

**Social & Emotional  
Learning Toolkit for  
Parents and Caregivers**

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**THE DOMINGUEZ  
DREAM**



Introduction.....	4
Unit 1: What is SEL? .....	5
Social Emotional Learning.....	6
Unit 2: Relationships.....	7
Honesty .....	8
Communication: Sharing & Listening .....	9
Conflict Resolution .....	10
Forgiveness & Apologies.....	11
Unit 3: Gratitude .....	12
A Guide to Gratitude.....	13
Gratitude Journaling.....	14
Acts of Kindness .....	15
Self-Gratitude .....	16
Unit 4: Belongingness.....	17
Helping Children Feel Valued.....	18
Restorative Practices .....	19
Autonomy Support.....	20
High Expectations .....	21
Unit 5: Growth Mindset .....	22
Growth Mindset in the Home.....	24
Making Mistakes: Resilience and Perseverance .....	25
Asking for Help.....	26
Unit 6: Emotions .....	27
Exploring Emotional Intelligence .....	28
Labeling Emotions.....	29
Losing Control: Upstairs vs. Downstairs Brain.....	30



Managing Emotions.....	31
Unit 7: Self-Esteem.....	32
Self-Esteem in the Home .....	33
Goal Setting .....	34
Positive Self-Talk .....	35
Embracing Differences .....	36
Unit 8: Empathy .....	37
What is Empathy? .....	38
Perspective-Taking.....	39
Embracing Diversity and Connecting with Others .....	40
Fostering Compassion .....	41
Unit 9: Mindfulness .....	42
Intro to Mindfulness.....	43
Mindfulness Breaks.....	43
You Are Not Your Thoughts .....	43
Play .....	43

# Introduction

**Importance of SEL:** Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is essential for success in school, in work, and in life. It is the way humans acquire and apply the skills necessary for healthy social and emotional development. SEL helps students learn to set goals, manage their emotions, develop healthy relationships, make good decisions, and achieve in school. Research demonstrates that now more than ever, SEL should be considered a critical priority for student success.

**Purpose of Toolkit:** It is our hope that by working through this toolkit, Parents and Caregivers learn how to support their student's social-emotional development and well-being. The purpose of this toolkit is to increase your knowledge of SEL-related topics, to provide tools for encouraging your students to practice these skills, and to create opportunities for caregivers to participate and grow alongside their students. We hope this toolkit serves as a guide for preparing to talk to your children about these topics, a handbook for how to incorporate SEL techniques in your parenting, and a resource for your own SEL as well.

**Format:** This toolkit is organized into 9 units—one for each month of the school year. Within each unit, there are related topics corresponding to weekly lessons. Refer to the Table of Contents to review the Units and Topics that are covered.

**How to use this toolkit** This toolkit is designed to be worked through week by week. Each week features lessons on topics relevant to that month's unit. Lessons will include a description of the topic with some background information, activities or videos that are helpful for understanding that topic, and tips & tricks for practicing it in action. Most lessons will include resources that you can use to start a discussion with your student(s). In each lesson, you will learn useful skills for both you and your student to practice.

# September

## Unit I: What is SEL?

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As your student begins a new school year and you begin to work through this toolkit, it is important to understand: what exactly is Social-Emotional Learning? You may have heard the term before at your child's school or from other caregivers. In this unit, we will take a closer look at what is meant by 'SEL' and what kind of topics make up SEL. It is important to note that the social and emotional well-being of students suffered greatly during the pandemic. With limited social interaction, being disengaged from a normal school routine, and isolation from activities that we normally love, many students experienced significant declines in SEL. These trends suggest how important it is - now more than ever - for Parents and Caregivers to learn more about SEL and to support the SEL of their students.

Ask your student: Have you heard of SEL? What do you think it means?

Ask yourself: As a parent, what is my role in the SEL development of my student?

# Social Emotional Learning

## What is SEL?

SEL refers to the process through which students and adults acquire and apply the skills that promote healthy social and emotional development.

According to CASEL, it is the way that humans learn and practice the knowledge, attitudes, and techniques necessary to:

- Understand and manage emotions
- Set and achieve positive goals
- Feel and show empathy for others
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions
- Develop healthy identities

## Benefits:

There are several well-known positive outcomes related to SEL. Research suggests that engagement in SEL can:

- Increase student motivation/engagement
- Improve academic performance
- Teach persistence
- Improve attitudes and behaviors
- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Increase emotional regulation skills
- Improve interpersonal relationships
- Much more!

To better understand Social & Emotional Learning and why it's important for you, your student, and their success in school, watch these videos:

[What is SEL? \(casel.org\)](https://casel.org/)

[Social-Emotional Learning: What Is SEL and Why SEL Matters](#)

[SEL for Parents - YouTube](#)

## CASEL Framework

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning has identified 5 Core Competencies of SEL:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-Management
3. Social Awareness
4. Relationship Skills
5. Responsible Decision-Making



[SEL: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted? \(casel.org\)](#)

Each topic covered in this toolkit will relate to one or more of these core competencies and will include research-backed techniques for practicing these skills with you student(s).

# October

## Unit 2: Relationships

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As your student settles into the new school year, they are likely making new friends and forming new relationships with their peers, teachers, and staff. In this Unit, we will cover topics such as honesty, communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness – all skills that are vital to healthy relationships! The information and resources in this unit will help you and your student learn how to develop and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, which are strongly associated with overall student well-being. Positive interpersonal relationships promote engagement in school and academic achievement, protect students from numerous risk behaviors, and provide students opportunities to develop emotional intelligence.

This time of year, we encourage you to get involved with your communities. Sign your kids up for activities in which they will have opportunities to meet new people, socialize, and build relationships.

Ask your student: What do you think it means to be a good friend? How do you know when someone is a good friend? If you created a “recipe” to make the best friend, what would be your ingredients?

Ask yourself: What are the most important traits in a healthy relationship? How do I learn to foster those traits in my own relationships?

# Honesty

As a parent or caregiver, you already know that honesty is an important trait for students to learn. Honest people are more trustworthy, dependable, and respected, so honesty is important in any relationship your student has.

“Trust is considered the central pillar supporting a relationship, and is compared to the concrete foundation of a house” -Kent Pinkerton

Trust is the foundation of any healthy interpersonal relationship. And, honesty simply *feels* good! Emphasize to your student that doing the right thing often *feels better*.

## Consequences of Lying

Dishonesty often leaves a stain; we can see the effects of telling lies for a long time after we’ve told them. Others lose trust in us and our relationships start to weaken. Ask your student if they can come up with examples of **consequences for lying**. Here are a few:

- A feeling of guilt
- Distrust or lost relationships from our friends and family
- Additional lies to cover up the first one, resulting in being caught in our own “*spider web*” of lies

Then, ask them to come up with some **benefits to telling the truth**. Here are a few:

- Our friends know they can trust us
- Feeling proud
- Peace of mind
- We don’t have to keep track of/remember our lies to cover them up

Check out [this video](#) for more tips on fostering honesty with your student

## Activity:

With your student, brainstorm a scenario in which someone tells a lie (any lie you can think of!) Write it down and draw a circle around it.

Now, draw two lines on either side of the circle; one to the left and one to the right.

Brainstorm with your student about what precedes a lie and what comes after. On the left line, write out things that lead up to a lie (something we’re embarrassed about and want to cover up, wanting to get out of trouble, etc). On the right line, write out the **consequences** that follow a lie (guilt, more lies, distrust). Now, talk through that same scenario but as if the person had told the truth. What follows instead? There might be some immediate consequences, but they probably also feel *proud* that they told the truth, and things likely resolved without continuing to spin a web of lies.

## Discussion Questions:

Here are some questions to get you started discussing honesty and lying with your student.

- *What does it mean that “Honesty is the best policy?”*
- *Why is honesty important in relationships?*
- *Do you expect your friends to be honest with you?*

# Communication: Sharing & Listening

Communication skills, especially sharing and active listening, are vital to building and maintaining healthy relationships.

Feeling like we can **share** openly and honestly within our relationships is crucial to our social health. Being a good **listener** helps others feel close to us and trust us. These skills make it easier to connect with others in meaningful ways.

