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Guide to social and emotional learning in Queensland state schools



Minister's foreword

Students who are happy in themselves, relate well to others and are motivated to learn, achieve better academically and create positive relationships with their teachers, family and classmates.

Today's young people are growing up in a complex society and they are faced with many challenges. Developing skills such as resilience, problem solving and interpersonal communication are essential for them to lead happy, successful lives now and in the future.

Research shows that by building children's social and emotional skills we can improve their capacity to learn and lay the foundation for coping strategies to improve behaviour and enable them to bounce back after problems.

Our Government is committed to a first class education and training system. Developing students' social and emotional learning skills is a core component of this.

This *Guide to social and emotional learning in Queensland state schools* will support teachers and parents in their efforts to develop these skills in their students.

Delivering social and emotional learning in partnership with families increases students' motivation to learn and leads to more positive relationships with teachers, family and classmates. It underpins the development of safe, supportive learning environments, improved student behaviour and academic performance.

This guide draws on schools' experiences in developing and implementing social and emotional learning programs.

I encourage you to read the guide closely and use the information in it to select and develop programs that take account of the local context of your school to meet the specific needs of your students and school community.

Rod Welford MP

Minister for Education and Training
Minister for the Arts

Social and emotional learning in Queensland state schools

Promoting students' social and emotional skills is critical to improving their academic performance and their success in life. Students who are happy in themselves, relate well to others and are motivated to learn, achieve better academically and create positive relationships with their teachers, family and classmates. Students with better developed social and emotional skills are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of resilience, learning capacity, social skills and values.

Schools are central in the lives of young Queenslanders and as such are ideally situated to establish plans, programs and practices that promote positive student health and wellbeing. A key component of improving student social and emotional wellbeing is the teaching of social and emotional skills for all students at each level of schooling as part of the school curriculum program.

Many schools already promote social and emotional learning as a key aspect of their school culture. They may do this through the whole-school environment, their curriculum, or through key initiatives such as the National Safe Schools Framework, the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools or the National Drug Education Strategy. Some schools also use strategies such as peer mediation or commercially available packages that specifically teach social and emotional skills.

What is social and emotional learning?

Various terms are used to describe social and emotional learning (SEL) including personal and social development, emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, social and emotional competence and social, emotional and behavioural skills (Department for Education and Skills UK, 2005).

Social and emotional learning is a process for helping students develop the knowledge, understandings and skills that support learning,

positive behaviour and constructive social relationships. Social and emotional learning is an approach that teaches students to recognise, regulate and express the social and emotional aspects of their lives so they can operate successfully in the world and manage life tasks.

To operate successfully in the social world, students must build knowledge and understanding of their identity, how relationships are developed and the impact of social contexts on their decision-making and behaviour.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five core social and emotional competency areas:

Self-awareness — identifying and recognising emotions; recognising personal interests and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence

Self-management — regulating emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and motivating oneself to persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward the achievement of personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately

Social awareness — being able to take the perspective of and empathise with others; recognising and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences

Relationship skills — establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation and resistance to inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and constructively resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed

Responsible decision-making — making decisions based on a consideration of all relevant factors, including applicable ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms; the likely consequences of taking alternative courses of action; evaluation and reflection.

Benefits of social and emotional learning

It is now well established in the research literature that social and emotional skills are integral parts of academic success. A recent meta-analysis of 207 studies of social and emotional learning programs conducted by CASEL (Durlak et al, 2008) found that students who participated in social and emotional learning programs:

- improved significantly in their social and emotional skills and their attitudes to themselves, others and school
- displayed more classroom pro-social behaviour and fewer disruptive and aggressive behaviours
- experienced lower levels of depression
- scored higher on standardised achievement tests relative to peers not receiving the program.

