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# SEL Discussion Series for Parents and Caregivers

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supporting parents and  
caregivers through social  
and emotional learning



Families are a child’s first teacher and an essential factor in the cultivation of social and emotional competencies throughout a child’s life. When schools and families work together, they can build strong connections that reinforce social-emotional skill development. In fact, research suggests that evidence-based SEL programs are more effective when they extend into the home.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

This discussion series was developed to support schools and community partners that wish to engage parents and caregivers in conversations about the social and emotional growth of their families. Each of these ten sessions helps caregivers become more familiar with social and emotional learning and encourages them to actively engage in their own growth while supporting their children to practice social and emotional skills.

Each session lasts about 60 minutes and is scripted in both English and Spanish. It is recommended that groups be limited to no more than 10 participants to ensure that each participant is able to contribute.

### THE SCHOOL/COMMUNITY PARTNER’S ROLE

As coordinators of this discussion series, the school or community partner invites caregivers to join the discussion series and provides a summary of what to expect. For example: *Come together with other parents and caregivers to explore ways to support and reinforce your child’s social and emotional learning. It’s an opportunity to learn from each other and explore our hopes for our children’s development.*

Be sure to include information about the time and location of the discussion series. It is also recommended to provide refreshments, as well as transportation and child care, if possible, so that families may participate. If you have not yet identified a caregiver(s) to facilitate, ask for volunteers.

### THE FACILITATOR’S ROLE

It is recommended that each session be led by caregivers rather than a school staff member or community organization employee. The ideal facilitator is a caregiver who is able to prepare for and lead sessions and is skilled in listening and inquiry. The facilitator need not be an “expert” in social and emotional learning or have all the answers. They only need to be willing to facilitate a productive discussion around the provided materials. Sessions require 30-60 minutes of preparation prior to each session. Groups can have one or two consistent facilitators, or rotate the responsibility among group members. Following each session, it is recommended that the facilitator collect feedback from families about their experiences during their group and the usefulness of the information. Facilitators can then make changes to sessions as needed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *SEL Discussion Series for Parents and Caregivers* was written by Jo A. Salazar, Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, and Jennifer Miller, author of the blog *Confident Parents, Confident Kids* (<https://confidentparentsconfidentkids.org>). A special thank you to *Latinos Progresando* (<https://latinospro.org/>) for partnering in the development, translation, and pilot implementation of this discussion series.

<sup>1</sup> Albright, M. I., and Weissberg, R. P. (2010). School-family partnerships to promote social and emotional learning. In S. L. Christenson and A. L. Reschly (Eds.), *Handbook of school-family partnerships* (pp. 246–265). New York: Taylor & Francis.

<sup>2</sup> Albright, M. I., Weissberg, R. P., & Dusenbury, L. A. (2011). *School-family partnership strategies to enhance children’s social, emotional, and academic growth*. Newton, MA: National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, Education Development Center, Inc.

<sup>3</sup> Patrikakou, E. N., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). School-family partnerships and children’s social, emotional, and academic learning. In R. Bar-On, J. G. Maree, & M. J. Elias (Eds.), *Educating people to be emotionally intelligent* (pp. 49-61). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated.

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# FACILITATOR'S INTRODUCTION TO SEL

**S**ocial and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- Develop healthy identities,
- Manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals,
- Feel and show empathy for others,
- Establish and maintain supportive relationships, and
- Make responsible and caring decisions.

Cultivating the social and emotional competencies of all members of a school community is important for creating models for student social and emotional growth. The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five core SEL competencies:

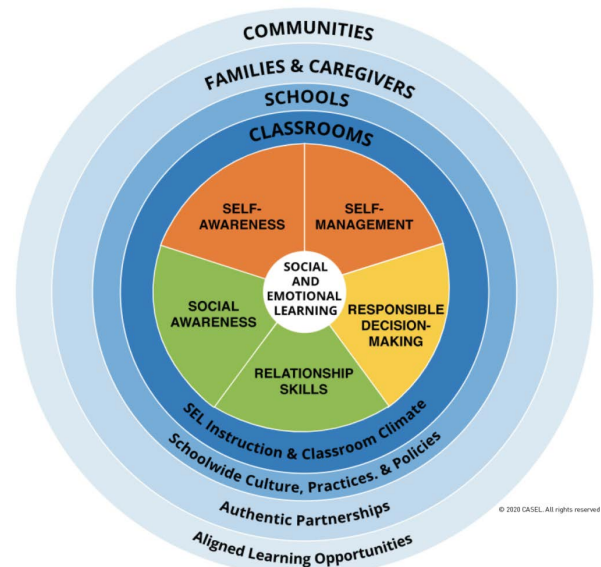
**SELF-AWARENESS:** The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose.

**SELF-MANAGEMENT:** The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations. This includes the capacities to delay gratification, manage stress, and feel motivation and agency to accomplish personal and collective goals.

**SOCIAL AWARENESS:** The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

**RELATIONSHIP SKILLS:** The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed.

**RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING:** The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations. This includes the capacities to consider ethical standards and safety concerns, and to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions for personal, social, and collective well-being.



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**S**choolwide SEL refers to a process for developing a school community where there is systemic integration of academic, social, and emotional learning at four levels:

- Classrooms
- Schools
- Families & Caregivers
- Communities

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## CLASSROOMS

SEL at the classroom-level typically involves:

- Intentionally cultivating nurturing, safe environments characterized by positive, caring relationships among students and teachers,
- Explicit instruction through which social and emotional skills and attitudes are taught and practiced in developmentally, contextually, and culturally responsive ways,
- Teaching practices such as cooperative learning and project-based learning, and
- Integration of SEL and academic curriculum.

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## FAMILIES & CAREGIVERS

The insights and perspectives of families and caregivers are critical to informing, supporting, and sustaining SEL efforts. Research suggests that evidence-based SEL programs are more effective when they are extended into the home.<sup>4,5</sup> Avenues for family partnership may include creating ongoing two-way communication, helping caregivers understand child development, helping teachers understand family backgrounds and cultures, providing opportunities for families to volunteer in schools, extending learning activities and discussion into homes, and coordinating family services with community partners.

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## SCHOOLS

At the school level, SEL strategies typically take the form of systems and practices that:

- Model social-emotional competence throughout the school community,
- Incorporate schoolwide policies and practices that promote SEL, and
- Integrate SEL goals and practices with universal, targeted, and intensive academic and behavioral supports.

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## COMMUNITIES

Community partners such as out-of-school time providers, community-based organizations, health care providers, and other community institutions offer opportunities for young people to practice their social and emotional skills in settings that are both personally relevant and can open opportunities for their future. To integrate SEL efforts across the school day and out-of-school time, school staff and community partners should align on common language and coordinate strategies and communication around SEL-related efforts and initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Albright, M. I., & Weissberg, R. P. (2010). School-family partnerships to promote social and emotional learning. In S. L. Christenson & A. L. Reschly (Eds.), *Handbook of school-family partnerships* (pp. 246–265). New York: Taylor & Francis.

