



Fostering Social and Emotional Learning at Home and in the Classroom

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One of the greatest challenges for both teachers and parents is helping our littlest learners manage their biggest emotions. When babies are born, they are programmed to express their needs in the only way they know how: to cry. As they grow older, children learn to communicate with parents and caregivers in a variety of ways, but most importantly through language.

Unfortunately, we all know what happens when toddlers lack the right words to express their needs: like babies, they revert to crying. This behavior continues and even evolves as many kids learn maladaptive ways to express their emotions, such as through whining, hitting others, or acting out in behaviorally inappropriate ways that often leads to punishment. Inevitably, a vicious cycle begins and is repeated throughout childhood and into adolescence.

So, what can adults do to avoid this cycle and help children learn how to express themselves and deal with their own emotions? The answer lies within teaching children social and emotional skills to help them cope with their big feelings and adapt to everyday stressors in a more positive way.

What is Social and Emotional Learning?

In the educational world, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to a framework that helps children learn skills to help them deal with their emotions and feelings, as well as build positive relationships with others leading them to make better choices. The cornerstone of SEL is teaching kids to become self-aware; this means that children learn how to identify and comprehend their emotions, to better manage their feelings while boosting their confidence in social situations. In doing so, they can improve their lives in a myriad of ways from communicating with others to making better decisions.

Strategies for Supporting Social and Emotional Skills

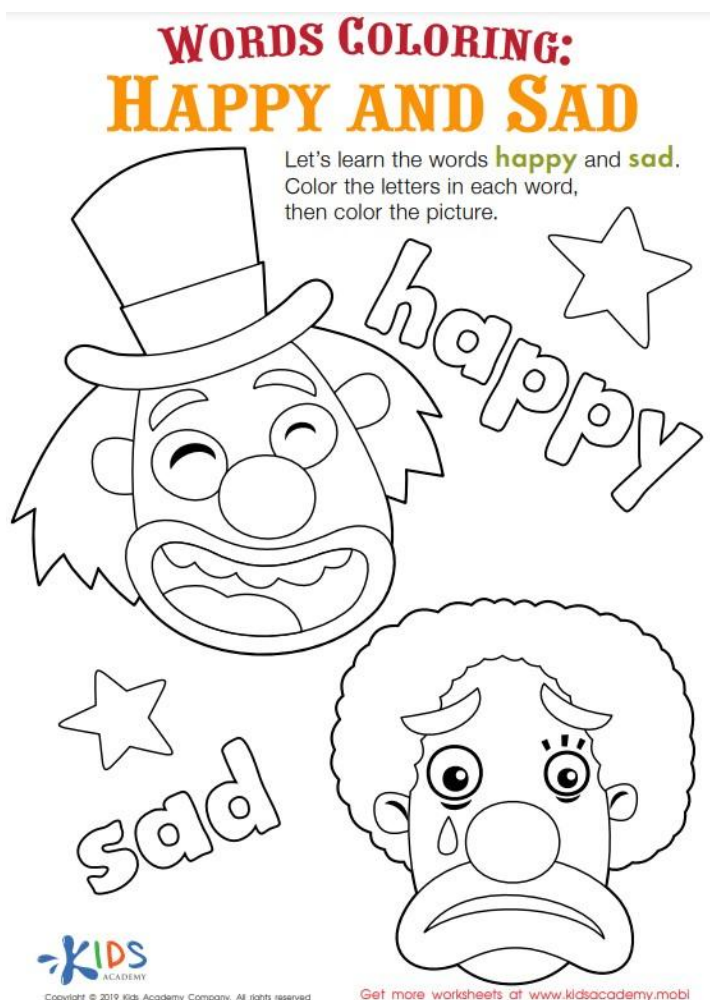
Emotional intelligence is at the core of any healthy and successful human communication. Understanding one's own feelings and how others can feel in certain situations will form a basis for building a more complex moral and emotional schema, which may include compassion, fairness, and equality. At Kids Academy, we offer [kids learning worksheets](#) that contribute to developing a child's knowledge of emotions and feelings, as well as encourage positive behavioral models.

For additional strategies to foster SEL at home or in school, try the following techniques:

Work through emotions using art

One of the best ways to help children learn about feelings is by exploring concepts through one of the activities they love the most: art! Kids begin to scribble and draw long before they learn to write. In fact, babies and toddlers enjoy art through fingerpainting before they have learned to talk. Because art is such a big part of a child's life, it makes it an obvious choice for using it to increase SEL.

One easy way to incorporate SEL concepts into art activities is by simply offering coloring pages that also teach kids new words to identify their emotions. For example, this [coloring page for kids](#) teaches the words "happy" and "sad" to give children the vocabulary needed for understanding how they feel. Likewise, this [worksheet](#) helps add to and refine their knowledge with the words "mad" and "scared".



Click on these worksheets to download them!

While they color, feel free to talk to children about what those words mean in relation to the expressions they see on the characters. Ask them if they ever feel that way to begin a discussion about those emotions and relate the vocabulary terms to their personal lives.

Teach lessons directly and reinforce those concepts in practice

Whether at home or in the classroom, sometimes there is no substitute for direct instruction. This means that some concepts must be explicitly taught, offering meaningful practice through [kids learning games](#) or worksheets.

After discussing a SEL concept, such as compassion or kindness, offer a [worksheet like this one](#), which allows students to explore the idea in a playful way that feels more like a puzzle or game.

Alternatively, talk about concepts, such as manners that are appropriate at school, and review them by offering a [worksheet](#) that gives kids scenarios that they evaluate by viewing images so they can visually see the communication playing out without requiring more advanced reading skills.

Likewise, [worksheets like these](#) prompt students to learn a skill such as cooperation, and immediately evaluate which images portray that concept. When SEL is directly taught and then reinforced through meaningful practice, children are more likely to internalize these important concepts.

Cooperation

Good citizens **cooperate** and work together.
Check the pictures that show **cooperation**.



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[Complete this worksheet online!](#)

Learn through song and dance

Kids are constantly in motion, so it's no wonder why they love to dance! Like art, music offers an excellent opportunity for learning. Whether it's through singing lyrics or moving to music, there are many ways that kids can learn SEL concepts through song and dance.

One way to incorporate music into your SEL lessons include using sing-along videos, like this cute video featuring the song, “If You’re Happy and You Know It”. Check out our [channel on YouTube](#) and find more song videos on our website and the Talented and Gifted app.



Watch on [YouTube](#)

Model concepts using “think alouds” and when interacting with kids

Sometimes kids just want to know that the big emotions they feel are normal, and everyone feels the same way sometimes. Unfortunately, children don’t often see adults grapple with the same feelings when grownups are much better at coping with them. That’s why thinking aloud to verbalize thoughts in an instructional way is a great technique to help kids learn to manage their emotions.

To utilize this strategy, when kids are struggling with keeping their cool, talk it out with them; simply think of an example when you felt the same way, and explain your thought process through the situation. When dealing with an emotion in the moment, this technique can be used to model how an adult deals with the same feelings.

For all of us, one of life’s greatest challenges is learning how to cope with daily struggles and disappointments. When children are taught SEL concepts, they can grow up to be better adjusted and primed to make better decisions and choices. Try the ideas above to get started and watch as your little learner’s attitude transforms from whiney to winning!