



## INTRODUCTION TO...

# Social & emotional learning in schools

## What are social and emotional skills?

Social and emotional skills play a crucial role in children and young people's development, enabling them to achieve positive outcomes in school, work and life in general. Definitions vary, but the term generally encompasses five interrelated sets of cognitive, emotional and behavioural competencies.<sup>1</sup>

### 5 core social & emotional skills



#### SELF AWARENESS

Recognising your own thoughts and emotions and understanding how they influence your behaviour. Self-confidence, and accurately assessing your own personal strengths and limitations.

#### SELF REGULATION

Regulating your own emotions, thoughts and behaviours, managing stress, controlling impulses, and setting and working towards personal goals.

#### SOCIAL AWARENESS

Empathy and understanding of others, respecting diversity, understanding social and cultural norms of behaviour.

#### RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING

Making ethical and constructive choices about your own behaviour, based on an ability to empathise and see the perspective of others.

#### RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships, communicating clearly, listening well, cooperating with others and negotiating conflict constructively.

Derived from  
Casel (2003)

## Why are these skills important?

Our own research has shown that social and emotional skills are important for children's health, wellbeing and future success, including their educational attainment.<sup>2</sup>

In much the same way that academic skills can be taught, social and emotional skills can be nurtured and developed throughout childhood, adolescence and beyond. Research also indicates that some social and emotional skills lay the foundation for later skill development. Skills learned in primary school act as building blocks for more complex skills learned throughout secondary school.<sup>3</sup>

Worryingly, inequalities in the development of these skills can be seen from the age of 3. Children from less well-off households tend to have lower levels of self control and emotional health than children from better-off homes.

There are clear opportunities for early intervention to improve social and emotional skills before children start school, and during the school years as a way of supporting children and young people's wellbeing and readiness for adult life.

### WHO ARE WE?

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is an independent charity that champions and supports the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children, young people and their families.

## What works to support children to develop these skills?

Promoting social and emotional development involves teaching and modelling social and emotional skills, providing opportunities for students to practice these skills and giving them the opportunity to apply these skills in various situations.

The range of approaches for promoting social and emotional skills in schools can be divided into three main groupings:

1. Universal classroom-based interventions
2. Whole-school interventions
3. Targeted interventions

**Universal classroom-based interventions** teach a range of skills through a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Teachers are generally trained to deliver lessons that teach skills including emotional identification and regulation, effective communication, problem solving, conflict resolution and coping skills. Several reviews have identified characteristics of effective interventions including: programmes with a strong theory base, a focus on teaching skills, use of interactive teaching methods, starting early with the youngest and continuing through the school, the provision of programme manual and teacher training. There are a number of evidence-based social and emotional learning programmes that enhance students' competence and behaviour in developmentally appropriate ways from preschool through to secondary school.

See for example:

**Zippy's Friends**

<http://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programme/zippys-friends>

**Whole-school interventions** define the entire school community as the unit of change. A whole-school intervention involves coordinated action between three core components: (i) curriculum teaching and learning, (ii) school ethos and environment, and (iii) family and community partnerships. It involves all pupils, staff, parents, the community and outside agencies. At the school ethos and environment level, skills are reinforced in non-curriculum-based ways through policies, whole-staff training, and daily activities designed to promote a positive school climate. School leaders play a critical role in fostering school-wide activities that promote a positive school environment. Family and community partnerships involves extending learning into the home and working cooperatively with outside agencies to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

See for example:

**Positive Action**

<http://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programme/positive-action>

**Targeted interventions** are designed for students at increased risk of developing mental health problems such as anxiety or depression. These students are at increased risk by virtue of their life circumstances or exposure to stress. Often conducted through small-group work, these programmes reinforce and supplement classroom-based instruction for students who need early intervention and more intensive support. Targeted programmes, which usually involve teacher training and parental involvement address the enhancement of coping skills and cognitive skills training which aim to help pupils reshape their thinking.

See for example:

**FRIENDS for Youth**

<http://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programme/friends-for-youth>

Reviewers of the evidence to date conclude that, for optimal impact, universal social and emotional skills-based interventions need to be embedded within a whole-school approach which embraces changes to the school environment, involves parents and families, and includes the provision of targeted interventions for those at risk of developing mental health and behavioural problems.