<sup>5</sup> Patrikakou, E. N., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). School-family partnerships and children's social, emotional, and academic learning. In R. Bar-On, J. G. Maree & M. J. Elias (Eds.), *Educating people to be emotionally intelligent* (pp. 49–61). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated.

<sup>6</sup> Harris, E., & Wilkes, S. (2013). *Partnerships for learning: Community support for youth success*.

# SESSION 1

## INTRODUCTION TO SEL

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### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Open the first session of the discussion series by welcoming the participants and giving them a chance to get to know one another.

**Facilitator:** *Welcome everyone! Thank you for being here. Before we get started, let's do a round of introductions. As we go around the room, please share:*

1. *Your name*
2. *The age of your children*
3. *Something that makes you proud to be a parent/caregiver*

*Over the next few weeks we're going to talk about the social and emotional lives of ourselves and our children. To accomplish this, we'll be leading you through a series of discussions about social and emotional learning.*

*It's important that we make this group our own and that we all have a chance to be learners and teachers. At most sessions, I'll bring an article, video, or piece of information and then guide us through a discussion about that topic. At the end of these sessions, it's my hope that we'll have created a community that understands how social and emotional learning impacts our own lives and the lives of our children—at school, at home, and in the community.*

### SHARED AGREEMENTS (10 MINUTES)

Next, lead the group in creating some shared agreements. These are norms for how group members will interact with each other, such as how to disagree in a civil way, and how to make sure everyone has a chance to participate. As facilitator, you'll record their suggestions on a piece of chart paper that's big enough for everyone to see.

**Facilitator:** *Before we begin, I want to be sure that these discussions are useful for everyone. To do that, it's important that we set some shared agreements for how we will communicate and interact during these discussions.*

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS

*The purpose of this session is to set the tone for the future sessions by helping the group to get to know one another and identify shared agreements for how all participants will interact. Participants will also be introduced to social and emotional learning.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED

*Laptop with Internet  
connection to play video  
SEL video  
CASEL wheel handout (p 8)  
Chart paper  
Markers*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*

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**Facilitator (cont.):** *Take a few moments to think about what kinds of behavior will work best. Here are some questions to think about:*

- *What norms should we follow to have a successful session? Do we want people to arrive on time and stay for the entire session?*
- *How do we need to treat each other? Do we want to encourage everyone to speak? How do we feel about issues like confidentiality?*
- *What else is important to you?*

When participants have had time to think and seem ready contribute, ask the questions above and gather responses on the chart paper. When the discussion is finished, work toward finalizing your list of shared agreements.

**Facilitator:** *Can we all agree to these norms? We can always add to them or adjust them as we move through the next few weeks. For today's discussion, we'll all keep these in mind. At our next session, we'll post these agreements as well.*

### WHAT IS SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? (10 MINUTES)

Next, introduce participants to the definition of social and emotional learning.

**Facilitator:** *I've mentioned social and emotional learning a couple of times so far today. To make sure we're all on the same page, I want to show you a video that describes exactly what we mean by "social and emotional learning."*

Show SEL Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2d0da6BZWA&t=30s>

### GROUP DISCUSSION (REMAINDER OF TIME)

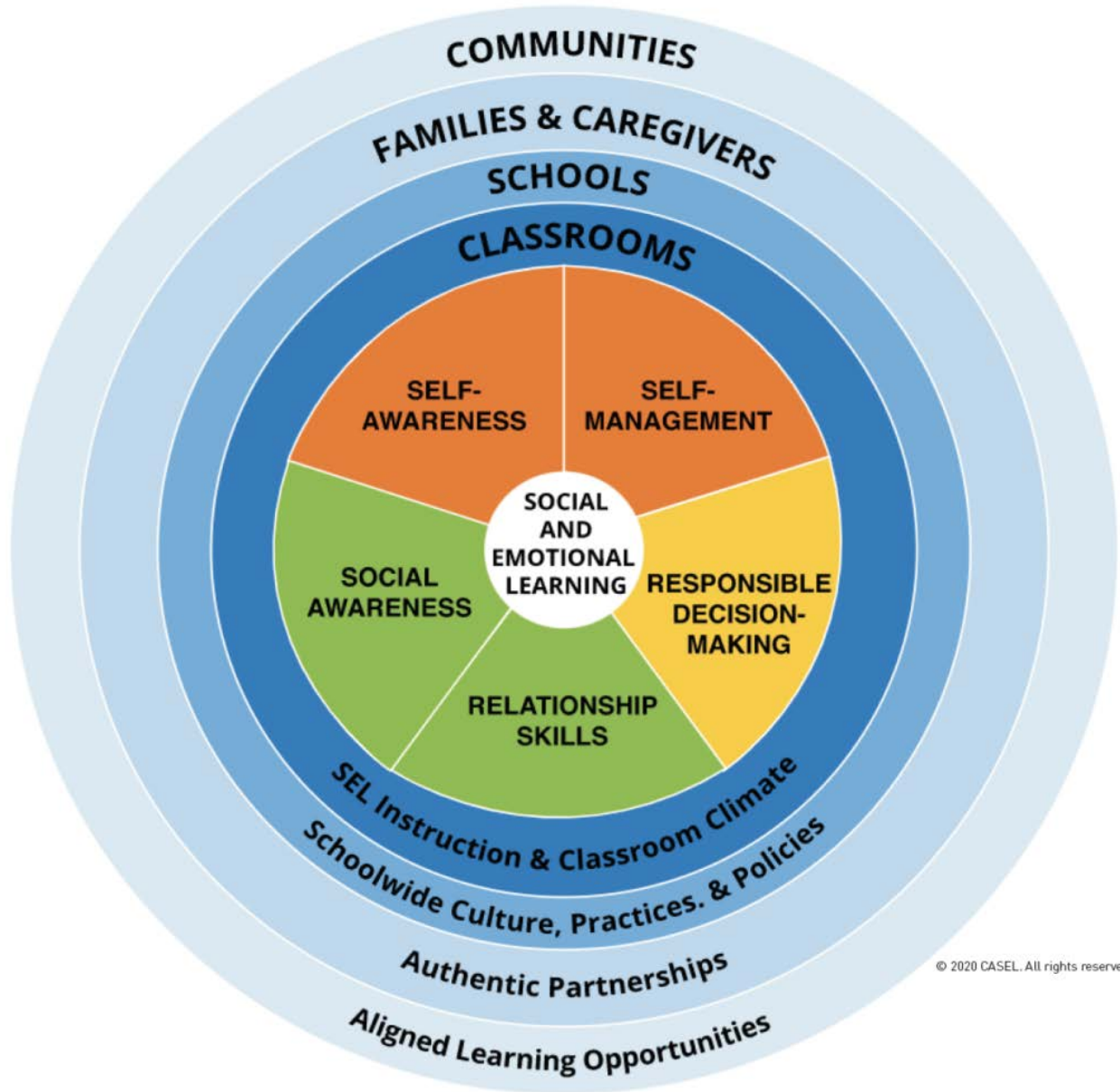
After viewing the video, lead a group discussion about the video and the impact of social and emotional learning. Here are some questions to explore:

- What did you think about the video? What resonated with you?
- What is a *caregiver's role* in the social and emotional development of children? How can caregivers do this?
- What is a *school's role* in the social and emotional development of children? Is our school doing this?
- What is a *community's role* in the social and emotional development of children? Is our community doing this?





## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES



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### BENEFITS OF SEL

↑ Better academic performance

↑ Improved attitudes and behaviors

↓ Less negative behaviors

↓ Reduced emotional stress



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## SESSION 2

# HOPES & DREAMS

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### WELCOME (10 MINUTES)

Welcome the group and invite all members to participate in a check-in circle in which they respond to questions that will help them connect to each other and focus on the topic at hand. You may need to ask participants to introduce themselves once again.

**Facilitator:** *Welcome back, everyone. To start off our discussion, let's reflect on why we're here today, what we'd like to accomplish, and any impressions you've had about the material we covered last time.*

Questions you may post to the group include:

1. "How are you feeling today?"
2. "What is it that made you decide to show up today?"
3. "If you attended the last session, was there anything that you have questions about?"

### HOPES AND DREAMS (45 MINUTES)

After the check-in circle, introduce the topic for the session.

**Facilitator:** *Today's topic is "Hopes and Dreams." When we were children, our families had hopes and dreams for us and instilled attitudes, skills, and mindsets in us to help us achieve those dreams. Those hopes and dreams live in us today and impact how we see the world.*

Share the CASEL Wheel (p. 8) and briefly review the competencies that are shown there (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). Then invite them to answer the following question by making reference to the competencies on the wheel:

- What are the top three skills, mindsets, and/or attitudes that your parents instilled in you? (Some examples: respect for elders, independence, remaining positive, never giving up.)

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS

*The purpose of this session is to identify and explore the hopes and dreams that we have for our children and consider how social and emotional learning can help our children to achieve those goals.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED

*Facilitator guide  
Notebook paper  
Pen/pencil  
CASEL Wheel (p 8)  
Shared agreements (developed in first session)*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*

Ask participants to write their top three answers and share out at least one or two.

When sharing has come to an end, lead a discussion about their hopes and dreams for their children:

**Facilitator:** *As adults, we all have hopes and dreams for our own children. Let's talk about what those hopes and dreams are and how we can help our children achieve them.*

Feel free to use these questions as prompts for the discussion:

- What hopes and dreams do you have for your child/children?
- In order for your children to achieve those hopes and dreams, what will they need to learn from you?
- Are there SEL skills, mindsets, or attitudes that will help them along the way to achieving those hopes and dreams?
- What kinds of things could you do to help them achieve those hopes and dreams? If you aren't sure, ask the group for ideas.

When the discussion comes to an end, issue this challenge to the group:

**Facilitator:** *Without judgment, ask your child about the hopes and dreams they have for themselves. Did they align with the hopes and dreams you discussed today?*

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## SESSION 3

# GRATITUDE

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### WELCOME (15 MINUTES)

Welcome all group members and invite them to participate in a check-in circle. Start with a question that allows them to reflect on what happened during the last session and how they have acted on the challenge issued at the end of the session.

**Facilitator:** *If you attended our last session, did you ask your child about their hopes and dreams? Did they align with yours? How did it feel to hear about their hopes and dreams?*

### GRATITUDE (25 MINUTES)

Source: [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/three\\_reasons\\_to\\_raise\\_grateful\\_kids](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/three_reasons_to_raise_grateful_kids)

Next, move on to the topic of the current session, and ask them for their responses to a few questions to engage them.

**Facilitator:** *Today we'll be talking about the impact the act of gratitude can have on our own lives and the lives of our children. What's something you're feeling grateful for today? Where did you learn gratitude?*

Once everyone has answered, distribute the Gratitude Infosheet.

**Facilitator:** *Practicing gratitude consistently can do great things for children, adolescents, and families as a whole. Research shows that grateful kids are kinder and happier, and get better grades. Grateful kids become stewards of the environment.*

Ask group members to review the Gratitude Infosheet.

**Facilitator:** *What surprises you about this handout?*

After participants have shared their impressions, continue the discussion about gratitude.

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

*The purpose of this session is to learn more about how the act of gratitude can impact our own lives and the lives of our children.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

*Gratitude Infosheet (p 13)  
Notebook paper  
Pen/pencil*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS:

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*

**Facilitator:** *Gratitude can become part of your family routine through intentional practice. So, how can we teach our children to feel and express more gratitude?*

Pause for discussion, and when the participants have shared their thoughts, continue by asking them to explore how to encourage children to show gratitude. Use the prompts that follow as a way to generate a list.

**Facilitator:** *How do you encourage your children to show gratitude at home? Are there other things that you could begin doing as a family to practice gratitude?*

Here are some examples that may come up:

- At dinnertime or bedtime each night, take turns sharing one thing you are grateful for and why.
- Throughout the day, model for your family what gratitude looks like for your family. Say aloud things like “Thank you for helping with the dishes. I’m grateful to have such a thoughtful son.”
- As a family, make it a habit to handwrite thank-you notes when you receive a gift or favor.

Conclude the session by issuing this challenge to the group: Identify at least one strategy to try, then share with the group how you’ll make it happen.

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# WHAT GOOD IS GRATITUDE? REASONS WHY IT'S BETTER TO LIVE GRATEFULLY

## CHARITY

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Grateful people on average give **20%** more time and money.

## COMMUNITY

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Grateful people will have a **stronger bond** with the local community.

## WORK

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Happy people's income is roughly **7%** higher.

## YOUTH

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Youth who practice gratitude:

Get into **13%** fewer fights

Are **20%** more likely to get A grades

Are **less likely** to start smoking

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

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Gratitude is related to age. For every 10 years, gratitude increases by **5%**.

## HEALTH

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Grateful people:  
Will have **10%** fewer stress-related illnesses.

Are more **physically fit**.

Have blood pressure that is lower by **12%**.

## FRIENDS

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Grateful people have more **satisfying relationships** with others are better liked.

## WHERE?

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The **most grateful** countries are: South Africa, UAE, the Phillipines and India.

The **least grateful** countries are: the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Czech Republic, and UK.

## LIFE

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Overall positive emotions can add up to **7** years to your life.

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## SESSION 4

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S OR TEEN'S DEVELOPMENT

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### WELCOME (10 MINUTES)

Welcome the group and invite all members to participate in a check-in circle. Start by guiding them in a reflection on the previous session.

**Facilitator:** *Welcome back, everyone. Last time we met, you committed to try at least one strategy to promote gratitude with your child. If you were able to try it, what did you do and how did it go?*

Invite participants to share their experiences, if they like, and then introduce the topic for the day.

**Facilitator:** *We all know how quickly children learn and grow. Sometimes we need to explicitly teach them things, and sometimes they learn all on their own. What are some of the milestones you watched your child reach? How did it feel to watch them learning these milestones?*

Pause for responses. Participants may volunteer such milestones as learning to walk, learning to talk, learning to share, etc. When suggestions come to a close, continue with the introduction.

