

Section 3: Social and Emotional Learning

D. Relationship Skills





Social Emotional Links



Social Emotional Learning and Relationships

The word “relationship” means to “connect”. One’s ability to connect or relate to another human being is fundamental to our survival. According to Dan Goleman, in *Emotional Intelligence* (2005), the art of relationships is the ability to recognize and respond fittingly to people’s feelings and concerns.

Socially and emotionally healthy children and teens know how to get along well with others. They understand how to handle their emotions effectively in relationships. They communicate well, empathize with others, are cooperative, know when to seek help, and can work with others to solve problems.

These relationship skills are necessary to be successful in school, the workplace and in personal relationships throughout one’s life. These skills are best taught by significant others in a child’s life through explicit and intentional instruction, modeling the skills, and providing children with clear feedback as they learn and practice.

Verbal and non-verbal communication are key components to healthy relationships. As we prepare our children to function in the 21st century, it is essential to recognize the current forms of communication used by youth, including cell phones, text messages, email, Facebook, Twitter, and Skype.

A 2010 study by the Pew Foundation indicated that the typical teen sends or receives 50 text messages a day or around 1,500 a month. Arbitron and Edison Research conducted a social networking survey in 2010 and found that 48% of Americans over the age of twelve have a profile on a social networking site. The skill set necessary to cultivate and maintain relationships in this technological age is a myriad of complex social skills. Communicating through technology makes it difficult for children to learn about relationship cues such as voice inflection, body language, or facial cues. Equally important is the inability to work together and solve relational problems when contact with others is primarily through technology.

Goleman states that the first school of social and emotional skills is the home. It is through our family life that “we learn how to feel about ourselves and how others will react to our feelings...what choices we have...and how to read and express our hopes and fears.” Adults who are emotionally competent in their own relationship skills are more capable of assisting children and teens in the work of developing these skills. Our children learn from observing how we as adults relate to others.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Make time to have a real conversation around a child’s day, feelings, or issues. Spend less time reminding them about rules or what they must do.
- Help children identify a problem, talk about solutions, discuss the consequences of each solution and assist them to solve the problem.
- Help children identify their own feelings and recognize the feelings of others.
- Teach children that their reactions have a consequence which can either be positive or negative.
- Help children learn when they can handle a situation and when they need to seek help.
- Model good listening skills.
- Treat others with respect.
- Apologize when appropriate and remember that children may not remember the issue, but they will always remember how adults made them feel.

SEL RESOURCES

Websites:

Collaborative for Academic, social, and Emotional Learning
Parent Resource Packet:
<http://www.casel.org/downloads/parentpacketLSS.pdf>

Books:

Building Emotional Intelligence: Techniques to Cultivate Inner Strength in Children (2008). Lantieri, Linda and Goleman, Daniel.

Written by: Myrna Shure, Ph.D.:
Raising a Thinking Child (1994)
Raising a Thinking Preteen (2000)
Thinking Parent, Thinking Child (2005)



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Assertive Communication



One way to increase self-esteem is to become more assertive. Assertiveness is a skill that can help you have more control over what is happening in your life, which can then lead to higher self-esteem.

Assertive behaviors include:

- asking for what you want or need
- saying what you are really feeling whether it's positive or negative
- saying "no" to what you don't want

Consider the following three communication styles:

1. **Passive** - You want to communicate something, but you don't express yourself, or you do so in a very timid or indirect manner that has no effect.
2. **Aggressive** - You communicate in a manner that hurts or offends the other person. Aggressive communication can be openly nasty (putting someone down, threatening, or pressuring) or it can be indirect (sarcasm, gossip, or saying something ugly behind someone's back).
3. **Assertive** - You express your thoughts and feelings clearly and directly without intentionally hurting or disrespecting the other person.

Being passive rather than assertive can leave you feeling depressed and worthless, feeling disrespected, feeling like a "wimp," feeling that you're not in control of your life, feeling frustration, anger, and/or anxiety. Being passive can also hurt your ability to have successful relationships because you aren't able to express your feelings directly and honestly.

