



Schools, Families, and Social and Emotional Learning

Ideas and Tools for Working with Parents and Families

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The Role of Parents in Social and Emotional Learning

“Family life is our first school for emotional learning,” states Daniel Goleman, the author of the groundbreaking book *Emotional Intelligence*. Through family life “we learn how to feel about ourselves and how others will react to our feelings; how to think about these feelings and what choices we have in reacting; how to read and express hopes and fears.”¹ This learning takes place, says Goleman, not only in what parents say and do, but in how adults treat each other. When parents are emotionally competent in their own relationships, they are more capable of helping their children work through their emotional challenges.

Parents’ impact. The emotional lessons that children learn from their parents are powerful and long-lasting. When parents ignore their children’s feelings, children come to believe their feelings are not important. When parents repeatedly threaten or punish children for a display of emotion, children learn that emotions are dangerous things that need to be held inside and hidden—an invitation to later depression or rage. When parents are unable to show their angry and destructive children other ways of expressing emotion, children learn it is acceptable to strike out at others or have a tantrum to get whatever they want.²

A careful study of parental relationships and parents’ interactions with children has shown another style of interacting that can help children grow in emotionally sound ways. Researcher John Gottman refers to this as being an “emotion coach.”³ This means that parents use opportunities of difficult or hurtful emotions, such as when a child has had an argument or experienced a disappointment, to explore the true nature of those feelings and how to work with them constructively. Parents can encourage children to use feeling words, such as “I feel sad” or “That made me really angry,” to express their emotions rather than simply act on them.

A growing body of research suggests that helping children to develop good social and emotional skills early in life makes a big difference in their long-term health and well-being. Studies have shown that children’s social and emotional functioning and behaviors begin to stabilize around the age of eight and can predict the state of their behavior and mental health later in life.⁴ In other words, if children learn to express emotions constructively and engage in caring and respectful relationships before and while they are in their lower elementary grades, they are more likely to avoid depression, violence, and other serious mental health problems as they grow older.

Children’s Success in School and Life: The Role of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Adults know from experience that when they are gripped by intense feelings, whether of joy or grief or fear, it becomes difficult to focus on the task at hand. Parents recognize that when their children are upset, they are far less receptive to what adults are trying to teach than when they are calm and happy. Whether children are dealing with such day-to-day stresses as arguments or homework, or life-altering realities such as parental divorce, economic hardship, family moves, or the illness or death of loved ones, both their emotions and learning are clearly affected. Stress and its emotional consequences may be unavoidable, but expressing emotions in healthy ways means that children can deal with the pressures of life with much greater strength, wisdom, and resilience.

The hopeful news is that schools and parents, working together, can play pivotal roles in supporting children’s healthy development in dealing with their emotions and in their relationships with others. This is referred to as *social and emotional learning* (SEL) because these are indeed skills that can be learned and mastered, every bit as much as language or mathematics or reading can be. Furthermore, teaching academic skills and social and emotional skills is not an either/or proposition. In fact, there is a great deal of research evidence to indicate that students perform *better* when academics are combined with SEL.^{5 6} Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* New York: Teachers College Press.⁷

What are these crucial skills? The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), an organization that focuses on the use of SEL as an essential part of education, speaks about five basic sets of skills, or competencies, that can be systematically cultivated both at home and at school.⁸

- **Self-Awareness:** Identifying one’s thoughts, feelings, and strengths, and recognizing how they influence one’s choices and actions.
- **Social Awareness:** Identifying and understanding the thoughts and feelings of others, respecting their rights, and appreciating diversity.
- **Self-Management:** Establishing and working toward short- and long-term goals, and handling emotions so that they facilitate rather than interfere with the task at hand.

- **Responsible Decision Making:** Generating, implementing, and evaluating positive and informed solutions to problems, and assuming responsibility for personal decisions and behaviors.
- **Relationship Skills:** Communication, listening, and negotiation skills to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding connections with individuals and groups.

When social and emotional skills are taught and mastered, they help students to succeed not just in school but in all avenues of life. Numerous studies have found that young people who possess these social and emotional skills are in fact happier, more confident, and more capable as students, family members, friends, and workers.^{9 10} At the same time, they are far *less* likely to experience harmful behaviors such as substance abuse, depression, or violence. Social and emotional learning is a powerful way to help children become healthy, caring, and competent.

