

Social-Emotional Learning

Social-emotional learning is a continuous learning process¹ where we (both children and adults) develop and practice skills that help us to become more caring, collaborative, empathetic and confident members of our communities – contributing our own unique and diverse skills and perspectives to those around us.

Similar to the physical and cognitive development that children and adolescents experience, their social and emotional development is just as critical to the building blocks of who they are as a person. The process of social emotional learning takes place throughout the lifespan, and contributes to the knowledge, attitudes and ability to develop healthy relationships, pro-social behaviors, self-confidence, empathy and more. As they get older and begin to understand and apply such skills in more complex ways, and be put in more complex and complicated situations with peers and other adults – whether it be navigating new challenges in relationships or managing the drive to gain more independence – these same foundational skills ultimately become the base of risk behavior prevention.

Research shows that social-emotional learning can help to better manage anxiety and depression and decrease substance misuse while building resilience and strengthening prosocial skills such as empathy, sharing and compassion.² Social-emotional learning helps children to better understand their thoughts, feelings and emotions, better understand the environment and people around them, and reflect on how they engage and interact with others.

What social-emotional learning in action looks like:

- **Self-Awareness:** Children use clear communication to identify and describe basic emotions, thoughts, needs and identity to peers and adults.
- **Self-Management:** Children successfully manage emotions, thoughts and behaviors to navigate stress and accomplish personal and collective goals (e.g., self-redirects to another activity when needing to calm down, etc.)
- **Social-Awareness:** Children demonstrate empathy, compassion and support towards others (e.g., show concern, offer support, awareness of diverse social norms, etc.)
- **Relationship Skills:** Children demonstrate effective communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills to collaborate with others, resist negative social pressures and stand up for the rights and needs of others (e.g., demonstrate building and maintaining health relationships with diverse individuals and groups).
- **Responsible Decision Making:** Children evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social and collective well-being. Children also demonstrate and model constructive, safe and responsible behaviors.



¹ [What is Social-Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)

² [Connection Social-Emotional Learning and Mental Health \(ERIC\)](#)

Connecting the Dots: Physical Activity, Play & Social-Emotional Learning

As recommended by, The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, children and adolescents age 6 to 17 years of age need at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, daily. Physical activity helps to build strong bones and muscles, improve cardiorespiratory fitness (a healthy heart and lungs) and helps to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.³

Research shows that physical activity is a natural mood booster. Movement releases chemicals in the body that improve mood, help us concentrate and relieve stress.⁴ In addition to the impacts physical activity has on mental health, it offers an opportunity to practice and explore different social-emotional competencies.

Physical activity and active play are social in nature and offer an opportunity for children to explore their own skills and passions while engaging and learning with others. Integrating social-emotional learning activities into physical activity and play is placing intention behind the activities/lessons we lead to create expanded learning opportunities to further SEL skill development and reflection

What social-emotional learning through physical activity and active play looks like:

- **Self-Awareness:** Children use clear communication to identify and respond to personal physical abilities, skills and passions.
- **Self-Management:** Children utilize physical activity and/or active play as a tool to support emotion regulation and healthy responses to heightened emotions, such as excitement, anger, sadness, frustration or anxiety (e.g., go for a walk, stretch, etc., when shifts in emotions occur).
- **Social-Awareness:** Children demonstrate respect for differences that exist among peers in terms of physical abilities, skills and passions. Children also demonstrate empathy, compassion and support towards other when engaging in group physical activity and/or group play.
- **Relationship Skills:** Children demonstrate the benefits of teamwork, collaboration and positive encouragement of peers through group physical activity and/or group play and proactively make modifications that support all participants.
- **Responsible Decision Making:** Children evaluate the benefits and consequences of actions and model constructive, safe and responsible behaviors when engaging in group physical activity and/or group play (e.g., keep themselves and peers safe during physical activity/use of equipment, identify solutions for conflict in team sports/play or when navigating winnings/loss, etc.).



³ [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans 2nd Edition \(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services\)](#)

⁴ [The Exercise Effect \(American Psychological Association\)](#)

Connecting the Dots: Nutrition & Social-Emotional Learning

Optimal nutrition is taking care of your body by getting essential nutrients to promote a healthy lifestyle. Nutrition plays an essential role in proper physical and cognitive functioning, particularly during childhood (Bleiweiss-Sande et al., 2019), and helps to establish a foundation to prevent health conditions as they get older. Our cells are dependent on the nutrients that we put in our bodies. As we all know; cells are building blocks of all living things. The food we consume gives our cells structure for our body and nutrients turn into energy that fuels our body.

Research shows that The food we eat and the bacteria our bodies use to digest it have a direct impact on how we feel. Healthy food and a balanced diet keep these bacteria in balance and stimulates a strong connection between the gut and the brain.⁵ Our brains function best with nutrient dense foods and the bacteria in our gut also affects how we feel, which influences the ways in which those feelings are expressed through different behaviors.