**Facilitator:** *Today we'll be exploring how children develop in regards to social and emotional learning milestones.*

### THE PRINCIPLES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT (10 MINUTES)

**Facilitator:** *We'll begin by discussing some basic principles of child development. Keep these in mind as we talk about how social and emotional learning is connected to child development.*

Distribute the handout entitled "The Four Principles of Child Development." Invite them to follow along as you review the four principles on the handout.

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

*The purpose of this session is to consider how social and emotional learning is connected to child development and explore ways to support children's growth in this area.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

*CASEL Wheel (p. 8)  
The Four Principles of Child Development (p.16)*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS:

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*



## CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (40 MINUTES)

When you have reviewed the handout, explain that you will break into groups for the next part of the activity. Ask each participant to go to either the K-3rd grade table, the 4th-6th grade table, or the 7-8th grade table depending on their child's age. If they have more than one child, ask them to select the child who needs the most support right now and go to the appropriate group for that child.

Tell the groups that you'd like them to consider a few questions:

- Which SEL competency do you see your child particularly working on learning? Consider social challenges, such as making new friends, and emotional challenges, such as expressing anger without yelling. (Make the CASEL wheel available to them, if needed.)
- In the classroom, home, and community, what opportunities do their children have to practice these skills?
- What do you think you can do to support that development?

Once they have had an opportunity to explore the questions, bring their attention back to the whole group. Ask for volunteers to discuss common themes or insights they have come to according to the age group they were considering.

**Facilitator:** *What were some of the common themes you discussed in your group? Did you have any "Aha!" moments during your discussion? Did you identify anything you would like to start trying at home?*

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## THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

### 1. DEVELOPMENT FOLLOWS PATTERNS.

We can recognize and anticipate the stages a child goes through in development. For example, a baby first crawls, and then “cruises” by holding onto furniture. Finally, the baby walks. These kinds of patterns can be seen in a child’s cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and physical development.

### 2. THERE IS AN ORDER TO DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES.

Children follow through stages in the same order. For example, you typically don’t see a child walking and then crawling. It’s the same for other developmental areas.

### 3. EVERY CHILD PROGRESSES AT THEIR OWN RATE.

Some children progress quickly through stages; others move more slowly. It is perfectly normal for children to vary in terms of their progression, or to stay in one stage longer than other children.

### 4. GROWTH IS UNEVEN AND UNPREDICTABLE.

There is no “normal.” Just as the rate of growth varies among children, the amount of time spent in any one stage by any one child can vary. There is not perfect “yardstick” that all children meet.

Source: Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom, Ages 4-14.

## SESSION 5

# FAMILY EMOTIONAL SAFETY

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### WELCOME (15 MINUTES)

Welcome the group members and invite them to participate in a check-in circle. Start by guiding them in a reflection on the previous session.

**Facilitator:** *Last time we met, we talked about the stages of social and emotional development that our children go through. What have you thought about since our discussion?*

Allow time for responses.

**Facilitator:** *Today we'll be exploring ways to manage disagreements and anger to promote emotional safety at home.*

Here are some questions you can pose to the group:

1. How do you know when you're getting REALLY angry? (Feel free to provide your own personal example, such as "My hands sweat," "I can feel my heart beat faster," "I feel like I'm going to cry," etc.)
2. What are some strategies you use to keep yourself calm?

### FAMILY EMOTIONAL SAFETY (40 MINUTES)

Source: <https://confidentparentsconfidentkids.org/parent-resources/family-emotional-safety-plan/>

Following the check-in circle, begin the exploration of the session's topic.

**Facilitator:** *We plan for the uncertainty of a fire in our homes with smoke alarms and exit strategies. But what about emotional "fires"?*

*Every single one of us will be overcome with anger, fear, or anxiety at some point. Without thought or planning, we risk lashing out at our loved ones and not only disrupting our routine but also our foundation of trust. And we have to live with the guilt and regret that comes with it. Let's examine why this happens.*

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS

*The purpose of this session is to help families identify and practice strategies for managing disagreements and anger in ways that promote social and emotional learning and emotional safety.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED

*Family Emotional Safety Plan template (p 20)  
Brain map (p 21)*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*

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When you're emotionally shaken from fear, anxiety, anger, or hurt, you're functioning from your primal brain, called the amygdala. [This is pronounced uh-MIG-duh-luh.]

Show the brain map provided on p. 18 of this guide, and point out the amygdala, which is labeled.

**Facilitator:** This is the "survival center" of the brain. It handles your "fight-or-flight" response.

As Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, has explained, the rest of your brain is "hijacked" by the stressful situation. The stress causes your body to flood your brain with a chemical that keeps the other parts of the brain from working effectively. This includes the parts of the brain that handle logic and creativity—important problem-solving functions. This means that when you're frightened, anxious, angry, or upset, your brain simply isn't equipped to deal productively with the issue. Instead, the amygdala is left in charge.

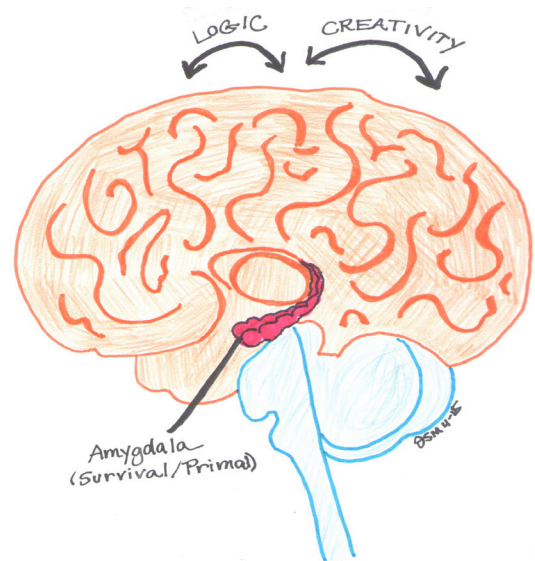


IMAGE BY JENNIFER MILLER

By creating a plan for what each member can do when they are upset, angry, or fearful, and by practicing the steps of the plan, your family can be prepared to act with emotional intelligence during a crisis, big or small. Let's look at how you can do this with your family.

Give a copy of the Family Emotional Safety Plan template on p. 17 to each participant.

**Facilitator:** You can use this handout as a template for you and your family to create your own emotional safety plan. Take a moment to look at it now.

Pause to let them review the template, and then walk them through it, using the following examples as responses to each section, if this seems helpful.

When I am angry or have high anxiety, I will say... (Keep it short!!) \_\_\_\_\_  
**Example:** "Mommy needs five minutes."

Then, I will go (Describe specific place.) \_\_\_\_\_ to cool down.

**Example:** I go to my favorite chair in my bedroom. I have heard from others that it's not safe for them to leave the room because a.) They have little ones. b.) They are worried siblings will hurt one another. In those cases, I designate a place in the room I am in or, in the case of the siblings, I sit quietly in between them in the middle of the floor.

