

Brilliant Me! in action



A practical guide to embedding social and emotional learning, emotional literacy and wellbeing in KS2 classrooms

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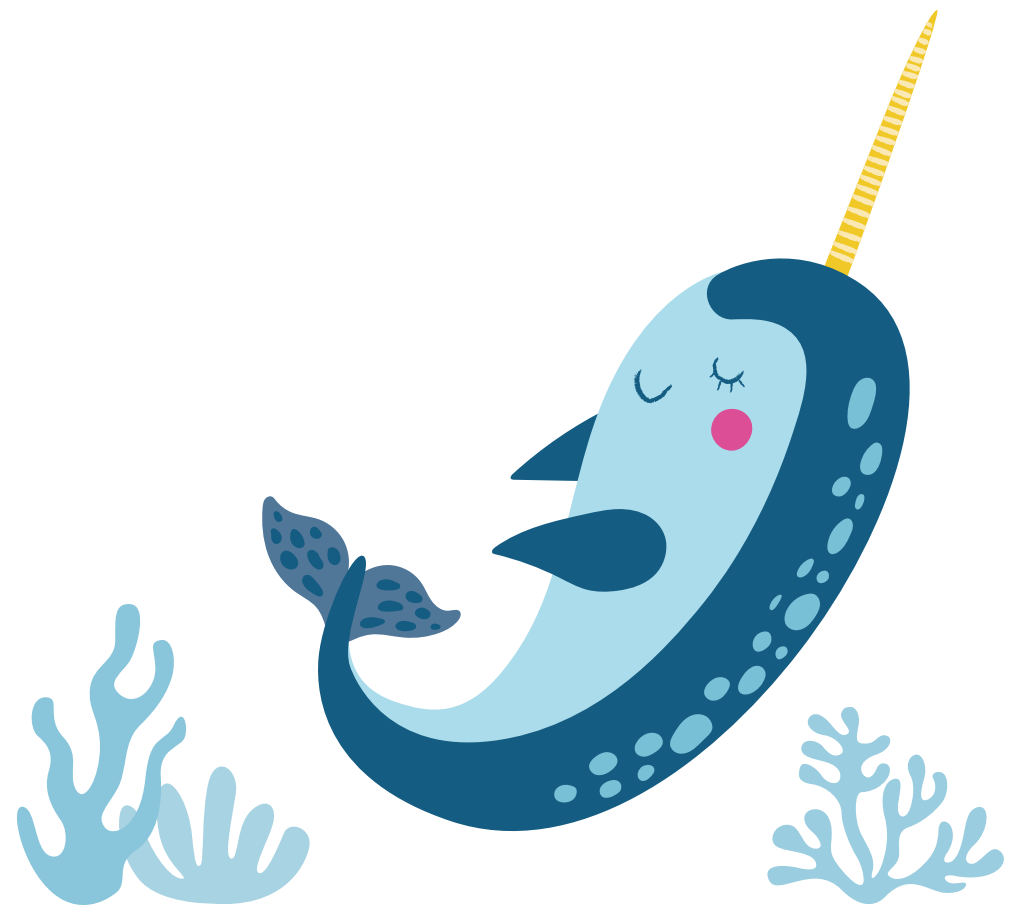
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Part 1: Introduction and purpose

Welcome!

Brilliant ME! in action is a resource for school staff to help support social and emotional learning in KS2 as part of a “Whole School trauma informed, relational approach to wellbeing that is ‘Everybody’s Business’”.

It complements the **My Brilliant Place to be ME!** wellbeing resource for KS2. **Brilliant ME!** was developed to support children’s emotional literacy and wellbeing by promoting self-awareness, positive thinking, and healthy coping mechanisms. **Brilliant ME!** is also useful for parents, caregivers, and school staff to help better understand and support children’s emotional well-being.

Brilliant ME! explores three important areas of Social and Emotional Learning:



All About Me: Self-awareness

These activities are designed to help children become aware of their uniqueness, strengths, and interests, to improve self-esteem, explore who they are and their place in their world and support them to develop healthy relationships.

By exploring All About Me we can remind children of their uniqueness and the things about them that make them who they are. It can be a powerful reminder:

- that they matter
- that they have strengths and skills to bring to the school / class community
- that they belong



Name It to Tame It: Recognising, naming and understanding emotions

Name It to Tame It includes activities to help children recognise, name, understand and manage their emotions. And to help them see feelings as simply feelings - not ‘good’ or ‘bad’ - just feelings. It’s how we manage feelings like anger or fear that’s important.

The ability to recognise, understand and manage emotions can help children to cope and keep themselves safe in a difficult or frightening situation.



I've Got This: Coping skills and strategies

I've Got This includes learning about the basics of self-care (sleep, diet, movement) alongside simple skills and strategies to calm and manage uncomfortable feelings (breathing, grounding, simple distractions, problem solving) can help children become more resilient and confident, and feel able to ask for help when they need it.

Brilliant ME! in action aims to offer primary schools:

- an overview of SEL and relevance to needs of schools in the current climate
- up to date, evidence-based information and guidance
- sample activities and;
- simple, practical tools and resources
- signposting to best practice and quality assured information and resources

My BRILLIANT PLACE TO BE ME

A WELLBEING JOURNAL (AND RESOURCES) FOR 8-11 YEAR OLDS

SINCE FEBRUARY 2024...

15,000 COPIES distributed across Cornwall in 2024

Requested by **150+ SCHOOLS** within 5 days of launch

They crashed the website on day 1 at 11.30 in the morning!

4,000 copies distributed by **28 LIBRARIES** across Cornwall

BRILLIANT ME HAS...

My Brilliant Place to Be Me got Cornwall's kids (and the adults in their lives) **thinking and talking about their emotional wellbeing.**

WHAT DO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE THINK?

94% say they use 'Brilliant Me' everyday or a few times a week

100% of young people would like to do more 'Brilliant Me' activities

100% of young people say 'Brilliant Me' helps them feel 'happier' or 'more confident' about themselves

WHAT DO THE ADULTS THINK?

100% of parents think 'Brilliant Me' has had a positive impact on their child's overall wellbeing, and would recommend it to other parents/carers

60% of school staff saw positive changes in individual students since using BM

WHAT NEXT?

We are working with young people and families to develop a version of the journal for teens, and Brilliant ME! is driving a complete refresh of our Start Now website for young people.

Testimonials:

- Parent:** "(My daughter) picked up... 'My Brilliant Place to Be Me' (from the library yesterday) and she loves it! A great resource. (She) has been writing in her book pretty much every day! She really loves it!"
- School teacher:** "Pupils have felt more confident to talk about their worries and ask for help. They appear happier, as they are taking charge and doing something positive to help themselves."
- Education welfare officer:** "I gave a copy of the... journal to a child who would not engage with anyone. It was a real icebreaker and her mum told me... today how she absolutely loves this journal! The kids love these, it's like I'm giving them the world!! Amazing work, thank you."

My Brilliant Place to be ME! was created for the young people of Cornwall by

CORNWALL COUNCIL Together for Families



The resource is available on the **Brilliant ME!** area of the Headstart Kernow website:

www.headstartkernow.org.uk/brilliant-me-in-action-resource

where new material and updates will be added.

Why SEL Matters now more than ever

- Children’s wellbeing in schools today (national and local context)
- Voices from Cornwall (‘Right On’ Survey, Cornwall Youth Council)

It is widely recognised, and documented^{1,2}, that our children and young people are increasingly struggling with their wellbeing. They experience challenges that affect their wellbeing & mental health; felt safety and their sense of belonging. This is impacting on school engagement, attendance, attainment and achievement.

“ ..But achieving is just one part of it. I want children to do well and be happy in school too. I want all children to achieve and thrive. Every child should go to a school where they are free to be themselves, free to make friends, free to explore their talents. A happy, healthy child who knows, that deep down inside, they belong. ”

Bridget Phillipson³

What we know about SEL and children’s mental health and wellbeing

“Our research team have found SEL programmes improved children’s social and emotional skills, peer relationships, wellbeing, minimise experiences of distress and aggression, and improve academic achievement. International research confirms both immediate and lasting improvements”.

The benefits of SEL

“The benefits that SEL can offer (understanding and managing emotions, building positive attitudes towards oneself and others, and social skills) are particularly important for disadvantaged children. Disadvantage in childhood can hinder the development of essential social-emotional skills, such as emotional and behavioural regulation. Everyday challenges of the school environment can become even more difficult and can have a detrimental effect on mental health. In turn, this disrupts learning, posing a risk to children’s academic achievement.”⁴

1. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up>

2. The majority of UK parents and carers of children aged 18 and under believe their own childhood was safer (63%), easier (54%) and full of better experiences (55%) than their own children’s. NSPCC Survey in May 2025

3. Bridget Phillipson’s speech at the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) Conference 7/11/24

4. Social and Emotional Learning for Every Child: Why SEL Matters. UCL Blog post

National context

According to recent data from the NHS⁵, one in six children and young people in England aged 5 to 16 have a probable mental health condition. This is up on around 1 in 9 in 2017.

For children in Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11), the picture is similarly concerning. Worry, anxiety, and low mood are increasingly reported, affecting their academic performance, social interactions, and overall quality of life.

