

# Learning to Get Along

*How to integrate social and emotional learning  
into your teaching practice*

Slide commentaries and stories

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## Learning to Get Along

**How to Integrate Social and Emotional Learning  
into Your Teaching Practice**

**Module 1**



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### Slide 1 Introduction


Learning to Get Along, Module 1: Understanding social and emotional learning, or SEL. What is it and why should we do it?

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## Module 1

Understanding SEL – What and why?



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### Slide 2 Inspiration

Module 1, like every module in this course, begins with a quotation from a famous person. The quote is intended to inspire, but also to shed some light on the ideas and information contained in the module. As you read these words from Timothy Shriver, think about what it says about learning for all people, and especially for your students.

“The myth was that knowledge could be bolted onto a brain, like any other mechanical part. The truth is that all knowledge is constructive, the truth is all knowledge is relational. The truth is that emotion drives attention, and attention drives learning.”



—Timothy Shriver

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“The myth was that knowledge could be bolted onto a brain, like any other mechanical part. The truth is that all knowledge is constructive, the truth is all knowledge is relational. The truth is that emotion drives attention, and attention drives learning.”

--Timothy Shriver  
Chairman, Special Olympics




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### Slide 3 Objectives

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:

- Give a working definition of social and emotional learning (SEL).
- Explain how executive functioning of the brain relates to SEL.
- Describe the core skill areas in which SEL programs and activities are grounded.
- Explain how integrating SEL into your daily teaching practice can benefit students and improve the learning environment at your school.


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## Module 1 Objectives

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to...



- Give a good working definition of social and emotional learning (SEL).
- Explain how executive functioning of the brain relates to SEL.
- Describe three core skill areas in which SEL programs and activities are grounded.
- Explain how integrating SEL into your daily teaching practice can benefit students and improve the learning environment at your school.



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## Slide 4 Jeremy's Story

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### Jeremy's Story

This story is fictional, but it is based on a real incident that took place at a school in New York City. As you listen, think about:

- What happened and why
- What strategy the guidance counselor used to diffuse the situation
- Why the school principal believes social and emotional learning is important

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A boy named Jeremy, age 8, is having a very bad day. At lunch time, he suddenly jumps up, starts throwing his food at the other kids and cursing out everyone in sight. At most schools, he would be sent immediately to the principal's office to be punished. He might even be expelled or suspended. But at this school, a teacher calls the guidance counselor, Mr. Renaldo, to come to the lunchroom. He takes Jeremy's hand. 'It's OK, calm down, Jeremy. Come with me'. Several months later, Jeremy still has bad days, but he doesn't fly out of control like he did before. With help from Mr. Renaldo, he has learned how to control his emotions.

"Now," he says, "I know when I'm about to get upset. I tell my teacher and she lets me take a walk to calm down. That's my coping skill."

Such out-of-control moments are not unusual at this school, which is located in one of New York City's poorest neighborhoods and has about 500 students. Many of the students are very poor, and nearly half of them are homeless. Most have already experienced more than their share of emotional trauma. The school gives teachers, staff and parents the support they need to help build children's social and emotional skills. "For us, it is important, says the principal, "to stabilize a child emotionally before we can work on academics."


Since starting a new social and emotional learning program for teachers and staff a year ago, absenteeism at the school has been reduced by almost 7%, and performance on the state reading exam has improved to match the city-wide average. Life and school are still not easy for Jeremy, but he is happier, and his chances of succeeding are a lot better than they were.

## Slide 5 What is social and emotional learning?

In the broad sense, SEL can be defined as a process through which people—infants, children, young people and adults—gain the skills they need to manage emotions, make responsible decisions and build meaningful relationships with others. Many types of research and interventions are now grouped under the SEL banner. Many, in fact, existed long before the term came into wide use. For example, subfields of psychology and human development such as 'prosocial skills', aggressive behavior problems, and emotional regulation fall under the SEL umbrella, together with interventions aimed at, for example, preventing bullying, building character, moral education, resolving conflicts and developing interpersonal skills.

It is also important to acknowledge what SEL is *not*. It is not a passing fad, not limited to one level of human development, and not a separate subject to be added on to the school curriculum.

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### What is social and emotional learning?

- Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process through which children, young people and adults gain the skills they need to:
  - understand and manage their emotions
  - make responsible decisions
  - build meaningful relationships with others
- SEL is not:
  - a passing fad
  - limited to one level of human development
  - a separate subject

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### Slide 6 What are the core SEL skill areas?

There are diverse perspectives on how to understand, categorize and teach social and emotional learning, and, of course, different cultural traditions have different ideas about the values, attitudes and behaviors that should be prioritized. But educators around the world generally agree that *emotional awareness* and *social awareness* are important for children to learn at a very young age. Emotional awareness is defined as the ability to perceive one's self in relation to others and to the world, and social awareness enables an individual to build and sustain meaningful relationships.

Both of these skill areas are closely related to empathy, which is the ability to understand and feel the emotions of another. In other words, to walk in another person's shoes.

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## What are the core SEL skill areas?

Social Awareness

Emotional Awareness

Empathy

enables an individual to build and sustain social relationships

ability to perceive one's self in relation to others and the world

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### Slide 7 What grows in time?

The core skill areas of emotional and social awareness are closely interconnected, to the extent that the distinction between them is often blurred. But making distinctions and drawing lines is not so important as understanding that, as teachers, a big part of our role is to nurture human development.

To do this, it is helpful to think of the core skill areas as the soil in which such life-long character traits as flexibility, resilience and openness to new ideas can grow over time. These sets of skills will empower students to make good choices, experience personal well-being, and help to make our world a better place.

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## What grows in time?

resilience  
self-control  
flexibility

openness to new ideas  
tolerance

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS ↔ SOCIAL AWARENESS

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### Slide 8 But that's not all

Looking to the future, integration of SEL into daily teaching and learning at all levels aims toward making our world safer and more sustainable, but that's not all. Benefits to learners are real, measurable and immediate. For example, documented benefits in schools where SEL has been implemented include:

1. At the New York City school where Jeremy's story was based, scores on a state reading exam rose after one year of an integrated SEL program to match city wide averages. Overall, schools with ongoing SEL programs report significant improvement in standardized reading and math assessments.
2. Other schools have reported significant reductions in aggressive behaviors, bullying, depressive symptoms and hyperactivity, as well as a significant reduction in drug and alcohol use.

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## But that's not all 😊

- Immediate benefits in schools where SEL has been implemented:
  - personal well-being—students report 'feeling better about themselves, their school and their relationships'
  - reduction of disruptive behaviors
  - Improvement in academic performance by helping students:
    - focus
    - set goals
    - solve problems

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### Slide 9 Why is it important?

The view of Earth, the planet we call home, from outer space brings us back to the proposition that academic knowledge and technical skills are simply not enough to equip students of today to meet the challenges of tomorrow. We may not know exactly what those challenges will be 50, 20, or even 10 years from now, and much will depend on what is being done to mitigate the impact of climate change and other major threats to a sustainable future. But we can be certain that these will include new challenges to life and health, the challenge of adapting to new technologies in the workplace, and unprecedented social, economic and environmental challenges.

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## Why is it important?

- Academic knowledge and skills are not enough to equip students to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
  - life and health challenges
  - challenges of the the workplace
  - social, economic and environmental challenges (local and global)

Greta Thunberg  
Climate and environmental activist

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Until very recently, Western school systems have focused primarily on academic knowledge and skills, partly because they are easy to measure. Educators generally felt that teaching ‘soft skills’ had a lesser role in helping children succeed at higher levels of learning and in their career pursuits. However, an impressive body of new research on learning processes and outcomes tells us that that cognitive learning in itself fails to prepare students for the rapidly evolving challenges of life and work in our times. For example, students need to learn how to cope with change, to respect different points of view, and to work in diverse groups to solve problems.

### Slide 10 Educating the whole child

To help students meet the challenges of life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educators around the world are shifting toward more comprehensive approaches to educating the ‘whole child’, not just the part that learns how to decode words and perform calculations, but the parts that have emotions, care about others and act responsibly. This means paying equal attention to their cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. It means that schools must try harder to ensure that learners are healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged.

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## Educating the whole child

physical

cognitive

emotional

social

SAFE

HEALTHY

ENGAGED

CHALLENGED

SUPPORTED

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### Slide 11 What is 'executive functioning' of the brain?