When I get to my cool-down spot, I will... (Take how many deep breathes? Then: Write? Draw? Think? Plan?) \_\_\_\_\_

**Example:** I take 10 deep breaths. This is an essential part of any plan since it removes the chemical from your logical brain so that you have access again. I keep my journal and pen beside my chair if I need it. Sometimes, in the case of a child's misbehavior that I need to respond to upon my return, I think about logical consequences or constructive responses while there.

I ask, "What does he need to learn? How can I best facilitate his learning in this situation?" I will return to my family when \_\_\_\_\_

**Example:** For me, it's when I have cooled down properly and know my next move when I return to the situation.

When you're done reviewing the handout, continue with the discussion.

**Facilitator:** *Children understand their emotions and how to handle them primarily from watching you! Have you ever noticed your child yelling or using words in anger in the same way you do? Modeling is a powerful teacher. So you go first! Take a quiet moment to fill in your responses.*

If there is time, you can ask participants to jot down some ideas now. Then continue on:

**Facilitator:** *Once you've filled the plan out for yourself, find a moment when you don't have time pressures to sit down and discuss a plan with your children. Share your knowledge. Talk about what you've learned about the amygdala and educate your children and your partner about how the brain functions in a highly emotional state.*

*Also, reflect on the things that happen to your body that can give you clues about your emotions. For example, do you get red in the face or in the ears when you are upset? Does your child shake when she is fearful or anxiety-ridden? What physical experiences do you have when you are highly emotional?*

*Next, ask your family to write their own plans after they've heard yours. Make sure all know each other's plans. An adult who leaves the room can scare a child and escalate the upset. But if you've already discussed it, then you merely need to remind him of your plan and implement it.*

*Having a plan can lend safety and security to your family life. It can create a more caring, supportive environment when all know that there is a clear response process for each person when they are at their most vulnerable. After living with and using your family emotional safety plan, you may wonder how you could have lived without it.*

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## **My Emotional Safety Plan**

I know that my children learn to manage emotions from my modeling when I am angry and anxious. I know my child will act in the same way I act when they are stressed. Having a plan ready and rehearsed will help me model how I want to teach them the handle their emotions.

When I am angry or have high anxiety, I will say... (keep it short!)

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Then, I will go... (describe specific place) to cool down.

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When I get to my cool down spot, I will... (take how many deep breathes? Then, write? draw? think? cry? plan?)

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I will return to my family when...

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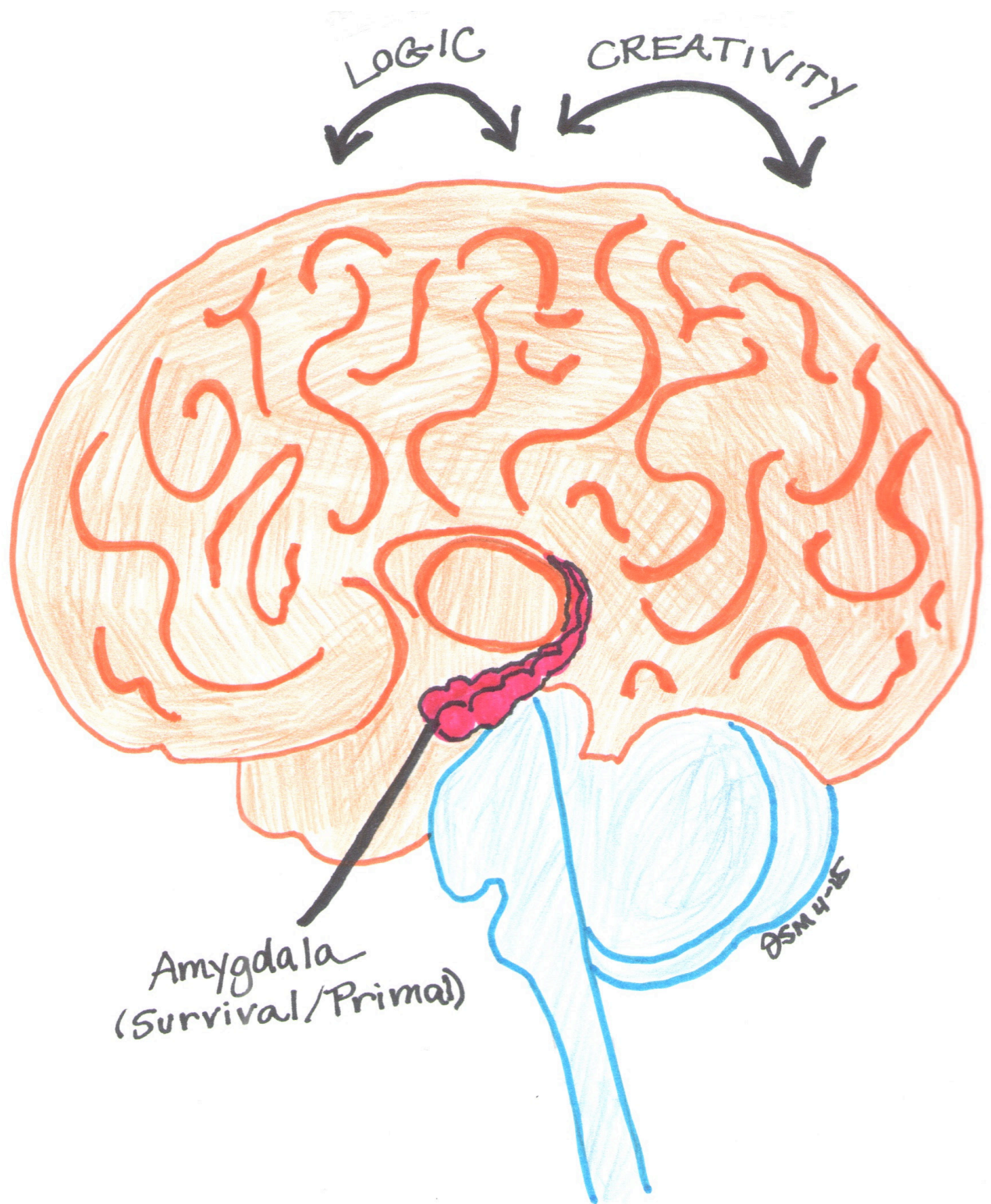
I will prepare my family for this (as I would let them know about any new routine) by telling them when we are...(when? where?)

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## SESSION 6

# MANAGING STRESS WITH MINDFULNESS

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### WELCOME (10 MINUTES)

Welcome the group and invite the members to participate in a check-in circle. Start with a question that allows them to reflect on the work in the previous session.

**Facilitator:** *If you were able to complete your family safety plan, how did it go?*

Next, pose some questions that encourage participants to begin thinking about the session topic: managing stress. Questions to ask include:

1. How do you know when you're stressed? Where do you feel it in your body?
2. Who is the first person to notice when you're stressed? You, a friend, spouse, child?