Frequently check in with your student and encourage them to share how they are feeling. Ask them how their day was, about their interests, favorite subjects, etc. and listen closely to them. Also be willing to share with them about how you are feeling. This will give them a great model for regular, healthy communication in relationships.

## Tips for Active Listening

- Maintain eye contact
- Give the speaker your undivided attention; no distractions and no interruptions!
- Ask open-ended follow-up questions to show you are interested in what they have to say
- Try putting yourself in their shoes to better understand their point of view

## Tips for Sharing

- Be direct and honest about what you are thinking or feeling
- Be as clear as possible
- Slow down; silence is okay while you are thinking about what you want to say
- Ensure your listener understands what you are trying to say to avoid miscommunications
- Listen and be open to how the other person responds

## Activity:

Ask your student a check-in question. For example: “What was something fun you did this week? Something not so fun?”, “What do you like to play at recess?”, “What is your favorite thing to study at school?”

Then, have a conversation! **Practice taking turns listening, sharing, and responding to one another** using the tips in the left column. Try to maintain eye contact and not interrupt each other.

Here are some more communication **GAMES** to try out with your student(s):

- Telephone
- 20 questions
- I spy
- Show and Tell

Here is a helpful [video](#) for more inspiration on fun activities to practice communication.

Check out these videos for further tips on being a good communicator

[Active Listening: How To Communicate Effectively](#)

[Active Listening. How to be a great listener. - Bing video](#)

[Active Listening](#)

# Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are natural and inevitable in any relationship. Learning how to resolve conflicts in a productive way is key to getting along with others and maintaining healthy relationships.

## Steps to Resolving a Conflict:

Use this step-by-step guide to practice resolving conflicts in a healthy way. Share this process with your student so they know what to do when a conflict arises.

1. Calm down
2. Listen to one another and share each side of what happened (This is where the listening and sharing skills from the previous lesson might be useful!)
3. Identify the problem
4. Say how you feel. Use **'I Statements'** (see 'Tips and Tricks')
5. Share what you want to happen
6. Compromise and find a solution that everyone is happy with

Watch this helpful video for more tips and tricks on step-by-step Conflict Resolution:

[Conflict Resolution Process](#)

## Tips & Tricks: 'I Statements'

Use 'I Statements' to address a conflict. I statements include what happened, how it made you feel, and how you would like the conflict to be resolved. For example:

"I felt ... when you ... I would like for ..."

I Statements are helpful because:

- they help everyone understand the situation better
- they express feelings in a calm way
- they help us avoid name-calling, even when we're upset
- they offer potential solutions to the conflict

## Activity:

With your student, watch this video of an example conflict between two students:

Example: [Conflict Resolution](#)

Discuss what you saw. *What did you notice about how the two handled the situation? What did they do wrong? What could they do better? Think back to the Steps and the Tips & Tricks mentioned in this this lesson. If you were in their shoes, how might you handle the situation to resolve this conflict?*

# Forgiveness & Apologies

Forgiveness and Apologies can be difficult skills to practice. However, they are both necessary skills to have in a relationship. Once a conflict has been resolved using the techniques outlined in the previous lesson, it is important we are able to let go and move on. Whether that means owning up and taking responsibility to something you did, forgiving someone who wronged you, or a combination of both. **Apologizing** keeps us accountable for our actions and repairs our relationships. And **Forgiving** helps us resolve issues, overcome grudges, and frees us from feelings of hurt and anger.

It is important to make sure that you model apologizing and forgiving to your student. Apologize often to them if you feel you handled a situation poorly or lost patience with them. This shows them that it's a good thing to be accountable for our actions. Also make sure they see examples of you forgiving others. You are one of their biggest role models when it comes to these skills!

Watch these videos with your student for more on forgiveness and apologizing:

[A Better Way to Apologize](#)

[How to Help your Kids Understand Forgiveness](#)

## Step by Step: How to Apologize

1. Own up to what you did. Before you even approach the other person, reflect to yourself on what you did wrong and take responsibility for your actions
2. Be sincere. Other people can tell when you really mean it versus when you don't
3. Find a way to make it right! Go beyond just apologizing, help them to repair any damage that you have done. This shows you feel genuine regret and want to make things better
4. Reflect on what you can do differently moving forward

## Step by Step: How to Forgive

1. Hear the other person out. Let them explain why they did what they did and what their intentions were. Did they mean to hurt you?
2. Try to put yourself in their shoes. Perspective-taking can help us see where they were coming from, and might help us let go of some harsh negative feelings or grudges.
3. Decide how you want to move forward. If it was a serious incident, you might not want to continue that relationship. Even so, it might feel liberating to forgive them--even if just in your own mind
4. Grant forgiveness when you feel ready. Take your time; some things take longer to heal than others
5. Remember: forgiveness is a skill that takes practice! Practice often and it will get easier!

# November

## Unit 3: Gratitude

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As Thanksgiving approaches, now is a good time to practice gratitude. Gratitude is showing appreciation for all that we have and for all that is good in our life. Gratitude helps us to realize the ways in which we are lucky, which in turn promotes a positive and optimistic outlook on our lives. It's important to remember that humans are not hardwired for gratitude; our default is to focus on the things that we *don't* have. However, gratitude gives us the power to shift the way we perceive our world. It has been linked to several social, emotional, and even physical health benefits. In this unit, we will learn about ways to practice and express our gratitude. These techniques will give you and your student the tools to reflect and be thankful this month.

Ask your student: What does it mean to be "grateful" for something? What does gratitude *feel* like to you?

Ask yourself: What does gratitude mean to you? Why is it important to express gratitude: to ourselves and to others?

# A Guide to Gratitude

## The Process of Gratitude

You may have heard that gratitude is good for you – and it's true! Students who are grateful are happier, do better in school, have healthier relationships, and tend to be more successful later in life. But how do we encourage our kids to be grateful? This lesson outlines *The Greater Good Science Center's* 4 steps to the gratitude process. You can use these steps as a guide for showing your student how to practice gratitude. We also encourage you to use this process to reflect on things you are grateful for in your own life.

### Tip:

Gratitude requires shifting the focus from the things we want but don't have to noticing the things that we have already received. When your student complains about not having something that they want, try to remind them of something they already have that they can feel grateful for. This mindset shift might be difficult for them to make initially, especially when they are young, but it will eventually pay off and gratitude will become more of a habit.

## 4 Steps to Gratitude

1. **Notice:** identify when there is something or someone to be grateful for. This is the hardest step; it takes lots of practice.
2. **Think:** reflect on that thing. Who played a role in making it possible? And why did they?
3. **Feel:** experience the positive emotions that thing makes you feel (kindness, generosity, love).
4. **Do:** think of ways to express your gratitude for that thing or person.

It is sometimes difficult for children to feel grateful on their own. It's not something they often naturally think about. This is normal; try to avoid getting frustrated.

Use this guide to help them practice. Help them to **notice** when they have something to be thankful for, and ask them what they **think**, **feel**, and want to **do** about it.

Watch this video for more details on how to support your student's gratitude:

[How to Talk with Kids about Gratitude - YouTube](#)

# Gratitude Journaling

A formal “gratitude practice” might seem daunting, but it can be as easy as thinking of 3 things each day that you feel grateful for. Doing something like this on a regular basis helps you develop a robust, long-lasting attitude of gratitude. Remember: gratitude takes practice! The more you do it, the easier it will be to come up with things you are grateful for. As it becomes a habit, you will begin to notice all the small things that enrich your life without even trying.

Check out this video for more info, tips, and tricks on practicing gratitude:

[How to Notice Good Things in Your Life | Dear Greater Good](#)



## Activity:

Try out Gratitude Journaling with your student this month by encouraging them to think about 2-3 things they are grateful for each day and writing them down in a journal. This is a great activity for *you* to try alongside your student, too! Doing it together will not only give you a chance to practice gratitude for yourself, but it also gives you an extra opportunity to connect with your student that day. You can talk about what each of you wrote down and why. Even if you don't have a journal, or you don't want to *actually write* something down each day, you can try simply sharing them out loud. Designate a special time each day (during breakfast/dinner, before bed, after school) to do this so you don't forget.

