

Social and Emotional Learning Skills Help Children Succeed in School, Work and Life

By Sue Laue, SEL Trainer and Coach

As children head back to school, former MHANS Board Member and current volunteer, Sue Laue reflects on the role of social and emotional skills in education and child development.

To navigate life's most challenging hurdles, we need to learn **social and emotional learning (SEL) skills**. These skills that help us build relationships, defuse conflict, make wise decisions and plan for our futures. Children who learn these skills also have higher levels of academic achievement.

CASEL and the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership have identified **5 basic social emotional skills**:

Self-Awareness: Identifying thoughts, feelings and strengths and understanding how they influence our choices, actions and decisions in life.

Self-Management: Handling emotions in a productive manner to advance our choices and to set goals that enhance our lives.

Social Awareness: Identifying and understanding the perspectives of others, how they are like us and how they are different from us and appreciating and respecting those differences and diversity.

Relationship Building: Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships with others, practicing good communication, listening and negotiation skills.

Responsible Decision-Making: Developing and evaluating positive and informed solutions to problems and assuming personal responsibility for choices.

Close to 10 years ago, Illinois was one of the first states to develop standards for teaching social and emotional skills in schools. Schools can select from evidence based programs rated by CASEL. However, with budget cutbacks and the increasing focus on academic achievement, many school districts find little time to devote to SEL. **Parents can advocate for SEL programs**. They can also support existing programs by reinforcing SEL lessons at home and serving on SEL school teams.

Although school SEL programs are important, **parents are the first teachers**. Parents can model SEL skills at home and help their children practice them. **For example, parents can:**

- * focus on children's strengths
- * ask how they feel about concerns
- * work together on setting rules
- * find ways to stay calm when angry
- * provide fair consequences for misbehavior
- * be willing to apologize when wrong
- * avoid humiliating or mocking children
- * respect their ideas and choices
- * ask questions to help solve problems
- * encourage sharing and helping in the community
- * read books together about how others deal with problems
- * help them practice SEL school lessons at home
- * help children set positive goals

A positive emotional relationship with your child is literally life-sustaining. Building trust and communication is a life-long process. Start slowly and enjoy sharing your child's inner life.

Helpful Links

www.casel.org
(SEL facts)

www.icmhp.org
(SEL brochure)