

SEL NEWS

From the APCSD Social Emotional Learning Team

Welcome to the first AP SEL Newsletter

We look forward to bringing you information about social-emotional learning happening in our school district, providing families with resources for home and sharing information about opportunities for discussion and learning. Each newsletter will include information on social-emotional skills as well as addressing topics in mental health. We are kicking off our first edition with a focus on connections, a quick SEL question and answer section and our first Topics in Mental Health section. In the upcoming weeks, we will be sharing information about opportunities for families to learn more about social-emotional learning through community presentations, round-table discussions and workshops. Newsletters and resources will be available on the district website soon so please check that out too! If you have suggestions for topics you'd like to learn more about, please drop us a line.

Kind regards,

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FAMILY AND SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

We have all been touched by the pressures of the Covid 19 Global Pandemic. For our children, the impact of quarantine, social distance, the changing of guidelines and recommendations has been challenging. The good news is that children, pre-K to High School, are very resilient! They bounce back, perhaps more easily than adults. Our job is to provide the support and resources to help them remain flexible and positive.

One of the simplest things we can do to help support our kids is to provide opportunities for connection. This can be more challenging with adolescents, but dinner table conversation and conversations in the car are two great opportunities to connect with your kids. Although this article focuses on young children, we find that teens will happily answer these questions as long as you do some sharing as well. They may seem like silly questions, but that's part of what makes them so good....increasing connection and self-awareness and laughing at the same time is really fun!

<https://www.anxioustoddlers.com/family-dinner/#.YWhK2BrMI2x>

Here is an article more specifically about connecting with pre-teens and teens:

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/preteen.html>

Another important way we can support our children is to work together as a team; a home-school partnership. Kids are always looking for consistency in connection and are quick to figure out when, and how, who is communicating with whom. We want to be working with parents and we encourage you to make connections with the school. Here is an article that provides some ideas on how to increase the connection between home and school.

<https://familyapp.com/5-ways-parents-can-connect-with-kids-school/>

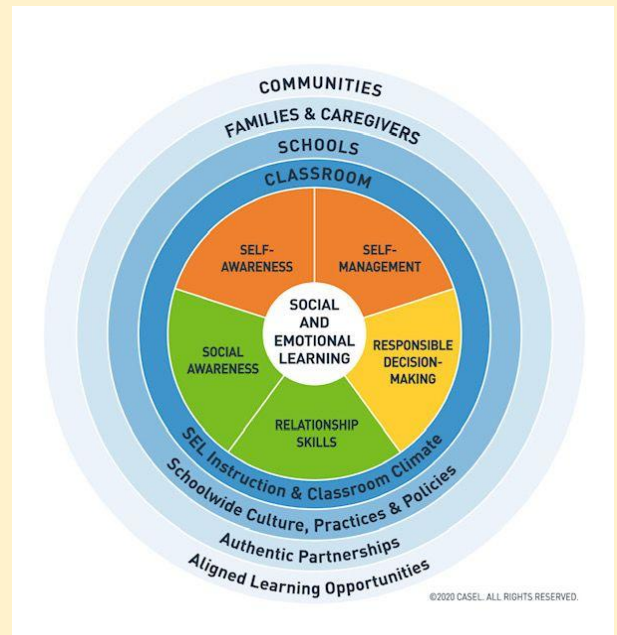


SEL Q & A

What is Social Emotional Learning and where is it promoted?

Social-emotional learning is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides a framework for social emotional learning centering around 5 main competencies. Circling the five competencies are the key settings where students live and grow. APCSD and CASEL agree that "Families are a child's first teacher and an essential factor in the cultivation of social and emotional competencies throughout a child's life. When schools and families work together, they can build strong connections that reinforce social and emotional skill development." Our goal as a school is to partner with families and the community to help students become their best selves.



Why is SEL important?

- A 2021 systematic review found that universal SEL interventions enhance young people's social and emotional skills and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in the short term.
- SEL interventions that address the five core competencies increased students' academic performance by 11 percentile points, compared to students who did not participate.
- 6 of the identified top 10 skills for the future involve social and emotional competence, including complex problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.
- Read more at <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>

Is this a new fad?

Social emotional competencies are not new but there is a renewed focus on helping students to learn the skills. Just as schools review how we teach reading or math, we revisit how we are teaching the cross-content skills that help students succeed in school and beyond. Schools have used character education programs, emotional intelligence curriculums and a number of other programs and products to help build skills. The Averill Park School District's focus on social emotional learning is a commitment to skill building rather than a commitment to a single curriculum.

Check out the APCSD podcast on SEL from August 2021

<https://anchor.fm/averill-park-csd/episodes/Discussing-ESY-and-SEL-e15lt08>

There are numerous articles on how education has incorporated SEL over time. Here are a few links:

<https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-social-emotional-learning-is-important-but-what-do-all-those-sel-terms-concepts-ideas-actually-mean-for-the-classroom-new-online-tool-helps-sort-them-out/>

<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-05-07-why-social-emotional-learning-is-suddenly-in-the-spotlight>

<https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history>

Topics in Mental Health: Worry or Anxiety

Given the continuing impact of Covid-19 on daily life, it is no surprise that the terms worry and anxiety have become common in everyday conversation. While these words are often used interchangeably, they are not entirely the same thing and they are not necessarily bad.

What's the difference?

Worry is typically described as being in our minds (thoughts), while anxiety is both mental and physical. Worry is usually connected to a real, specific event and is the brain's way of trying to work through fear in a logical way. Worrying about failing a test might lead to studying more. Anxiety tends to be more generalized and can become exaggerated. Still, not all anxiety is bad. Anxiety, like most things, falls on a continuum ranging from low levels of fear or apprehension, mild sensations of muscle tightness and sweating, or doubts about your ability to complete a task to severe, persistent worry that is excessive for the situation, and extreme avoidance of anxiety-provoking situations. On one end of the spectrum, symptoms are mild, short term and can help us to prepare and on the other end the symptoms cause distress, impair daily functioning, and occur for a significant period.

Here is a good overview of worry and anxiety:

- <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-worry-anxiety-are-different>

Other articles of interest:

- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Signs-your-Teen-May-Need-More-Support.aspx>
- <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/worrying.html>

Why does it matter?

If you or your child are experiencing persistent worry that is not redirectable, interferes with daily responsibilities or relationships or is having an adverse impact on health, it is important to seek professional help. A doctor or school counselor can point you in the right direction.

Fortunately, evidence shows that mindfulness and deep breathing exercises can really help when you, or your child, are feeling worried or anxious. Here are three exercises that are good for all ages that you can try together!

- [The Butterfly Hug](#)
- [10 Minute Mindfulness Meditation for Teens](#)
- [Bubble Bounce! Mindfulness for Children \(Mindful Looking\)](#)

Two activities you can use at home to help students manage worry are::

Counting or reciting: This is an easy activity that can be used anywhere. When big worries start to brew, remind your child to count or recite something. You can make this as easy (count from 1 to 20) or complex (recite the alphabet backwards) as you or your child need. Over time you can teach your child to do this silently so they have an invisible and portable strategy to calm their mind and body.

Coloring and Jig-Saw Puzzles : Adult coloring books have been popping up everywhere over the past few years and for a while puzzles where in such high demand they were almost impossible to get. Coloring and puzzling are great ways to unwind and de-stress. They can be solitary activities or you can do them together as a family. Worry is future oriented, and completing a puzzle and coloring are oriented in the present...what we are doing now...so they can help ground us and calm our mind and body.