Try your best to do it regularly for a whole month and see how you feel! Did you notice that it got easier to come up with things to be grateful for? Did you feel a stronger attitude of gratitude throughout your day, even when you weren't actively trying? It might be fun to look back on everything you came up with for that month. You will realize just how many things there are to be thankful for!

# Acts of Kindness

## Why it's Important to Express Gratitude to Others

While it's great to have our own personal gratitude practice, it's also a wonderful thing to express gratitude outwardly toward people when we feel thankful for them. If you feel appreciation for someone or for something they did, it's important to demonstrate that appreciation through acts of kindness. Pay back the favor or reciprocate the good intentions. Included in this lesson are several ideas for how to express our gratitude toward others. Check out [this video](#) for more ideas.

## Thank You Letters

Writing a note to someone is a great way to express that we are grateful for them and what they do. Plus, thank you notes are extremely quick and easy to write. Sit down with your students and ask them to think of someone they are grateful for. It could be a teacher, a friend who helped them out with something, the lunch lady, or the garbage truck driver! Then, write a note to that person together thanking them for what they do. People love receiving words of thanks. Try to make this a regular practice!

Watch this video for an example of a Thank You Letter written by author Yuyi Morales:

[A Thank-You to Librarians Who Make Everyone Feel Welcome](#)

## Random Acts of Kindness

Try doing an act of service for someone without expecting anything in return. Do a random favor for someone you appreciate, lend a helping hand to a neighbor, or find simple ways to volunteer your time or resources. It can be as small as helping a stranger pick up something they dropped or complimenting a friend. Random Acts of Kindness will remind you how much you have to give others and empower you to do good. Plus, generosity will simply put you in a great mood!

## Activity:

Like writing a thank you letter, try writing a poem for someone is a great way to express thanks. A fun idea to try is writing an **Acrostic Poem**.

Here's how it works:

Have your student spell out that person's name or a special message. For each letter of their name or of the message, write our something about that person you are grateful for. Then, give them the poem! Use this template as an example:

T	_____
H	_____
A	_____
N	_____
K	_____
F	_____
U	_____
L	_____



# Self-Gratitude

As important as it is to show gratitude toward others, it's also important to show gratitude for yourself! Being able to notice the things about yourself you are grateful for will foster more self-appreciation and self-confidence. This is perhaps one of the less-common components of gratitude, but it plays a huge role in fostering our overall attitude of gratitude. In this lesson we will go over some ways you can practice feeling grateful for yourself.

## Activity: Write Yourself a Letter

Just like how you can write a Thank You Letter to someone you feel grateful for, you can write one to yourself, too! Sit down with your student and brainstorm some things you want to thank yourselves for. Maybe you are proud of how you handled a tough situation with a friend. Or maybe you want to thank yourself for trying hard at learning something new in school. Thank yourself for the things you do throughout the day that make your life more joyful and fulfilling. This will help you realize what those things are and make you feel more empowered and confident in yourself to maintain those things/activities that make you feel happy.

**Tip:** If you don't have time to sit down and write a letter, try thanking yourself in the mirror. When you're getting ready in the morning or brushing your teeth at night, take a moment to show yourself some gratitude. It might feel awkward at first, but it will pay off.

## Practice with your Student

Another great practice to try out is to come up with things about yourself that you like. Sit down with your student and try it out. Here are some questions to get you started:

- *What are your favorite traits about yourself? (compassionate,, good friend, hard-working, etc.). Name as many as you can think of!*
- *What did you do today that you are proud of?*
- *How do you take care of yourself? Thank yourself for showing yourself love.*

Many of us tend to think negative thoughts about ourselves frequently throughout the day. (“I’m not smart enough”, “I’m so awkward”, “It’s too complicated and I’m too lazy”). Here’s something to try when you catch yourself doing that:

# December

## Unit 4: Belongingness

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The need to belong is considered by many to be one of our most basic human needs. With you students at home for the holidays, it is a good time to reflect on how we can make our children feel loved and valued at home. Belonging to a community or a family that values and supports you is vital to a child's social-emotional health. It provides them a space in which they feel safe to explore their world and their curiosities, and in which they are supported in doing so. It gives them the security and confidence to be themselves, develop their interests and identities, and learn to take healthy risks. In this Unit, we will learn ways to promote belongingness and why it is important to a student's social-emotional well-being.

Ask your student: Where do you feel you belong the most? Where do you feel you can be your true self? Who or what makes you feel that way?

Ask yourself: Where do I feel valued? Where do I feel I belong the most? How do those people/communities make me feel that way? How can I make others feel that way?

# Helping Children Feel Valued

Belongingness is the basic emotional need to be accepted by a community. Children have a natural desire to feel accepted, nurtured, valued, and loved--especially by their family or by important adults in their lives.

When students feel they belong, they feel more confident and empowered to grow and explore the world around them. If the adults in their life regularly make them feel valued, the trust in those relationships increases and the connection deepens, resulting in a sense of protection, acceptance, respect, self-confidence, and love.

Watch this video for more on how to make your student feel loved

[How to Help Your Kids Feel Loved](#)

## Everyday Practices

Here's a list of easy everyday practices you can do with your students this break to help them feel valued and loved. They may seem very simple, but if you do them consistently, they can make all the difference.

- Spend quality time with them. They will notice and appreciate that you make spending time with them a priority.
- Put technology away. Try to have quality face-to-face interaction, even if they are resistant at first.
- Show interest in the things they're interested in. They will notice and appreciate even subtle things like asking them a follow-up question about their favorite toy or game.
- Give your student compliments. Highlight what they are good at or what they did well that day/week. Some students thrive with verbal validation.
- Listen to your student & try to put yourself in their shoes (use the active listening and sharing tips covered in Unit 2)

## Tips & Tricks: Consistency is Key

Your consistency signals to a child that their needs are important to you. It nurtures a sense of value and self-worth. It also gives them a sense of security. Try to build these Everyday Practices into a routine to provide them that security. Find a time in your daily schedule for each of these things, so your student knows what to expect and when.

# Restorative Practices

It is possible you have heard the term ‘restorative justice’ or ‘restorative practices’ in the context of your student’s school. It is often used to describe ways to build community, repair relationships, resolve conflicts, or discipline students. When it comes down to it, restorative practices are really all about fostering a **safe, healthy, and positive environment in which to learn**. We can bring the lessons of ‘restorative practices’ into the home environment, too. This lesson will provide tips for building and nurturing meaningful relationships in the home. These strategies are intended both to proactively prevent interpersonal conflicts from happening and to address them when they arise.

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Check out this video for more on Restorative Practices:

[What is Restorative Practices?](#)

## Restorative Practices & Tools

- **Mood Meter:** use a “mood meter” to check-in with your student and take inventory of their emotions. This could be useful before trying to have a discussion with them about something serious, after something upsetting happened, or after receiving big news. You could use a simple thumbs up/down/middle method, or [click here](#) to use this helpful Emotions Scale.
- **Connection Questions:** ask fun and creative questions for a quick and easy way to connect with your student. You can learn more about them and their interests, and they can learn about you. [Click here](#) for 28 sample questions.
- **Dialogue Circles:** use family circles to practice sharing thoughts with one another. These are great for building understanding and empathy. You can use this to resolve a conflict or address an issue, or you can just use it at the dinner table to share about your day. Try using a “talking piece” to help identify who the speaker is and who the listeners are. [Click here](#) for more ideas for family circles
- **Respect Agreement:** use these agreements to help reduce recurring conflicts or resolve problems in a respectful way. [Click here](#) for instructions how to create a Family Respect Agreement
- **Put technology away!** And come up with fun activities to do. Having an activity planned makes it easier for your student to avoid distractions from technology and engage with you. Read a book, play a board game, or go to the park!
- **Get active.** It will help your student clear their mind. Exercise is great for the brain and for their emotional well-being. You will both feel better after!