“ Stress and anxiety in our children are the top mental health issues worrying callers to ChildLine and teachers alike (see Headteacher Update, 2023). The consensus is that anxiety is common and rising in our young, and even in the very young. ”

Thornton, 2024⁶

“ A third of primary school leaders are more concerned about the mental wellbeing of their Year 6 pupils this year compared with their previous cohorts, according to a survey shared with TES. ...Worry and anxiety are on the rise. This used to be a problem for a few pupils, but we’re finding that it’s now affecting more children than it used to. He added that since the pandemic “a wider group of parents are also anxious about SATs and secondary school transition, which, of course, impacts on the children”. ”

TES May 2024

Children and young people who experience a probable mental health disorder are likely to feel lonelier, have problems with their sleep, be up to 7 times more likely to be absent from school more than 15 days in a term and less able to learn⁷.

Children’s mental health has worsened due to factors including the pandemic⁸; increasing levels of poverty and money worries; aspects of social media and life on line; school pressures and parental mental health.

“ ...seeing children who are hungry, tired and in need of emotional support because they are experiencing hardship. On average, staff estimate more than a third of their pupils came to school hungry (35%) at some point (n the 2023/4 school year), rising to 44% in deprived areas ”

Joseph Rowntree Foundation⁹

5. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up>

6. [https://www.headteacher-update.com/content/best-practice/addressing-anxiety-in-primary-age-pupils/#:~:text=Stress%20and%20anxiety%20in%20our,young%20\(Thornton%2C%202024\).](https://www.headteacher-update.com/content/best-practice/addressing-anxiety-in-primary-age-pupils/#:~:text=Stress%20and%20anxiety%20in%20our,young%20(Thornton%2C%202024).)

7. Ibid

8. https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/members/faculties/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry/1.-living-through-lockdown---an-exploration-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-its-impact-on-child-and-adolescent-mental-health.-rcpsych-essay-competition.pdf?sfvrsn=b0bff4c0_3

9. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/the-impact-of-hardship-on-primary-schools-and-primary-healthcare>

According to recent research by Speech and Language UK in 2023¹⁰ it is estimated that 1 in 5 children were struggling with speech and language. They estimated there are currently 1.9 million primary and secondary school-aged children behind with talking and/or understanding of words. Quotes from teachers taking part in the research highlighted how this impacts wellbeing and learning:

“ There is an impact and an increase in nonverbal children who struggle with emotional dysregulation because they can’t articulate their needs or how they feel. I’m seeing lots of children struggle with sentence construction/sounds/ vocabulary. My experience is that this also impacts behaviour which in turn can impact the class. ”

“ I think children being able to regulate how they feel so they are ready to learn is so important. And you can’t do that without oracy skills ”

10. <https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/the-issue/our-campaigns/listening-to-unheard-children/>

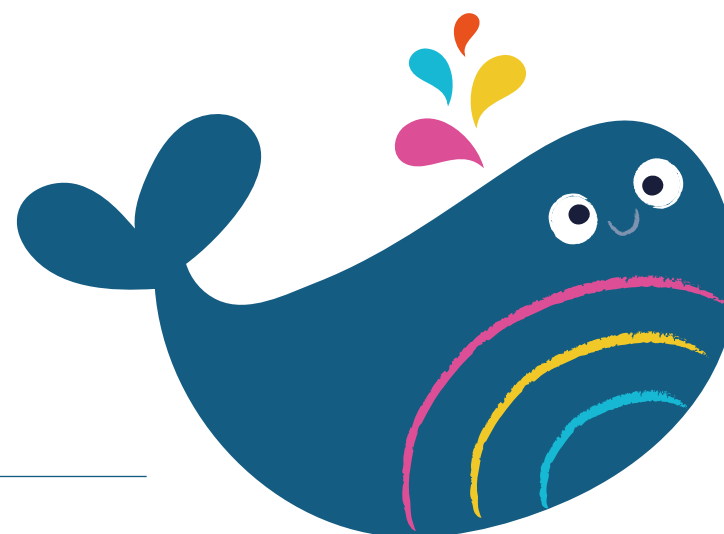
11. **Creating confident communicators: How the government can help every child find their voice**, NLT, Aug 2024

A report published by the National Literacy Trust¹¹, noted:

“Speech and Language Therapists noted a link between weak spoken communication skills and low levels of wellbeing...”

“...oracy skills enable young people to communicate their feelings effectively, engage in inquiry, practise active listening and empathy, and manage conflict. Without these skills, young people may externalise their emotional processing through aggression and physicality, which can lead to school exclusions. Alternatively, young people may internalise their feelings, and become muted or absent from school. Neither path supports the building and maintenance of healthy relationships.”

Creating confident communicators | NLT, Aug 2024



Worry and anxiety have increased since the pandemic. This is often related to school work, social pressures and online life, and family issues (such as worrying about parents, who are worried about money etc.). This can mean children have difficulty concentrating in school, and experience physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches. Pupils can fall into a pattern of illness / absence that can lead to Emotionally Based School Avoidance¹² (EBSA).

“ **One of the biggest challenges facing schools today is the disconnection many pupils are feeling from their own school communities.**

For some pupils, struggling to belong causes them to opt out of their school all together. Instead, they choose the comfort (or even the discomfort) of their own homes.

It is a vicious cycle – they feel isolated from the school community, they don't attend, they disengage, and fall behind in the content, they don't achieve, their mental health suffers, they don't attend.¹³ ”

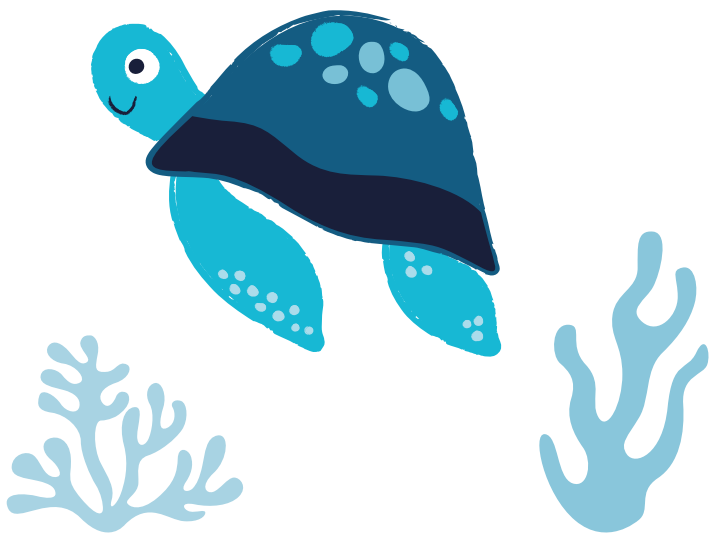


12. <https://www.headstartkernow.org.uk/everybodys-business/> (session 10 – webinar / resources)

13. <https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/content/best-practice/using-oracy-to-build-belonging-ideas-and-advice/>

Children experiencing mental health difficulties can struggle with managing their emotions, leading to outbursts, withdrawal, or other behavioural issues. Many will recognise that such behaviour is communicating an unmet need, 'behaviour as communication', whilst for others it is met with more punitive measures that are fuelling an increase in suspensions and permanent exclusion.

Children experiencing mental health difficulties are more likely to be bullied, face social exclusion, and less likely to resist peer pressure and can become a target for county lines or other exploitation in a bid to 'fit in' or find a sense of belonging.



We are frequently reminded of the scale of the problem and its potential impact on the future lives of our children when picking up newspapers or journals:

The Guardian

Girls in England feel less safe at school than they did pre-Covid

Girls in England say they feel less safe at school and are more disenchanted with their education, research has found.

Research by UCL (April 2025) has indicated how, in England, pupils' emotional engagement at school drops rapidly in the first stages of secondary education (Key Stage 3). But to what extent is a similar pattern observed in other countries, and is the fall steeper in England than elsewhere? This paper presents new comparative evidence on this issue, drawing on multiple waves of data from the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Our results show that between the end of primary and mid-secondary school, pupils' level of emotional engagement falls in almost every country with data available. The magnitude of this fall is, however, more pronounced in England than elsewhere. In several areas the drop is greater for girls than boys, though with little difference according to immigrant status. We also illustrate how secondary school pupils' emotional engagement with school has fallen significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁴.

Guardian Newspaper (online) | April 2025

14. Jerrim, J. & Kaye, N. (2025). The decline in pupils' emotional engagement with school. How does England compare to other countries? (CEPEO Working Paper No. 25-03). UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities. <https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:ucl:cepeow:25-03>.

tes magazine

Teenagers' socioemotional skills 'significantly worse' in England

The socioemotional skills of 15- and 16-year-olds in England are significantly weaker than many of their peers in 30 comparator countries, according to research published by NFER (April 2025)

These weaknesses - in areas such as cooperation, curiosity, empathy, persistence and stress resistance - could damage young people's job prospects if ignored, the report's authors warn.

The study suggests that socioemotional and cognitive skills are precursors to the skills that are essential if young people are to thrive in the future labour market.¹⁵

TES (online) | April 2025

Wellbeing in Cornwall

Compared to England the picture is not significantly differently for Cornwall. We do, like many rural areas, face unique challenges related to children's mental health including our geography, access to transport and socio-economic challenges.

The response to the release of the **My Brilliant Place to ME!** journal started wide ranging conversations and indicated a high-level of concern among parents and carers, school staff and many others about our children's wellbeing.