In order to activate learning in the core SEL skill areas, a set of cognitive processes located in the frontal lobe of the brain acts as a central routing system or 'switchboard' that acts as a central routing system or 'switchboard' that receives and assesses incoming signals, responds to high priority messages, and sends other messages to relevant parts of the neural network for further processing and response.

In sum, executive functioning enables us to pay attention, remember, plan, prioritize, think flexibly and control emotions.


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### What is 'executive functioning' of the brain?



- A set of cognitive processes located in the frontal lobe of the brain
- These processes act together as a central routing system or 'switchboard' that:
  - receives and assesses incoming signals
  - responds to high priority messages
  - sends other messages to relevant parts of the neural network for further processing and response
- In sum, executive functioning enables us to pay attention, remember, plan, prioritize, think flexibly and control emotions.




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### Slide 12 How does SEL help to strengthen executive functioning?



We know that executive functioning of the brain can help to activate SEL learning, but scientists also believe that there is a powerful reverse effect. In other words, learning in core skills areas like emotional and social awareness builds the capacity of executive functioning processes and connected areas of the brain and, at the same time, engagement in this kind of learning reinforces and expands our ability to experience empathy,

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### How does SEL help to strengthen executive functioning?

- SEL builds the capacity of executive functioning processes and connected areas of the brain that regulate emotional and social awareness
- SEL reinforces and expands our ability to experience empathy




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### Slide 13 Nature or nurture?



This is, of course, a very big question that has been debated by philosophers, scientists and religious leaders for thousands of years. Are we humans hardwired to protect and cooperate with others? Are personality traits and behaviors such as self-control, kindness, and caring for others part of our fundamental human nature or must we be taught to acquire them? Considering the emergent field of epigenetics, the answer is 'it's both', but with a twist.

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### Nature or Nurture?

- Are we born with certain characteristics?
- What does the emerging field of epigenetics tell us?
- Why does it matter (or not)?



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### Slide 13 Nature or nurture? (continued)

Briefly stated, ‘epigenetics’ is the study of biological mechanisms that switch genes on and off. The different combinations of genes that are turned on or off are what makes each of us unique. In other words, this explains why some of us may naturally appear to be more empathetic or socially aware than others, while in fact everything around us—what we eat, where we live, how we exercise—can cause changes in the way our genes are switched on or off. There is solid evidence that both nature and nurture play a role in how our individual characteristics, including SEL skills, are formed. Either way, educators and psychologists agree that all children have the potential to develop social and emotional competencies that drive their attitudes and behaviors, and that these are essential to their individual and collective happiness.

### Slide 14 What is the role of culture?

The nature vs nurture debate, together with reflections from the field of epigenetics, brings the role of culture, physical environment and history into the spotlight. That’s because different cultures prioritize certain values, attitudes and behaviors over others. For example, independent thinking and individual assertiveness may be highly valued in some societies, while conformity and obedience are considered more important in others. As globalization has brought cultures of the world into closer and closer contact with one another, some of these priorities may be said to be in a constant state of flux and are sometimes a cause of friction, for example, between young adults and their elders. It remains the case, however, that traditional religious and cultural practices have a strong role in cultivating core SEL skill sets AND that our physical environment—both natural and constructed influences individual and group behaviors.

In defining SEL skills and shaping educational programs, it is important to respect cultural diversity as well as to support global initiatives for sustainable peace and economic development.

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### What is the role of culture?

- Different cultures prioritize certain values, attitudes and behaviors over others.
- Traditional religious and cultural practices have a role in cultivating core SEL skill sets.
- Our natural and constructed physical environment also influence individual and group behaviors.



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### Slide 15 Examples of SEL strategies from around the world

As you read through the examples, think of strategies you and/or your colleagues have used to achieve the same or similar objectives. For example, how do you get students to focus their attention? How do you establish calm so that your students are ready to learn? Which strategies have been especially effective with which age groups. If you are working with colleagues, take a moment to share or demonstrate a particular strategy that you have used with a particular age group.