### MANAGING STRESS WITH MINDFULNESS (40 MINUTES)

*Source:* [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-kring/the-5-main-tenets-of-mindful-parenting\\_b\\_4086080.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-kring/the-5-main-tenets-of-mindful-parenting_b_4086080.html)

When the check-in circle is done, introduce the topic of the session.

**Facilitator:** *As caregivers, we are often living our lives running on empty, over-scheduled, and in a constant state of low-grade stress. As a result, sometimes we don't bring our "best selves" to the interactions with our families. However, it is possible to shift from a reactive and stressed mode to a mindfully responsive mode by using the STOP acronym.*

Review the acronym, as shown:

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS

*The purpose of this session is to encourage participants to practice self-awareness as a way to manage stress and foster positive interactions with family, even when stress levels are high. By modeling this skill in the presence of other family members, this strategy can become a family habit.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED

*STOP Cards (p 23)*  
*Article (optional): Source* [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-kring/the-5-main-tenets-of-mindful-parenting\\_b\\_4086080.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-kring/the-5-main-tenets-of-mindful-parenting_b_4086080.html)

### THANK PARTICIPANTS

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*

**S**top. Whenever you notice stress or imbalance, pause and be aware of how you feel.

**T**ake a breath. Simply bring your awareness into the breathing body, letting the sensations of the breath move into the forefront. Notice how your mind begins to settle a bit, bringing more clarity. Breath awareness actually harmonizes the cardiovascular systems in the body, while also calming the “alarm” centers in the more primitive parts of the brain, restoring full brain function. When we are stressed, we can’t think clearly or see any situation accurately.

**O**bserve. Just notice how breathing begins to naturally bring balance to the systems of the body. Let this be felt. Also, look around. What is really happening, in the moment?

**P**roceed. Having shifted to a more mindfully responsive mode, take an action that is more skillful, appropriate, and best attuned to your situation.

**Facilitator:** *You can use this on the way to school, getting the kids ready for school, and in any situation that you have found to be stressful.*

Pass out a laminated STOP Card that participants can use on their own, and remind them that this is something that children can learn to do as well.

Then invite responses to the following questions:

- How might the STOP acronym be helpful in your daily life?
- How might your relationships change if you used STOP at home?
- Could your children be taught the STOP acronym?

Conclude the session by issuing this challenge to the group: Try using the STOP strategy at least once this week

**S- Stop.** Whenever you notice stress or imbalance, pause and be aware of how you feel.

**T- Take a breath.** Simply bring your awareness into the breathing body, letting the sensations of the breath move into the forefront. Notice how your mind begins to settle a bit, bringing more clarity. Breath awareness actually harmonizes the cardiovascular systems in the body, while also calming the “alarm” centers in the more primitive parts of the brain, restoring full brain function. When we are stressed, we can’t think clearly or see any situation accurately.

**O- Observe.** Just notice how breathing begins to naturally bring balance to the systems of the body. Let this be felt. Also, look around. What is really happening, in the moment?

**P- Proceed.** Having shifted to a more mindfully responsive mode, take an action that is more skillful, appropriate, and best attuned to your situation.

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# SESSION 7

## FIGHTING FAIR

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### WELCOME (15 MINUTES)

Welcome the group and invite all members to participate in a check-in circle. Start with a question that allows them to reflect on the work in the previous session.

**Facilitator:** *If you were able to attend the previous session, did you use the STOP strategy? How did it go?*

Next, pose some questions that encourage participants to begin thinking about the session topic: fighting fair. Questions to ask include:

1. Who is the peacemaker in your family?
2. What skills does that person have? How are they able to create peace?

### FIGHTING FAIR FAMILY PLEDGE (40 MINUTES)

**Facilitator:** *Today, we'll be talking about how to disagree in ways that help, instead of hurt. Let's start by looking at a valuable resource, the Fighting Fair Family Pledge.*

Distribute a copy of the Fighting Fair Family Pledge to each group member and ask them to read it. When they are finished reading, start a discussion by posing the following questions:

1. What did it feel like to read this pledge?
2. What social and emotional skills would it take to be able to commit to this pledge?
3. What skills would your family need to learn before they could commit to this pledge?
4. What can you do tonight to get yourself or your family one step closer to being able to commit to this pledge?

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

*The purpose of this session is to provide families with strategies for moving through disagreements in ways that help all parties grow socially and emotionally.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

*Fighting Fair Family Pledge (p 25)  
CASEL Wheel (p 8)*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS:

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*

## Confident Parents, Confident Kids Fighting Fairly Family Pledge

Fighting is inevitable in families. It does not represent weakness but only reality. I know that the way we fight - what we say, how we say it and what we do - can either deepen our intimacy and strengthen our bonds or create divisions and break down trust. Here is our family commitment to one another.

We, the \_\_\_\_\_ (insert last name(s)) family, will...

### 1. Plan ahead.

We'll develop a plan for dealing with heated emotions, expressing ourselves respectfully and calming down. Each will create their own individual response and share it with the others in the family. We will respect each person's plan. See the Family Emotional Safety Plan for a simple template.

### 2. Go to the source.

We will not talk with one person about another when they are not present. We will go directly to the person with whom we have the problem.

### 3. Take responsibility for our own feelings and role in the problem.

Instead of blaming others, we will voice our own feelings. We'll ask "What am I feeling? What's my role in this problem?" and "How can I articulate and take responsibility for my role fairly?"

### 4. Move to empathy and get curious about other's perspectives.

We'll assume that other family members have good intentions and that everyone can make mistakes. We'll ask, "What are you feeling? What are you thinking?" Then, we'll listen with an open mind and heart seeking understanding.

### 5. Work together to meet each other's needs and forge an agreement.

No agreement is going to work if needs — physical or emotional — are not met. So before finding solutions ask "What needs have to be met on both sides?" Then with those needs in mind, we'll discuss ways to move forward and work to resolve the problem.

### 6. End with love.

This is typically not a possible way to close a conflict if the problem is not truly resolved. But when we've heard each other's feelings and thoughts, worked to understand one another and tried to resolve the problem fairly, then we'll end with an expression of love and care.

We, the \_\_\_\_\_ (insert last name(s)) family, pledge not to use the following types of fighting that we know are destructive to our loving relationships. They can whittle away at our trust of one another and rock our foundation.

We will not...

### 1. Use physical force.

Whether it's between siblings or between a caregiver and child (including spanking), using physical force in a conflict signals that the individual has lost all control and only believes s/he can regain it with physical dominance. Five decades of research shows there are no positive and only negative outcomes when force is used. See the following article for numerous alternatives. Brainstorm alternatives so that children have other options at the ready.

### 2. Criticize.

We will not judge or comment on the character of a person in the struggle but focus our energies and words on solving the problem at hand.

### 3. Show contempt.

We will not use hostile humor, sarcasm, name-calling, mockery or baiting body language. We recognize these all involve some kind of aggression and character attack with the implicit intention of causing harm.

### 4. Become defensive or blaming.

We will not point fingers and use "You..." language. Words like "always, never or forever" will not enter into our arguments since they cannot represent the truth.

