroom supports. We believe deeply in the growth mindset, and know that we are still growing and learning in this process as well. We'd love to hear from each one of you about your success and challenges in utilizing this curriculum in your classroom and offices. From the bottom of our hearts, we want to thank you all for the important work you do day in and day out. Thank you!

Sincerely,

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Philosophy and Guiding Beliefs

We understand that social-emotional learning is foundational to academic success. It is also a vital area of children's education and personal development until recently has been left out of the classroom. It's critical that social-emotional learning is brought into every classroom and reinforced and supported each year. We've focused our attention and efforts on finding new avenues to support children, caregivers, and educators on this journey of emotional wellness through offering curriculum, books, and creatures to engage children in fun and playful learning. Our creatures and curriculum are informed by evidence-based practices as well as knowledge in the fields of psychology and education. The following are the beliefs that we drew from as we created the Slumberkins Curriculum. These beliefs guide our approach and influence the lessons, activities, and interventions that we suggest and offer in our comprehensive lessons.

Safety is Vital

Children and adults need to feel safe to be in a space to learn. They also need to be safe in order for their social-emotional development to thrive. Safety to us refers to the absence of physical harm, but also that emotional safety is present as well. Safety refers to children having their basic needs met and environments being free from as many stressors as possible that hinder children's feelings of safety. Safety is an issue for every classroom; from the threat of school shootings to students not having adequate access to food and shelter at home, safety is something that each school and community needs to address in order to support children. This curriculum, of course, is unable to address the physical needs of children, nor is it able to ensure that all schools remain safe. Thus, we recommend that it be paired with adequate school supports (i.e. school counselors, family resource centers, additional safety protocol, and school routines). We recommend that communities come together to support schools and families in helping children access safety.

Environment

We believe that the way a classroom environment is set up and the materials and resources offered in a classroom are essential to learning. Humans have adapted to be aware and sensitive to their environments—children are especially so. We recommend that the classroom be set up in a way that promotes a calm, supportive, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive space for all students to learn. Finding ways to adapt the classroom environment to meet all the needs of students throughout the year is also important. Having an environment that is clean, orderly, and

consistent, with developmentally appropriate labels and systems in place, can help students gain confidence and navigate the environment on their own. The types of learning materials, the arrangement of the room, and the presence of materials that support SEL all influence the experience a student has in the classroom. Setting up a “comfort corner” is a staple of the Slumberkins classroom and a vital part of offering a welcoming environment for students to learn and practice self-soothing techniques. See our “Environment Section” below for more information about how to set up a classroom environment.

Behavior is Communication

We believe that every behavior can be seen through the lens of what a person is trying to communicate. Behaviors are the observable part of a student’s experience, which to us, begs the question—what is it that we are not seeing under the surface? Often it is the underlying thoughts, feelings, and needs that are not being expressed that manifest in the form of behaviors. If a student is refusing to do their work, what could that behavior be indicating about the student’s inner experience at that moment? What is the student communicating with their behavior of ‘refusal’? Perhaps the student feels overwhelmed? Or doesn’t know where to start? Perhaps they are distracted by something happening at home? When we become curious about what the behavior is communicating, it can support us in moving in to offer support to address the underlying need as opposed to correcting.



All Feelings Are Welcome

Although some feelings are more difficult to experience than others, no feelings are “bad feelings.” What we mean is that all feelings serve a purpose and offer something we can learn from. We strongly advocate for utilizing language in the classroom that supports the welcoming of all emotions while setting appropriate boundaries regarding behavior. For instance, a student may be frustrated with an assignment and try to rip their paper up. Instead of saying, “don’t be frustrated,” a teacher might say, “It’s okay to be frustrated, and I’m not going to let you rip your

paper.” Finding ways to welcome all feelings, even the tough ones, helps students feel supported, valued and also builds a foundation of acceptance and tolerance for difficult emotions. We believe that shifting our mindsets to welcome all feelings takes conscious effort, as the tradition of minimizing or avoiding difficult feelings has been present in many cultures and education systems for years.



People Do The Best They Can

We believe that deep down, everyone wants to feel connected, and everyone wants to succeed. While research, at this point, cannot prove this to be true, we believe that teaching (and engaging with the world) with this belief at its core, helps us to be more compassionate and come towards problems with more creativity and openness. This guiding belief really means that we believe all students (and teachers too) are doing their best, and if they are struggling, it's because something is getting in their way. If we address the barrier or help them build a skill, they will be able to move through the challenge and meet appropriate goals. Approaching students in this way is extremely helpful in thinking through what skills a student may need to gain, or what needs can be met, for a student to be able to meet a goal. We believe the same thing about teachers too. If something is not going well, you are not inherently flawed or bad; you just may need support. Moving towards compassion and understanding in this way allows us more flexibility and helps us stay in a place of connection versus a place of judgment.

Our Bodies Are Wise

We believe that our bodies often have wisdom that is important to listen to. Much of our curriculum infuses somatic and mindfulness-based practices throughout lessons in order to support students in listening to the wisdom of the body and learning to trust their own felt experiences. Helping students connect to their bodies and learn to trust their bodies is a valuable skill that will help them throughout their lives. Teachers can support students in this learning by offering opportunities for students to check-in with themselves and then offer support and validation in their responses. This messaging can and should be utilized at all times, even outside of direct SEL learning time. Here are some examples of language that supports body trust:

- ★ If a student asks to use the restroom, a teacher can respond, "Thanks for letting me know. It's important to listen to your body."
- ★ Teachers may model this language too, by saying, "my body is telling me I need to rest for a moment. I'm going to sit down at my desk for a moment to rest."

