

## The Heart- Brain Connection: Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Especially in our world, where many changes have been experienced in recent years, communication skills that based on understanding, respect, and sensitivity are prominent determinants in our social life. **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** is a concept that we have heard frequently lately, but it is an approach that allows us to avoid habitual thinking and prejudices and to communicate with others with a new care and understanding. **The first step in developing the** Social and Emotional Learning process is to accept these needs in ourselves and others. In other words, the first step in this process is to create a new communication channel where people can talk to and understand each other in a more respectful and thoughtful way.

Social and emotional learning is an integral part of education and human development. **It is a concept that concerns not only children but also individuals of all age groups.** SEL is the process in which children and adults acquire and apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, achieve personal and social goals, feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain supportive relationships. **Children and adults with advanced social emotional learning skills also encounter some problems, but they develop alternative solutions in more appropriate and effective ways to solve these problems.** SEL includes many skills such as effective problem solving, self-discipline, impulse control, and emotion management, and provides a basis for long-term positive effects on children, adults and communities.

Researches show that developing social and emotional skills at an early age makes a big difference in supporting good mood in children in the future. Additionally, it was found that children who learn to express their emotions in a constructive way at a young age and establish compassionate and respectful relationships are less likely to experience social problems in the future. **Social emotional skills are skills that can be learned and children can master, such as mathematics or literacy. Students perform better when academic skills are combined with social emotional learning.** Children who are academically successful also need the development of social emotional learning skills. In addition, studies have shown that young people with

social and emotional skills are happier, confident, talented students, family members, friends and employees in the future.

## **5 Key Skills for Successful Social Emotional Learning**

Studies show that SEL, in addition to students' academic success, also increases positive social behaviors such as kindness, sharing, and empathy, strengthens family communication, improves students' attitudes towards school, and reduces depression and stress among students (Durlak et al., 2011). Social and emotional learning includes the following five concepts:

### *Self-awareness*

Self-awareness includes understanding one's own emotions, personal goals, and values. Self-awareness includes the ability to correctly assess one's strengths and limitations, to have positive thoughts, and to have a solid foundation of self-efficacy and optimism. A high level of self-awareness requires the ability to understand how thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected.

### *Self-management*

Self-management requires skills and attitudes that facilitate one's ability to regulate one's own emotions and behavior. This includes the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, and go on with challenges to achieve personal and educational goals.

### *Social Awareness*

Social awareness involves the ability to understand, empathize with, and have compassion for people with different backgrounds or cultures. It also includes understanding social norms and recognizing family, school and community resources and support.

### *Relationship Skills*

Relationship skills help students build and maintain healthy and beneficial relationships and act in accordance with social norms. These skills include communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating; and resisting inappropriate

social pressure, negotiating the conflict constructively, and seeking assistance as needed.

### *Responsible Decision Making*

Responsible decision making involves learning to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions in a variety of settings. This skill requires considering ethical standards, safety concerns, correct norms of behavior for risky behavior, the health and well-being of yourself and others, and realistic evaluation of the consequences of various actions.



## THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

- **Family life is our first school for emotional learning.** Through family life, children learn how to feel about themselves, how to react to the emotions of others, how to think about those emotions, and what choices they have in reacting.
- **When children face daily stresses and homework related stress, or life-changing realities such as parents' divorce, economic difficulties, family problems; both learning processes and feelings are clearly affected by this situation.** While stress and the emotional consequences of stress are inevitable, expressing these emotions in healthy ways helps children cope with the difficulties in their lives with much greater strength, wisdom and resistance.
- Social emotional learning takes place not only by the parents' words and behaviors towards children, but also by observing their attitudes towards other people by children. **Children learn how to react to the events they experience by observing their parents in every situation.** The more emotionally competent parents are in their relationships, parents help children more overcome their emotional difficulties.
- **The knowledge and experiences children learn from their parents are powerful and enduring.** The important thing is that adults can set an example for the child and open up space by showing all positive or negative emotions with appropriate language and behavior.

### **Suggestions to Help Your Child's Social Emotional Learning Skills At Home:**

#### Suggestions for Preschool and Primary School Children:

- **Puppets:** Puppets are a great way to introduce kids to words like happy, sad, angry. It is very useful to use puppets when expressing emotions or resolving conflictual situations in young children. Using puppets can be a funny

communication for you and your child to help your children express their emotions or to talk with children on issues that are difficult to talk about.