# Autonomy Support

For students to feel they are valued and respected, they need to be given autonomy over their lives. ‘Perceived autonomy’ is the extent to which students feel they have power and control in what they do and what happens to them. A higher perceived autonomy is related to a greater sense of belonging because students feel as though they **are valued and respected** enough in that environment to hold a position of power. As a parent or caregiver, you can support your student’s perceived autonomy at home using various techniques (“**autonomy-supporting parenting styles**”) that will be outlined in this lesson. These techniques are aimed at supporting 4 aspects of autonomy: **freedom of choice, self-expression, independence, and problem-solving**. By providing your student these freedoms, you support their autonomy and communicate to them that they are a valued member of your family, that their choices matter to you, and that you trust and respect them enough to have power over their lives. Their perceived autonomy empowers them to feel confident and capable of making their own life choices.

Reminder: note that the amount of autonomy support you should provide depends greatly on age. Each child has different needs, so try to be sensitive to where and when your student needs more autonomy. As your student gets older, the areas in which they need more autonomy will increase. However, you can always remain a positive, supportive resource that is there to step in when they need it.

## Autonomy-Supporting Techniques

- **Provide a reasoning** or explanation for your rules/expectations. Explain to them why you ask them to do certain things. They feel more respected (and are more likely to comply) if they understand where your expectations come from, versus telling them “because I said so.”
- Allow them to **make choices**. By giving them opportunities to make decisions for themselves, you empower them with a healthy sense of agency and control. Whenever possible, give them a choice between various options rather than telling them what to do.
- Let them **solve problems** on their own. Give them the independence to make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes. This shows them you trust them to figure it out and do the right thing, which in turn instills confidence in them. It also teaches them the valuable lesson of learning from their mistakes. That is how children grow!
- Let them **struggle**. It may be tempting to jump in and take over, but it is important for students to learn that failure is not a bad thing. Struggling (a healthy amount in a safe way) at an early age will teach them valuable coping mechanisms they will use for life.
- Let your kids be **curious**. Give them the freedom to explore their interests without trying to control them. Support their curiosity and self-expression. You can be a positive influence on them, but try to approach your relationship with collaboration in mind rather than control.

# High Expectations

It is important to communicate high expectations to students because it signals to them that we believe in them, and we think highly of their capabilities.

High expectations from parents and caregivers are associated with student self-esteem, confidence, perceived competence, and motivation. When we believe highly of them, they begin to believe highly of themselves.

## A Difficult Balance: Expectations vs. Pressure

How do we communicate high expectations without putting too much pressure on our students? Without high expectations, students might not think they are capable or competent. But too much pressure can sometimes result in stress, avoidance, and anxiety. Listed in the right-hand column are ways you can communicate high expectations in a supportive and healthy way.

## Tips for Communicating High Expectations

- Help your student **set goals**. This helps them understand what expectations you have of them. Creating realistic, clear, and achievable goals for your student communicates you believe in and expect a lot from them without piling on the pressure.
- Let them **answer questions for themselves**. This signals to them that you respect their independence and believe they are capable to speak for themselves.
- Aim for **personal bests**. Rather than encouraging them to be *the* best, help them figure out how they can do *their* best and fulfill their own potential.
- **Focus on the process** rather than the outcome. Praising how they studied vs. the grade they got will clarify your expectations while avoiding harmful pressures.
- **Offer support** and encouragement. This helps them build their confidence and live up to your expectations while alleviating some of the related stress or anxiety.
- Remind them that **failure is okay**. Regardless of the outcome, high expectations will teach students to believe in their abilities and that hard work pays off.

# January

## Unit 5: Growth Mindset

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With your students going back to school in the New Year, it is important to encourage them to keep up their hard work and finish the second half of the school year strong. This month's topic is a popular one: growth mindset. You have likely heard the term before, but we are going to dive deeper into what exactly a growth mindset is, and how to foster it within your student and yourself. We will cover topics including making mistakes, perseverance, and asking for help.

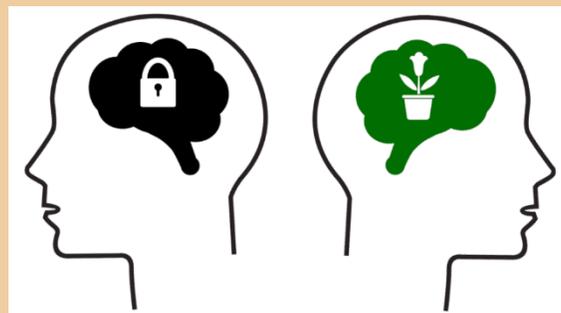
Ask your student: What is a growth mindset? What do you do when you make mistakes? What do you do when something is challenging for you?

Ask yourself: Do I model a growth mindset for my children? Do I believe my talents are fixed or changeable? How do I respond to challenges? How can I encourage my children to persevere?

## Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

In this lesson, we will go over the differences between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset, and how these different mindsets influence student behavior. Students with a **fixed mindset** believe that their own intelligence and talents are innate traits that don't change ("I'm just not a math person"). They believe you are either born good at something or you're not. Students with a **growth mindset** believe that ability can change as the result of effort, perseverance, and practice ("Math is hard for me, but I can get better at it if I keep trying").

**WHY IT MATTERS:** A wide body of research has shown that these two different mindsets can affect student effort and motivation, and lead to achievement gaps in grades, test scores, class behavior, and several other student outcomes. These mindsets can affect performance in other non-school related areas of our lives, as well.



To better understand the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset, watch these videos:

[Developing A Growth Mindset - YouTube](#)  
[Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset - YouTube](#)  
[The Mindset of a Champion | Carson Byblow | TEDxYouth@AASSofia - YouTube](#)

### What do these mindsets look like in real life?

Students with a <b>FIXED</b> mindset are more likely to...	Students with a <b>GROWTH</b> mindset are more likely to...
Desire to look smart, avoid looking dumb	Desire to learn, even if it takes effort
Get upset when they make mistakes; view mistakes as failure	Embrace challenge; View mistakes as opportunities to learn
Give up in the face of challenging tasks	Persevere when faced with difficult tasks
Avoid trying or learning new things	Seek to learn/try new things, even if hard initially
Ignore criticism	Learn from criticism
Feel threatened when others are successful	Find inspiration and lessons in others' successes
Have a fragile sense of self-esteem	Have a resilient sense of self-esteem
See the path to success as outside of their control	See their own effort as the path to success

# Growth Mindset in the Home

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Now that we understand the differences between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset, let's talk about how we can help our students develop a growth mindset. In this lesson, we will cover ways to foster a growth mindset in the home.

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## Practice in the Home:

- **Make mistakes commonplace:** Emphasize to your students that mistakes are a *natural part of learning the process*. Talk about mistakes you make in front of your children, emphasize that it's normal, and show them how they helped you learn and get better
- **Praise process and effort, *not* outcome:** Give your students props for trying hard or for *how* they went about doing something, rather than for how it turned out. If a student gets a good grade, say “Wow, you worked really hard on that, awesome job giving it your best effort” rather than praising the grade itself. Or if they're working on a difficult math problem, say “Nice work, that must have been tricky; I like your strategy to solve that problem. Can you walk me through how you did it?” rather than simply praising if they got the problem correct. This helps them learn to place their self-esteem in their effort and hard work, rather than their performance. A good way to practice this process vs. outcome orientation is by checking in with your students *while they are working* instead of waiting until they are completed with a chore or assignment.
- **Emphasize that the brain is like a muscle:** When talking to your students, talk about the brain like a muscle: it gets stronger with effort and practice. It can grow just like any muscle!
- **Encourage them to take on challenges:** Pushing them to try something challenging communicates that they can grow and improve on something with perseverance, even if it is difficult at first. It also teaches them that challenge is a good and valuable thing, and it will make them more likely to challenge themselves (and persevere in the face of challenge) in the future.
- **Give frequent feedback:** Giving your students frequent feedback helps them to progress through a problem and see their growth. When their growth is visible, they gain confidence in their skills to improve. It also helps them to identify where they might have made mistakes.

# Making Mistakes: Resilience and Perseverance

We talked briefly in the previous lesson about the importance of challenges, making mistakes, and persevering. We noted that it is important for students to learn that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. Our goal is to encourage them to overcome and learn from their mistakes. While it is completely natural to feel frustrated or embarrassed when we make mistakes, this does not mean we should give up. Learning to persevere in the face of challenge is one of the most valuable lessons your student can learn. So, how do we teach them?