Being aggressive rather than assertive can cause others in your life to feel hurt, angry or disrespected, and they might respond aggressively in return. This style can also lead to poor relationships characterized by a lack of communication and high levels of conflict.

Specific Skills

Use assertive body language. Face the other person, stand or sit straight, don't use dismissive gestures, be sure you have a pleasant but serious facial expression, keep your voice calm and clear, not whiny or abrasive.

Make clear, direct, requests without any hesitation or a lot of explanations. Don't invite the other person to say no.

- Example: "Will you please ?" instead of "Would you mind ...?" or "Do you think you would be able to ...?"

Use "I" statements. I feel (emotion) when you (behavior). I would prefer that you (alternate behavior.)

- Example: "I feel disrespected when you keep interrupting me. I'd like to be able to finish making my point."

Stay focused on what you want to change without accusing or blaming the other person.

- Example: "I'd like to be able to tell you something without worrying that other people will find out my business" instead of "You're such a gossip!"

Give someone feedback calmly and respectfully without being aggressive or judgmental.

- Example: "It seems like you pull away whenever we have some kind of disagreement" instead of "You think you're so tough, but you're a wimp when it comes to this relationship."

Take ownership of your own thoughts and feelings.

- Example: "I get upset when you go through my things without my permission" instead of "You make me so mad when you go into my room and go through my stuff behind my back."

Use the broken record technique. Keep repeating your point, using a low level, pleasant voice. Don't get pulled into arguing or trying to explain yourself.

- Example: You are trying to buy a CD player that is on sale, and the sales person is trying to sell you one that is more expensive because it has state-of-the-art features, but you know you can't afford the more expensive equipment.

Using the broken record, you say, "I want the CD player that's on sale." Then no matter what the clerk says, you keep repeating, "I want the one that's on sale."

Demonstration of the Skill

Before having youth practice the skill of assertiveness, model three styles of making a request. For example, ask three participants, one at a time, if you can borrow their pen or pencil, changing the style of your request each time. Pay attention to your tone of voice and body language, using them to emphasize the three different styles.

- **Aggressive request** - In a gruff tone of voice, say something like, "Give me your pen. I don't have a pen, and I need to borrow one" while snatching the pen out of the youth's hand.
- **Passive request** - Look nervous and softly mumble something like, "Could you, uh, could I please, uh, would you mind if I borrowed your pen, please?" while looking down at the floor.
- **Assertive request** - Look the person in the eyes, smile in a non-threatening manner. In a calm, clear voice, say something like, "I need a pen for this next exercise. May I borrow yours?"

Debrief what you modeled with the group until you're sure that they can distinguish the three styles and that they're clear about assertiveness.

Behavioral Practice of the Skill

- **Body Language** - To emphasize the importance of body language as a component of assertiveness, have youth assess what their body language is communicating when they are talking. Help them understand that how we say something can be more important than what we say.

Review assertive body language:

- Make direct eye contact.
- Keep your back straight and head high (erect posture).
- Speak clearly and audibly.
- Use facial expressions and gestures that add emphasis to your words.
- Avoid passive body language: No eye contact (or indirect evasive eye contact); soft, whiny or muffled voice; cringing/or physically making yourself small (hang-dog posture); use of nervous or childish gestures.
- Avoid aggressive body language: angry staring-eye contact, loud strident voice, invading someone's personal space, pointing your finger, balling your fists, yelling, towering over others.

Family Mindfulness



Mindfulness is an important exercise to practice regularly. Students must learn how to be mindful of themselves, their needs and their emotional wellness in order to ensure good mental health. Families often need mindfulness exercises to ensure their mental health and relationships as well.

Family mindfulness is a great way to bring families closer together. It helps improve camaraderie in families. It also helps everyone stay connected and in the loop while living their own individual lives. Maintaining family mindfulness activities is a great way to strengthen the bond in families. To support mindfulness in families, a weekly schedule of mindfulness activities help families to practice together.