The concern was not only about children and their families but also the huge impact on schools and school staff:

- rising absence and high numbers of children being taken out of school to be educated at home
- an increase fixed term and permanent exclusions in recent years
- schools finding it difficult to access timely external support for C&YP due to high demand
- their own wellbeing and morale

Given these challenges, we want to help school staff to access tools and strategies that support children's social and emotional development and attendance, behaviour, and learning & achievement.

15. Lucas, M., Bockock, L., Del Pozo Segura, J.M. and Hillary, J. (2025) **International comparisons: Implications for England of research on high-performing education systems. Summary report.** Working paper 7 of The Skills Imperative 2035: Essential skills for tomorrow's workforce. Slough: NFER

Voices from Cornwall

The **2025 'Right On!' Survey** was taken by over 13,500 school-aged children and young people in Cornwall found that 10% primary pupils and 23% secondary pupils 'never' feel that they belong to (or feel part of) their school.

For **primary pupils** the most common reported reasons for missing school were feeling unwell/injury, medical/dental appointments and day trips/holidays. However, 'worries' were also a reason for missing school. 11% said that worries about school had stopped them from going to school, 5.5% worries about friendships, bullying, loneliness.

The survey also asked children and young people if they felt safe in a variety of public spaces. The majority said they 'always' or 'usually' feel safe in a range of spaces, with boys more likely to report feeling safe than girls. 14% primary pupils reported feeling safe 'sometimes' / 'never' and 25% secondary pupils said they 'sometimes' / 'never' feel safe at school.

Some of groups of children and young people including young carers, SEND students and those identifying as non-binary reported lower than average levels of belonging or feeling safe at school.

Cornwall Youth Council Manifesto 2024 – 2026

Our manifesto is a document that outlines what our goals are as Cornwall Youth Council.

“Our manifesto brings together thousands of youth voices from across Cornwall! We captured your views... we worked to bring all these ideas together into workable goals. Our overall aim is to create opportunities for young people that are accessible, inclusive and equal”¹⁶

The goals are wide ranging and thoughtful with a consistent focus throughout on safety and wellbeing. It is a remarkable piece of work and highly recommended.

16. <https://letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/youth-council>

Aims

- Support school staff to explore Social and Emotional Learning in the context of a “Whole school, trauma-informed, relational approach that is ‘Everybody’s Business’”.
- Support the use of Brilliant ME! in the classroom as a resource for SEL¹⁷.
- Link SEL to Cornwall’s wider support for schools through, for example, current work on ‘felt safety’, belonging, inclusion, reducing exclusions, the Parent Engagement Framework, relational approaches to behaviour and the Healthy Schools Toolkit.
- Highlight effective, evidence based best practice and resources.
- Offer tools, resources and information to support everyday SEL in the classroom and across the school.



17. <https://www.headstartkernow.org.uk/a-brilliant-place/> and see more information elsewhere in the resource.

Part 2: The Brilliant ME! approach

Our Guiding Principles

“Establish a shared vision for SEL, ...ensure it is connected to rather than competing with other school priorities.”¹⁸

- We believe that wellbeing is a vital part of any successful school and so we believe that it cannot be ‘a nice to do’. On the other hand, we don’t feel it is productive to call for this, or any other approach, to be a ‘should do’. Rather it is offered as a ‘could do’ to contribute to ‘achieving and thriving’ supporting attendance¹⁹, learning and achievement of all pupils.
- Each school has specific needs and starting points. Therefore, our support is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach: **“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”**²⁰

- We aim to share best possible guidance available to support effective implementation as appropriate to the needs and circumstances of individual schools.
- At the heart of a whole school approach is staff wellbeing. We recognise school staff are under tremendous pressure without capacity to add ‘yet another initiative’. This isn’t intended to be. It is a guide to how SEL can be effective in helping to reduce some of the challenges and pressures school face.
- We are determined to help avoid ‘initiative overload’. We encourage you to identify, prioritise and do a small number of things well²¹. This gives time for approaches to be introduced at a considered pace, giving time for them to become embedded and thoughtfully assessed.

“Teachers are at capacity and there is no time to support these children effectively. We are not counsellors or therapists, and I worry the tools we are told to use with these children are inconsistent and may do more harm than good. We are experts at teaching not mental health, if we were, we would have better mental health ourselves and maybe more teachers would stay in the profession.”²²

18. **Improving social and emotional learning in primary schools. Guidance Report EEF, 2021**

Resources such as **SEL Kernals** are a low-cost and flexible way to integrate SEL into the daily routines and activities of schooling.

19. For example as outlined in: https://www.onecornwall.co.uk/_site/data/publications/attendance_booklet/index.html

20. Attributed to tennis player Arthur Ashe.

21. The EEF has excellent **implementation guidance**

22. Quote from a teacher in the Young Minds research **“Nearly three quarters of teachers believe poor mental health support is having a negative impact on learning”**

- We acknowledge concerns like the one expressed in this quote. Social and Emotional Learning is not ‘therapy’. It is a ‘universal approach’²³. It is the **Ordinary Magic**²⁴ of everyday interactions where everyone in the school community can help all children (and each other) feel safe, experience connectedness, experience supportive relationships and have a sense of belonging in school.
- We strive to make sure our work is aligned to and consistent with other wellbeing and education support available to schools in Cornwall.
- Our support is evidence based and draws on effective practice locally, nationally and beyond and aligns to policy / guidance from government as available.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child underpin everything we do.

“ **Education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full.** ”

Article 29, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The Brilliant ME! approach

Everybody’s Business

A whole school, trauma informed, relational approach to wellbeing.

Enabling children and young people to achieve and thrive by being in school, ready and able to learn and reach their full potential, in a Brilliant Place to be a child and grow up.

Ordinary Magic



23. That, according to research by the EIF, can have an impact on everyone who takes part and the greatest impact can be on pupils most at risk of poorer mental outcomes.

24. **Ordinary Magic** is a term created by psychologist Ann Masten that sums our approach to supporting wellbeing in schools.

How Brilliant ME! in action aligns

- Links to Cornwall’s priorities, frameworks and services
- Children’s Rights
- PSHE, Ofsted, NICE

Locally, the first of the council’s (current) four strategic priorities is that Cornwall is “A Brilliant Place to be a Child and Grow Up”²⁵.

A Brilliant Place to be a Child and Grow Up

We are determined to make Cornwall a place where every child can grow up:

- Mentally and physically healthy
- Enjoying, learning and achieving
- Living in safety and with stability
- Accessing good jobs and a great environment
- Belonging and contributing as part of a society which respects their rights



Brilliant ME! complements:

- **Right On Survey** (offered free to schools on a two-year cycle)
- **Children’s Rights** and the work of the **Right On** team / **Cornwall Youth Council**²⁶
- **Our desire to support a “whole school, trauma informed, relational approach to wellbeing that is ‘Everybody’s Business’”** and our work on **safety, belonging and resilience**²⁷ that supports it.
- The TFF **Belonging Framework**, as well as current work with schools on **Reducing Exclusions and Promoting Inclusion** and the work of our colleagues across the **Education Welfare Service**.
- **The Education Psychology Service Relational Policy Guidance**
- **TFF Parental Engagement Framework**
- The **Healthy Schools Framework** developed by our colleagues in **Public Health**.
- **Local PSHE support**
- **The role of Senior Mental Health Leads**
- The work of our **Education Mental Health Practitioner** colleagues in primary schools
- **Your own wellbeing priorities** as individual schools or as part of a MAT

More broadly, Social and Emotional Learning contributes to:

- National PSHE guidance
- Strategies for Improving Attendance
- Closing the Attainment Gap
- Ofsted
- NICE guidance on wellbeing in schools
- The emerging focus on oracy

You’ll find more information about the links in the appendices.



25. <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/the-council-and-democracy/your-council/council-strategy-and-business-plan/>

26. **Right On Manifesto 2024 – 2026**

27. Through our work to share the Boingboing Resilience Framework and Protective Behaviours

Part 3: What is Social and Emotional Learning?

“ SEL is the universal life jacket, keeping pupils afloat and open to learning. Only when children can learn in psychologically safe environments that nurture their emotion skills can they move from helplessness to resilience, from anxiety to action, from scattered to centred from isolated to connected. ”

Marc Brackett, *Permission to Feel* (p. 217)

Background

- There is **no single definition for social-emotional skills**, with several different major frameworks existing.
- There are a range of **other terms that schools use that overlap with SEL** (though each has a different emphasis), including: ‘supporting children’s mental health and wellbeing’; ‘character education’; development of children’s ‘resilience’; ‘bullying prevention’; ‘life skills’; ‘behaviour management’; ‘personal development’; and ‘Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development’. Colleagues who accessed Thrive / TIS training through Headstart or have come across the wonderful work of Louise Bombèr may be familiar with the term ‘**psychoeducation**’.
- There are also specific programmes / resources such as **Emotion Coaching**, **Zones of Regulation** or the **Incredible 5 Point Scale** and many more²⁸.

With all this in mind, this resource:

- uses the **definition of SEL** from the **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**²⁹ and;
- is informed by the excellent **Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools. Guidance Report** (2019^{30,31}) from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)

28. See the one page guides in **our resources section**

29. <https://casel.org/about-us/>

30. **The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)** is an independent charity supporting teachers and school leaders to use evidence of what works – and what doesn’t – to improve educational outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children and young people.

31. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/primary-sel>

CASEL

More than ever, SEL is critical to supporting the academic recovery, mental well-being, and safety of all young people:

- SEL is for everyone. SEL develops skills that help us be successful in all parts of our lives—like communicating effectively, setting goals, staying motivated, and making decisions that benefit ourselves and others. With these skills, we can build healthy relationships, succeed in schools and workplaces, and contribute to our communities.
- SEL is based in science. Hundreds of independent studies show that SEL leads to better academic performance, improved well-being, and safer schools. It creates positive school environments where children learn the skills they need to succeed in school and in their futures.
- SEL brings families, schools, and communities together.

Adapted from the [CASEL website](#)

The CASEL Framework

- The CASEL definition
- The five core competencies
- The CASEL Wheel

What is the CASEL definition of Social and Emotional Learning?

“The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”

CASEL 2020



The CASEL 5

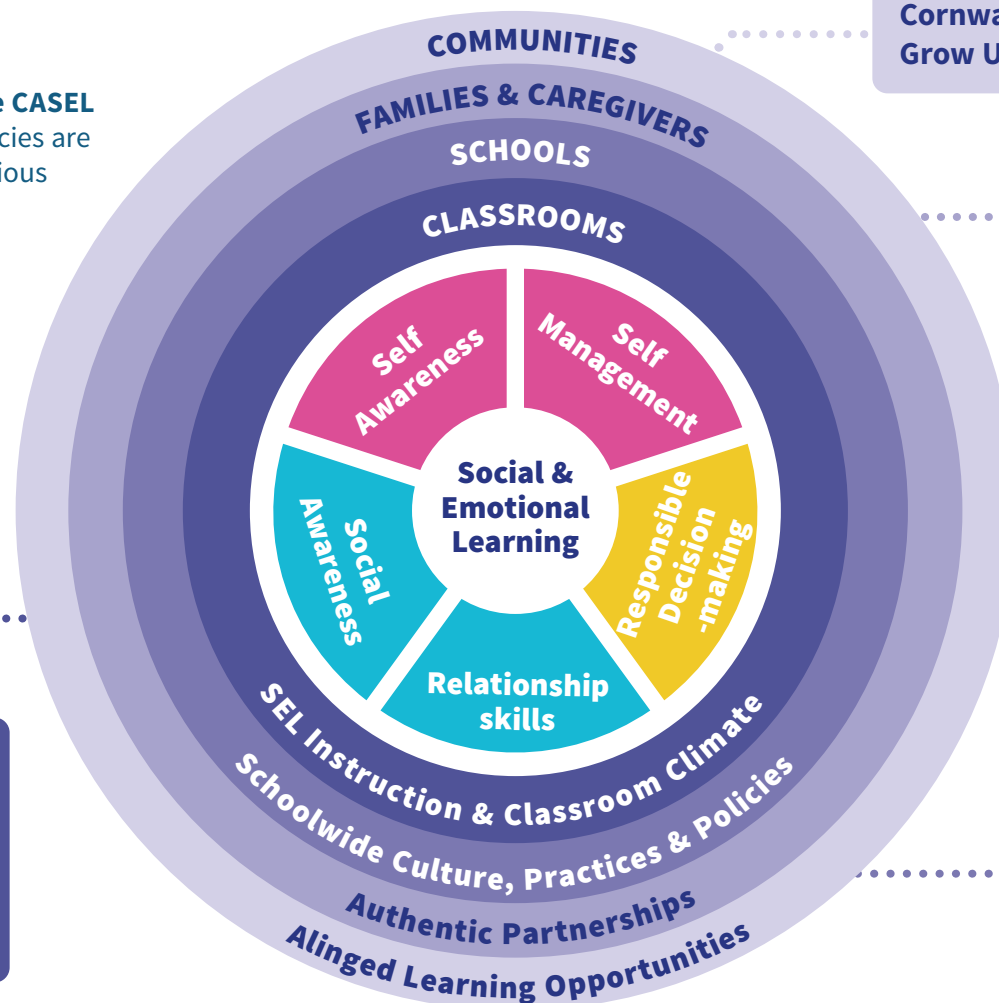
The CASEL Framework for promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools and other settings **emphasises the development of five core competencies** ((see Table). These are skills that have been linked to a range of positive outcomes.

Core competency	Definition	Associated skills
Self awareness	<p>The ability to accurately recognise one’s own emotions, thoughts and values and how they influence behaviour.</p> <p>The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying emotions Accurate self-perception Recognising strengths Self-confidence Self-efficacy
Self-management	<p>The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts and behaviours in different situations – effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself.</p> <p>The ability to set and work towards personal and academic goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impulse control Stress management Self-discipline Self-motivation Goal setting Organisational skills
Social awareness	<p>The ability to take the perspective of and empathise with others. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour and to recognise family, school and community resources and supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding emotions Empathy/sympathy Appreciating diversity Respect for others
Relationship skills	<p>The ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively and seek and offer help when needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Social engagement Relationship building Teamwork
Responsible decision-making	<p>The ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions and a consideration of the wellbeing of oneself and others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying problems Analysing solutions Solving problems Evaluating Reflecting Ethical responsibility

The CASEL Wheel

The CASEL framework also uses a visual representation, sometimes referred to as **The CASEL Wheel**, to illustrate how these five competencies are interconnected and work together within various settings³². The wheel typically depicts:

- At the centre: Classroom instruction and practices that promote SEL.
- Surrounding the centre: The five core competencies (CASEL 5).
- The outer rings: Represent the different contexts where SEL is applied and supported, such as school-wide practices, family involvement, and community partnerships.



Cornwall: A Brilliant Place to Be a Child and Grow Up - Cornwall Council Strategic Priority

Parents and carers are given advice/information/signposting to support their child's wellbeing.

Parents and carers are supported to be fully involved in the life and learning of their child.

- Cornwall Parent Carer Engagement Framework

A classroom built on safety and belonging where SEL is taught in the curriculum and 'caught' in relational approaches.

- TFF Belonging Framework

A whole school, trauma informed, relational approach to wellbeing that is 'Everybody's Business'.

- Cornwall EPS Relational Policy Guidance

32. Some of you may recognise echoes of Uri Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in the CASEL Wheel. Bronfenbrenner's work was a key element of the original HeadStart Programme. See appendices for 1-page overviews

The Education Endowment Foundation's Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools: Guidance Report - Summary of Recommendations

The guidance highlights the crucial role of SEL in children's overall development, academic success, and positive life outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. The report offers **six evidence-based and practical recommendations** that schools can integrate into their everyday practices **without creating significant additional workload**. It emphasises that SEL skills can and should be taught and reinforced across the curriculum and the wider school environment.

Teaching Strategies

1. Teach SEL skills explicitly

- Use a range of strategies to teach key skills, both in dedicated time, & in everyday teaching.
- **Self awareness:** Expand children's emotional vocabulary & support them to express emotions.
- **Self regulation:** Teach children to use self calming strategies & positive self talk to help deal with emotions.
- **Social awareness:** Use stories to discuss others' emotions & perspectives.
- **Relationship skills:** Role play good communication & listening skills.
- **Responsible decision-making:** Teach & practise problem solving strategies.

2. Integrate and model SEL skills through everyday teaching

- Model the social & emotional behaviours you want children to adopt.
- Give specific & focused praise when children display SEL skills.
- Do not rely on 'crisis moments' for teaching skills.
- Embed SEL teaching across a range of subject areas: Literacy, history, drama & PE all provide good opportunities to link to SEL.
- Use simple ground rules in groupwork & classroom discussion to reinforce SEL skills.

Curriculum

3. Plan carefully for adopting a SEL programme

- Use a planned series of lessons to teach skills in dedicated time.
- Adopting an evidence-based programme is likely to be a better bet than developing your own from scratch.
- Explore and prepare carefully before adopting a programme - review what is required to deliver it, and whether it is suitable for your needs and context.
- Use evidence summaries (i.e. those from EIF or EEF) as a quick way of assessing the evidence for programmes.
- Once underway, regularly review progress & adapt with care.

4. Use a SAFE curriculum: Sequential, Active, Focused & Explicit

- Ensure your curriculum builds skills sequentially across lessons and year groups. Start early and think longterm.
- Balance teacher-led activities with active forms of learning, like role-play, discussion and small group work, to practice skills.
- Focus your time: Quality matters more than quantity. Regular brief instruction appears more effective than infrequent long sessions.
- Be explicit: Clearly identify the skills that are being taught and why they are important.

Whole-school

5. Reinforce SEL skills through whole-school ethos and activities

- Establish school-wide norms, expectations and routines that support children's social and emotional development.
- Align your schools behaviour and anti-bullying policies with SEL.
- Seek ideas and support from staff and pupils in how the school environment can be improved.
- Actively engage with parents to reinforce skills in the home environment.

Whole-school

6. Plan, support and monitor SEL implementation

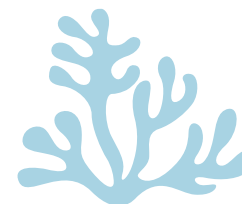
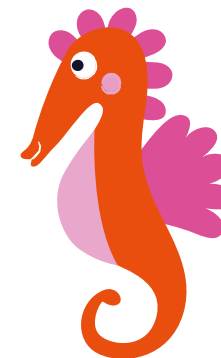
- Establish a shared vision for SEL: Ensure it is *connected to* rather than *competing with* other school priorities.
- Involve teachers and staff in planning for SEL.
- Provide training and support to all school staff, covering: Readiness for change; development of skills and knowledge; and support for embedding change.
- Prioritise implementation quality: Teacher preparedness and enthusiasm for SEL are associated with better outcomes.
- Monitor implementation and evaluate the impact of your approaches.