Relationship is Key

Humans are relational beings. Many studies have shown that access to love, connection, and belonging is vital for human health and wellness. Our need for connection applies to all areas of our life, including education. All students benefit from having a connected relationship with their teacher. Feeling safe, seen, and valued in a classroom can help students feel safe enough to be away from home, as well as take more chances in their learning. Knowing that they can try something challenging, works much better if students understand they have a safety net of support when they run into problems or get overwhelmed. Even students that struggle with meeting classroom expectations will show increased cooperation when they feel connected with their teachers.




Home-School Connection

We believe that increasing communication between home and school is beneficial for all. Teachers gain valuable information about their students when they learn more about their home environments, values, and culture. Families feel more engaged when they hear more about what their children are learning at school. Students can feel supported by the increased communication. Increased learning can happen on the community level as information is shared in multiple directions. Supporting the whole self of the student includes their communication with all parties involved. Welcoming a home-school connection also includes valuing, welcoming, and celebrating diverse ways of thinking and diverse cultural practices into the classroom setting. Exploring these

themes through the building of relationships and community is vital for every student's educational experience. When done respectfully can assist in the dismantling of prejudice that works to undermine many students' mental health and functioning in the education system.

Trauma-Informed Practices Belong in Every Classroom

Many schools in the United States are beginning to adopt Trauma-Informed Practices. This means that schools and classrooms implement practices that support students exposed to adverse life experiences such as violence, homelessness, food scarcity, and even things like parental unemployment, among many other situations. There are many experiences that can impact a student's social and emotional wellness. In each classroom, there is likely a student who needs trauma-informed practices, and it turns out even students who haven't experienced trauma can benefit from implementing these practices. Trauma-informed practices include educating teachers and staff at the school to understand trauma and the impact of trauma on the students and implementing approaches that help empower students to feel safe, connected, and supported throughout their day. Our books and practices are trauma-informed, meaning they take into account the specific needs of those impacted by trauma and aim to support, mitigate the impact and even offer practices that support healing from trauma.



Setting Students up for Success

Environment

Each classroom environment needs to be set up to reflect the unique needs and cultures of the students and families it serves. While each classroom may be equipped differently, and differences will be present, we believe some key factors help support social-emotional learning for students. Offering a safe, organized, and welcoming classroom environment is vital for student's learning. Overall we recommend that classroom decor remains simple, useful, and welcoming, the aids focus and attention and does not cause sensory overwhelm to students who struggle with lots of visual stimuli. Neurodivergent students may need different types of visual supports made available to them at their seats, and around the classroom. Supplies and decor should be hung at the student's level, and furniture should be sized appropriately for students to be able to access materials and maneuver about on their own as much as possible. Offering seating and classroom arrangement that promotes independent work and cooperation can help students practice important social skills and emotional regulation skills. When the classroom is well thought-out to accommodate students, teachers and students alike can benefit from the support of the environment to enhance learning and aid in emotional regulation. As you get to know your individual students and become aware of classroom functioning as a whole- you may find that changing the setup is important. That's okay! It's always great to try something out and then adjust it. If a change is made, we recommend that this change be shared with the students to adjust to the new setup adequately.

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Labels

We recommend that each student have a cubby or hook to hold their belongings and that each space is labeled for the student. We recommend that each space have the student's written name as well as a photo or image that can help students identify their spot. Easy to understand labels can help students build self-confidence and independence. We recommend that all materials be labeled and stay in the same spot when possible. Predictability is important for students and is a trauma-informed practice that can help students feel safe and secure. See our Slumberkins classroom labels to add to your classroom look.

Schedules

Having visual schedules of the day posted is vital for young students (and older ones too!). Knowing what comes next can help students feel more confident and safe. This allows students to really engage in their current work, instead of thinking about or worrying about what comes next. Various types of visual schedules can be helpful. Overall we recommend a schedule that is simple, visually pleasing, and developmentally appropriate. Teach students how to understand and follow the schedule. Some students may benefit from having their own copy of a schedule to keep with them-especially if they will be attending specialists or additional services. Modify student schedules



according to the students' needs. If a student struggles with multiple steps, reduce the number of activities listed, the simplest being a First, Then schedule. Be proactive, and work with each student's team of providers to find a schedule and a system that works across providers-the more the adults work together the less the student has to worry about it themselves.

Routines

Planning out classroom routines is vital before the onset of the school year. These, of course, may change, or be added to, but thinking through the flow of the day, and how to move students through transitions can really help the

start of the school year off right. Students benefit from teachers being clear on expectations and processes right from the start.

Comfort Corner

We recommend that each classroom be set up with a "comfort corner." A comfort corner is an area in the classroom that is a comfortable and safe space for students to choose to go to when they need a break or having a difficult time. We recommend that students are able to self-select into the comfort corner, and that it is not used as a punishment. This is because we don't believe that big feelings should be punished- they are welcome! At the start of the year we recommend that you start off simple and give students a "tour" of the comfort corner and describe why it is there. Let them know that it is a place students can go to take a break when they need to. As the year goes on we recommend adding additional resources to your comfort corner. We recommend that only one student use the space at a time.

Resource List and Links

Slumberkins Classroom Schedules/Labels Set
Comfort Corner Tool Kit
Online Youtube Content for Classrooms
Washington State Social-Emotional Learning Standards- link
Oregon Early Learning Framework- link



Curriculum Development Team

The Slumberkins Curriculum was developed by a team of educators and specialists with experience in the field of Social Emotional Learning, Child Development, Special Education, Early Education, and Child and Family Mental Health. The following are a list of contributors to this robust collection:

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