

The first days and weeks of school can be both exciting and challenging for students and adults. Social and emotional learning (SEL) can help lay the foundation for a strong school year. Here are five strategies to get started.

What is social and emotional learning?

Social and emotional learning helps students and adults develop skills and supportive environments that strengthen academic achievement, mental well-being, and long-term success. There are five core SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

1

Get to Know Students

Connection and relationships are at the core of SEL. Start building relationships from Day 1 by greeting students with a warm smile and a calm, caring attitude.

- Schedule [5-minute one-on-one chats](#) with each student.
- Ask students to fill out a “Getting to Know You” [questionnaire](#) about their strengths and concerns about school, or write “3 Ways My Teacher Can Help Me Learn.”
- Use welcome activities that engage all students. You can use CASEL’s [SEL 3 Signature Practices](#) or [these prompts](#) for ideas—but the activity itself isn’t the point. The point is fostering connections from the start.

2

Create Shared Agreements

Finding ways to include students in decision-making about their school or classroom can boost their engagement and SEL skills. Brainstorm [shared agreements](#) about what students want their classroom or school to look, sound, and feel like:

- What makes a good learning environment?
- What do respect and kindness look like?
- How will they handle disagreements?

After students brainstorm individually or in small groups, decide on a set of agreements that everyone commits to upholding. You can also survey students throughout the year about how the class is going.

3

Set Goals

- Whether you're a teacher or a school counselor, encourage students to practice self-management by setting goals from the start of the school year:
- What are three things they would like to achieve this year?
- How will they know when their goals have been met?
- What steps do they need to take to reach their goals?

Consistently revisit these goals with written reflections or personal check-ins. What is going well, and where can they improve? What is one thing they can do next week to get closer to their goals?

4

Welcome Families Warmly at Back-to-School Night

Back-to-School night is the perfect opportunity to demonstrate SEL and [build bridges between school and home](#). For example:

- Encourage families and staff to introduce themselves and their hopes for the year.
- Engage families in your school's vision and goals for SEL, and highlight how you'll work together to support children's social, emotional, and academic learning.
- Share how you'll partner with families, including how they can inform decisions and raise questions and ideas.
- Showcase SEL practices that students experience rather than just telling caregivers about SEL.

5

Check in With Yourself and Your Colleagues

Check in regularly with yourself and other adults in your building to discuss how they are implementing SEL in your school. What is working? What challenges are they having? How can you better support one another? You (or others at your school) can use the [SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment](#) to assess strengths and areas to develop when it comes to promoting SEL.

