

Social Awareness

A Key Component of Social-Emotional Learning



Equipping students with the mindsets, skills and habits they need to succeed

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Introduction

Research shows that social-emotional skills like social awareness, self-management, and growth mindset are crucial to college and career readiness

- Parents and teachers have long known the importance of these skills and have taught them to their students
- Current standardized tests don't assess these skills
- Schools don't always prioritize these skills or give teachers the support they need and the credit they deserve for teaching these skills



Objectives

In this session you will:

- Build a **deeper understanding of social awareness**, one example of a social-emotional competency that can help students succeed
- Leave with at least one **specific strategy or technique** that you could try in the classroom to support your students in developing social awareness
- Identify the **role a teacher can play** in helping students develop social awareness, including by **modeling** social awareness strategies for students



Defining Social Awareness

Social Awareness is the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures; to understand social and ethical norms for behavior; and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.



Defining Social Awareness

What we know about **Social Awareness** comes from multiple strands of research on concepts like emotional intelligence, social capital, social perspective taking, and cultural competency.

How do these relate? Being socially aware means having the ability to:

- recognize one's own emotions and other people's emotions
- use information about emotions to guide thinking and behavior **Emotional Intelligence**
- discern the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of others
- understand how others view a particular situation **Social Perspective Taking**
- understand social and ethical norms for behavior
- recognize and use family, school, and community resources and supports **Social Capital**
- be aware of one's own cultural identity and views about differences of culture **Cultural Competency**



Defining Social Awareness: Student Voice



Activity #1: Share your voice



Group Discussion:

What does social awareness look like in your classroom?

When do students use social awareness?

In what ways do your students excel in this area?

In what ways do your students struggle with social awareness?

How does this impact the classroom climate? What about student learning?



Social Awareness Matters



Why Social Awareness Matters: Summary

- **Positive Classroom Climate:** Students with strong social awareness adapt more easily to their environment, empathize with the perspectives of others, and engage in fewer disruptive classroom behaviors. This, in turn, creates an environment where students can focus on learning.
- **Better Relationships:** Students who demonstrate strong social awareness are able to engage in constructive communication with their peers and resolve conflicts when they arise. These students benefit from peer learning and know how to take advantage of social supports.
- **Fewer Risky Behaviors:** Students who are able to adapt to new environments, understand the needs and perspectives of others, and know where to get support when they need it are less prone to emotional distress and less likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as drug use and aggression, that interfere with school success.
- **Greater Career Success:** An employer survey conducted by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills demonstrates that four of the five most important skills for high school graduates entering the work force are linked to social awareness: professionalism, collaboration, communication, and social responsibility.

Social Awareness in the Classroom



Social Awareness in the Classroom

A variety of practices exist for improving students' social awareness at every grade level. The following **research-based strategies** are sample approaches to developing the many aspects of social awareness.

These strategies include elements of

- Building positive relationships
- Emotional intelligence
- Cooperative learning
- Social perspective taking

We use the following key to indicate the grades for which each strategy is most relevant:

E	Elementary Grades
M	Middle Grades
S	Secondary Grades

Choose the strategies that are most age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and aligned with your teaching style

Building Positive Relationships

Positive relationships in schools are important for families, teachers, and students. Research suggests that positive social interactions support students' social and academic development. They also help students feel safe and supported.

What makes a teacher-student relationship positive?

- Mutually respectful and supportive
- Open communication
- Empathy, warmth, and genuineness
- Closeness, trust, care, and cooperation

Through this secure relationship, students are more confident and better equipped to explore the world around them and learn about socially appropriate behaviors as well as academic expectations.



Sample Strategy: Active, Constructive Responding

Social awareness is not just for students: when teachers improve their own social awareness, they are better positioned to model and teach these strategies.

Effective communication and strong relationships support both students' and adults' development of social awareness. One communication strategy that helps strengthen relationships is **Active and Constructive Responding**. To practice active, constructive responding:

- **Encourage students and colleagues to share positive news with one another.**
- **When a student or colleague shares something positive, use an active and constructive response (e.g., enthusiastic support), as opposed to a passive–constructive response (e.g., quiet, understated support), an active–destructive response (e.g., quashing the event), or a passive–destructive responses (e.g., ignoring the event).**

“Responses from others perceived to be *active and constructive* were associated with emotional well-being and better relationship quality, whereas responses perceived to be destructive or passive were negatively associated with these outcomes” (Gable, et al., 2004, pg. 242).