Check out these videos from The Greater Good Science Center for more on perseverance

[What to Do When You Want to Quit | Dear Greater Good - YouTube](#)

[How to Nurture Stick-to-itiveness in Kids - YouTube](#)

## Tips for Fostering Perseverance:

- **Acknowledge Growth:** Point out things your student can do now that they couldn't before. This will remind them that growth is possible and encourage them to persevere when they can't **yet** do something.
- **Practice Positivity:** Help students to avoid responding negatively or destructively when frustrated. Encourage them to use positive language like "I am smart, and I know I can figure this out." Make sure you model this in how you talk to yourself and approach your own challenges, too. A destructive response indicates we are likely approaching it with a fixed mindset.
- **Try "Self-distancing":** When doing something challenging, tell your students talk to themselves in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, to call themselves by their own name, or to imagine themselves as their favorite character or superhero. This helps them get an outsider's perspective of the situation, nurtures perseverance, and improves focus.
- **Reframe the meaning of "mistakes"** from a negative to a positive thing. When talking about mistakes, emphasize that they are actually a good thing; they are the surest sign that you are learning or improving! It means our knowledge or skills are growing.

# Asking for Help

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A big part of having a growth mindset is being able to admit when we need help. We must be honest about our current abilities and say: “I don’t understand, **yet**” in order to learn and improve with the help of others. Having the humility to admit needing help is exactly the attitude that turns a difficult task into a learning opportunity. Asking for help shows that we are trying to better understand something and that we believe we can improve at it, which is an unmistakable reflection of a growth mindset.

Oftentimes we simply cannot reach our goals without the help of others. The key point to remember is that **no one knows you need help until you ask**. Practicing humility and asking for help might require bravery, but it is an important skill for your students to have. Make sure to remind them that **asking for help is never a bad thing**. Try to model this in your own life, too. They will learn that humility is a sign of strength and will come to admire people who are brave enough to ask for help.

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Check out these videos for more on  
Asking for Help:

[Asking For Help - YouTube](#)

[Life Lesson | It's OK to Ask for Help - YouTube](#)

[Asking for Help in School - YouTube](#)

Check out this article on intellectual  
humility:

[The Benefits of Admitting When You Don't Know \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

# February

## Unit 6: Emotions

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This month, we will focus on emotions: how to better understand our emotions and how to cope with, or regulate, them so that we can respond to them effectively. We hope that with what you learn from this unit, you will be able to talk openly with your student about feelings, provide them the tools and language to make sense of what they are feeling, and empower them with strategies to help them deal with strong emotions in a healthy way.

Ask your student: How many emotions can you name? Who do you usually talk to about your feelings?

Ask yourself: What do I do when I feel strong emotions? Do I manage them in a healthy way?

# Exploring Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, make sense of, and express our emotions. Strong emotional intelligence can help students regulate their emotions in a healthy way, respond to challenges, and solve problems. It can also help them be more empathetic and in touch with others' emotions.

It can be difficult to talk about strong emotions with kids, but this lesson will help you equip your students with the skills and vocabulary necessary to have those conversations. This lesson will cover a 3-step process by Transforming Education for increasing emotional awareness. In upcoming lessons in this unit, we will dive deeper into each of the steps and provide strategies for improving each skill.

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Check out this video about kids discussing emotions for an introduction to Emotional Intelligence for Kids:

[PBS KIDS Talk About | FEELINGS & EMOTIONS! | PBS KIDS - YouTube](#)

## 3-Step Guide to Emotional Awareness

1. **Label emotions:** The first step in responding to our emotions is being able to identify what they are. When we label how we are feeling, we can better understand why we feel that way and identify strategies to help us cope with those emotions.
2. **Recognize physical reactions:** We often will notice physical indicators of strong emotions. We might notice sweaty hands, tension or balled up fists, butterflies in our stomach, increased heart rate, or feel our face get hot. This might indicate we're feeling nervous, anxious, or angry. Recognizing these reactions helps us to label emotions and identify the stressors that caused them.
3. **Respond rather than react:** Try to avoid reacting too quickly to a situation; instead, take a second to slow down and consider how you are responding and whether that response will be helpful to you/others. When we have the patience to intentionally deliberate how to respond to an emotionally triggering situation, we can better consider the impact of our response.

# Labeling Emotions

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Being able to identify and name our emotions is the first step in deciding how to respond to and regulate them. It can also create some space between ourselves and what we are feeling, calming us down and giving us time to respond deliberately and productively. One way to remember this practice is to remember the phrase: **“Name it to tame it.”**

When your student is upset, you might ask them to “use your words” to express how you’re feeling. However, they must have the emotional vocabulary to do that. Below, we will cover some ways you can practice identifying and labeling emotions with your student.

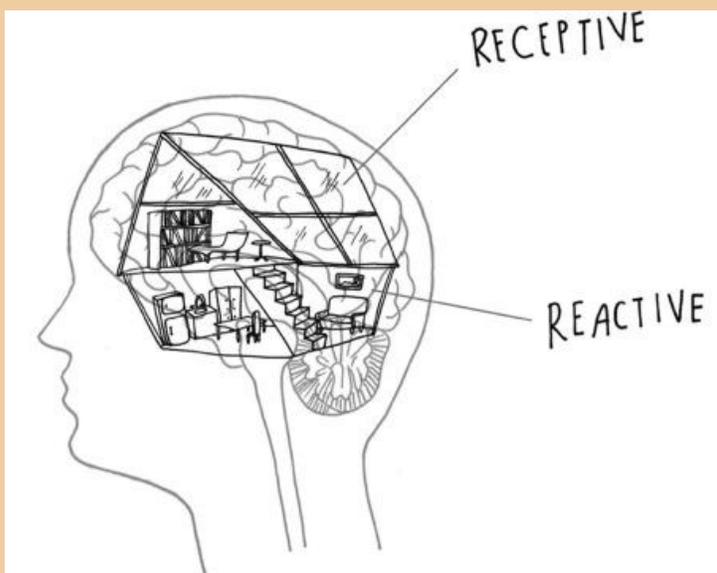
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## Practice with your Student

- **Use books and/or movies:** When reading a book or watching a movie, ask your student about the characters’ feelings and motives: “What do you think that character is feeling?” “Why is she frustrated?” “How can you tell?” Ask them to investigate by focusing on facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice being used.
- **Play Emotional Charades:** Write many emotions down on slips of paper and put them in a hat. Take turns picking out an emotion to portray and act it out without speaking. Have the rest guess which emotion is being portrayed.
- **The “What If” game:** Ask your student how they would respond in different scenarios. For example: “what would you feel if someone stole your favorite marker? How would you respond?” You can even role-play these scenarios to practice expressions and body language.
- **Frequently ask how they are feeling:** This helps students practice using emotional vocabulary think about what events might led up to/caused their emotions. You can use this [Feelings Thermometer](#) from [Harmony SEL](#). Remind them to pay attention to physical cues from their body.
- **Set an Example:** Finally, make sure you use your words to express what you are feeling and why. They will follow your example.

# Losing Control: Upstairs vs. Downstairs Brain

What happens when we feel really strong emotions? Why do we sometimes feel like our emotions are *out of our control*? We can better understand these questions by thinking of our brain as a house with two stories: a downstairs and an upstairs. The downstairs brain can be referred to as our emotional brain. It helps us react instinctively to keep us out of danger. Our upstairs brain can be referred to as our thinking brain. It helps us use reason and logic to solve problems. We need these two stories to work together; they communicate and share information so that we can problem solve and respond reasonably. However, sometimes our emotions are simply too strong and our downstairs, emotional brain takes over. It can no longer communicate with our upstairs, thinking brain. In these cases, we are not able to *respond logically*. Instead, we *react impulsively* and “lose control.”



Watch these helpful videos with your student to better understand how this works. In the next lesson, we will go over strategies for how to avoid losing control and ensuring that we can **respond** rather than **react** to strong emotions.

