

# REACH MS NEWSLETTER

*Realizing Excellence for ALL Children in Mississippi*

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

MAY 2019 | ISSUE 6

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS

### SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPETENCY: RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

In our last installment of our six-part SEL newsletter series, we are putting into practice the social and emotional skills that have been addressed throughout this school year in order to make responsible decisions. Responsible decision-making is the fifth and last core Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competency, enhancing “regular” decision-making by attaching an ethical value to decision that involves contemplating how decisions will affect oneself and others (CASEL, 2018). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) definition of responsible decision-making includes the ability to identify, analyze and solve problems while reflecting on the outcomes of past choices and evaluating the outcomes of current possible choices.

Responsible decision-making is a process with each component heavily reliable on the previous one. The first component or step in the process is to be able to identify a problem – whether that be through spoken words, inward thoughts or gestures (e.g., I want an item someone has OR I want to make the cheer team, but there are only seven spots). In order to make a responsible decision, we have to be able to know more than there is a conflict and what the specific problem is. The second step of the responsible decision-making process is to analyze possible solutions to the problem. (For younger students, we break this step down into two steps with the second step being to think of possible solutions and the third step being to analyze these solutions.) In our analysis, we should ponder the outcomes of each possible solution and ask ourselves whether the solution is safe, whether the solution is fair, and how others would feel if we chose this solution (I can use my words to ask for the item; I can trade the item I have for the item I want; I can snatch the item; OR I will attend extra practice sessions; I will sneak into the drawer where the score sheets are and alter them; I will try out again next year if I don't make it). Ethics fit into this step in the process, especially for secondary students and adults, as we should think of the morals and values we have as a person and a society while we are analyzing possible solutions to the problem (e.g., what society thinks about altering score sheets).



The last official step to making a responsible decision is choosing a solution and trying it. Sometimes, this solution works, and sometimes it doesn't (e.g., I used my words and still didn't get the item OR I practiced extra and still didn't make the team). Sometimes this solution works in one setting or with one person but not in or with others (e.g., Johnny always gives me the item when I ask, but Mark doesn't OR practicing extra didn't help me make the cheer team, but it did help me win the soccer game). We know this by reflecting on prior decisions and evaluating why they did or did not work well. As adults assisting students, it's important to allow them to generate possible solutions even if we don't think they are favorable so they can go through the analysis and later reflect and evaluate. If we always present or advocate for “good” solutions when students are on their own in non-facilitated environments where they are presenting with non-favorable solutions, they will not have had the practice of discerning good solutions from those that are not.

Responsible decision-making includes solving problems in daily life but doing so in context of the social and emotional outcomes the solutions will entail. In the matrix on the following page, components of responsible decision-making are aligned to one grade band/the family; however, all of these components are appropriate to teach in any grade or through the family at varying levels of depth. The strategies listed for each grade band are directly linked to the targeted skill. These strategies can be adapted across the grade bands for intentional teaching of the targeted skill at any age.

Resources:

- [casel.org/core-competencies](https://casel.org/core-competencies)
- [isbe.net/Pages/Social-Emotional-Learning-Standards.aspx](https://isbe.net/Pages/Social-Emotional-Learning-Standards.aspx)