Sample Strategy: Active, Constructive Responding

	<i>Active</i>	<i>Passive</i>
<i>Constructive</i>	<p>Enthusiastic support Eye Contact Authentic</p> <p>Great news! I knew you'd do it. How do you feel?</p> 	<p>Low Energy Delayed Response Quiet</p> <p>Oh cool, that's nice...good for you.</p> 
<i>Destructive</i>	<p>Quashing the event! Dismissive Demeaning</p> <p>I don't believe you! It sounds stressful.</p> 	<p>Turns focus inward Avoiding Ignore Speaker</p> <p>Huh. Well, I just got a new video game.</p> 

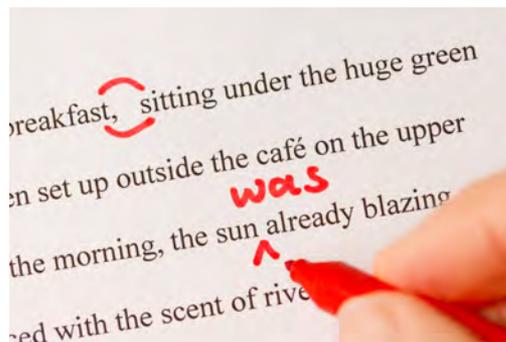
Sample Strategy: Wise Critical Feedback

Providing **Wise Critical Feedback** to students can strengthen student-teacher relationships by mitigating any mistrust that may exist due to a student's perception that bias plays a role in the feedback provided by an educator. "Wise critical feedback" (described below) has been shown to improve students' academic outcomes. Research finds this strategy especially effective in grades 7-12, particularly with students of color and students from low-income communities.

To provide "wise, critical feedback," teachers must reinforce their **high expectations** and their **belief in a student's potential** through every instance of feedback. When providing written or verbal feedback to students, be sure to communicate:

- 1) that you're providing this feedback because you have high standards for the student, and
- 2) that you believe in the student's ability to meet those standards.

"Minority students' prior encounters with discrimination and their awareness of the significance of race can affect their academic outcomes by influencing the way that they interpret ongoing school experiences" (Yeager, et al., 2014, pg. 807)



Sample Strategy: Engaging Families

Engaging families in their child's education improves opportunities for support; however, typical family engagement strategies may not align with the needs of low-income families. To enhance family involvement, consider using the following strategies:

Make sure opportunities for family involvement are accessible to parents and guardians who work multiple jobs, don't have access to paid leave, are unable to afford child care, and/or rely on public transportation. Start by providing transportation and on-site child care for family-focused events.

Reach out to families early and often. Many low-income parents and guardians experienced school as a hostile environment when they were students. Any hesitance educators experience when reaching out is not necessarily ambivalence about school. It might reflect reasonable distrust for the education system. Alternatively, it might be related to long work hours or lack of access to a phone or internet. Be persistent.

Facilitate ongoing communication rather than reaching out only when something is wrong.

This builds trust by nurturing a positive relationship and can help create an equitable classroom environment across all dimensions of diversity.



Emotional Intelligence

Every interaction with another person involves **Emotional Intelligence**. Teachers are constantly using their Emotional Intelligence to help educate learners. Emotional Intelligence consists of 5 skills, which make up the acronym “RULER”:

- **R**ecognizing emotions
- **U**nderstanding emotions
- **L**abeling emotions
- **E**xpressing emotions
- **R**egulating emotions



Recognizing and understanding emotions in ourselves and in others can help improve our social interactions.

It is important to remember that emotional expressions may vary based on cultural norms. Watch this [video](#) for a summary of the research on how emotions differ across cultures. **What are the implications of this research for a multicultural classroom?**

Sample Strategy: Using Media to Recognize and Label Emotions

Media & Emotion: Students are exposed to various forms of media on a daily basis. Use examples of media to help students understand the *use* of emotions, as well as develop their ability to recognize and label emotions. For example, advertisements often intend to manipulate our emotions: a product commercial may try to invoke sadness, happiness, laughter, or anger, with the intent of gaining our trust and/or changing our ideas and desires. Children may be surprised at how easily their emotions can be manipulated.

Students can analyze commercials, develop their own commercials, or think about other forms of media (e.g. snapchat or twitter) and how they relate to emotions. High school students might analyze political commercials or social media ads, while elementary school students might identify pictures about products or services to identify the emotions they are intended to elicit.



Sample Strategy: Journaling to Understand Emotions

Journal Writing: Frequent journal writing can help students reflect on academic content as well as their emotional connection to the material, their peers, and their teachers. By regularly identifying their emotions and the emotions of others, students will develop their ability to recognize, understand, label, and express emotions.

A **sample journal assignment** for 8th grade includes having students record their reflections after each project or assignment for which they worked in a group. Throughout the year, students maintain a journal that is frequently reviewed by the teacher. Prompts can help elicit reflection in order to have students practice identifying and labeling emotions.

Sample prompts:

- Did your group complete its goal(s)?
- How do you feel about the group's effort toward finishing the assignment?
- List some actions you took to help the group finish the assignment.
- How do you feel about *your* level of effort? Could you have done more?
- How did participants treat one another throughout the project?
- How did it feel to work in this particular group? What made it feel that way?



Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning takes place when students work together toward a common goal, typically in small teams of students with varying abilities.

Cooperative learning works best when students:

- work together to complete the assignment
- are held accountable for the group's final outcome
- use interpersonal skills, such as decision making, conflict resolution, and effective communication
- reflect on the team's strengths and weaknesses for improvement



Cooperative Learning helps students understand peers' perspectives and incorporate those perspective into decision making

Sample Strategy: The Jigsaw Classroom

The Jigsaw Classroom is a research-based cooperative learning technique for group work. While this strategy applies to all grades, research has shown that it has the strongest effect in elementary grades. This strategy has been shown to reduce racial conflict and improve educational outcomes including higher test scores, reduced absenteeism, and greater interest in school.

In the jigsaw approach, students are divided into diverse groups and assigned distinct tasks under a common topic. Students become independent experts on their subtopic and work with leaders of the same task from other groups. Then, each person returns and teaches their original group about their area of expertise.

- Students become valuable resources to each other.
- The process encourages listening, engagement, and empathy by giving each member of the group an essential part to play in the academic activity.
- No student can succeed completely unless everyone works well together as a team.
- This “cooperation by design” facilitates interaction among all students in the class, leading them to value each other as contributors to their common task.



See handout for 10 specific steps to implement the Jigsaw Classroom

Sample Strategy: Constructive Controversy

Constructive Controversy is a research-based cooperative learning technique primarily for students in middle and high school.

This strategy builds on debate and group discussion formats. One common approach is to assign a cooperative group goal (e.g., passing a test or writing a report). Each group splits into subgroups, which take sides on a particular topic and research their respective positions in order to develop a persuasive argument. The subgroups spend time presenting their argument and refuting the opposition. Finally, the subgroups must take the opposite position, resulting in a synthesis of both positions that represents students' best reasoned judgment.

Benefits of this approach include:

- Improved student engagement
- Increased curiosity in students
- More positive attitude toward class and instruction
- Improved academic achievement

See handout for additional information



Social Perspective Taking

Social Perspective Taking is the capacity to discern the thoughts, feelings, motivations, and points of view of others. Researchers have identified multiple stages in the development of perspective taking, which are described in more detail below:

Age	Five developmental stages of perspective taking
	Undifferentiated Perspective Taking:
3-6	Children understand that self and others can have different thoughts and feelings, but they tend to confuse thoughts and feelings
	Social Informational (or Subjective) Perspective Taking:
6-8	Children understand that different perspectives may result because people have access to different information
	Self-Reflective Perspective Taking:
8-10	Children can “step into another person’s shoes” and view their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior from the other person’s perspective
	Third-party (Mutual) Perspective Taking:
10-12	Children can step outside a two person situation and imagine how they and others are viewed by a third party
	Societal Perspective Taking:
12-15+	Adolescents now consider others’ perspectives with reference to the social environment and culture the other person comes from, assuming that the other person believes and acts within their society’s norms and values

The Role of Social Identities in Developing Social Awareness

Also, consider how various social identities may intersect with the developmental stages described on p. 24. For example, how might **racial or ethnic identity** and experiences of discrimination and bias influence the way(s) in which a child perceives herself and her peers?

Helms' (1994 & 2003) work on racial identity theory is based on the premise that all people of color are exposed to racial socialization. She describes the common stages of identity development as:

- **Conformity**- active or passive devaluing of people of color, and idealization of white groups
- **Dissonance**- identity confusion, self-consciousness and preoccupation with unanswered questions about oneself as a racial being
- **Immersion**- idealization by individuals of their own racial groups
- **Emersion**- use of own-group external standards to self-define; valuing of own-group loyalty
- **Internalization**- positive commitment to one's own group
- **Integrative awareness**- capacity to value one's own collective identity as well as empathize and collaborate with members of other groups

Other social identities – such as nationality, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender, physical ability, religion – may also intersect with students' development of social awareness.

Activity #2: Share your voice



Group Discussion:

In the chart on p. 24, identify which description of development aligns most closely with the grade level(s) you teach.

Which of the social identities mentioned on p. 25 may also be relevant to your students' development of social awareness?

Think of a time when a student struggled with an aspect of social perspective taking that is age-appropriate. What was the scenario? Was there a particular strategy s/he applied?

Sample Strategy: Using Popular Music in Social Studies

Tatum's (2003) work on racial identity development notes that avoiding conversations about race can perpetuate the development of racism and segregation. **Integrating historical and popular music** into social studies classes is one strategy to spark and facilitate an engaging discussion about racial issues.