[Upstairs Brain Downstairs Brain - SEL Sketches - YouTube](#)

[Why Do We Lose Control of Our Emotions? - YouTube](#)

# Managing Emotions

Now that we have a better understanding of our emotions, we will go over some strategies for regulating, or coping, with them. We want to be able to intentionally respond to a situation rather than reacting impulsively or “flipping our lid”. To do so, we must calm our bodies and quiet our minds so that we can think rationally. People use different strategies to do this. Some people use breathing exercises, go on walks, talk with a friend, exercise, or listen to music. Try out some of the relaxation strategies presented in this lesson to help you and your student figure out what works best for you!

## Strategies for Calming Down

- A **Feelings Check-in** is a great place to start when you feel overwhelming emotions. Remember the “name it to tame it” principle! Try the [Feelings Thermometer](#) to check in with yourself.
- **Calm Breathing** helps calm our minds and our bodies when we feel overwhelmed. Our breathing often gets shallow and fast when stressed, which only makes us feel worse. Taking deep, calm “belly” breaths helps. Try out [Belly Breathing](#) or a [4-7-8 Breathing Exercise](#).
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** is a great way to release tension when feeling strong emotions. Try it out [here](#).
- **Positive Thoughts** influence our feelings, which influence our behavior. If we want to respond in a positive way, we must remember to think positively!
- **Talk it Out** with a trusted adult or a friend. It will feel good to get it off your chest
- **Exercise** is a great way to blow off steam and increase endorphins, which makes us feel happier and less stressed. Play your favorite sport or go for a walk!
- **Journaling** helps us make sense of our thoughts and feelings. Putting pen to paper can help us feel calm and prepared to respond in an intentional, positive way.

# March

## Unit 7: Self-Esteem

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Confidence and self-esteem strongly predict long-term success in school, relationships, and life in general. Self-confidence is believing in yourself and your abilities. Having high self-confidence and self-esteem means that you acknowledge the things you are good at, you trust in your own abilities, you generally accept yourself, and you feel positive about the way that you are

Students who are confident in themselves are more likely to try new things, to not give up, and to succeed in school. This month we will discuss some ways you can foster your student's confidence and self-esteem. Topics will include goal setting, positive self-talk, and embracing individual differences.

Ask your student: What are some things that make you feel confident? What are some of your special talents? What are some things you like about yourself?

Ask yourself: Do I have a healthy self-esteem? When do I feel most confident? Am I kind to myself? What makes me unique?

# Self-Esteem in the Home

In this lesson, we will talk about some ways you can practice building self-confidence inside your home. You will notice that you've already seen many of the strategies we will discuss in previous lessons, including growth mindset, making mistakes, and belongingness. That's because many of the strategies that are relevant to supporting your student in each of those areas are also helpful in encouraging their self-esteem. In other words, good parenting strategies are good because they often accomplish many different things at once! Later in this unit, we will dive deeper into some of the strategies listed here, with more details on how to practice them with your student.

Check out these videos for some more introduction to Confidence and Self-Esteem for Children

[PBS KIDS Talk About | SELF-CONFIDENCE & DETERMINATION | PBS KIDS - YouTube](#)

[Wellbeing For Children: Confidence And Self-Esteem - YouTube](#)

[Self-Esteem: How To Feel Awesome About Being You - YouTube](#)

## Tips & Tricks: Practices for In the Home

- **Point out their strengths:** Kids love to hear positive feedback from the adults they look up to in their life. If you notice they are doing something particularly well, or if they have a special gift or talent, give them that verbal validation!
- **Reframe mistakes:** Emphasize that mistakes are a good thing, not a bad thing! They signify progress and getting closer to success. This implies to your student that you believe in their ability to improve (and eventually succeed) which will give them the confidence to persevere and try again.
- **Celebrate your differences:** Everyone has different traits and talents, and that's okay! Make sure to point out that these differences are something to be celebrated, not to be embarrassed or anxious about. The things that make us unique are often also our strengths.
- **Allow students to struggle:** Struggle can be very valuable. When a student overcomes something that was challenging after a healthy amount of struggle, they often come out the other side feeling proud. Overcoming hard things gives us a sense of accomplishment and boosts our confidence in our abilities to learn new things and succeed at what we put our mind to. It can be hard to watch them struggle, but you can always offer support along the way.
- **Encourage positive self-talk:** Help your student be kind in the way they talk to themselves. Teach them to be encouraging and constructive rather than critical and destructive. Make sure you model this in the way you talk to yourself, too!
- **Help them set goals:** This lets them know that you believe in their abilities to learn and improve, and eventually accomplish a hard goal.
- **Encourage a growth mindset:** Frequently remind them that we can all grow and improve with practice. You can reference the January unit of this toolkit for more tips on developing a growth mindset.

# Goal Setting

Setting and achieving goals is beneficial to increasing our confidence. This is because setting goals help us to see how much we have improved, and because we gain a sense of self-efficacy when we see ourselves mastering new skills and achieving what were once intimidating goals. The process of setting and achieving goals encourages the belief that, if we work hard, we can succeed at things that once seemed difficult. The confidence this gives us is what helps us accept difficult challenges that might come up later in life, and to keep persevering in the face of setbacks.

You can encourage your student to get into the habit of setting goals by setting some goals together. This also shows them that you are invested in their success and believe in their ability to succeed, which will boost their confidence right off the bat!

## How do I set goals? And how do I hold myself accountable to them?

So, how do we go about actually doing this? Let's introduce two acronyms that are helpful to this process: we want to use the **WOOP** method to set **SMART** goals. Let's break down the first part: what is the WOOP method?

The WOOP method is a process you can use when first setting a goal. It is named for each step in the process: identifying your **Wish**, imagining the best **Outcome**, anticipating your main **Obstacles**, and finally developing a **Plan** to fulfill that wish. Check out [this video](#) for more on the WOOP method.

Next, let's take a look at the type of goals we want to set: SMART goals. A **SMART** goal is a goal that is **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound**:

**Specific:** What exactly do you want to achieve? When? Why? Give details!

**Measurable:** How will you track if you are reaching your goal or not?

**Achievable:** Is this realistic? (Hint: you might need to break down your goal into smaller steps, or subgoals, that create a path to success.)

**Relevant:** Does this fit in with other long-term goals/objectives you have in your life?

**Time-bound:** Set a deadline or target date for yourself to complete each step toward your goal

Check out [this video](#) for a breakdown on how to create a SMART goal.

These tips will help you stay motivated and on-track to achieving your goals!

# Positive Self-Talk

Self-talk refers to that dialogue we have with ourselves – whether out loud or in our head. For many of us, the conversations we have with ourselves revolve around things we should do better, ways in which we are struggling or frustrated, or things we don't like about ourselves. While it's normal to give ourselves feedback on things, we must ensure that feedback is constructive rather than destructive. Replacing negative self-talk with positive self-talk is crucial to building our self-worth. It's important for all of us – especially young students – to learn how to shift those negative, critical thoughts to more positive, encouraging ones. This might look like changing:

“I can't figure this out by myself! I'm not smart enough.” to “It will take time, but I can learn this. I am smart and will figure it out.”

Or “that was so embarrassing, I can't believe I messed up.” to “I'll do better next time. I choose to learn from my mistakes.”

Being kinder and more accepting toward ourselves will naturally lead to us being more confident, secure individuals.

Here are some ways to get in the habit of positive self-talk:

1. **Pay attention to your thoughts:** Try to monitor the things you tell yourself throughout the day. What do you observe? Do you notice any patterns?
2. **1 for 3 rule:** For every negative thought you think about yourself (personality, talents, appearance, etc.), come up with 3 things that you like.
3. **Talk to yourself like you would a friend:** We are often much more compassionate toward others with our thoughts and our words than we are toward ourselves. If you catch yourself thinking or saying something negative about yourself, imagine thinking/saying that same thing but to a friend. How would you have treated a friend in your situation differently? What would you have said to them?
4. **Pen to paper:** Write down 1-5 things in a journal every day that you are proud, that you're good at, or that you like about yourself.
5. **Try distanced self-talk:** This means talking to yourself in the third person. For example, instead of saying “I'm having a bad day,” you might say “Jenna, you're having a bad day—what can you do to turn it around and put yourself in a better mood?”

Check out this video for more tips on how to practice self-compassion:

[Being Kinder to Yourself - YouTube](#)

# Embracing Differences

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What does it mean to embrace our differences? It can be difficult – especially in the age of social media – to avoid comparing ourselves to others.