Research on the benefits of developing children's social, emotional and behavioural skills (Weare and Gray, 2003) identified the following:

Greater educational and work success

Emotional and social competencies have been shown to be more influential than cognitive abilities for personal, career and scholastic success. Research demonstrates that educational gains from programs that teach social and emotional competencies include improved school attendance, higher motivation and higher morale. Social and emotional competencies are becoming increasingly central in workplaces with growing emphases on teamwork, communication and management skills (Goleman, 1996).

Improvements in behaviour

Several reviews have reported that social and emotional learning results in improved behaviour in students. Programs intended to teach social competencies were shown to be effective in decreasing early behaviour problems (Wells, 2000).

Increased inclusion

Studies indicate that children with challenging behaviours have responded positively to programs that focus on developing their social and emotional skills. The teaching of social and emotional skills has been effective in improving the learning environment for all students and promoting the inclusion of those with behavioural challenges.

Improved learning

Teaching students the skills to manage emotions can assist learning (Greenhalgh, 1994). There is evidence that cognitive processes need input from our emotions to be effective. Emotions such as sadness and anger can block learning, while others such as a sense of wellbeing, or feeling safe and valued, can promote learning.

Greater social cohesion, increase in social capital

If people are to be effective in their communities and workplaces, they need to be skilled in dealing with and understanding emotions (Antidote, 1998). Changes in society and expectations mean that this is particularly crucial. Changes in the family and other support structures have seen the teaching of social and emotional skills shift from the domain of parents to include the wider community.

Improvements to mental health

There is a strong link between social and emotional development and mental health (Greenberg, 2003). The development of social and emotional competence can reduce the mental health problems of young people, e.g. depression, anxiety, suicide, eating disorders and stress. Studies confirm that children with emotional and behavioural problems are prone to the increased likelihood of school exclusion, offending and antisocial behaviour, and alcohol and other drug use. Children with high levels of social and emotional competence do better in school, at work and in their personal life.

Social and emotional learning and the curriculum

Queensland state schools provide a curriculum that maximises the capacity of all students to achieve the *Essential Learnings* and *Standards of the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework*, to achieve Year 12 certification and to exit from schooling with the capabilities and values to be active and responsible citizens.

The *Essential Learnings* describe the knowledge, understanding and ways of working that students need for ongoing learning, social and personal competence and participation in a democratic society. They support the development of:

- deep understandings of key disciplinary concepts, facts and procedures
- the processes students use to develop and demonstrate their understandings
- the capabilities students need to work with knowledge, grow and manage themselves, and become active participants in local and global contexts.

The health and personal development, knowledge and understanding areas contain clear connections to the social and emotional competency areas. The Health and Physical Education (HPE) *Essential Learnings* are organised under three broad headings or learning dimensions: health, physical activity and personal development.

The HPE *Scope and Sequence Years 1–9* document provides a summary of performance expected at different junctures under the heading ‘Enhancing personal development’:

In the **early years**, students understand that individuals are unique but also have characteristics in common with others. They understand that they interact differently with various people, according to the level of intimacy (e.g. parent, teacher, stranger). Students learn strategies for managing their emotions.

By **upper primary**, students develop an understanding of the meaning of and impacts on identity, including stereotyping, fashion and the media. They understand how behaviours with other people change with developing sexuality. They are aware of how personal skills and social and emotional environments impact on their resilience. They develop assertiveness and the ability to manage conflict, as well as strategies to deal with intense emotions.

In **lower secondary**, students have a more complex and critical understanding of the beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours that impact on identity and relationships, including sexual relationships. They develop skills to cope effectively with challenge and conflict, including situations associated with identity and relationships. They are able to analyse and take action to improve their communication skills (Education Queensland, *Scope and Sequence Years 1–9*, 2007).

Creating trusting and respectful relationships

It is important to recognise that building social and emotional skills and knowledge also occurs through positive relationships between teachers and students. Smyth (2007) argues for a ‘relational view of teaching’ to inform professional development, which includes giving students a voice in curriculum and pedagogy that addresses ‘rigor, relevance and relationships’ (Smyth, 2007).