- **Think out loud:** When your child hears your thinking process, you help your child understand how to deal with frustration and solve problems. For example, "Not all of these books will fit in the library, I'd better put some of them on my desk."
- **Read bedtime stories:** This end of day routine has a magical side that makes it an ideal time to talk about emotions. Discuss the characters and events in the story. Invite your child to share his/her thoughts and feelings by asking questions: "What do you think s/he should do? How do you think it feels? What would you do if you were this character?"
- **Do a job together:** Instead of asking your child to do a job alone, do it together. The two of you can fold the laundry, set the table, rake leaves, ask your socks to find their mates, or paint a wall.
- **Play games:** Board games and outdoor games provide opportunities to help children learn to take turns, cooperate, deal with frustration, and more. When playing games with your child, focus on the fun instead of winning or losing.
- **Consider potential problems together:** Talk to your child in advance about any potential problems that may arise. For example, before a friend of your child comes to play with him/her, help your child pick up toys he or she doesn't want to share. Before you get in the vehicle to go to the zoo, give a step-by-step explanation of what to do: "We will travel 30 minutes by car to the zoo. (Describe 30 minutes as the length of an episode of a favorite cartoon). Then we will walk three blocks to the zoo and most importantly, we will visit the lion house!". During the journey, remind your preschooler what will happen next.

#### Suggestions for Adolescents:

- **Teach teens about the structure of the brain:** We need to help teens understand how adolescence changes their body, as well as how they change their minds. Being aware of thought processes provides freedom and authenticity to individuals. Considering that the starting point of behaviors is

the mind, it is very important to learn how our brain works in order to realize our mental power and use this power more efficiently. Getting to know the brain should be the first goal of learning. Therefore, encourage learning about the structure of the brain and its working principles.

- **Help teens connect with their emotional centers:** Instead of suppressing their emotions, we should recognize them and help teens understand them. You can suggest that teens rate their emotions to give them a quick way to measure the intensity of happiness, sadness, hurt, anger, love, or other emotions. Ask questions such as, “How does a feeling affect your mind and body, and how do you feel the intensity of this emotion?”. It provides an opportunity to get to know emotions more clearly and deeply. In this way, they gain awareness of the violence of emotions.
- **Learn breathing techniques together:** Young people need strategies that help them manage their intense stress, anxiety, anger, and other emotions. Accompany this experience as you encourage them to learn and experience different breathing techniques.
- **Encourage positive self-talk:** If a teenager is feeling down, persistent negative thoughts can create a downward spiral. Help teens recognize these thoughts, stop them and replace them with positive ones. When negative thoughts come to the mind of young people, first talk about the importance of being aware of this. You can use metaphors to talk about this topic: Our inner voices are sometimes like intruders. We want these voices to go away immediately, but it is useful to show a hospitable attitude for a while and try to understand the reason for the visit of the guest - that is, feelings. Emotions can sometimes be a stimulus to tell us something, to make us aware of something, or to start changing things. By using the calm and understanding inner voice, we can reduce the intensity of negative inner voices. This, in turn, helps break a negative steady mindset and foster a positive growth mindset.
- **Help teens set goals:** Discuss how young people can set goals in their own lives. Ask them to think about who they want to be and what they want to do in a month, a year, and five years. Then ask what they can do in the short and long term to achieve their goals. In addition to this question, you can add how the young person expects support from their parents to achieve the goal.

## Social and Emotional Learning Reading Recommendations for Parents

- ❖ *Çocukta Rezilyans*, Dr. Şirin Seçkin, Dr. Alper Hasanoğlu, Remzi Kitabevi
- ❖ *Duygusal Zekası Yüksek Çocuklar Yetiştirmek*, John Gottman ve Joan Declaire
- ❖ *Empatiyle Gelişmek, Empatiye Geliştirmek: Çocuk ve Empati*, (Editör: Yücel Kabapınar), Pegem Akademik Yayıncılık
- ❖ *Ergenliğe Geçişte Duygularla İletişim Becerileri*, Bonnie Thomas, Sola Kidz, Görünmez Adam Yayıncılık
- ❖ *Geliştiren Anne-Baba*, Doğan Cüceloğlu, Remzi Kitabevi
- ❖ *Neden Beyin Temelli Öğrenme*, Bilal Duman, Pegem Akademi

## Resources

“Building Social and Emotional Skills at Home” <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/building-social-emotional-skills-at-home>

Duman, B., 2015, *Neden Beyin Temelli Öğrenme*, Pegem Akademi

“Five Social-Emotional Strategies for Teenagers” <https://k12.thoughtfullearning.com/blogpost/5-social-emotional-strategies-teenagers>

Kabakçı, Ö. M., Totan, T., 2012, Sosyal ve Duygusal Öğrenme Becerilerinin Çok Boyutlu Yaşam Doyumuna ve Umuda Etkisi

“Sosyal Duygusal Öğrenme Nedir?”, 2020 <https://erkencocukluk.wordpress.com/2020/10/23/sosyal-duygusal-ogrenme-nedir-neden-onemlidir/>

“Sosyal Duygusal Öğrenme Nedir?”, 2015  
<http://www.sdoakademi.com/sosyal-duygusal-ogrenme-nedir/>

“SDÖ 101: Sosyal Duygusal Öğrenmeye Giriş – Sosyal Duygusal Öğrenme Nedir ve Ne Değildir?”, 2015

<http://www.sdoakademi.com/sdo-101-sosyal-duygusal-ogrenmeye-giris-sosyal-duygusal-ogrenme-nedir-ve-ne-degildir/>

“What Is Social and Emotional Learning, and How Can It Save Students' Lives?”, 2017