How Teachers can Help Parents to Teach SEL Skills

Many respected social and emotional programs use parenting workshops, interactive homework assignments, and other approaches to assist parents in teaching their children skills that promote social and emotional learning. Some of the best programs are described briefly in this packet. When parents and students practice and use the skills at home, the effects are doubly beneficial. Not only are young people better able to acquire the skills, but relationships within the family tend to improve when family members listen to each other openly and solve problems together. Children also come to appreciate the fact that learning is a lifelong process, not something that stops when they leave school.

Getting support. Parents also need support from each other. It is less and less common for parents to have an extended family around them to offer advice or share in the tasks of raising children. Often parents themselves feel isolated, lonely, and overwhelmed. When parents have the opportunity to meet with and learn from a skilled teacher as well as from each other, they can share the problems they experience with their children and learn ways of working through them. They learn that they're not the only ones experiencing certain problems with their children and that there are creative and constructive options for addressing them. When a group of parents agree to support each other in setting household rules, such as limiting time in front of the television or

establishing regular times for homework, it is much more likely that those rules will be enforced by adults and obeyed by children.

Many parents feel unsure of their own parenting abilities and helpless in the face of the negative influences so common in the media and culture—the glamorization of sex and violence and the put-downs and humiliations of well-known figures in public life. Still, children want their parents to be there guiding them and teaching them. A recent national poll found that 86% of young people between the ages of 10 and 17 said their parents were very important influences on their lives. In contrast, only 22% reported that television, movies, and popular music occupied a place of special importance.¹¹ No one can take the place of parents in raising caring, confident, capable children.

Parents and Schools Working Together: A Needed Partnership

“Schools and families are both partners in the healthy development of the child,” say researchers Pamela Davis-Kean and Jacquelynne Eccles of the University of Michigan.¹² When families and schools work together, the benefits for students—academically, socially, and emotionally—are magnified. According to a recent review of the research,¹³ students who experience strong connections between their homes and their schools:

- Attend school more regularly and achieve higher scores on standardized tests;
- Have better records of attendance;
- Are less likely to be placed in special education;
- Are more likely to avoid high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse or violence;
- Show improved behavior in homes and at school; and
- Display better social skills and adjustment to school.

Parents also benefit. In a review of successful family-school partnerships, the National PTA found that involved parents were more confident in making decisions about their family and enjoyed being with their children more. They were more sensitive to their children's social, emotional, and intellectual needs. They were more affectionate and used less punishment with their children. They enjoyed more positive communication with teachers.¹⁴

While the need for these partnerships is great, so are

the many barriers to such partnerships. Some teachers, and, sadly, many parents, don't believe that parents can play a meaningful role in guiding their children's academic or social development. Teachers often have no training in ways to invite the collaboration of families. Sometimes parents, because of their own unhappy childhood encounters with education, feel threatened by any interactions with the school. Both teachers and parents are often so overwhelmed by the demands of their work and personal lives that they can't find the time to make collaborations happen, even if they believe in their importance.

Being good partners. Yet in spite of all the obstacles, most parents and teachers want to establish better ways of cooperating that support the healthy development and school success of children. How can parents be good partners with the schools in the education of their children? Studies suggest¹⁵ that children benefit socially, emotionally, and academically when parents:

- **Set high standards** for children's educational activities and support learning in the home environment;
- **Communicate with children** about school-related matters such as homework and school programs;
- **Supervise children's activities**, such as homework, television viewing, and after-school time; and
- **Participate in school events**, such as volunteering or attending parenting workshops.¹⁶

One proven way to strengthen the relationship between parents and schools is through family-school teams.¹⁷ These teams—which typically include parents, teachers, and school administrators—make decisions about designing and implementing programs, often for parent involvement and student support. When parents are actively involved in making decisions about school practices, then they and other parents enjoy programs and activities that truly address their needs. And when parents and teachers work closely together, then students hear the same messages at home and school about acceptable behavior and the importance of studying and learning. Having common expectations makes it far easier for students to succeed academically and become more responsible and confident.