Smyth (2007) states that ‘when young people can not, or do not, form a relationship in school with at least one adult or with their peers, then they disconnect, disengage or ‘drop out’ of school.’ (Smyth Hattam et al, 2000, National Research Council, 2004).

The work of teaching is a social practice and is profoundly relational. ‘Creating trusting and respectful relationships in schools and classrooms is the indispensable and single most crucial element to learning’ (Smyth, 2007). Conditions necessary for learning have to be actively promoted and policy directions need to move beyond ‘prescriptive pedagogy’ being imposed on schools.

Schools that want to engage students in learning will have a range of guiding principles that underpin their teaching and learning programs. We need to ask the following questions of our programs and learning environments:

- How is teaching connecting to and respecting the life experiences, aspirations, cultures and expectations of students?
- In what ways is learning a happy, enjoyable and enlivening experience for students?
- How is teaching enlarging or expanding the cultural map for the most excluded and marginalised students?
- How is the school creating a context for students to bond that creates a sense of belongingness and attachment to the school?
- How are students encouraged and made to feel comfortable and safe in speaking out and challenging the status quo?
- How does the school provide students with ways of owning their own behaviour and learning about the consequences of their actions on their learning?
- How are parents brought into meaningful partnerships in the education of their children?
- How are students being given significant ownership of their learning?
- How is successful learning being acknowledged, recognised and celebrated?

Selecting social and emotional learning programs

There are many social and emotional programs, both Australian and international, that are promoted to schools. Schools may also have developed their own program with teachers, students and parents to teach the skills, knowledge and understandings their students need to build social and emotional competence.

Selecting or developing a program that is appropriate to your school context can be challenging given the range of programs and resources available.

A selection of commercially available social and emotional learning programs has been compiled into a table of *Social and Emotional Learning Programs*. The table which can be accessed at www.education.qld.gov.au/student-services/protection/index.html includes the following information:

- year level
- sequenced structure
- social and emotional learning core competency addressed
- links to essential learnings
- evidence of effectiveness
- theoretical basis
- student assessment
- professional development
- parents' programs.

A selection tool to assist schools in selecting an appropriate social and emotional learning program is also available on the department's website. The tool draws upon guidelines described in CASEL's *Safe and Sound: An educational leader's guide to evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs* (2003).

Considerations for selecting social and emotional learning programs

There are a number of factors to be considered in examining social and emotional learning programs to ensure suitability to each individual school context.

A school's social and emotional learning program should:

- provide opportunities for students to develop positive social skills, understandings of identity and social contexts
- be sequential in nature and build on what students have previously learnt
- cover the five core social and emotional competencies
- include effective evidence-based teaching practices
- enable judgments about the quality of student learning to be made.

Evidence of effectiveness

In selecting or developing a program, school staff should consider any evidence available about whether the program and strategies have resulted in positive outcomes in a school context. While many programs have undergone some form of evaluation, the nature of these evaluations can vary widely. A program will be considered highly effective if, for example, it has been positively appraised by independent studies conducted across several program sites.

Link to Queensland curriculum

Social and emotional learning programs in schools should be delivered in the context of the Queensland curriculum and linked to the *Essential Learnings*. At present there are limited commercial programs that articulate explicit links between the program and Queensland curriculum.

Whole school approach

Whole school approaches to the development and implementation of social and emotional learning programs are necessary to ensure a consistent delivery across the school and to reinforce the strategies within the program.

Identified theoretical framework

An effective social and emotional learning program should be evidence based and identify a recognised theoretical framework.

Student assessment

Programs should preferably incorporate a range of assessment opportunities to enable teachers to effectively assess the quality of student learning of social and emotional concepts, skills and processes.

Staff professional development availability

An important part of any school based social and emotional learning program is professional development and support for teachers and other staff involved in implementing the program.

When considering the purchase of a resource to complement a social and emotional learning program, take into account whether professional development is offered to support the use of the package.