Report recommendations

- **Explicit teaching** ensures that all children are introduced to and can develop these fundamental skills. It provides a common language and framework for understanding and discussing emotions and social interactions. This proactive approach can prevent issues from escalating and equips children with strategies to navigate social and emotional challenges
- **Integrating SEL** makes it relevant and contextualised for children. Seeing teachers model these skills provides powerful examples, and embedding SEL across the curriculum reinforces its importance and provides varied opportunities for practice and application in different contexts.
- **A planned approach** increases the likelihood of successful implementation and positive outcomes. Selecting a programme³³ that aligns with the school's ethos and has a strong evidence base is crucial for effectiveness. Ongoing review allows for necessary adaptations and ensures the programme meets the evolving needs of the pupils.
- **The SAFE principles** help maximise the impact of SEL teaching. A sequential approach ensures a coherent development of skills, active learning promotes engagement and deeper understanding, focused attention allows for mastery, and explicit instruction ensures clarity and purpose.

- **A whole-school approach** creates a consistent message and provides numerous opportunities for children to observe and practice SEL skills in various contexts. When SEL is embedded in the school's ethos, it becomes a fundamental part of how the school operates and how everyone interacts.
- **Effective implementation** requires leadership commitment, staff buy-in, and ongoing professional development. Monitoring and evaluation are essential to determine the effectiveness of the strategies and to make informed decisions about future developments in the school's SEL provision.

We highly recommend the EEF report and the supporting material that can be found on their website including other guidance, e.g. on SEND; Behaviour and the role of TAs, that overlap with this report³⁴.



33. Originally there was an emphasis on the importance of 'structured programmes' within SEL, and this is echoed in this report. More recently there has been research to show that resources such as **SEL Kernals** are a low-cost and flexible way to integrate SEL into the daily routines and activities of schooling.

34. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>

A 'SAFE' curriculum: Sequential, Active, Focused and Explicit:

This recommendation outlines key principles for designing and delivering effective SEL curricula, whether it's a specific programme or integrated activities. 'SAFE' stands for:

Sequential: Skills are built progressively over time.

Active: Learning involves engaging activities like role-play, discussions, and group work.

Focused: Sufficient time and attention are dedicated to developing specific skills.

Explicit: Skills and their importance are clearly identified and taught.

Building upon these SAFE elements, SEL is most effective when it:

- Occurs within supportive contexts.
- Builds adult competencies
- Partners with family and community
- Targets key behaviours and skills
- Sets reasonable goals



Stella Jones, from the Town End Research School³⁵, adds “**we encourage adults to engage in the following practices that align with a SAFE approach to SEL...**

- **Teach:** Clearly name and provide children with explicit instruction in SEL concepts, vocabulary, and skills in culturally and developmentally appropriate ways;
- **Model:** Model and live the skills and attitudes they hope to see in children;
- **Practice:** Provide and act on real-life opportunities for children to practice skills (i.e. integrate skill practice into everyday activities and interactions); and
- **Discuss:** Take the time to talk with children about what happens when a challenge arises, what skills they can use to address it, and reflect on how it went.

35. **Town End Research School** specialise in SEL alongside metacognition and literacy. They have produced some thoughtful blog posts, created some excellent resources and Stella Jones, who has been leading on this, may be known to some of you through the Cornwall Research School. They have very kindly allowed us to use their work and resources. Which you'll find threaded throughout the resource.

Evidence Base for SEL

There is an ever-increasing body of research that shows SEL can lead to improved wellbeing, behaviour and attainment /achievement and that these effects are long lasting.

If you are interested in exploring the evidence, these links provide a good starting point:

- <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/social-and-emotional-learning>
- <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-does-the-research-say/>
- <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit> (Evidence suggests that effective SEL can lead to learning gains of +4 months over the course of a year.)
- https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/unlocking-high-quality-teaching_f5b82176-en.html
- **Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out.** Wallace Foundation 2021
- OECD (2025), **Unlocking High-Quality Teaching**, OECD Publishing, Paris
- **Social and Emotional Learning: a methodological perspective**, Shotton Hall Research, 2022³⁶

Education for wellbeing

Education for Wellbeing is a large-scale research programme, funded by the DfE, involving two randomised control trials. Education for Wellbeing evaluated five mental health and wellbeing interventions being delivered in primary and secondary schools. The aim was to examine the impact of these approaches on children and young people's mental health. The programme ran between 2018 and 2024. Across England, 32,655 pupils across 513 schools participated in Education for Wellbeing.

One of the five interventions, **Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing (SSW)** is of particular interest to SEL and our 'Brilliant ME!' approach. Based on the research findings SSW is a recommended intervention for primary schools. SSW will be offered alongside our Protective Behaviours Training courses.

SSW is influenced by **Protective Behaviours** and aims to improve children and young people's skills around safety, mental health, wellbeing and accessing sources of support.

More specific goals:

- identify what feels safe or unsafe
- identify support networks for pupils
- recognise, understand and manage our feelings
- identify coping and help seeking strategies for pupils
- challenge stigma around mental illness.

36. A reflective piece asking, 'how good is the evidence for social and emotional learning?' Included here to add some context and perspective.

Part 4: Taught *and* Caught

Brilliant ME! and SEL in KS2 in Cornish Schools

“ Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is widely acknowledged to support children’s wellbeing, mental and physical health, social and relational development, and life skills. Also, importantly, SEL fosters a healthy and positive school environment where young people can feel the safety and belonging, they need to thrive. ”

Marc Brackett, Permission to Feel (p. 202)

Across all the best practice guidance³⁷ it is possible to identify three ways of approaching SEL in schools.

1. **Bespoke programmes** structured around specific resources / curricula / tools and often ‘prescriptive’ in delivery.
2. **Targeted support** intended to support particular pupils.

3. **Embedding SEL in everyday practice** that includes **explicit teaching** (through PSHE and opportunities in the wider curriculum); **modelling** SEL skills & coping strategies and creating a **whole school ethos and shared language** supportive of safety, connectedness and belonging.

Our resource is about embedding SEL in everyday practice because:

- Information about choosing (from the many) effective **programmes** can be found elsewhere;
- **Targeted support** is working well in many schools already with many superb wellbeing practitioners providing great support for children alongside MHSTs, The Educational Psychology Service and Education Welfare amongst others.
- **Embedding SEL in the everyday**, and ensuring it is ‘everybody’s business’ is what a ‘Whole School Approach’ is about.

The advantages of taking an ‘everyday approach’

One of the frequent, and most valid, push backs we hear from school staff is about capacity - “**not enough hours in the day, not enough room in the curriculum**” - alongside apparent expectations that schools will manage mental health and wellbeing alongside sexism, knife crime, online safety and the effects of social media to the impact of child poverty and...

We agree. We recognise the very real challenges schools face, but we believe that ‘everyday SEL’ offers opportunities, freedom and flexibility.

37. Including the EEF guidance report.

We believe that ‘everyday SEL’...

- is in the everyday interactions and positive relationships that Ann Masten calls **Ordinary Magic**³⁸ and that every member of staff can be **Ordinary Magicians**
- doesn’t have to be about ‘shoe-horning’ another programme into the curriculum...³⁹
- encourages a whole school culture and climate that is explicit in saying SEL is important and will be supported across the school – in training, in policies, in relationships with parents and carers, in the resources available to staff to use.
- recognises and acts on opportunities to build belonging (creating the ‘we’⁴⁰). E.g. meet & greet / endings (belonging ‘cues’), ‘check-ins’ and helping all children feel ‘seen’ and ‘heard’⁴¹.
- is about how adults model SEL skills and coping strategies (“teachable moments”)
- is an opportunity to ease some of the pressures / challenges schools face by contributing positively to attendance strategies, relational approaches to behaviour, wider wellbeing and, ultimately, improved learning.

- finds opportunities throughout the curriculum in, reading, science, history, art, PE alongside PSHE for explicit teaching of skills and strategies... that includes teaching children about their brain and nervous system⁴².
- is about developing the skills children and young people will need for a changing and, possibly uncertain, future.