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### Examples of SEL strategies from around the world

Context	Location	Strategy	Objective
Pre-school	United States	Play a memory game, such as placing objects into a basket, hiding it and then having children name the objects.	Focus children's attention and strengthen executive function
Lower primary	Thailand	Group meditation following recess	Establish calm and regulate emotions
Upper primary	Uganda	Teacher led story on resolving a conflict between neighbors	Taking different perspectives
Secondary	Holland	'Skills for life' lesson on dealing with cyber bullying.	Building empathy for victims and supporting positive social relationships

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
## Slide 16 The takeaway

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# The Takeaway


1. Social and emotional learning is a process for strengthening core skill areas and specific skill sets over time.
2. The core SEL skill areas are emotional awareness, and social awareness. Both of these are related to empathy.
3. Specific SEL skills and characteristics are developed over time through sequenced activities and supportive learning environments.
4. Integrating SEL into classroom interactions helps to develop the brain's executive functioning.
5. Explicit SEL instruction is positively correlated to higher levels of academic performance.



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## Slides 17, 18, 19 Self-checkout\*

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# Self-Checkout

1. Which of the following best describes SEL?
  - a school subject
  - a process
  - an emotion
  - part of the brain
2. In addition to improving students' well-being, there is mounting evidence that SEL...
  - helps prevent the spread of diseases
  - extends average life expectancy
  - improves the physical school environment
  - enhances students' academic performance



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\*Make a note of your choices and discuss with colleagues. You can check answers on p. 12 (slide 22)



## Self-Checkout (continued)

3. The ability to perceive one's self in relation to others and to the world is known as...
  - executive functioning
  - empathy
  - emotional awareness
  - social awareness
4. The brain's executive functioning capacity enables us to...
  - focus attention
  - take in new information
  - control impulses
  - all of the above




## Self-Checkout (continued)

5. Which of the following best describes the 'whole child' approach to education?
  - Learning is more focused on the child's cognitive development.
  - There is increased emphasis on mathematics and science in the curriculum.
  - Children are encouraged to keep their emotions under control.
  - Learning focuses equally on children's cognitive, emotional, social and physical development.
6. Scientists and educators tend to agree that all children...
  - are alike in every way.
  - are born with equal mental and physical abilities.
  - have the capacity to develop social and emotional competencies.
  - should learn foundational academic skills at the same pace.




Slide 20 Think like a teacher\*

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**Think like a TEACHER\***

*Based on your experience, what do you feel are the main risks to children's well-being at your school? What are your recommendations for introducing SEL strategies to reduce these risks?*





Risks	Recommendations

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\*Copy the chart into your journal or display on a board or screen. If possible, discuss with colleagues before you share or present to others.

Slide 21 What's next?

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**What's next?**

Now that you have an idea of what social and emotional learning is and why it is important, you probably have a lot of questions. The next module addresses the practical question:

***How, when, and where can SEL be implemented?***

The answer begins in Module 2 with the story of Huda, a nine-year-old Syrian refugee. It continues with a discussion of what constitutes a safe and welcoming learning environment, and concludes with a consideration of how SEL can help enhance learning for students with special needs.

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## Slide 22 Self-checkout answers

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**Self Checkout Answers**

1. a process
2. enhances students' academic performance
3. emotional awareness
4. all of the above
5. learning focuses equally on children's cognitive, emotional, social and physical development
6. have the capacity to develop social and emotional competencies

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Thank you for participating in the learning path of Module 1. We hope that the ideas and information presented in this self-learning program are useful to you and your students. We invite you to send your feedback directly to us at [spectaclelearningmedia@gmail.com](mailto:spectaclelearningmedia@gmail.com). We also encourage you to send your own stories and ideas for classroom strategies or activities related to the themes of Modules 1-6 (listed below) to the same address. We are planning to set up a space on our website for sharing stories, ideas, and examples of SEL practices with educators around the world.

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1. Understanding SEL – What and why?
2. Implementing SEL – Where, when and how often
3. Emotional awareness – What it is and how it can help students to take charge of their lives
4. Social awareness – How to help students build strong social relationships
5. Learning is for everyone – How to make your classroom and school more inclusive
6. Peace from within – Finding a treatment for bullying that works in your school

For information on how to request a PowerPoint version of Module 1 or advice on how to adapt LtGA for your school, district or system, please visit:

<https://spectaclelearningmedia.net>