Parent component

Programs should provide for parent participation and education on social and emotional skills. For example, programs may provide specific education modules for parents thus enabling parents to reinforce social and emotional learning language, concepts, processes and skills at home.

Further information on commercially available Social and Emotional Learning programs

It is advisable to make contact with the organisation for further information about commercially available programs. You may wish to consider inviting representatives to present workshops and outline the professional development components of the program. Program developers may be able to put you in contact with schools that are implementing the same program. In addition to the availability of the program materials and staff support, the costs of implementing and sustaining the program are an obvious and important consideration for schools.

Summary of commercially available social and emotional learning programs

Aussie Optimism Program

Aussie Optimism provides teachers, practitioners and parents with practical strategies and resources for developing children's social competence, self-management and positive thinking in everyday life, during times of stress, and across transitions, like the move to high school. The programs are developmentally appropriate for children in middle and upper primary and lower secondary school. www.psych.curtin.edu.au/research/aussieoptimism/index.htm

BOUNCE BACK! Classroom Resiliency Program

Bounce Back! is a classroom resiliency program written by Dr Helen McGrath and Dr Toni Noble. It is a collection of practical classroom strategies to help young people cope with the complexity of their everyday lives and learn to 'bounce back' when they experience sadness, difficulties, frustrations and hard times.

The program teaches the personal skills of resilience through the key learning areas. There is a special emphasis on Literacy, Science and Technology and Social Studies. The parent program shows parents how to reinforce the teaching of the same skills at home. www.bounceback.com.au/

Caring School Community

The Caring School Community™ (CSC) program is a research-based P–6 program that builds classroom and schoolwide community.

It focuses on strengthening students' connectedness to school — an important element for increasing academic motivation and achievement and for reducing drug use, violence, and delinquency. The U.S. Department of Education has recently highlighted the Caring School Community program's research base and effectiveness.

Four principles are at the heart of the Caring School Community™ program:

- respectful, supportive relationships
- opportunities for collaboration
- opportunities for autonomy and influence
- emphasis on common purposes and ideals.

www.devstu.org

Cool Kids

The Cool Kids program is a 10-session cognitive behavioural therapy program. It teaches young people cognitive behavioural skills that can be used to combat anxiety. The program helps young people to recognise emotions such as fear, stress and anxiety and helps young people challenge cues associated with feeling nervous. The program has a number of additional components that can also be included depending on the needs of the child including dealing with teasing, social skills training and problem solving. The program also consists of two parent information sessions.

www.psy.mq.edu.au/MUARU/books/prof.htm

Coolness under pressure

This program was developed by three Community Mental Health Nurses from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in response to the need for children to develop skills in anger, stress management and conflict resolution.

The program covers themes that aim to promote choice, increase responsibility and develop self-awareness in children. The themes include communication, feelings, stress management, anger management, assertive behaviours, families and conflict resolution. A variety of methods are used to enhance the children's skill development including discussion, games, activities, role-playing, positive reinforcement and role modelling.

FisT: Feeling is Thinking

The FisT program aims to assist children to understand and explore the origins of their feelings. It also aims to help children with problem solving and expression of their feelings. The program provides feedback, information and strategies to families and school staff regarding the children participating in the program. Therefore it actively engages the children's family and school in supporting and extending the positive skills and strategies developed through their participation in FisT.

Themes covered in the program include:

- exploring feelings
- strong emotions: how do they look?
- what things make people angry

- taking risks
- practising changes.

www.rch.org.au/mhs/services/index.cfm?doc_id=1071

Friendly Kids, Friendly Classrooms

A book used by teachers and counsellors to teach students social skills that will help them to get along well with their classmates.

The book incorporates diagnostic tools and practical steps on how to teach 21 important classroom and playground skills. Games and activities are designed to create a positive and fun filled classroom and to help students who are shy or awkward. Teachers are encouraged to follow the suggested program or create their own based around the four areas of the book.

www.bounceback.com.au

Friendly Schools and Families Program

The Friendly Schools and Families Program can be aimed at the individual, group, family and/or school community level. It aims to prevent bullying in its social context. The program assists with the design, development, implementation, dissemination and evaluation of a social skill building and comprehensive anti-bullying program.