### 7. Stonewall.

We will not refuse to listen, shut down the argument or give the silent treatment. We know that our loving family relationships will continue to grow stronger through our commitment to this pledge.



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## SESSION 8

# RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

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### WELCOME (10 MINUTES)

Welcome the group members and invite them to participate in a check-in circle. Start by guiding them in a reflection on the previous session.

**Facilitator:** *Last time we met, we talked about the ways in which we can fight fairly in family life. We learned about what research tells us can be said and done in an argument to strengthen relationships. And we learned what kinds of words and actions can harm our relationships. Did you make the Fighting Fair Pledge as a family? If you did, how has it gone?*

Invite participants to share their experiences, if they like, and then introduce the topic for the day.

**Facilitator:** *Today we're going to explore how we can raise children who make responsible decisions and care for themselves and others when making choices.*

Invite them turn to the person next to them and briefly share their thoughts on the following question: What are the ways in which you are helping your children to make responsible decisions?

### RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING (45 MINUTES)

**Facilitator:** *Responsible decision-making is something children need to practice over and over again. Remember, the logical part of the brain, the part that helps us stop and think before making decisions, is still developing in our children. In fact, it continues to develop into young adulthood. Today, we'll discuss ways to help support that development.*

Distribute the "Responsible Decision-Making Tip Sheet."

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

*The purpose of this session is to consider how we can raise children who show responsibility and care for themselves and others when making choices.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

*Responsible Decision-Making Tip Sheet (p. 28)  
Questions to Ask When Reading Stories or Watching Television With Your Family (p. 29)*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS:

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*



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**Facilitator:** *Responsible decision-making includes considering whether a choice will show care or cause harm to yourself, another person, an animal, or a thing; and considering the broader impact of the decision.*

*We're going to divide into smaller groups, and each group will discuss two of the tips on our Responsible Decision-Making Tip Sheet. After you've had some time to review and discuss your tips, each team will summarize their discussion to the larger group.*

Divide the participants into three smaller groups and assign two tips to each group. Allow 20 minutes for the small-group discussion, then bring the attention back to the larger group and ask each small group to report out their findings and thoughts.

When each small group has shared, invite the entire group to debrief the discussion. Some questions you may wish to ask include:

- Did you discover you were doing some of these strategies already?
- What do you want to try out that will be new to you and your family?

Close the session by distributing the handout "Questions to Ask When Reading Stories or Watching Television With Your Family."

**Facilitator:** *We've done some productive thinking about how to encourage responsible decision-making in our children. If you want to continue to explore this topic, here's a list of questions you can discuss with your children while reading stories or watching television. It's a great way to help students practice thinking through problems in a safe, fun way.*

## RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING TIP SHEET

### **1. Look for opportunities to offer choices.**

You can help your child practice making responsible decisions by offering them a few safe choices, then allowing them to make the final decision. For example, younger children can be asked, “Would you like to brush your teeth before your bath or after?” Or “Would you like to do your homework before bed or while you eat breakfast tomorrow?” Older children can be offered choices like “You will need to be at school tomorrow by 7:30. Make a list of all the things you’ll need to do before we leave, then let me know what time you think you should wake up so that you have time to do all the things on your list.”

### **2. Help your child develop a healthy self-image through supportive inner self-talk.**

*The language you use can help shape your child’s sense of identity. “If you weren’t so lazy, this wouldn’t have happened” might seem like a harmless comment, but it could cause your child to start believing that they really are a lazy person. Sarcasm can also be misunderstood by children. Try using words that encourage a growth mindset, such as: “It’s important to learn from this situation. What can you try next time this happens?”*

### **3. Give your child space to reflect and think things through.**

Children may need extra time to consider issues before responding. To encourage your child to reflect on decisions, ask open-ended questions. If you are reflecting on a situation that was negative or stressful, wait until your child is calm before starting this kind of discussion.

### **4. Make problem-solving a family affair.**

An enjoyable topic such as “Where should we go for our family fun night?” could be the perfect chance to brainstorm ideas and consider the pros and cons of each one. You can keep the process simple: (1) Define the problem. (2) Articulate the feelings involved. (3) Brainstorm solutions. (4) Evaluate the pros and cons. (5) Choose a solution all can agree upon.

### **5. Understanding consequences.**

There are many opportunities throughout the course of the week to discuss consequences. When your child makes a poor choice, offer love and support while focusing on the problem they’re confronting instead of focusing on their behavior. Raising questions about predicting outcomes can initiate thinking in a young person about causes and effects.

### **6. Engage your child with characters and stories they can learn from and relate to.**

Responsible or irresponsible decision-making are central themes of most great literature. Ask open-ended questions (ones without a correct answer) and let your child ponder. Check out the “Helpful Questions When Reading Stories With Your Family.”

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## QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN READING STORIES OR WATCHING TELEVISION WITH YOUR FAMILY

### **While reading or watching television, try asking:**

- Can you predict what might happen?
- What do you think the character is thinking before a major decision?
- What do you think the character might be feeling?
- What do you think the character wants to happen?

### **At the end of the story, ask your child to consider:**

- Why do you think the character made the decision to act the way they did?
- How do you think that character considered the effect on others or on the environment?
- How do you think the main character felt after the decision?
- What other decisions could the character have made? What decision would you have made?
- What effects would another decision have on others?

## SESSION 9

# PARENT-TEACHER CONVERSATIONS

### WELCOME (15 MINUTES)

Welcome the group and invite all members to participate in a check-in circle. Start with a question that allows them to reflect on the work in the previous session.

**Facilitator:** *Last time we met we talked about helping our children make responsible decisions. Did you use the Responsible Decision-Making Tip Sheet or the Reflection Questions? How did it go?*

Next, pose some questions that encourage participants to begin thinking about the session topic: parent-teacher conferences. Questions to ask include:

1. What does it feel like to talk to your child's teacher?
2. What fears or worries do you have about the process? Why?

### PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES (40 MINUTES)

**Facilitator:** *Whether it's parent-teacher conference day, you've requested to speak with your child's teacher, or your child's teacher has requested to speak with you, parent-teacher conferences can be stressful.*

A continuación, dirija una discusión sobre las conferencias de padres y maestros y su relación con la competencia social y emocional. Aquí hay algunas preguntas para el grupo:

- Using the "Wheel," identify which SEL competency you feel strongest in when speaking with your child's teacher. Why?
- Using the "Wheel," identify which SEL competency you personally need the most help with when speaking with your child's teacher. Why?
- During parent-teacher conversations, what have you tried that has worked well?
- Are there ways that your school could improve parent-teacher conferences that would help all caregivers?

Before the group ends, share the Parent-Teacher Conversations Tip Sheet with the group. Encourage group members to add to the list or compile their own list. Group members can share these tip sheets with other caregivers if they wish.

### NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

*The purpose of this session is to prepare families for an interaction that can sometimes feel intimidating and stressful—meetings with their child's teacher.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

*Parent-Teacher Conversations Tip Sheet (p 31)  
CASEL Wheel (p 8)*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS:

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*

## Parent-Teacher Conversations Tip Sheet

Source: <https://confidentparentsconfidentkids.org/2013/03/14/parent-teacher-conversations/>

### Get yourself into the right frame of mind.

#### **ASSUME THE BEST INTENTIONS ON THE TEACHER'S PART.**

Assume competence and caring. Assume that the teacher is trying to do what is fair. But of course, teachers are human and make mistakes like all of us. If you are upset or emotional about the situation, first do some journaling, walking, or other means of getting out some of your frustrations. Try not to go into the conversation highly charged and emotional if possible. If you do, you are SIGNIFICANTLY less likely to be successful.

#### **ASK YOURSELF: WHAT ARE YOUR DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR THE CONVERSATION?**

Think about it. If you raise this issue, are there a number of outcomes that might be acceptable to you? Involve your child in thinking through what solutions might be acceptable. If there is only one solution that is acceptable and you do not believe that the teacher will either a.) understand or b.) accept that solution, then it sounds like it is not worth having the conversation unless you are only planning to focus on the future. In other words, "What can he do in the future to avoid this problem from happening again?"

#### **INITIATING THE CONVERSATION.**

Whether you call or email to set up a conversation, let the teacher know that you would like to discuss your child in general and specifically the problem at hand. Be sure to find the time to go in person. Email and phone conversations seem easier, but real resolutions in which all parties feel better can best be reached in person.

#### **THE CONVERSATION ITSELF.**

Begin with the positive strengths of the school year and the teacher's influence on your child. What do you like about her, or what he is learning? Then, ask about the problem at hand.

When you leave the conversation, be sure to thank the teacher for her time and care with your child. Go through the conversation with your child. If agreements have been made, you then need to supervise your child carefully to ensure that he follows through with those agreements. It may be the case that because of school rules there is no way that a student can make reparation or improve a grade. Help your child to accept the rules of the school that his teacher is following. Discuss what they can do to avoid the problem the next time. You will not only be working in partnership on your child's behalf with the school, but also teaching the valuable lessons of accepting consequences and learning from mistakes.

#### **FOLLOW UP ON THE CONVERSATION.**

Because you want to continue a good and growing relationship with your child's teacher, follow up. After your child has followed through on making up the test, for example, check back in with your child's teacher in a few weeks just to see if reparation has been made and things are going well. If you focus on your partnership with the teacher as an important investment in your child's future success and not on the problem of the moment, you will make better choices about how to approach the teacher even when difficult situations occur.

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# SESSION 10

## HELPING KIDS DEAL WITH FEAR

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### WELCOME (15 MINUTES)

Welcome the group and invite all members to participate in a check-in circle. To get the discussion started, pose the following questions:

What are your children most afraid of right now? How do you know?

### HELPING KIDS DEAL WITH FEAR (45 MINUTES)

Source: <https://confidentparentsconfidentkids.org/2015/10/29/true-terror-helping-kids-deal-with-their-fears/>

After the checkin circle, introduce the topic of the day: helping kids deal with fear.

**Facilitator:** *One of the greatest challenges we face as caregivers is to watch our children suffering, whether it's from fear or pain. We want to fix it—and quickly. The only way for a child or any person to move through a fear and come out with confidence and bravery is for that individual to control how he or she faces the fear. You can play a critical role by facilitating that process and, as a result, prepare your child for life's challenges.*

Distribute the Promoting Resilience and Courage Tip Sheet.

**Facilitator:** *This tip sheet describes a process for helping a child with fear of the dark. However, this process can work with just about any fear your child may have.*

Ask the group to scan the tip sheet, and then facilitate a discussion using the following questions:

1. What social-emotional skills do you need to help your child manage fear?
2. What do you like about the process described in the tip sheet?
3. What looks difficult?
4. Is there anything you would do differently? Why?

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### NOTE TO FACILITATORS:

*The purpose of this session is to provide caregivers with a strategy for helping their child manage fear by practicing self-awareness and self-management.*

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

*Promoting Resilience and Courage Tip Sheet (p. 33)  
CASEL Wheel (p. 8)*

### THANK PARTICIPANTS:

*End each session with a thank you to all for participating.*



## **Tip Sheet: Promoting Resilience and Courage with Kids in the Midst of Fear**

Source: <https://confidentparentsconfidentkids.org/2015/10/29/true-terror-helping-kids-deal-with-their-fears/>

### **UNPACK THE FEAR.**

Talk through the emotions with a child when you don't have other pressures. List out all aspects of what they are afraid of. If it's the dark, what parts of the dark don't they like? What do they see? What do they imagine? What's the worst thing that could happen to them in the dark? Find out all of the aspects of what's worrying them and be sure to discuss their worst-case scenarios.

### **BEGIN WITH THE LEAST SCARY THING ON THE LIST OF FEARS AND BECOME INFORMED TOGETHER.**

Provide education and safety information about that topic, and the more interactive, the better. For example, what causes the dark? Are there more safety risks in the dark? What are they? How can you address them? Do you need night lights in the bedrooms and in the hallways? If there are issues you can research in children's books together, that is a great process for exploring a high-anxiety topic. Or else go and pick out night lights to serve as a safety measure. Involve your child in addressing the issue.

### **TAKE SMALL STEPS TOWARD FACING THE FEAR.**

Before moving forward, be sure to ask your child how they feel about taking the next step and make it fun.

### **CONTINUE SMALL STEPS AS YOUR CHILD CONSENTS.**

With each small step, your child will learn to trust working with you on his fear (because you are not pushing, but allowing him or her to set the pace). You will offer practice in facing his fear through these small steps, inching closer to the darkness until they are ready to turn out the lights altogether.

### **PRACTICE IN VARIED SETTINGS.**

Even if your child has been able to face turning out the lights and has come through it triumphantly, he will better internalize the lesson if you practice in a few settings. So go to your living room, ask his readiness, and perhaps take a smaller step first in the new setting by turning out one light in the room.

### **RETURN TO SAFETY.**

If you have struggles along the way, you can always return to safety. Turn on the lights. Talk more about safety issues, such as checking to see if all of the doors are locked so no strangers could possibly get in your home. Help your child feel comfortable at each stage of the process.

### **DEBUNKING THE "TOUGHENING UP" MYTH.**

It is a common belief that we must toughen up our kids for what they must face in life. Sometimes that belief translates into pushing kids beyond their coping capacity. We may force them into petting a dog they are terrified of approaching because it is our belief that they have to face their problem. Indeed it does make children strong for them to face their fears, but the only way they can truly conquer them is on their own terms. No amount of pushing, forcing, punishing or yelling on our part is going to help. In fact, it will do the opposite.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the world's leading organization advancing one of the most important fields in education in decades: the practice of promoting integrated academic, social, and emotional learning for all children. The nonprofit, founded in 1994, provides a combination of research, practice, and policy to support high-quality social and emotional learning in districts and schools nationwide.

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Thank you to the Robert R. McCormick Foundation for funding this project and supporting efforts to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning an integral part of education, preschool through high school.