As an alternative, or in addition to, documents, speeches, photographs, diaries, or other artifacts, using music as a primary source for discussion can help emphasize larger historical movements, evoke personal feelings, and illuminate historical and current racial issues.

Sample activity: **Analyzing song lyrics**

- Students can work together (e.g., think-pair-share) to analyze song lyrics.
- This activity can aid students in exploring racial stereotypes. Students can see that while some artists might perpetuate negative images of African American youth, others reference specific historical racial tensions, protests, or current issues.
- Students can connect lyrics to their broader historical context and express their findings in discussions, reflections, research papers, or presentations.

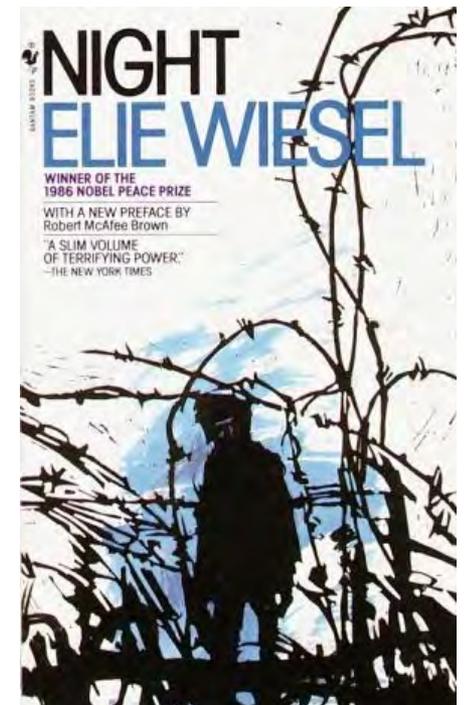
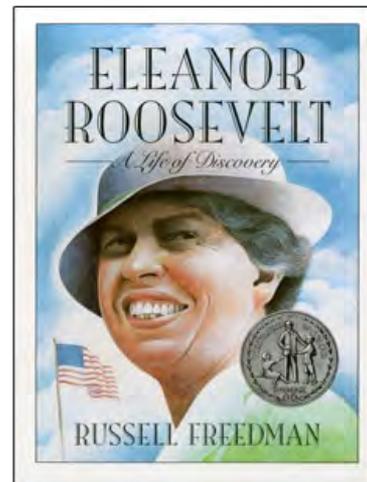
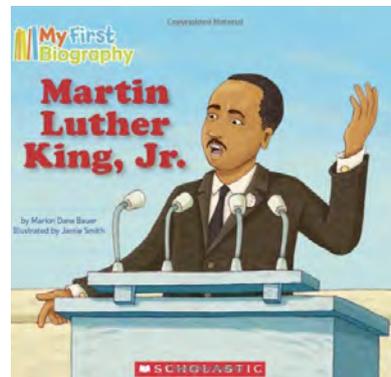


Sample Strategy: Perspective Taking Through Biographies

Reading Biographies helps students become immersed in another person's perspective and experience. Reading narratives about another person's experience can build empathy, strengthen peer relationships, and enhance pro-social behaviors.

Gallery Walk: Students create text and visuals or other creative expressions that convey the unique experiences of the person featured in the biography. Students then conduct a "gallery walk," spending time at each student's station to learn about a new person and their experiences.

Students must understand their chosen person sufficiently to answer questions that peers or teachers may pose. In the process, students learn about that person's perspective and circumstances, as well as how these factors relate to the person's actions and/or emotions.



Closing Activity: Planning for Implementation

Of the various strategies we've discussed today, which one do you want to commit to trying?

Questions to consider:

- What planning / preparation is required?
- How do you plan to address anticipated challenges?
- How might this strategy be integrated into your existing practices, strategies, or lesson planning?



Active and Constructive Responding

Reading Biographies

Journal Writing

The Jigsaw Classroom

Media & Emotion

Engaging Families

Integrating Historical and Popular Music

Constructive Controversy

Wise Critical Feedback

Want to Know More?

Social Awareness

- [Teaching Social Awareness](#)
- [Racial Equity Tools](#)
- [Teaching Math with Cooperative Learning](#)
- [Facing History and Ourselves](#)
- [Social Skills for Middle School Students](#)
- [Can Emotional Intelligence Be Taught?](#)
- [Emotional Intelligence Is the Missing Piece](#)

Social-Emotional Learning

- [Transforming Education toolkit on Growth Mindset](#)
- [Transforming Education toolkit on Self-Management](#)
- [A National Teacher Survey on How Social and Emotional Learning Can Empower Children and Transform Schools](#)
- [Smart Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning Overview](#)
- [The Heart-Brain Connection: The Neuroscience of Social and Emotional Learning](#)

Looking for Some Quick Feedback

Please share your feedback in this 2-minute survey so that we can improve the free tools we create for teachers! <http://bit.ly/2kpn0qE>