“ SEL is effective where school staff can be flexible and depend on lightweight intentional, and easy-to-apply strategies⁴³. If teachers only have a prescribed SEL curriculum, they won’t be able to address the always changing and varied emotional needs that show up throughout a class session... the most effective strategies are those that can be applied in real time so that they are responsive and relevant... in any given moment. ”

Dr Linda Lucey⁴⁴

“ Social and emotional skills, such as empathy, self-awareness, respect for others and the ability to communicate, are becoming essential as classrooms and workplaces become more ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse. Achievement at school also depends on a number of social and emotional skills, such as perseverance, efficacy, responsibility, curiosity and emotional stability. Social and emotional skills can be equally and, in some cases, even more – as important as cognitive skills in becoming a responsible citizen. ”

Skills for 2030 (OECD)⁴⁵

38. Ordinary Magic – check out **our website** and our **one page guide**.

39. Although there are some excellent **evidence-based examples**

40. Jean Gross – Feb 2025 **Creating the ‘we’: Ideas for pupil belonging in school**

41. Allen Mendler’s 2 x 10 framework is an excellent strategy. See our **one page guides**.

42. See the section on the brain science in Part 5.

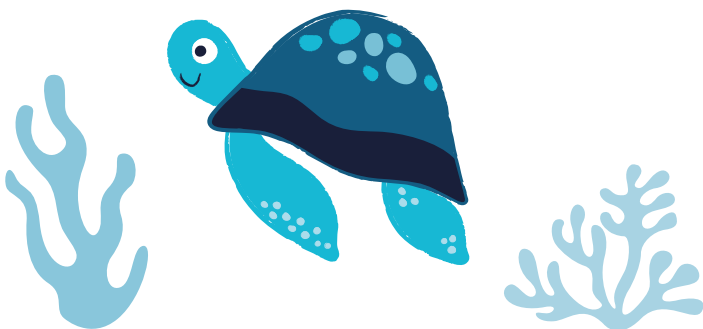
43. See Harvard EASEL’s **SEL Kernels** for one example.

44. **The K-12 Educators Guide to SEL, HMH, 2022**. At one time it was thought by some that only a faithfully implemented planned programme could be effective, but increasingly there has been research to create flexible ways to integrate SEL into the daily routines and activities, The Harvard EASEL programme ‘**SEL Kernels**’ are an excellent sample of this.

45. From **The OECD Learning Compass 2030** - also highlighted in *Jerrim, J. & Kaye, N. (2025). The decline in pupils’ emotional engagement with school. How does England compare to other countries? (CEPEO Working Paper No. 25-03). UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities. <https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:ucl:cepeow:25-03>*

“ What’s great is, it doesn’t have to be another thing to fit in! Yes, there are practical tips and ideas for whole class sessions but why not start by weaving SEL into your existing teaching? By adapting that PE lesson, roleplay or the reading text, we can ‘model the social and emotional behaviours you want the children to adapt’ (EEF). Tweaking the lessons you’re already covering can allow the SEL content to ‘align with the structures and routines already in place’ in your classroom. ”

Martin Hill, Billesley Research School⁴⁶



Social and Emotional Learning at KS2

CASEL Competencies and Curriculum Progression in KS ⁴⁷		
	Year 3 & 4	Year 5 & 6
Self awareness	Understanding complex emotions, identifying emotions more accurately (e.g. ‘I’m proud of this work because I tried hard’), recognising personal values, developing self-confidence.	Understanding and managing a wide range of emotions (e.g. understand why they feel nervous before standing up to talk in assembly), reflecting on personal strengths and weaknesses, developing self-esteem and understanding peer pressure.
Self-management	Managing strong emotions effectively (e.g. frustration / disappointment or managing ‘stress’ using favourite coping strategies), setting and achieving more complex goals, showing self-discipline.	Setting and achieving long-term goals, showing self-control, managing stresses effectively, developing resilience ⁴⁸ and perseverance (e.g. trying again after an initial failure).
Social awareness	Taking others’ perspectives, showing empathy for a peer who is upset, understanding group dynamics, appreciating diversity and inclusivity.	Taking others’ perspectives, showing empathy for a peer who is upset, understanding group dynamics, appreciating diversity and inclusivity.

Note: This is a general framework, and the specific learning objectives will vary depending on the school context and curriculum. It’s important to adapt this progression to meet the needs of your pupils and to ensure a smooth transition between key stages.

46. Martin Hill **Billesley Research School Blog** March 2024

47. See appendices for a more detailed progression table covering EY and KS1 alongside KS2.

48. Our understanding of resilience is based on the **Boingboing Resilience Framework** (see Appendices plus more on the HSK website)

CASEL Competencies and Curriculum Progression in KS⁴⁷

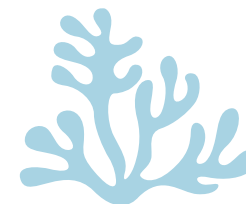
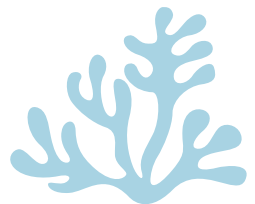
	Year 3 & 4	Year 5 & 6
Relationship skills	Building strong friendships, communicating needs effectively, resolving conflicts peacefully, cooperating in group activities, practicing active listening.	Building and maintaining positive relationships, resolving conflicts constructively (including being able to mediate between friends), leading and collaborating effectively.
Responsible decision-making	Making informed choices by evaluating different options and reflecting on impact of decisions on self and others, understanding ethical dilemmas, showing responsibility	Making ethical choices, considering the impact of decisions on others, being willing to stand up for something / someone even if it is an unpopular choice, demonstrating civic responsibility.

SEL across the school day

Connected to rather than competing with other school priorities...

“ ...The end goal of SEL is that children use the knowledge and skills they are taught as part of their daily interactions with peers and adults. The teaching of skills is therefore likely to have greater and longer-term impacts when it is integrated into everyday classroom interactions, and across subjects, than when skills are taught in isolation. Teachers and other school staff can support children’s skill development by purposefully seeking out opportunities to model, recognise and practise SEL skills.”

Martin Hill, Billesley Research School⁴⁶



49. EEF Social and Emotional Learning Guidance report

Ideas for including SEL across the school day

- In PSHE and the wider curriculum
- Creating and nurturing a supportive classroom environment
- Building relationships (staff-pupils and pupil-pupil)
- Underpinned by a Whole School Approach and a shared language

For example:

- “Teachable moments”
- Getting to know pupils individually in ‘one-minute meetings’ or using the Mendler 2x 10 framework⁵⁰
- Classroom talk and group discussion / oracy skills
- Exploring emotions – displays, check-ins, PSHE lessons, art and more
- ‘Getting to know you’ ideas for building belonging⁵¹
- Teaching about self-regulation skills and strategies
- Picture books and stories / novels
- Games
- Classroom jobs and responsibilities
- Teaching time management and other executive functioning skills

- Safe spaces and calm kits
- The 5 Ways to Wellbeing

The following table offers more suggestions by the CASEL competencies and linked to different aspects of the school day.

“ SEL depends on effective communication between pupils and adults. It is vital that teachers undertake high-quality, adult-led interactions with children to support all aspects of thinking, learning and well-being. ”

Stella Jones, Director of Town End Associate Research School⁵³

Teachable moments

“...seize on teachable moments – opportunities that occur during the natural course of the school day to model SEL skills”.

Example: Modelling self-management

- “At the pivotal and most exciting point in a history lesson that Sophia had carefully planned and was eager to teach, her slides freeze and refuse to budge.
- Sophia uses “I” statements to articulate her feelings of frustration, disappointment, and confusion. She then models how to use positive self-talk and second person pronouns to explore a solution to her problem:
- “Right Sophia, this is a hinderance, but you can sort it. You need to get the slides to work so that the lesson can continue. When this happened before you quit the programme and started it up again. If that doesn’t fix it, try restarting your laptop. You can do this!”⁵⁴

50. See 1-page guides

51. What Adrian Bethune calls ‘The Tribal Classroom’ and Jean Gross refers to as “creating the ‘We’”

52. From The Town End Research School. Town End have built on the EEF report and created some excellent resources linking SEL work to reading and oracy skills. We refer to these throughout this table. Details and resources can be found in Appendix G.

53. **Seizing upon SEL with Structured Talk.** Stella Jones, Director of Town End Associate Research School

54. From **Scenarios – making the most of teachable moments**

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Self awareness	<p>Recognise, understand and label emotions:</p> <p>Be ‘Emotions Explorers’ - Identify emotions through photocards / images / emojis and in everyday lessons / resources.</p> <p>Play games like emotion charades / bingo to explore emotions and develop vocabularyⁱ</p> <p>Make ‘Feelings files’ⁱⁱ – exploring emotions in detail – definitions / what the emotion looks / sounds like in face / body / voice.</p> <p>Help children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand all feelings are OK. No ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ or ‘good’ or ‘bad’ feelings. Simply feelings. (how we respond or express is important e.g. OK to feel angry but not OK to hurt yourself or others or break things) • understand we are not our feelings. We feel angry or anxious rather than we are angry or anxious • understand it is important to express feelings especially when feeling uncomfortable or unsafe 	<p>Use questions that enable children to think about different points of view, emotions, relationships and problem solving. E.g.</p> <p>English / Literacy^v</p> <p>Exploring stories^{vi}: Character feelings maps over the course of a story. Discuss how characters feel and why?</p> <p>Use reading strategies^{vii} like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence stems • Hot seating • Freeze frame • This path: that path • Conscience alley <p>Explore feelings’ idioms – ‘browned off’, ‘seeing red’ etc.</p> <p>Poetry: Use poetry to explore feelings and emotions. Both by reading existing poems^{viii} or creating their own</p>	<p>Model by talking about own feelings, “I’m feeling a bit... today, because...”</p> <p>Talk about and model ‘I statements’ “I am feeling...” as opposed to “I’m anxious”</p> <p>Model being human. Being human means, we all make mistakes. Know how and when to say sorry and make amends for those mistakes.</p> <p>Emotional Check-ins with pupils^{xi}</p> <p>Emotion displays in the classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feelings tree with the leaves as different feelings words, emoticon board, feelings wheel, • poster/ display of words • home-made ‘feelings dictionary’ – see the ‘feelings files’ suggested activity. 	<p>The Public Health England 8 Principles of a Whole School Approach provides an effective, evidence-based model for planning / implementing SEL. In addition, here in Cornwall we have plenty of locally focused support. E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on Developing a Relationally Informed Behaviour Policy – Cornwall Educational Psychology Service (in development) • Belonging Framework – Together for Families • Parent Carer Engagement Framework for education settings – Together for Families / Parent Carers Cornwall • Right On Children’s Rights Team / Rights Respecting Schools Award