GRADE/BAND	SKILL TARGETED	STRATEGIES
Early Childhood Pre-K – 1st	Make Positive Choices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teach the 4-step problem solving process to your students using visual(s). <a href="https://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies/problemsolvingboy.pdf">csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies/problemsolvingboy.pdf</a></li> <li>2. Use visual solutions to provide possible choices of problems to students. <a href="https://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/2006/getatimer2006.pdf">csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules/2006/getatimer2006.pdf</a></li> <li>3. Introduce the concepts of “problems” and “solutions” by reading the book, “I Have a Little Problem,” <i>Said the Bear</i>, and discussing the elements in the story. <a href="https://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/booknook/bn_problem.pdf">csefel.vanderbilt.edu/booknook/bn_problem.pdf</a></li> <li>4. Present a “fake” problem to the students that ties into daily routines or thematic units. Have children generate possible positive choices for this problem.</li> <li>5. Encourage students to “use their words” as their first choice to solve problems instead of a negative behavior. <a href="https://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/scriptedstories/words.html">csefel.vanderbilt.edu/scriptedstories/words.html</a></li> </ol>
Elementary 2nd – 5th	Evaluate Alternative Solutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduce students to the “Tucker Turtle Technique” with visuals and encourage them to stop and think before acting on a solution. <a href="https://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules-archive/module2/handouts/7.pdf">csefel.vanderbilt.edu/modules-archive/module2/handouts/7.pdf</a></li> <li>2. Provide students with examples of good and bad solutions to everyday problems and have them role play each solution. Discuss what made each possible solution good or bad, safe or unsafe, etc.</li> <li>3. Teach students the SODAS Method – Situation. Options. Disadvantages. Advantages. Solution.</li> <li>4. Allow students to play games that require critical thinking and problem-solving skills such as chess, checkers, etc. Have students reflect on their choices. Here are some additional problem-solving games for the classroom: <a href="https://stenhouse.com/sites/default/files/public/legacy/pdfs/8247ch10.pdf">stenhouse.com/sites/default/files/public/legacy/pdfs/8247ch10.pdf</a></li> </ol>
Middle School 6th – 8th	Determine Relationship Between Societal Norms and Decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When a student breaks a classroom or school rule, talk about it. Discuss how the student’s behavior impacts the smooth running of the classroom and/or how it impacts other students. By talking through the misbehavior, the student comes to realize the impact of their actions on others and why societal norms are important.</li> <li>2. Lead a classroom discussion about societal norms and how students feel when they are broken. Most middle school students have little emotional reaction to rule breaking unless they see how it impacts others.</li> <li>3. Give students the opportunity to have input on classroom rules. The classroom may already have defined rules, but have classroom discussions to define them further so that students understand the importance of following the rules and how breaking the rule impacts others. <a href="https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_misunderstood_middle_schooler">greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_misunderstood_middle_schooler</a></li> <li>4. Show a video or read a story where the main character makes poor social choices (i.e. <i>The Girls</i>). Lead students in a group discussion about the societal norms and why they are important. Have students decide what they would do differently if they were in the same situation. <a href="https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/sel%20standards%20and%20benchmarks%20anchorage%20school%20dist_.pdf">smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/sel%20standards%20and%20benchmarks%20anchorage%20school%20dist_.pdf</a></li> <li>5. Discuss family, school and societal boundaries. Have students work in small groups to complete the Boundaries Worksheet. Discuss what life would be like without boundaries or rules. <a href="https://scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/grades-6-8-social-emotional-skills/scholastic.com/content/dam/teachers/articles/migrated-files-in-body/setting_boundries.pdf">scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/grades-6-8-social-emotional-skills/scholastic.com/content/dam/teachers/articles/migrated-files-in-body/setting_boundries.pdf</a></li> </ol>
High School 9th – 12th	Analyze Effects of Present Decisions on The Future	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask students to create a list of values they think are important. The students will then explain how these identified values play a part in their decision making process.</li> <li>2. Have students think back over the previous day and make a list of all the decisions they made. They may have chosen to hit the snooze button rather than get up, study for a test instead of eating lunch, or not do the assigned reading for an afternoon class. Ask them to look at each decision and consider what their choices reveal about what’s important to them. Have them write a reflective paragraph in which they consider the potential and obvious results?</li> <li>3. ICED is an acronym that spells out the steps in the decision-making process: identifying the problem, creating alternatives, evaluating the alternatives, and deciding on the best solution. Type up several fictional scenarios for teenage decision-making with positive and negative outcomes. Examples might include deciding whether to tell an adult about a friend’s drug use, shoplift a T-shirt they can’t afford, or plagiarize a paper. Students can discuss these dilemmas in groups, working through the potential consequences to find a solution or better decision to make. Each group can then share their scenario and how they used the ICED process to reach their final decisions.</li> <li>4. Ask teens to make a list of school subjects, activities and hobbies they enjoy and then list one potential career that aligns with each item on the list. Have them choose one career they would each like to have someday and list the skills and special training they’d need to hold these jobs. Create action plans of how they might achieve this career. This will get them thinking about how the choices they’re currently making could keep them from their goals.</li> <li>5. Create a fictional scenario involving a big decision and write four different outcomes on slips of paper. After reading the scenario story to the class, have students work in groups to randomly select one outcome and put together a skit showing what happens. Once all the groups have performed their skits, discuss which outcome was the best solution, which was the poorest choice, and how these decisions affected everyone involved. <a href="https://classroom.synonym.com/decisionmaking-activities-teens-7742556.html">classroom.synonym.com/decisionmaking-activities-teens-7742556.html</a></li> </ol>
Family	Discuss Own Family Values and Impact on Decisions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anticipate and preview experiences. Talk aloud about what a particular experience might be like to build your child’s ability to recognize their own feelings and develop their own methods to prepare for a situation and make the appropriate decision.</li> <li>2. Listen. When your child has a tough moment, create a space to listen. Listening is a simple and easy way to validate the feelings that kids experience, regardless of the size of the problem and to help to build their decision-making skills.</li> <li>3. Reflect. As things happen in the world around you—whether it be a relatively insignificant moment at a sports game or something that makes national headlines—engage your child in conversations that help them identify problems and design solutions. When kids work through the problem-solving process with you, they grow their ability to think critically on their own.</li> <li>4. Self-talk. When you’re feeling frustrated in the grocery store checkout line and take a deep breath to keep your cool, invite your child into your world by using self-talk. Say, “We are in a hurry, and this line is not moving very fast. I am feeling frustrated, so I’m going to take a deep breath.” This quick exchange teaches your child words to associate with their feelings, as well as strategies like taking deep breaths. The words you use will become your child’s inner monologue when they’re faced with similar situations.</li> <li>5. Personalize your conversations. Your family’s background and experiences will inform how you talk with your child about their world. The more you personalize conversations about social-emotional learning, the more relevant that learning becomes, and the more it will influence their decisions now and in their future.</li> <li>6. Build up your child. Help your child learn and apply the skills and understanding needed to manage their feelings. When your child is struggling with something new, remind them of a time they worked hard to overcome obstacles. By shining a light on your child’s past successes, the path forward is a bit clearer. <a href="https://parentparachute.com">parentparachute.com</a> <a href="https://mindyeti.com/v2/s">mindyeti.com/v2/s</a> <a href="https://confidentparentsconfidentkids.org">confidentparentsconfidentkids.org</a> <a href="https://parenttoolkit.com">parenttoolkit.com</a></li> </ol>

## REACH MS at THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

118 College Drive #5057, Hattiesburg, MS 39406 | Phone: 601.266.4693 | Web: [usm.edu/reachms](https://usm.edu/reachms) | Email: [REACHMS@usm.edu](mailto:REACHMS@usm.edu)