The advantages that students receive in elementary and middle schools from school-parent collaborations are not temporary. There is considerable evidence of lasting results in such areas as increased rates of high school graduation and diminished mental health problems and destructive behaviors. The investment of time and energy in partnerships pays rich dividends.



HANDOUTS FOR PARENTS

Parents and schools working together to build students' social, emotional, and academic skills can accomplish far more than either group working alone. Both schools and parents can contribute in unique ways to make the partnership fruitful.

The handouts included with this packet offer “small things” that all parents can consider doing. When done on a regular basis with children, these actions can make a big difference in children's well-being and social and emotional learning.

The suggestions in the handouts are not an exhaustive list. Nor are they meant to be implemented all at once. In some cases, they may sound simple but take some advance thought and planning to put into action. You may want to suggest that parents begin with a single item and add others as they gain comfort and confidence with using these strategies.



Ten Things You Can Do at Home

1. ***Focus on strengths.*** When your child brings home a test, talk first about what he or she did well. Then talk about what can be improved. Praise specific strengths. Don't just criticize things that were done wrong.
2. ***Follow up with consequences for misbehavior.*** Sometimes parents say things in anger that don't curb the behavior in the long run. You might say, "Because of what you did, no television for a month." Both you and your child know that after one or two days the TV will go back on. Decide on consequences that are fair, and then carry them out.
3. ***Ask children how they feel.*** When you ask your child about his or her feelings, the message is that feelings matter and you care.
4. ***Find ways to stay calm when angry.*** It's normal to get angry or irritated sometimes. Learn to recognize "trigger situations" and do something about them before you lose control. Try taking deep breaths for a few moments. Consider having a "quiet area" where people can go when they are upset. Or you can just stop talking and leave the room for a while. Sit down as a family and talk about what everyone can do to stay calm.
5. ***Avoid humiliating or mocking your child.*** This can make children feel bad about themselves. It can lead to a lack of self-confidence and, in turn, problems with schoolwork, illness, and trouble getting along with friends. Unfair criticism and sarcasm also hurts the bond of trust between children and parents. Be mindful of how you speak to your children. Give them the room to make mistakes as they learn new skills.
6. ***Be willing to apologize.*** Parents need to be able to apologize to their children if what they said was not what they meant. Calmly explain what you really wanted to say. By doing this you're being a good role model. You're showing how important it is to apologize after hurting someone. You're teaching that it's possible to work through problems with respect for the other person.
7. ***Give children choices and respect their wishes.*** When children have a chance to make choices, they learn how to solve problems. If you make all their choices for them, they'll never learn this key skill. Giving children ways to express preferences and make decisions shows that their ideas and feelings matter.
8. ***Ask questions that help children solve problems on their own.*** When parents hear their child has a problem, it's tempting to step in and take over. But this can harm a child's ability to find solutions on his or her own. A helpful approach is to ask good questions. Examples include, "What do you think you can do in this situation?" and "If you choose a particular solution, what will be the consequences of that choice?"
9. ***Read books and stories together.*** Reading stories aloud is a way to share something enjoyable and learn together about other people. For example, stories can be a way to explore how people deal with common issues like making or losing friends or handling conflicts. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian to recommend stories on themes that interest you and your children.
10. ***Encourage sharing and helping.*** There are many ways to do this. Together you and your child can prepare food in a homeless shelter or go on a fund-raising walk-a-thon. You can help out elderly neighbors or needy families. This teaches children that what they do can make a difference in the lives of others.