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Self awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore intensity of emotions and associated vocabulary – word sorting activities. Feelings Wheels, Thermometers / Scales etc. • understand feelings are simply feelings. They come and go – like visitors • explore how feelings change over the course of a day / week – use feelings maps; timelines or mood trackers (such as those in Brilliant ME!) • understand how emotions can influence thoughts and behaviour <p>Develop an understanding of the brain and nervous system and links to feelings / behaviour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upstairs / Downstairs brain • Amygdala • Flipping our lid • Brain chemicals <p>Recognising strengths and developing self-efficacy</p> <p>Help children explore their strengths using ‘strengths cards’ and ‘All About Me’ activities in the Brilliant ME! resource.</p>	<p>Drama Explore how emotions can be expressed and communicated. Including how actors communicate feelings to an audience during a performance.</p> <p>History, Geography, Science Explore protagonists’ emotions and how may have affected actions and outcomes.</p> <p>Science Develop an understanding of the body, brain and nervous system^{ix}</p> <p>Art^x Emotions and colour Create feelings wheels and intensity maps – where the stronger the feeling the darker the colour.</p>	<p>Refer to/use the display to add new words that come up; help children find other words to use in their writing or to express themselves, help children with an emotions check-in or express how they feel about school or a new topic etc. they have just started.</p> <p>Create a classroom ethos where strengths are seen and acknowledged. Praise children when they use different strengths and encourage them to spot strengths in others.</p> <p>Facilitating safe class / group discussions</p> <p>Create a classroom where children feel they belong^{xii}. Where they will feel safe to explore and take risks – i.e. to learn.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commitment from senior leadership 2. Creating a school ethos and environment with universal, schoolwide principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about how wellbeing and SEL are ‘Everybody’s Business’ • all members of the school community will behave and interact (including a focus on a shared language of safety, belonging and inclusion) to support SEL • with explicit reference to developing SEL in school development plan and in curriculum plans <p>A behaviour policy that takes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a relational, trauma informed approach to behaviour support / management.

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Self awareness	<p>Encourage children to spot strengths in each other and create opportunities for them to do soⁱⁱⁱ.</p> <p>Help children recognise areas for improvement and help them set goals and develop problem solving skills.</p> <p>Healthy lifestyles^{iv} Help children understand the importance of getting active / healthy diet and sleep to their wellbeing.</p>		<p>Talk about self-care in your classroom. Refer to your own strategies. Posing questions like, “How can we take better care of ourselves?” can lead to rich discussions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> into account that a behaviour policy (and the consequences within it) cannot be a ‘one size fits all’. Being fair is less about all pupils being treated the same (equality), than about all pupils getting what they need to reach the same outcome (equity). <p>3. Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> wellbeing/support recognised as fundamental to a successful WSA. are fully on board and involved in developing the whole school approaches receive appropriate training in whole school approaches / policies etc. supported to implement / review / reflect receive supervision^{xiii} / reflection time
Self-management	<p>Support children to safely express and regulate their emotions</p> <p>Help recognise emotions and understand there are shades of intensity to our emotions.</p> <p>Teach children about physical signs linked to their emotions. ‘Body cues’.</p> <p>Explore feelings ‘icebergs’ where what we see above the surface can be very different to what’s beneath.</p>	<p>Use questions that enable children to think about different points of view, emotions, relationships and problem solving.</p> <p>Use stories, drama, poetry and history teaching to explore instances of being overwhelmed by big feelings, the effects, and what the people involved might have done differently.</p>	<p>Model calming strategies: ‘I can feel myself getting angry with the IWB. I need to take a moment to take a deep breath and calm down’.</p> <p>Help children use positive self-talk to calm their emotions, e.g. “I can calm down”; “I will feel happier in a little bit”.</p>	

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Self-management	<p>Teach children about the brain science behind feeling overwhelmed and flipping their lid.</p> <p>Introduce children to coping skills and strategies^{xvii} and explain to children why and how they work.^{xviii}</p> <p>Enable children to explore a range of strategies to find ones they like; think will help and feel comfortable using.^{xix}</p> <p>Encourage children to practice coping strategies so they are ready to use when needed. For example, encourage them find a moment for a strong, deep breath each day – the repetition helping to create a neural pathway and become internalised.</p> <p>Teach children positive self-talk. When children experience a strong emotion such as anger, often there is an underlying thought (self-talk) accompanying this emotion which intensifies how they are feeling...</p>	<p>Help children think of metaphors for strong feelings, e.g. Anger: Volcanoes, fireworks, bursting balloons... This can help them explore what's happening when they experience strong emotions.</p> <p>Art/craft: Create their own tokens and reminders for their favourite coping strategies. e.g. Small breathing cards to keep in a pocket or stuck on their desks. Decorating some small smooths stones / cabochons as a tactile grounding activity, or a breathing band made of a pipe cleaner and beads.</p> <p>Calm boxes.</p> <p>PE: Look at the importance to a sportsperson of calming nerves before a big race, or why 'losing it' can result in being sent off or disqualified and so missing out on chance to succeed.</p>	<p>Co-regulation. Support children's self-regulation 'in the moment', and notice and give specific focused praise for children using emotion regulation strategies. Use language that builds children's self-efficacy by drawing their attention to strategies they have used to help themselves.</p> <p>Set up a calm area in the class or create a calm kit children can access freely if needed.</p> <p>Model using your own Calming strategies – 'Teachable Moments'</p> <p>Help children create their own 'calm boxes' to take home and share with parents / carers.</p> <p>Use approaches like Regulate / Relate / Reason^{xxii} and PACE^{xxiii} when a child is overwhelmed by strong feelings and things have gone wrong.</p>	<p>4. Needs: The school knows and understands the needs of children including their lived experience. The school uses and acts on appropriate wellbeing measurement tools^{xiv} amongst other insights (to, for example, understand needs, monitor effectiveness of SEL approaches).</p> <p>5. Targetedsupport and appropriate referral for children</p> <p>6. Curriculum: "Everything works somewhere; nothing works everywhere". Adopt tools, resources, and approaches that work for your school. E.g. some schools find the Zones of Regulation^{xv} a useful way to help children understand their emotions, but others find it tricky to maintain focus and consistency across the school.</p>

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Self-management	<p>("I've been left out...no one likes me"). When self-talk is negative, children can get angry, frustrated, or anxious more easily. Teach children to use positive self-talk (helpful thoughts) to calm their emotions.</p> <p>Similarly help children explore helpful and unhelpful behaviours in response to emotions. Use simple scenarios e.g.: "Someone on line said something nasty. I feel uncomfortable..." An unhelpful response might be – "I'm scared. I'll stay offline". A helpful response– "I can tell someone and get help"</p> <p>Healthy lifestyles</p> <p>Help children understand the importance of getting active / healthy diet and sleep to their wellbeing^{xx}.</p> <p>The 5 Ways to Wellbeing (or CLANGERS^{xxi} – if you add sleep and diet!) are a good place to start.</p>			<p>7. Children:</p> <p>All children, including the most vulnerable, have a voice and know they are valued and listened to.</p> <p>8. Parents and carers:</p> <p>Parents and carers feel welcome and safe in school and informed about SEL and wellbeing work in school, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight courses for parents • Signpost parents to help and support for their mental health and wellbeing and their children • Create a wellbeing books area for parents and carers in the school library • Adopt the TFF Parent Engagement Framework^{xvi}
Social awareness	<p>Help children recognise others' feelings and emotions</p>	<p>Using stories / poems / film / real-life accounts to explore:</p>	<p>Ensuring the classroom is a place of safety, belonging and inclusion.</p>	

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Social awareness	<p>Help children recognise others' feelings and emotions</p> <p>Guess the emotion from photos / images / emojis / short film clips and in stories (including specific short scenarios).</p> <p>Play emotion charades – acting out and guessing different emotions</p> <p>Help children understand how emotions can influence our decisions / actions (and how they can affect ourselves and others)</p> <p>Explore perspective taking and seeing situations from the view point of others - e.g. looking at some fairy tales and stories from the perspective of different characters.</p> <p>Help children develop an understanding and importance of empathy (and how it differs from perspective taking) What it is like to 'walk a mile in someone else's shoes'.</p> <p>Help children understand and diversity and the importance of inclusion^{xxiv}.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspective taking and how different people react to the same events differently. • How the story characters or historical figures built positive relationships or how they repaired arguments or disagreements. • How emotions affected behaviours which then affected others or the outcome of events. • The feelings of those who feel bullied, or different, or lonely, or what it feels like to experience difficult events . • Empathy - i.e. creating 'empathy maps' for a character over the course of a story or a particular timeline. <p>Use activities like Hot Seating^{xxvii} - to explore a character's feelings and choices etc.</p>	<p>Encourage self-reflective questioning, such as: "What would I have done in that situation?" This allows children to evaluate actions, promotes self-reflection, and develops their use of self-talk.</p> <p>Model approaches to problem solving, e.g. "I can't get the... to work. How frustrating... How did I solve it last time it did this? What else could I try? If I can't get it to work, what I do instead?" etc.</p> <p>Encourage random acts of kindness / kindness challenges.</p> <p>Recognising kindness / empathy / cooperation from children.</p> <p>Helping children resolve fallings out using 'peaceful problem solving' approaches / restorative practices</p>	<p>Signpost parents to support that might help them address wider needs, e.g. food banks; debt advice etc.</p>

