



## Social-Emotional Learning, Self-Care, and Adults

By Educator Barnes – February 25, 2021

Thankfully, we are moving in the right direction and realize that we have to support the whole child. Academics are important and should be a huge focus of school, but students' behavior and inability to regulate their behavior and emotions can hinder students from learning. Also,

traumatic experiences can be a huge hindrance. This is why social-emotional learning (SEL) has become a focal point for schools.

CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) is a resource many educators use to improve outcomes for their students. The CASEL SEL framework focuses on five areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. It is not only the students who need to embrace these areas, the adults leading and implementing SEL work need to be models of SEL.

Due to the pandemic, teacher self-care and social emotional wellness have become a heightened emphasis in schools. However, just like the implementation of SEL with students is key, the same should apply to teachers. Unfortunately, some school leaders are missing the mark.

My children's school uses Second Step which is a social emotional curriculum. Since my sons have been learning remotely and I have been working remotely during part of this school year, I have had the opportunity to watch them learn. The reason my twin sons' teacher can be successful with these lessons is because she has a strong relationship with her students, and they know her class is a safe place.

When school leaders try to provide social-emotional learning professional development at a school where the culture is not great and teachers don't feel safe to be their authentic selves, social-emotional learning with colleagues can be stressful and emotionally draining. For example, one of the components of the CASEL framework is self-management. We all know those teachers who struggle with managing their emotions. What if that teacher actually wants to change and be vulnerable about the triggers that causes him or her to fly off the handle or burst into tears? This teacher must feel safe to be open and if that is not the case, SEL professional development for teachers is nothing more than moving through the motions of calculated responses for fear of a punitive consequence.

Furthermore, self-care, at times, is lumped into SEL professional development. Come closer. Let me get really, really, real with all of you today. My idea of self-care is not, I repeat, is not spending time in a professional development. Maybe I just want to kick up my feet and watch the birds flying around outside of my window while sipping a glass of pinot grigio. Clearly, this won't be an option while at school.

The other issue is that the tips are not practical due to the constraints of the school and the responsibilities teachers have. Teachers being provided with tips for self-care and improving their social-emotional wellness is pointless if nothing is being taken off of their plates. When school leaders do remove a responsibility, they should be explicit with staff and tell them they are doing this to lighten the load. Knowing there was this specific intentionality behind the action can go a long way with buy-in for staff to believe the administration really does want staff to take care of themselves and improve their social-emotional health.

SEL and self-care professional development for teachers actually starts with the work that happens before this professional development is ever given.