Ten Things You Can Do with Your School

1. **Focus on the value of learning.** Take some time each day to ask what your child learned in school. Don't focus just on math, English, and social studies. Ask how your child gets along with other students and how he or she feels about school. Learning is for life, not just school. Talk about what you yourself may have learned in the course of a day.
2. **Focus on creating a positive learning environment at home.** Make regular times and provide a quiet, well-lit place for homework. Limit the amount of TV. Decide with your child about rules for dealing with interruptions such as phone calls or visitors. Make sure your home has plenty of books, magazines, and newspapers.
3. **Set up a school bulletin board at home.** Display the school calendar and other flyers from the school. Decide as a family which school events you will attend. Help your child get involved in interesting and worthwhile school activities.
4. **Listen when your child talks about school.** Pay attention to what your child says about school. If your child is happy with his or her classroom and school activities, write or call the teacher to say thank you. If your child seems frustrated, bored, or lonely at school, call a teacher or counselor to see what can be done.
5. **Help your child with homework.** Don't ever do homework for your child. But do help. Assist your child in setting priorities for schoolwork. For example, you can encourage your child to tackle the difficult assignments first while he or she has the most energy.
6. **Take advantage of school meetings.** Finding the time to attend school meetings can be a challenge. Many schools offer alternative times and places for parents to ask questions and discuss solutions to common problems. Often these meetings provide child care. Make these kinds of meetings a priority.
7. **Volunteer at school.** By volunteering in the classroom, you can better understand how to support your child's learning at home. Try being a room parent, a chaperone at school functions, or a tutor. Even parents who work full-time can visit their child's school at night or on weekends. Create opportunities if they do not exist.
8. **Attend school activities.** Whenever possible, attend your child's plays, sports events, or science fairs. Your presence shows that your child's interests and work are important to you. It can also give you a chance to meet other parents and school staff.
9. **Join or create a "Social and Emotional Learning Book Club."** In some communities parents have created book clubs to learn how they can encourage their children's social and emotional development. This could be part of the PTA or PTO. It could also be something you do informally with friends or parents of your child's classmates. (See the brief reading list included with this packet.)
10. **Encourage good communication with the school.** Good communication is basic to supporting your child's education. Ask your child's teacher to provide suggested home activities to support skills the children are learning at school. Ask for homework assignments that directly involve parents. An example might be students asking parents about their cultural background or work experiences.

Tips for Parents

By working together schools and parents can promote children’s social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL includes some key skills:

- ◆ **Self-awareness**—recognizing feelings and managing anger.
- ◆ **Understanding others**—developing empathy and taking the perspective of others.
- ◆ **Making responsible decisions** and following through. This includes considering long-term consequences of your actions for yourself and others.
- ◆ **Understanding yourself**—handling emotions, setting goals, and dealing with obstacles.
- ◆ **Building healthy relationships**—saying no to negative peer pressure and working to resolve conflicts constructively.

When young people master these skills, they are more likely to succeed in school and life. They become happier and more confident. They are better students, family members, friends, and workers. They are less prone to drug and alcohol use, depression, or violence. Social and emotional learning is like an insurance policy for a healthy, positive, successful life.

The Role of Parents

Long before children can say their first word or take their first step, they respond to the touch, tone of voice, and moods of their parents. This is the beginning of learning about emotions and relationships. It happens as naturally as their bodies grow and develop.

“Family life is our first school for emotional learning,” states author Daniel Goleman. In the family, he says, “we learn how to feel about ourselves and how others will react to our feelings.” This learning happens both through what parents say and do to their children and how they treat each other.

Some Key Points to Consider

- ◆ Children learn important lessons about emotions from their parents. When parents threaten or punish children for a display of emotion, children learn emotions are dangerous, to be held inside. This can lead in later life to depression or unchecked rage. When parents do not teach their children acceptable ways to express anger, the children may think it’s okay to strike out at others or have tantrums.
- ◆ Parents should think of themselves as “emotion coaches.” They can encourage their children to use feeling words, such as “I feel sad” or “That made me really angry” to express emotions.
- ◆ When children learn to express feelings and respect others, they become happier and healthier. Such children are less likely to have problems with depression, violence, or other mental health issues as they grow older.
- ◆ Many SEL programs for schools include activities for parents. When parents and students practice SEL skills at home, the effects are even greater. Children also come to see learning as a lifelong process, not something that stops when they leave school.
- ◆ Children want their parents to guide and teach them. A recent poll found that 86% of young people 10-17 years old said their parents were very important influences on their lives. Only 22% said television, movies, and popular music were so important. No one can take the place of parents in raising caring, confident, capable children.

Books for Parents

All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do To Raise Caring And Responsible Children and Adolescents, by Peter L. Benson. (Jossey-Bass, 1997). The author focuses on how to build developmental assets in young people based on support, empowerment, boundaries, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ, by Daniel Goleman. (Bantam, 1994) This best-seller raised public awareness about the importance of emotions in healthy human development.