However, when we do this, we do a disservice to ourselves. Not only does comparing yourself to others negatively affect your self-worth, but you waste energy that could be spent cultivating your own unique talents. Rather than envying others or hoping to be more like someone else, we should focus on discovering our own strengths. It is important for all of us, particularly for kids, to find and appreciate your unique traits: the special qualities that make you, you. When we can identify and learn to love our uniqueness, we become more confident individuals with a healthy sense of self-worth.

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Check out these videos about learning to stop comparing ourselves to others and to love our differences

[You Are Awesome | Children book of finding their personal strengths - YouTube](#)

[Wellbeing For Children: Identity And Values - YouTube](#)

[Self Care Doodles - 3 Ways To Stop Comparing Yourself to Others. - YouTube](#)

[We Are All Different - and THAT'S AWESOME! | Cole Blakeway | TEDxWestVancouverED - YouTube](#)

## Tip:

Talk openly with your student about the individual differences that exist in the world (skin color, hair color/texture, religion, languages, abilities, talents, etc.) and teach them to value variety. This will teach them that uniqueness and diversity are good things, and they will learn to love the things about themselves that set them apart from others rather than trying so hard to fit in.

# April

## Unit 8: Empathy

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This month's topic plays a big role in a student's social life and social health. Empathy is a key ingredient in maintaining positive relationships. Being able to empathize with others helps us make friends, reduces conflict, show kindness, and leads to more *helping* behavior. Being able to listen, communicate, and act with empathy means being able to listen, communicate, and act productively.

Ask your student: What is empathy? How do you show your friends you understand them? How do they show you?

Ask yourself: What is empathy? What are some examples of empathy? What can you change about your behavior to be more empathetic?

# What is Empathy?

Empathy is the ability to understand someone's thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. The two main empathy skills are

1. Identifying how someone is feeling
2. Understanding their point of view

The first skill is simply about paying attention to how someone else is feeling, while the second is about putting ourselves in their shoes. This second skill is where empathy differs from sympathy: it is trying to imagine their perspective and identify with their experience of the situation so that we can better relate and more deeply understand. Watch [this video](#) for more on the difference between empathy and sympathy.

## Why is it important?

Empathy plays a big role in our social health. It allows us to understand the people around us. When we understand other people's feelings and points of view, we can better understand how to be supportive. It makes them feel understood and helps us avoid saying things that might hurt their feelings. It also generally makes us feel closer to friends and deepens relationships.

Empathy in children is associated with more altruistic, cooperative, and prosocial behavior. Empathic children are more likely to follow rules, help those in need, and demonstrate prosocial skills, and are less likely to participate in bullying.

Check out this video with your student for a great introduction to empathy

[All About Empathy \(for kids!\) - YouTube](#)

Below are some strategies to foster Empathy with your student. We will go into detail on some of these strategies in the next few lessons.

- **Observe Others:** By paying attention to how other people feel or act in situations, we practice not focusing so much on our own perceptions of the world. We get in tune with others and get insight into how they might be feeling. Use skills from the Labeling Emotions unit, like paying attention to their facial expressions, body language, or tone of voice, to help identify their feelings.
- **Perspective Taking:** Try “putting yourself in their shoes”. In other words, imagine their perspective or their experience of the situation, and let them know you understand how they feel. For example, you might say “I can tell you're really worried. I understand how you feel” or “you must be so excited!” to show we understand their point of view.
- **Listen to Others:** use your Active Listening skills from Unit 2 to learn more about their perspective. Avoid interruptions, ask questions, and clarify/ repeat what they say. This shows that we care about their feelings and want to understand.
- **Show Compassion:** Do kind things for others in need. Find ways to show we genuinely care about their well-being.
- **Find Commonality with Others:** Connecting with others on shared interests or identities helps us build mutual better understanding. When we do this, it becomes easier to exchange perspectives and share points of view.
- **Avoid Assumptions:** Avoid jumping to conclusions or categorizing people too quickly. This helps us to challenge our prejudices and to care for those who appear different from us.

# Perspective-Taking

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You have likely heard the term “Put yourself in their shoes” before. But what does this really mean and how do we accomplish it?

Empathy requires that we take on someone else’s point of view, and try our best to identify with their experience. This is called perspective-taking. Perspective-taking is a vital component of empathy. It is what makes others feel understood. As a reminder, the two skills of empathy are:

## 1. Identifying How Someone Feels

To understand how someone else feels, we can simply pay attention. People give many cues about what they are feeling or thinking.

As you’ll remember from our Labeling Emotions unit, you can pay attention to their facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, and their word choice to help decipher their emotions.

## 2. Understanding Their Perspective

Once you’ve identified how someone is feeling, we can now work to better understand their point of view. We can imagine how we might feel in their situation, or even remember a different time or situation that we felt that way in order to better relate to their current feelings/situation.

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### Practice in the Home:

When watching a movie or reading a book, spend time discussing how the characters might feel or think in the story or a specific scene. This will help children practice our two empathy skills of analyzing and understanding the emotions or thoughts of others.

It’s a great exercise to learn about empathy!

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\* Reminder! \*

It’s important to remember that everyone reacts differently to different situations, and people can have different perspectives of the same situation! Try your best to empathize with *their* perspective, even if yours is different. Remember that empathy is trying to understand theirs; it’s all about them.

# Embracing Diversity and Connecting with Others

Another way to foster empathy in your family is to emphasize the importance of finding commonalities with others and embracing diversity. As stated in Unit 7, it's important to find the ways in which we are unique and to fully embrace our individual differences. However, it's also important to find things we have in common with others, or ways that we can relate to one another. Connecting with others on shared interests, identities, or communities helps us to build better mutual understanding of each other's perspectives and experiences. In other words, recognizing our common humanity with others—especially those who appear different from us—helps us to better empathize with and relate to them.

## Identity Icebergs:

Much like icebergs, our identities are made up of a small visible part that floats “above the surface”, and a much bigger invisible part below. Our visible identity might include differences like our skin color, age, or the language we speak. The “invisible” parts of our identity include things like our interests, talents, religion, beliefs, or life experiences. It's important to acknowledge that the majority of what makes us who we are is invisible, and that if we take the time to get to know others—even if they initially appear to be very different from us—we will often find we have much more in common than we thought. Taking the time to get to know others helps us to avoid making harmful assumptions about people and helps us better understand or relate to them.

## Tips & Tricks:

- **Get Curious.** Get curious about others and their experiences. Assume a detective's mindset and set out to learn as much as you can. Ask open-ended questions that start with “what” or “how.” What experiences shaped the other person's life? What's most important to them?
- **Practice Active Listening.** When interacting with others, make sure you turn your inner voice off and focus entirely on the other person. Your only mission is to understand. When you seek to learn instead of to assert your own opinions, you can open up more doors for dialogue, collaboration, and relationship-building. You can use the tips you learned in Unit 2 of this toolkit!
- **Connect with Respect.** We as humans share 99 percent of the same DNA. We are much more similar than we are different. It's important to share stories with others and connect beyond surface-level things. By being more open and more respectful of one another, we can improve communication and better connect.
- **Share Openly.** The more you share about your own experiences, the more someone else can understand your point of view and the better they can relate to you. They might also in turn feel more comfortable sharing their own perspective, fostering mutual understanding and a reciprocated empathy.

# Fostering Compassion

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Compassion is concern for the well-being of others. It is feeling someone else's pain or suffering and wanting to take steps to help relieve that suffering. In other words, compassion is having empathy for someone else *and* caring enough to do something about it.

Why is it Important?

Children who demonstrate compassion feel more connected with others and with the world around them.