The Family Mindfulness Schedule worksheet is a great homework assignment for parents and families. Each day of the week lists a new family activity. It aims to keep consistent activities for engagement in families. The following worksheet helps to create consistency in the home and strengthen the support network between family members.

Parent(s) who are working to build mindfulness activities for their families will lead this activity. Consistency on the schedule is key, and while small modifications are okay, it is important to keep to the schedule as much as possible.

Check in with the parent(s) to see how the Family Mindfulness Schedule exercise is going. Reflect on the progress and trials with the exercise in effort to strengthen its effectiveness.

Family Mindfulness Activity

Directions: Below is a Family Mindfulness schedule, intended to schedule time to be mindful of spending quality time with family. Each day of the week has a different activity. Take 1-2 hours each day to turn off your smartphones, tablets and computers and spend time connecting with each other.

Day of the Week:	Activity:	Completed?
Sunday	<u>Family Dinner Night</u> To wind down from the weekend and rest up for the week ahead, sit down for a nice quiet dinner together.	
Monday	<u>Family Homework Night</u> Everyone complete homework together! (Parents, if you have nothing to do, how about reading the paper?)	
Tuesday	<u>Family Breakfast</u> Everyone set your alarms 15 minutes earlier so that you can eat breakfast together	
Wednesday	<u>Family Cleanup Night</u> Everyone pitch in to clean-up the kitchen after dinner	
Thursday	<u>Family Leftover Night</u> Time to clean out the fridge! Pull out all of the leftovers and enjoy a fun family dinner together.	
Friday	<u>Family Game Night</u> Join together for a family game night	
Saturday	<u>Family Outing</u> Pick a fun family activity to enjoy together	

Healthy Boundaries



Setting boundaries is an important part of establishing one's identity and is a crucial aspect of mental health and well-being. Boundaries can be physical or emotional, and they can range from being loose to rigid, with healthy boundaries often falling somewhere in between.

In general, "Healthy boundaries are those boundaries that are set to make sure mentally and emotionally you are stable" (Prism Health North Texas, n.d.). Another way to think about it is that "Our boundaries might be rigid, loose, somewhere in between, or even nonexistent. A complete lack of boundaries may indicate that we don't have a strong identity or are enmeshed with someone else" (Cleantis, 2017).

Healthy boundaries can serve to establish one's identity. Specifically, healthy boundaries can help people define their individuality and can help people indicate what they will and will not hold themselves responsible for.

While boundaries are often psychological or emotional, boundaries can also be physical. For example, declining physical contact from a coworker is setting an important boundary, one that's just as crucial as setting an emotional boundary, i.e., asking that same coworker not to make unreasonable demands on your time or emotions.

Tips for Setting Healthy Boundaries:

- When you identify the need to set a boundary, do it clearly, calmly, firmly, respectfully, and in as few words as possible. Do not justify, get angry, or apologize for the boundary you are setting.
- You are not responsible for the other person's reaction to the boundary you are setting. You are only responsible for communicating your boundary in a respectful manner. If it upsets them, know it is their problem. Some people, especially those accustomed to controlling, abusing, or manipulating you, might test you. Plan on it, expect it, but remain firm. Remember, your behavior must match the boundaries you are setting. You cannot successfully establish a clear boundary if you send mixed messages by apologizing.
- At first, you will probably feel selfish, guilty, or embarrassed when you set a boundary. Do it anyway and remind yourself you have a right to self-care. Setting boundaries takes practice and determination. Don't let anxiety, fear or guilt prevent you from taking care of yourself.
- When you feel anger or resentment or find yourself whining or complaining, you probably need to set a boundary. Listen to yourself, determine what you need to do or say, then communicate assertively.
- Learning to set healthy boundaries takes time. It is a process. Set them in your own time frame, not when someone else tells you.
- Develop a support system of people who respect your right to set boundaries. Eliminate toxic persons from your life— those who want to manipulate, abuse, and control you.