Emotionally Intelligent Parenting: How to Raise a Self-Disciplined, Responsible, Socially Skilled Child, by Maurice Elias, Steven Tobias, and Brian Friedlander. (Harmony Books, 1999) Parents can learn how to communicate with children on a deeper, more gratifying level and help them support their child's development in relating to others.

The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child, by John Gottman. (Simon & Schuster, 1997) The author describes how parents can use an effective five-step process to become "Emotion Coaches" and teach their children how to express and manage emotions throughout their lives.

Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers, by Maurice Elias, Stephen Tobias, and Brian Friedlander. (Random House, 2000) The authors explain creative, caring, and constructive ways to parent adolescents during these crucial years.

Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child To Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along With Others: The "I Can Problem Solve" Program, by Myrna Shure. (Pocket Books, 1996) This book provides a step-by-step guide for teaching young children how to solve problems and resolve daily conflicts constructively.

Raising a Thinking Preteen, by Myrna Shure. (Henry Holt, 2000) In a follow-up to her best-selling book *Raising a Thinking Child*, Dr. Shure explains a program for resolving conflicts and developing critical thinking skills that can be used with 8-12-year-olds.

WHAT PARENTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

How do social and emotional learning programs affect families? No one can explain it better than parents who have directly experienced these efforts. The five parents interviewed below all have one or more children involved with a social and emotional learning program in their local public schools. They candidly describe both how their children have benefited from these programs and how they as parents have gained from them as well.

Each program is described briefly at the beginning of the interview. These programs not only have documented success in supporting the healthy development of young people, but are notable for their efforts to involve parents. Each program is described in more detail in the book *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*, published by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning in collaboration with the Mid Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory for Student Success (see *Resources* section for further information). Contact information for all the programs can also be found in the *Resources* section.

ROBIN BRADSHAW
Louisville, Kentucky

"There's more to learning than just reading, writing, and arithmetic. The emotional needs of a child are just as important as the academic ones."

Program Overview: CARING SCHOOL COMMUNITY (part of the Child Development Project) is designed to build caring relationships among students, between students and teachers, and between schools and families. The program has four main components: class meetings, cross-age buddies or peer mentoring, "homeside" activities that students complete with the help of parents or other caring adults, and school-wide activities for parents and students. The program is currently in 150 schools throughout the country.

Robin Bradshaw: It's hard to raise really good kids. Sometimes, it feels like a lost battle with TV and what kids learn from their friends and society. That's why I agree with the philosophy that it takes more than parents to raise a healthy child. I also believe in the idea that there's more to learning than just reading, writing, and arithmetic. The emotional needs of a child are just as important as the academic ones. Children

can't learn academically if there are all these other issues that haven't been addressed.

Part of the Child Development Project is doing family nights at the school. They have meant so much to me. Especially when I was working full-time, there weren't other opportunities for me to get involved. Having family nights after work allowed me to connect with my children and reinforce to them that "You're important and your education is important." The themes of the family nights are fun for the kids and still educational. Recently we went to a "Mad Scientist Fair" that allowed kids to experiment with Play-Doh and other things. They look forward to the family nights, and so do we as parents. It's a way that parents can come to school, and it's relaxed for them and for the teachers. The activities that are done at home are also enjoyable.

If kids see that education is important for you, it becomes important for them. If parents display a healthy attitude towards learning, it's a good example for children. As it is, my kids don't want to miss a day of school. They love going there.

MARSHA MIRKIN
Wellesley, Massachusetts

"Of course we all want schools that teach good academic skills. But why do we as parents tolerate our children not being taught social skills in the classroom?"

Program Overview: OPEN CIRCLE uses a structured curriculum in grades K-5 to help children become ethical people, contributing citizens, and successful learners. It assists schools in developing relationships that are safe, caring, and respectful and teaches effective problem-solving skills. Open Circle has involved 250 schools and trained 4,500 teachers.

Marsha Mirkin: What I find valuable about Open Circle is that it teaches social skills and doesn't just assume them. Too often we think that kids will somehow automatically develop the social skills they need. Yet even though a few children read before they enter school, parents still expect that the schools will teach them how to develop those reading skills. And, we don't tell the majority who can't read that they have to teach themselves! It really is the same thing with social and emotional skills. Children may have some of those skills before they enter school, but those skills need to be developed throughout the grades.