The program provides strategies for a whole school program (including ethos, policy and practice, physical environment, social environment, engaging families, learning environments and behaviour management) and tools to assist with their implementation. It also provides case studies to demonstrate how other schools have tailored and used these strategies.

www.friendlyschools.com.au/

FRIENDS for Life – FRIENDS for Children

FRIENDS for Children is a program designed for use in schools as an anxiety prevention program and resiliency building tool. It is aimed at young people aged 7–11 years. FRIENDS for Children helps children cope with feelings of fear, worry, and depression by building resiliency and self-esteem and teaching cognitive and emotional skills.

FRIENDS for Children does not require specialist staff and can be run by teachers in normal class time. It does not involve any clinical assessment or diagnosis

of children. FRIENDS for Children promotes important self-development concepts such as self-esteem, problem-solving, self-expression, and building positive relationships with peers and adults.

www.friendsinfo.net/index.html

FRIENDS for Life – FRIENDS for Youth

FRIENDS for Youth is an early intervention program that teaches young people how to cope with and manage anxiety. It promotes important self-development concepts such as self-esteem, problem solving, self expression and building positive relationships with peers.

FRIENDS for Youth is about early intervention for childhood anxiety and depression. It is aimed at preventing the development of serious mental disorders, emotional distress and impairment in social functioning by teaching children and young people how to cope with and manage anxiety both now and in later life.

www.friendsinfo.net/index.html

Healthy Relationships

Healthy Relationships is a whole school curriculum based program designed to build resilience in children and assist in creating safe, supportive educational environments for all children. It is a teacher friendly program which teaches pro-social and resiliency building behaviours, while encouraging the creation of a cooperative and supportive learning environment.

www.valuesforlifeeducation.com/

KidsMatter

KidsMatter is a national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative aimed at primary school-aged students. KidsMatter recognises the fundamental importance of students' mental health to their learning and wellbeing.

www.apapdc.edu.au/kidsmatter/

MindMatters

MindMatters is a national resource and professional development program to support Australian schools with secondary enrolments to promote and protect the social and emotional wellbeing of members of school communities. The MindMatters professional development program has been designed to fit within existing state and sector education contexts ensuring

it is relevant for all secondary schools. MindMatters encourages schools to build partnerships with other agencies in working with young people.

www.cms.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters

PASSPORT Program

A prevention curriculum that helps students to learn positive mental health concepts by developing self-acceptance, personal relationship skills, problem solving and decision making strategies and skills to deal with troublesome emotions. It is designed to teach students what is normal for their age group and to help them learn effective strategies for dealing with the challenges and problems of growing up.

PASSPORT is a self-contained developmental curriculum containing numerous learning activities for use in classrooms or small-group settings. The PASSPORT Program is strongly grounded in developmental theory and the principles of Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy.

www.researchpress.com/product/item/5001/

PATHS Curriculum

The PATHS program teaches primary school children how to change behaviours and attitudes that contribute to violence and bullying; how to express and control their emotions; and how to develop effective conflict-resolution strategies. The Preschool PATHS program aims to improve children's knowledge about emotions as well as their social and emotional competence.

PATHS covers five conceptual domains, including self-control, emotional understanding, positive self-esteem, relationships and interpersonal problem-solving skills.

www.bswb.det.wa.edu.au/content/health-and-wellbeing/copy_of_introduction-to-paths

Resourceful Adolescent Program – Adolescent (RAP)

The aim of RAP is to reduce the incidence of depression and associated problems in young people. It is an experiential, resilience-building program that has been designed to promote positive coping abilities and the maintenance of a sense of self in the face of stressful and difficult circumstances. It is a universal program that targets all teenagers in a particular year level.

www.hlth.qut.edu.au/psyc/rap/

SECOND STEP

The SECOND STEP violence prevention program integrates academics with social and emotional learning. Children from Prep through Year 9 learn and practice vital social skills, such as empathy, emotion management, problem solving, and cooperation. These essential life skills help students in the classroom, on the playground and at home.