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How do we motivate our students to help others and grow their compassion? Check out these videos and the tips below:

[How to Help Your Child's Compassion Grow - YouTube](#)

[Meditating with Kids - YouTube](#)

- Practice self-compassion. Encourage your student to be kind to themselves in their words, thoughts, and actions, and make sure you practice self-compassion toward yourself, too! Check out Lesson 24 of this toolkit for more tips!
- Teach them they have value and deserve to be treated well. You can do this by valuing their opinions and feelings, listening to their ideas, and attending to their feelings. This will teach them that *all* humans deserve to be treated this way, and it will encourage them to treat others the same.
- Do acts of service for those in need. Find ways they can help out at home, in the community, or even globally. If there are causes your student cares about, help them take action to address those causes (fundraising, volunteering, writing letters, etc.)
- Send loving thoughts to those in need. If you can't take a physical action toward something, you can help your kids feel compassion for those suffering by including them in your thoughts, prayers, meditations, or discussions together.
- Encourage them to be compassionate to friends and strangers alike. This will then encourage them that *all* people deserve compassion, and that we should care about and try to minimize suffering for all people of the world.

# May

## Unit 9: Mindfulness

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As school is coming to an end and summertime approaches, now is the perfect time to institute a mindfulness practice with your student. Being focused on the here and the now is extremely beneficial for young children and adults alike. With increased time at home (and opportunities to get outside and be in nature) we hope you take the time to slow down, be present, and appreciate the small things. In this final unit of the Toolkit, you will learn how to do just that.

Ask your student: Do you know what mindfulness is? How do you slow down your mind and enjoy the present moment?

Ask yourself: Do I make an effort to be mindful? How can I be more present in my life? With my children?

# Intro to Mindfulness

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## What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the state of active attention to the present moment. It is purposefully focusing your mental effort and awareness on your current experience and surroundings:

- What is happening around you?
- What are you feeling?
- What is your experience of it in the present moment?

It is being aware of the here and now with an open mind. It allows you to observe both your internal and external world: observing both your thoughts and feelings, without judgment, as well as all that's happening in your surroundings. Living mindfully is existing fully now and experiencing the present moment, instead of allowing to pass you by.

## Benefits of Mindfulness:

The benefits of mindfulness are plentiful and are still being discovered by scientists. Known benefits include:

- Reduced stress
- Increased relationship satisfaction
- Improved focus
- Improved listening skills
- Enhanced creativity
- Improved decision-making and problem-solving
- Feelings of gratitude

...and many more! As you can see, mindfulness is very beneficial to our mental physical, social, and emotional health. Being mindful helps us build healthy habits for how we experience our lives and respond to daily life events.

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Mindfulness is *not* a natural tendency. Our brains naturally gravitate toward ruminating on past mistakes or planning for the future (e.g., “I should’ve...”, “I wish I’d...”, “I need to remember to...”, usually with a judgmental or negative perspective.

Mindfulness shifts our mental attention toward the present. It is meant to alleviate the self-induced suffering caused by these habits, and to change the way we tend to think about and respond to our experiences in a healthier, more positive way.

Check out [this video](#) for a great introduction to Mindfulness

# Mindfulness Breaks

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Our brains are not hardwired to be mindful – it requires practice and effort. We often spend most of thoughts/mental energy on worrying about the past or planning for the future. Shifting our focus to the present takes deliberate effort.

Listed below are concrete ways to practice mindfulness in your home. Try to integrate mindfulness breaks into your routine throughout the day. They serve as a reminder to refocus and shift our thoughts back to the present. It also gives our mind a quiet break amidst the noisy chatter that typically dominates our minds throughout the day.

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1. **Mindful Check-in:** The check-in is a great way to notice what you're feeling in the present moment. It's like checking the internal weather. Pay attention to 3 things: your **physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions** you're experiencing. Try doing the check-in with your family at mealtimes or on long drives.
2. **Mindful breathing:** Our breath serves as a great anchor for our attention. In other words, taking slow and deep breaths while focusing our attention on our breath (the rise and fall of our bellies, the air travelling in and out of our nose), is a great way to practice being in the present moment. If you find your mind wandering, simply bring your attention back to your breath. Try it out [this exercise](#) for yourself and [this exercise](#) with your student.
3. **Guided Meditations:** Try out a formal mindfulness meditation with a guided practice. Try [this one](#) for you and [this one](#) for your student. There are also many apps that offer guided mindfulness meditations. It might feel awkward at first, but you're sure to feel relaxed and present by the end!
4. **Body Scan:** A body scan helps us relax and settle the mind while noticing what physical sensations we might be feeling in our bodies. Try [this one](#) with your student.
5. **5-4-3-2-1 Method:** This method uses your 5 senses to bring you awareness to your surroundings and ground you to the present. Watch [this video](#) to see how it works. You can even practice this by taking a mindfulness walk to help [clear your head](#)
6. **Gratitude Practice:** Try any of the activities discussed in Unit 3. Thinking about what we're grateful for brings our attention to on one thing, or thought, that we can focus on in the present.
7. **Mindful Listening:** Practice the active listening skills from way back in Unit 2. Active listening requires staying in the present moment by paying attention to the person in front of us.
8. **Play:** playing a game and having fun is a great way to practice being in the present moment. When our brains are occupied by a game or a fun task, all our attention is on what is needed of us in the present moment! It's a great way to practice on focusing on what's in front of us

# You Are Not Your Thoughts

Mindfulness involves observing our thoughts, at a distance, without judgment. A big part of mindfulness is de-identifying with our thoughts. The two components of this are **acceptance** of our thoughts and **creating distance** between them and us.

**Acceptance** is allowing your thoughts and feelings to be as they are. You can observe them, but avoid giving them too much of your energy: try to be an unbiased, non-judgmental observer. Acceptance means letting your thoughts, feelings, and sensations (whether painful, pleasant, or neutral) come and go naturally without attempting to change or hide them. Watch [this video](#) for more on acceptance:

**Creating distance** is making space between yourself and your thoughts. With thoughts constantly coming and going, we can remind ourselves that we have the power over which thoughts we give energy to; we can choose to let go of thoughts that do not serve us. Take a step back and think about the kinds of thoughts you are having: how does this make me feel? Is this important to me? What things do I think about most often?" By observing our thoughts, we create some distance between us and them, giving us the power to choose how we respond: either by giving them more attention or choosing to let them go. Check out [this video](#) for more on creating distance.

## Responding vs. Reacting

How we respond to thoughts is a good indicator of if we're responding mindfully or not. Are we responding wisely or reacting blindly? Remember from Unit 6 on Emotions that we want to take our time to respond intentionally to something, rather than recklessly and impulsively reacting. This requires deidentifying with our thoughts.

We can refuse to identify with, or inhabit, our thoughts. For example, I can have the thought "I'm becoming annoyed", without allowing my whole body to become annoyed. Instead, we can observe the thoughts we are having about the situation, and simply redirect our energy more positively. We can refuse to get too caught up with the thought. We do this by reminding ourselves that we are not our thoughts, and that we have power over what we devote our energy to. This reminder helps us to respond rather than react.

In this way, mindfulness is like a superpower. Check out [this video](#) for more.

# Play

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As listed in the “Mindfulness Breaks” lesson of this unit, one of the best ways to practice mindfulness is through play! The importance of play for a young student cannot be overstated. When we are fully engaged in a game or task, we can access what scientists call “Flow State”. You may have heard this term before or even experienced it. It’s when your active mental attention is entirely focused on the task at-hand, you feel fully immersed in the moment, and you enter a state where you might even feel your perception time begin to disappear. It’s described as being “in the zone” and often happens when kids feel challenged (without being too difficult), are using their imagination, and are engaged in something that’s meaningful to them. This occurs frequently during play time!

## Ditch the Technology

Especially during the summertime, it’s important to engage students in games or activities that allow them to play and potentially find “flow”. When watching TV, or mindlessly scrolling on your phone, you’re passively engaging your brain.

Planning games or activities provides opportunities to engage actively and to find flow, which helps train your brain to be mindful and exist in the present moment.

It’s also great for improving focus and attention span. Make sure you give your kids as much “play” as you can this summer, and avoid too many long stretches of watching TV or being on their phone.

## Get Outside

Getting outside and being active is great for our minds and bodies. Being active is shown to boost our mood with endorphins, and sunshine gives us vitamin D which is associated with health benefits including stronger bones and teeth and increased serotonin.

On top of all that, outside is the ideal place to practice mindfulness! Aside from increased opportunities for play, there’s endless sensory stimulation to bring us back to the present moment: the sound of birds, the feeling of sunshine, or the bright colors of trees.