The curriculum gives parents and children a common language with which to speak about relationships. For example, when one of my daughters was in fourth grade, she had a sleepover party with some friends. At one point, the children started having an argument. I was able to say to them, “I know you have the skills to work this out because you’re in Open Circle.” And they *did* work it out themselves, using the problem-solving steps they had learned. The program gave me a way to support the skills of my children rather than being the one who had to play judge all the time. Kids can use these skills and figure out a lot of problems themselves. But, of course, if they need guidance, the adults are there. In fact, one of the lessons in the Open Circle curriculum is called “Double D’s” and teaches that if a situation is dangerous or destructive, children should seek help from an adult.

Through the parent workshops, I also learned more about the idea of communication. All too often, when our kids are talking to us, we are busy with chores or other activities and “uh-huh” our way through the conversation without really paying attention. The program reminded me how important it is to really stop what I’m doing and listen carefully. Or if I need to finish a task that I can’t drop at the moment, I can let my child know how much I want to hear what she has to say and ask her if we could talk in about ten minutes.

Open Circle is a systemic program that involves students, teachers, administrators and parents. As a result, I have always felt like a part of the school community. I’ve never felt that there was a separation between parents and the school.

Of course we all want schools that teach good academic skills. But why do we as parents tolerate our children not being taught social skills in the classroom? The research shows that emotional intelligence is just as, if not even more, important to adult success as academic achievement. Children not only need to learn these skills, but also teachers benefit when a program like Open Circle is in place. They can spend less time dealing with behavioral issues and more time teaching academics.

KYOKO MATSUMOTO WRIGHT
Mountlake Terrace, Washington

“Any time that I needed help, I could call on the counselor that Raising Healthy Children has in my son’s school. She has known the children and parents for a number of years and is really there to help us.”

Program Overview: RAISING HEALTHY CHILDREN (part of SOAR—Skills, Opportunities and Recognition) is a school-wide program for elementary through high school. To develop healthy behaviors in students, the program helps teachers and parents to communicate healthy beliefs and clear standards for behavior. In addition, the program develops strong bonds between students and their families, schools, and communities. Teachers use a wide range of social and emotional skills in their classroom teaching and throughout the school.

Kyoko Matsumoto Wright: My son, who is now in tenth grade, has been part of the Raising Healthy Children program since he began elementary school. I’ve taken every parent class they’ve offered. When I attended parent classes the program offered childcare, so when my son was younger he always got to meet other kids and play with them. It was fun for him.

I was a late mom—I had my child at age 37, and knew that I only had one chance in life to be a parent. The parent programs have really been helpful to me in understanding that I’m not alone and not the only one experiencing certain problems with a child. We do role-playing in the classes so that I feel that I can handle situations better instead of just being upset. And since our child is living at home, I feel that I can still have a great deal of influence on his behavior.

Any time that I needed help, I could call on the counselor that Raising Healthy Children has in my son’s school. The counselor has been with my son’s class since elementary school and moved up with the children. So she has known the children and parents for a number of years and is really there to help us. For example, there was a time when almost all the kids were failing a math class and the parents were very angry with the teacher. The teacher was unwilling to help those kids who were struggling and only spent time with the students who were doing really well in the class. The counselor met with the parents and served as a go-between with the teacher. As a result, things did get better. While things weren’t perfect, the teacher made more of an effort to teach everyone in the class, and no one failed.

Then there was a time when my nephew committed suicide, and his younger brother also attempted suicide. Our whole family was badly shaken by these terrible events. With the counselor’s help, we came up with the needed resources that helped us through this time. All of us were able to talk about and better understand the nature of these children’s depression. We were very grateful for the support we received. I would have been so lost if I didn’t know who to call in this situation.

As a real estate agent, I know that so many parents just look at test scores when choosing a school. There should be much more to a decision than that—there needs to be strong parent involvement and opportunities for kids to develop good social skills in the schools. If those conditions aren't present, then test scores don't mean a great deal. I wish that every parent could be a part of a program like this.

MELISSA HYDE and STUART McENERNEY
Meriden, Connecticut

“We have to help make schools a place where children aren't afraid of violence, aren't afraid of each other. With a program that teaches skills for communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution, there is nothing to lose and everything to gain.”

