

Health Wise: Emotional Intelligence Is Important, Too

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Emotional Intelligence Is Important, Too

It may seem intuitive to associate a higher intelligence quotient (IQ) with higher grades. Although IQ and aptitude are important, there's another measure related to academic performance that may be just as important: emotional intelligence (EI).

Daniel Goleman, co-founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), brought EI to light in a bestseller (1995). Studies since then have shown a strong relationship between EI skills and success in school, careers, and business.

"One way to think about EI is that it's part of being people-smart," says D'Arcy Lyness, behavioral health editor for KidsHealth.org and an adolescent psychologist based in Wayne, Pennsylvania. "Understanding emotions helps us get along with people. Regulating our emotions helps us be successful in almost any area of life."

"Students can improve their EI," Lyness says. "Some EI skills, however, such as managing emotional reactions, can feel difficult for teens to master. That's because the *prefrontal cortex*, the area in the brain which helps integrate and regulate emotions, is still developing. Meanwhile, the adolescent brain is drawn to risk and reactivity and more sensitive to strong emotional states. But learning and practicing social and emotional skills helps increase cortical activity and helps self-regulation develop."

EI is a foundational component of social and emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools, Lyness says. One meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs involving 270,034 K–12 students showed that SEL participants gained 11 percentage points in academic achievement, compared with students who didn't participate in the SEL programs. The analysis also showed that SEL participants "demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional



skills, attitudes, [and] behavior" (Durlak et al. 2011, p. 1).

CASEL.org defines SEL in terms of the following competencies, making it easy to see why EI and SEL skills are associated with academic achievement:

- **"Self-awareness:** The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.
- **"Self-management:** The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.
- **"Social awareness:** The ability ... to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.
- **"Relationship skills:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.
- **"Responsible decision-making:** The ability to make constructive and re-

spectful choices ... based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences" (CASEL; see "On the web").

Classroom activity

As an extra-credit opportunity, have students peruse the Be Your Best Self website (see "On the web"), an expert-reviewed resource featuring dozens of EI- and SEL-related, age-appropriate articles for high school students. Topics include getting along with teachers, setting goals, dealing with test anxiety, and managing emotional reactions. Then have the students write a top-ten list of tips they learned that can help them in your class. (Students can also benefit from tips on the Homework Help minisite.)

Posting students' lists, with the minisite URLs, around your classroom can also help students who choose not to do the assignment.

Michael E. Bratsis is senior editor for Kids Health in the Classroom (kidshealth.org/classroom). Send comments, questions or suggestions to mbratsis@kidshealth.org.

On the web

Be Your Best Self: <http://bit.ly/1ORlrgV>
 Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Social and emotional learning core competencies. <http://bit.ly/1TTT29y>
 Homework help: <http://bit.ly/1Wb4K1u>

References

- Durlak, J.A., R.P. Weissberg, A.B. Dymnicki, R.D. Taylor, and K.B. Schellinger. 2011. The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based interventions. *Child Development* 82 (1): 405–432.
- Goleman, D. 1995. *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.