Similar to physical activity, nutrition is social in nature and offers opportunities for self-reflection, discovery and community. Integration social-emotional learning activities into nutrition to build healthy nutritional habits and supports expanded learning opportunities to further SEL skill development and reflection.

What social-emotional learning through nutrition looks like:

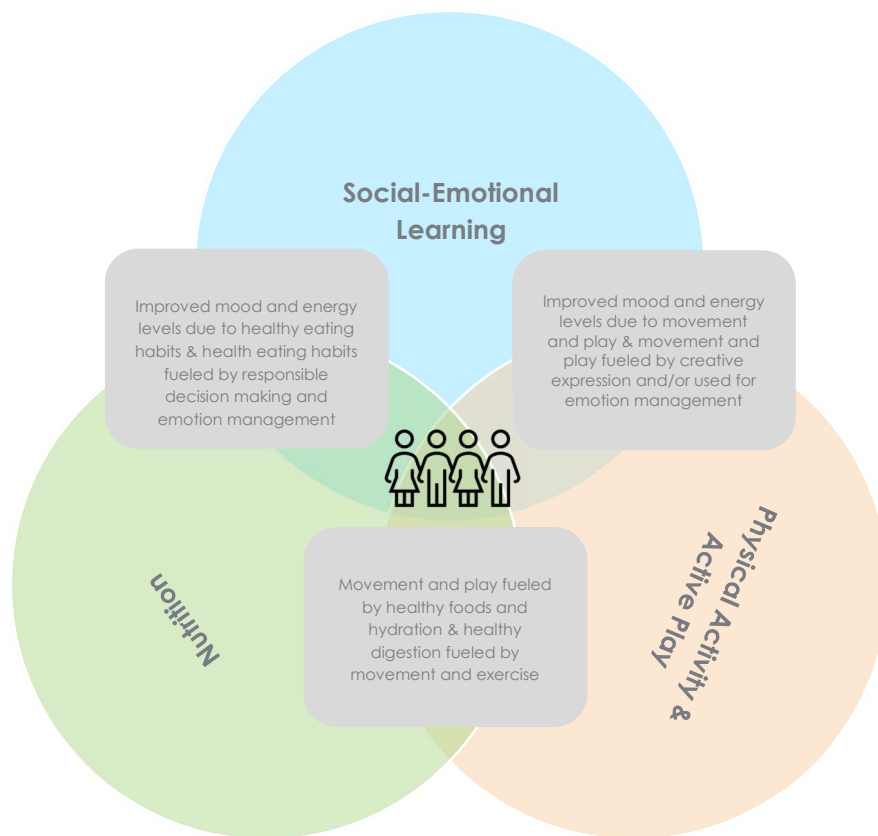
- **Self-Awareness:** Children use clear communication to identify, describe and respond to internal hunger cues (e.g., hungry, full).
- **Self-Management:** Children utilize internal hunger cues to regulate emotions, thoughts and behaviors to support the development of healthy eating habits and patterns (e.g., demonstrate and understanding of how emotions influence appetite/comfort food cravings and vice versa).
- **Social-Awareness:** Children demonstrate respect for cultural diversity in culinary practices/preferences.
- **Relationship Skills:** Children demonstrate effective communication with peers during snack and mealtimes and respect for differences in body shape/culinary preferences and actively stand up against weight-based bullying/teasing and/or food shaming.
- **Responsible Decision Making:** Children make healthy and constructive decisions about nutrition and eating habits (e.g., make responsible choices at snack and mealtimes, stay hydrated, etc.)



⁵ [Feelings of Food: Exploring the Mind-Body Connection \(Action for Healthy Kids\)](#)

Connecting the Dots: Supporting the Whole Child

The bottom line – social emotional learning is a part of everything we do! More often than not, we engage or facilitate activities that promote social emotional learning each and every day. When we take it a step further and place intention behind the activities and lessons we lead we in turn create expanded learning opportunities to further the development of social-emotional learning competencies. Helping children to see the interwoven elements of health and wellness, helps them to develop lifelong skills and better understand the domino effect one has on another. Supporting the Whole Child means supporting all elements of health – socially, emotionally and physically. Start small and discover ways to integrate learning at school and at home.



Additional Resources:

- [Building Family-School Partnerships through Social-Emotional Learning \(español\)](#) (Action for Healthy Kids)
- [Building Family-School Partnerships through Physical Activity & Active Play \(español\)](#) (Action for Healthy Kids)
- [Building Family-School Partnerships through Nutrition Education \(español\)](#) (Action for Healthy Kids)
- [Making the Connection: Social-Emotional Learning and Physical Activity](#) (Action for Healthy Kids)
- [Making the Connection: Social-Emotional Learning and Nutrition](#) (Action for Healthy Kids)
- [Social-Emotional Learning Wheel](#) (CASEL)
- [School Nutrition and the Social and Emotional Climate and Learning](#) (CDC)
- [Physical Education Social-Emotional Learning Crosswalk](#) (SHAPE)