Program Overview: SECOND STEP: A VIOLENCE PREVENTION CURRICULUM is a preschool through ninth-grade curriculum designed to develop students' social and emotional skills and affect behaviors and attitudes that contribute to violence. There is a curriculum kit for each grade level. Lessons are divided into three basic units—empathy; impulse control and problem solving; and anger management. Second Step has been implemented in approximately 15,000 schools and 4,000 school districts in the United States.

Melissa Hyde: What I have found valuable about Second Step is that you learn with your child. While they are learning in the classroom, you can go to the parent meetings and learn the same things. It keeps the whole family on the same page.

Through Second Step I have changed many of the ways I communicate my annoyance or anger. For example, instead of saying something like, “Stop that. Why do you have to keep doing the same thing wrong over and over again?” I now might say, “It gets me very frustrated when you do that when we have talked about that.” That type of communication does not single out my son in an accusatory tone and helps him to understand how his actions are affecting me.

My experience with other parents has been terrific. The presentations for parents are voluntary so everyone there is enthusiastic and ready to learn. There is no lack of sharing and even some laughs as we all get together with common concerns and problems of raising young children today. It's in part due to the parents' response that I am continuing with the program.

As a parent, I think the most important thing to

remember is that we are our children's role model. Our children learn more from what we do than by what we say, and so we need to set the example with problem solving, anger management, empathy, self-esteem, and respect. I truly believe that if this program can really take hold both at school and at home, in five or six years we will be able to see a real difference with our children. And I do not see any reason why it can't take hold because what it teaches is not difficult or complex. Any family member can learn the principles and employ them in day to day life.

Stuart McEnerney: Every few weeks, we receive an educational packet that gives me the opportunity to work with my daughter on ways to control her anger and have more empathy for how other children might be feeling. It gives me a different outlook too on communication. Now, if my daughter does something that gets me angry, I stop for a minute and take a deep breath instead of just jumping in with criticism. I ask why she's doing something. This program isn't just for the kids; it's also for the parents.

As a parent, you have the responsibility to teach your kids how to deal in certain situations—what to do if someone hurts them or taunts them. The way society is, and the way the world is, we have to take a chance to make our children's lives better. We have to help make schools a place where children aren't afraid of violence, aren't afraid of each other. With a program that teaches skills for communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution, there is nothing to lose and everything to gain. It makes the entire community a better place.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Benson, P. L., Galbraith, J., & Espeland, P. (1998). *What Kids Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Raise Good Kids*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing. Based on groundbreaking nationwide studies, this easy-to-understand guide shows how to build children's developmental assets at home, at school, in the community, and in the congregation.

Christenson, S. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2001). *Schools and Families: Essential Connections for Learning*. New York, NY: Guildford Press. This book offers practical tools for school personnel, which are grounded in theory and research, to build positive connections with families and enhance student learning.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2003). *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*. Chicago, IL: CASEL. Profiling 80 nationally available, multi-year, and sequenced programs for SEL, this detailed guide helps educational leaders, parents, and others make informed choices about adopting the programs that best fit the needs of the school community.

Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T., Haynes, N. M., Kessler, R., Schwab-Stone, M. E., & Shriver, T. P. (1997). *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. This seminal book introduced and described the field of social and emotional learning, highlighting 39 guidelines for designing, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining beneficial school-based programs.

Elias, M. J., Tobias, S. E., & Friedlander, B. S. (2000). *Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers*. New York: Random House. The authors explain creative, caring, and constructive ways to parent adolescents during these crucial years.

Elias, M. J., Tobias, S. E., & Friedlander, B. S. (1999). *Emotionally Intelligent Parenting: How to Raise a Self-Disciplined, Responsible, Socially Skilled Child*. New York: Harmony Books. Using suggestions, stories, dialogues and activities, the authors share constructive ways for parents to support children in developing caring relationships and making responsible choices.

Goleman, D. (1994). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam. An international bestseller, this book brought into public awareness the complex nature of human intelligence and the central importance of emotions in healthy human development.

Gottman, J. (1997). *The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. New York: Simon & Schuster. The author describes how parents can use an effective five-step process to become "Emotion Coaches" and teach their children how to express and manage emotions throughout their lives.