## What can these programmes achieve?

There is a substantive body of international evidence to indicate that social and emotional skills-based interventions, when implemented effectively, can positively impact on children and young people's outcomes, including improved social and emotional skills, attitudes about self, school and others, prosocial behaviour and academic achievement, and reductions in aggression, mental health problems and substance use.<sup>4</sup> Also, these interventions have been proven to result in long-term findings across multiple outcomes, including enhanced social and emotional skills, attitudes and academic performance.<sup>5</sup>

## How is EIF supporting social and emotional learning in the UK?

Our online Guidebook is a key tool for supporting the delivery of effective social and emotional learning interventions in schools. The Guidebook provides independent information on the effectiveness and delivery of these interventions. EIF rates programmes according to the strength of their evidence (the quality of evidence suggesting that the intervention has a positive impact on child outcomes) and relative costs. We do this by assessing programme evidence against 34 criteria. In addition to providing information about specific outcomes a programme has been shown to improve, the Guidebook also provides a wealth of information about how the programme works, how it is delivered and the conditions or resources that can make a programme more likely to be effective.

**EIF Guidebook of early  
intervention programmes:**  
[www.Guidebook.EIF.org.uk](http://www.Guidebook.EIF.org.uk)

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We have joined forces with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and will be embarking on a joint programme of activity until 2020 to provide guidance and resources for schools on social and emotional learning (SEL). Our guidance will identify actionable, evidence-based recommendations for schools' SEL practice, including:

- developing a vision that prioritises SEL alongside academic learning
- conducting a resource assessment to determine schoolwide needs
- implementing effective professional learning to build staff capacity
- adopting and implementing evidence-based SEL within the context of a whole-school approach
- establishing a process to monitor implementation and embed SEL within the school context.

We will collaborate with EEF to communicate the messages from this guidance to influence decision-making and change practice in schools.

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Alongside our work with EEF, we are working with the Behavioural Insights Team to trial a range of interventions aimed at enhancing young people's essential life skills. This research has a particular focus on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and aims to address a range of life skills including social and emotional skills, motivation, goal orientation, and meta-cognitive skills.

## Introduction to social & emotional learning in schools

# Notes and useful sources

### NOTES

- 1 Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2003). *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-based Social and Emotional Learning Programs*, Illinois ed, Chicago, IL.
- 2 Goodman, A., Joshi, H., Nasim, B., & Tyler, C. (2015) *Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life*. Early Intervention Foundation, London, UK.
- 3 Jones, S.M., & Bouffard, S.M. (2012). 'Social and emotional learning in schools: from programs to strategies: social policy report'. *Society for Research in Child Development*, 26(4), 3-22.
- 4 Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K.B. (2011). 'The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions', *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432; Sklad, M., Diekstra, R., De Ritter, M., & Ben, J. (2012). Effectiveness of school-based universal social, emotional, and behavioral programs: do they enhance students' development in the area of skill, behavior, and adjustment?, *Psychology in the Schools*, 49(9), 892-909; Weare, K., & Nind, M. (2011). Mental health promotion and problem prevention in schools: what does the evidence say?, *Health Promotion International*, 26(S1), 29-69; Greenberg, M.T., Weissberg, R.P., O'Brien, M.U., Zins, J.E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., & Elias, M.J. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *American Psychologist*, 58(6-7), 466; Zins, J.E., Weissberg, R., & Wang, M.C. (eds.) (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* Teachers College Press.
- 5 Taylor, R.D., Oberle, E., Durlak, D., & Weissberg, R.P. (2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1156-1171.

### EIF PUBLICATIONS

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<http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/social-and-emotional-learning-skills-for-life-and-work/>
- Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) (2017). *Social and emotional learning: supporting children and young people's mental health*, policy briefing, EIF, London, UK. <http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/social-and-emotional-learning-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health/>
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<http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/social-and-emotional-learning-skills-for-life-and-work/>

### OTHER RESOURCES

- Barry, M.M., Clarke, A.M., & Dowling, K. (2017). Promoting social and emotional well-being in schools. *Health Education*, 117(5), 434-451.
- Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2013). *Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs: Preschool and Elementary School Edition*. Casel Guide, Chicago, IL.
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This infosheet was first published in February 2018. © 2018