The SECOND STEP program is research-based. It has been shown to reduce discipline referrals, improve school climate by building feelings of inclusiveness and respect, and increase the sense of confidence and responsibility in students.

The program includes teacher-friendly lessons, training for educators and parent-education tools.

www.cfchildren.org/programs/ssp/overview/

Skills for Growing

Skills for Growing helps create the kind of classroom environment essential for academic success and social and emotional well-being.

Curriculum Resources include six comprehensive teaching kits (P–5). There are five unit topics:

- building a school community
- growing as a group
- making positive decisions
- growing up healthy
- celebrating you and me.

www.lionsclubs.org.au/lions-quest/

Skills for Adolescence

Lions-Quest Skills for Adolescence (SFA) is a positive youth development and prevention program. SFA has a five-component structure for addressing protective factors that promote health, safe and drug-free behaviours and risk factors for substance abuse, violence and other high-risk behaviours. The five components are:

- classroom curriculum
- parents and family participation through shared homework assignments, a parent book, and direct involvement in school activities
- positive school climate
- community involvement — participation in

training workshops, school climate events panel discussions, service projects and parent meetings

- professional development — to implement the program it is necessary to attend an introductory two to three day workshop.

www.lionsclubs.org.au/lions-quest/

Social Decision-Making and Social Problem-Solving

Social Decision-Making and Social Problem-Solving is a social and emotional learning program that assists students in acquiring social and decision-making skills and in developing their ability to effectively use those skills in real life, with the aim of preventing violence, substance abuse and related problem behaviour. It is a primary prevention program conceptually grounded in research from public health, child development, clinical psychology, cognitive sciences, and organisational and community psychology.

The curriculum-based program occurs in three developmental phases:

- self-control and social awareness
- social decision-making
- application of social decision-making.

www.ubhcisweb.org/sdm/aboutus/index.htm

Stop Think Do Social Skills Training

The aim of the program is that children can use the Stop Think Do social problem solving method for resolving conflicts. Adults can also use Stop Think Do to manage children's behaviour, in this case directly sharing the responsibility for problem solving with the child. Specific applications for this program include anxiety, ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome.

The method aims to develop self control, perceptual and communication skills, and cognitive problem solving skills. It is theorised that children with social-behavioural problems are often stuck at one of these steps. Dependent, immature children are often stuck at STOP as they tend not to think or do much for themselves. Shy, anxious children are stuck at THINK as they often think too much about what could happen. Impulsive, aggressive children are stuck at DO because they do and do and rarely stop to

think. The program aims to train all children to move through all steps with positive feedback and support from adults and peers.

www.stophinkdo.com

Thinking, Feeling, Behaving

A resource for helping students learn to overcome irrational beliefs, negative feelings and the negative consequences that may result. Activities are identified by year level and categorised into one of five important topic areas: self-acceptance, feelings, beliefs and behaviour, problem solving and decision making, and interpersonal relationships. Thinking, Feeling, Behaving is an emotional education curriculum based on the principles of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy. It can be used in classroom or small group settings.

www.researchpress.com/

You Can Do It!

You Can Do It! is a curriculum for teaching students how to set attainable goals and be happier in their school and general life. An emphasis of You Can Do It! is to teach a person that to change their feelings or behaviours, they need to change their thoughts. The program teaches students how to have confidence-building thoughts, rather than confidence-destroying thoughts. You Can Do It! covers eight areas with three sub-sections each:

- confidence
- effort and persistence
- happenings, thoughts, feelings, behaviours
- self acceptance/self-esteem
- goal setting
- time management and organisation
- making friends
- handling conflict.

www.youcandoit.com.au

The Department of Education Training and the Arts acknowledges the Mindmatters Plus website www.mhws.agca.com.au as a source of several program descriptions.

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