Lantieri, L., & Patti, J. (1996). *Waging Peace in Our Schools*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. Based upon the experiences of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), a national effort which combines the teaching of social and emotional skills with conflict resolution and diversity issues, this book explains the steps that people in every community can take to foster schools that are safe, caring, and healthy.

National PTA. (2000). *Building Successful Partnerships: A Guide to Developing Parent and Family Involvement Programs*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Services. This research-based resource provides a blueprint for developing quality parent involvement programs.

Patrikakou, E. N., Weissberg, R. P., Redding, S., & Walberg, H. J. (2005). *School-family partnerships: Fostering Children's School Success*. New York: Teachers College Press. This edited volume provides a comprehensive review of research and practice regarding home-school connections, and suggestions on how to enhance school-family partnerships for the benefit of all students.

Rich, D. (2000). *Creating Positive School-Home Connections*. Washington, D.C.: Home and School Institute. Associated with the acclaimed MegaSkills curriculum—used in more than 4,000 schools in the U.S. and abroad—this publication is part of a mini-book series that helps parents, teachers and counselors to build academic knowledge and social and emotional skills.

Shure, M. B. (2000). *Raising a Thinking Preteen*. New York: Henry Holt. In a follow-up to her bestselling book *Raising a Thinking Child*, Dr. Shure explains a program for resolving conflicts and developing critical thinking skills that can be used with 8-12 year-olds.

ORGANIZATIONS

Character Education Partnership

1025 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 1011
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone: 800-988-8081
Website: www.character.org

The Partnership is dedicated to developing moral character and civic virtue in youth to create a more compassionate and responsible society.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Department of Psychology (M/C 285)
University of Illinois at Chicago
1007 West Harrison Street
Chicago, IL 60607-7137
Phone: 312-413-1008
Website: www.casel.org

An organization of educators and researchers, CASEL works to establish evidence-based SEL programming as an essential part of education from preschool through high school.

National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC)

700 Broadway, Suite 1200
Denver, CO 80203-3460
Phone: 303-299-3606
Website: www.ecs.org/nclc

NCLC is a nationwide coalition of education leaders and others who are committed to infusing service-learning into the K-12 curriculum.

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: 1-800-307-4782 or 312-670-6782
Website: www.pta.org

The largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the country, the National PTA supports better education, more resources and safer schools for every child.

Operation Respect

2 Penn Plaza, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10121
Phone: 212-904-5243
www.dontlaugh.org/parents.htm

Founded by singer and activist Peter Yarrow of the legendary folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary, Operation Respect promotes the inclusion of character education and SEL principles into school curriculum.

PROGRAMS THAT EMPHASIZE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

Caring School Community

Developmental Studies Center
2000 Embarcadero, Suite 305
Oakland, CA 94606
Phone: 1-800-666-7270 or 510-464-3670
Website: www.devstu.org

Check & Connect

University of Minnesota
Department of Educational Psychology
350 Elliot Hall, 75 East River Road
Minneapolis, MN 55455
Phone: 612-624-0037
Website: www.ici.umn.edu/checkandconnect/

Open Circle Curriculum

Wellesley College, The Stone Center
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
Phone: 781-283-2861
Website: www.open-circle.org

Raising Healthy Children

Channing Bete Company
One Community Place
Deerfield, MA 01373-0200
Phone: 877-896-8532 or 413-665-7611
Website: www.channing-bete.com

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program

23 Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02131
Phone: 1-800-370-2515 or 617-492-1764
Website: www.esrnational.org

Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum

568 First Avenue, Suite 600
Seattle, WA 98104-2804
Phone: 800-634-4449
Website: www.cfchildren.org

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- ⁴ Huesmann, L. R., & Guerra, N. G. (1997). Children's normative beliefs about aggression and aggressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72 (2), 408-419.
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- ¹¹ Children's Defense Fund. (1994, January). *Living in fear*. Washington, DC: Author.
- ¹² Davis-Kean, P. E. & Eccles, J. S. (2002). *Influences and barriers to better parent-school collaborations*. Paper presented at the National Invitational Conference on School-Family Partnerships: Promoting the Social, Emotional and Academic Growth of Children, Washington, DC.
- ¹³ National Center for Family and Community Connections to Schools. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- ¹⁴ National PTA. (2000). *Building successful partnerships: A guide for developing parent and family involvement programs*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
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