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Social awareness	<p>Help children understand the power of kindness and being kind (and how acts of kindness have a positive effect on the brain and wellbeing).</p> <p>Give children opportunities to work in teams and explore how teams succeed. Looking at team roles / different strengths team members bring.</p> <p>Create opportunities for self-reflective questioning — such as, ‘What would I have done in that situation?’ This allows children to evaluate actions. It also promotes self-reflection, and develops their use of self-talk.</p>	<p>RE / Art / Music Lessons that explore different faiths and cultures.</p> <p>DT / Science Problem solving activities and ‘build a...’ challenges.</p> <p>PE Explore the importance of teamwork & cooperation in sports.</p>		
Relationship skills	<p>Work with children to explore friendships and what makes a good friend. What are the ways to be a good friend to others?</p> <p>Use scenarios, e.g. A new person joining the class or joining a club for the first time.</p>	<p>Using stories / poems / film / real-life accounts to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspective taking and how different people react to the same events differently. 	<p>A belonging classroom means establishing and investing in positive relationships between adults and children and between children themselves.</p>	

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Relationship skills	<p>Explore skills needed for teamwork and co-operation – through team / board games^{xxviii} or cooperative challenges (e.g. rocket launcher countdown game – where children must work together to ensure the rocket does get launched and they don't have to start again...).</p> <p>Focus on conflict resolution / problem solving</p> <p>Use sentence stems to help children practice / model good communication and group work skills^{xxix}.</p> <p>Enable children to consider what good and poor communication skills look like. Act out scenarios using both. A good activity is to look at the Chinese pictogram for the verb 'to listen' and what tells us about active listening and good communication skills.</p> <p>Teach children about assertiveness and use of 'I-messages'</p> <p>Make sure children believe it is OK to ask for help. Teach them how to ask for help and to persist if the help is not forthcoming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the story characters or historical figures built positive relationships or how they repaired arguments or disagreements. • How emotions affected behaviours which then affected others or the outcome of events. • The feelings of those who feel bullied, or different, or lonely, or what it feels like to experience difficult events^{xxx}. • Empathy^{xxxi} - i.e. creating 'empathy maps' for a character over the course of a story or a particular timeline. <p>In PE explore the features of effective teamwork, or discuss what it feels like to lose a game and how to respond constructively</p>	<p>How teachers and other adults in school speak to each other, to parents and to children can model respectful relationships through attentive listening, or how to speak to someone who is upset.</p> <p>Encourage relationship skills by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering social skills through board / card games • Drama and role play acting out social situations and rehearsing different strategies. 	

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Responsible decision-making	<p>Help children see need for rules and possible consequences or effects of not following the rules.</p> <p>Consider decision making and the link to safety of self and others. Explore Early Warning Signs and the importance of ‘choice, control, time limit’ is to feeling safe / unsafe.^{xxxiii}</p> <p>Look at decisions and risk taking / peer pressure.</p> <p>Teach about healthy lifestyles and choices (vaping for example).</p> <p>Explore Children’s Rights and teach about the responsibilities that come with those rights.</p> <p>Work on setting goals^{xxxiv} / overcoming barriers to achieving them using, for example, WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan)^{xxxv}.</p> <p>Opportunities to practice problem solving via scenarios / case studies as well as for real.</p>	<p>Using stories / poems / film / real-life accounts to explore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspective taking and how different people react to the same events differently. • How the story characters or historical figures built positive relationships or how they repaired arguments or disagreements. • How emotions affected behaviours which then affected others or the outcome of events. • The feelings of those who feel bullied, or different, or lonely, or what it feels like to experience difficult events^{xxxvii}. • Empathy^{xxxviii} - i.e. creating ‘empathy maps’ for a character over the course of a story or a particular timeline. 	<p>Use real life classroom and playground situations to apply SEL strategies and skills in ‘real time’. E.g.: Use SEL skills taught in class to apply problem solving to a playground dispute about how much space the football players take up or who gets to use the ‘trim trail’ equipment. Encourage children to think through others’ perspectives when discussing.</p>	

Examples of embedding SEL across the school day

	PSHE Lessons	Other areas of the curriculum	How staff can reinforce skills in the classroom	Whole School approaches to support SEL
Responsible decision-making	<p>Teaching critical thinking skills and problem-solving strategies like STOOD or POOCH^{xxxvi}.</p> <p>Provide opportunities to explore decision making and develop skills through stories / scenarios as well real-life opportunities that include real responsibility in school.</p> <p>Use structured class /group discussion to reflect on decisions and dilemmas.</p>	<p>Use activities like Hot Seating^{xxxix} - to explore a character's feelings and choices etc.</p> <p>Give children opportunities to take responsibility for School wide community / charity projects including ethical / green projects – e.g. Fair-Trade Fortnight / Children in Need.</p> <p>A Forest for Cornwall campaign.</p> <p>Help children become more invested in such projects by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a connection- through a local project or something connected to a member of the school community. Ensure children know what impact their involvement has. • Having fun. 		

Endnotes

- i. Suggestions for a progression in emotions vocabulary across the key stage can be found in the 'Feeling Files' resource area.
- ii. See the 'Feeling Files' resource area.
- iii. There are a number of excellent 'strengths cards' decks to buy or much cheaper versions can be bought /downloaded via sites like **ELSA Support** or **Whole Hearted School Counselling**. See also the Strength Spotting pack in resources.
- iv. The **Cornwall Healthy Schools Toolkit** is an excellent resource.
- v. There is some excellent work on SEL / reading / literacy from The Town End Research School – see Appendix G.
- vi. See our book suggestions in Part 7.
- vii. Town End Resources – see Appendix G.
- viii. See our book suggestions in Part 7.
- ix. National Curriculum Science, Programme of Study: **Living Things and their Habitats** offer some opportunities
- x. See resources for suggested art activities and useful links
- xi. See the 'Feeling Files' resource area for suggestions / guidance on check-ins
- xii. See Safety, Belonging and Resilience section
- xiii. Increasingly schools are offering supervision for staff, especially those in safeguarding roles. 'Using Supervision in Schools' by Penny Sturt & Jo Rowe is an excellent guide to the importance of supervision and how to implement in the school setting. See Bibliography
- xiv. See Part 6 Monitoring and Evaluation
- xv. See ZOR in the one-page guides for a brief introduction.
- xvi. You can **download a copy of the framework** here.
- xvii. For example in **Brilliant ME**.
- xviii. Especially breathing. It is one of the simplest, most effective ways to calm ourselves but children will often find it difficult. They've been shown it / tried it but not properly so they can't see the benefit (and often feel self-conscious trying) so dismiss it. No-one has explained why it is so effective and how it works on the amygdala... (see Brain Box resources).
- xix. As above.

- xx. The **Cornwall Healthy Schools Toolkit** is an excellent resource.
- xxi. There are 5 Ways to Wellbeing activities in **Brilliant ME!** and on the **Start Now** young people's website.
- xxii. See RRR in the one-page guides for a brief introduction.
- xxiii. See PACE in the one-page guides for a brief introduction.
- xxiv. 'No Outsiders: We Belong Here' by Andrew Moffat has lesson plans for each year group. Each lesson is based on a separate picture book and covering belonging; inclusion; equality and diversity - see Bibliography
- xxv. For example **Mud Boy** by Sarah Siggs– a truly powerful book about bullying - see Bibliography.
- xxvi. The brilliant **Empathy Lab** as part of their annual Empathy Day provide a fabulous 'Reading for Empathy' booklist each year. They also provide activity ideas and lesson plans.
- xxvii. Town End Resources – Appendix G.
- xxviii. 'The Mind' card game which we recently discovered is a brilliant example. The Mind encourages non-verbal communication, empathy, social awareness, and teamwork.
- xxix. E.g. Oracy sentence stems to help structure inclusive conversations.
- xxx. For example **Mud Boy** by Sarah Siggs– a truly powerful book about bullying - see Bibliography.
- xxxi. The brilliant **Empathy Lab** as part of their annual Empathy Day provide a fabulous 'Reading for Empathy' booklist each year. They also provide activity ideas and lesson plans.
- xxxii. Help children consider that actions (including rule breaking) don't always result in consequences (may not get caught) but there is always an effect on themselves or others.
- xxxiii. This is explored in Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing (Anna Freud) and the Protective Behaviours process. (see Safety, Belonging and Resilience section).
- xxxiv. See Goal Setting in resources.
- xxxv. Town End Resources – Appendix G.
- xxxvi. Town End Resources – Appendix G.
- xxxvii. For example **Mud Boy** by Sarah Siggs– a truly powerful book about bullying - see Bibliography.
- xxxviii. The brilliant **Empathy Lab** as part of their annual Empathy Day provide a fabulous 'Reading for Empathy' booklist each year. They also provide activity ideas and lesson plans.
- xxxix. Town End Resources – Appendix G.

Part 5: Core themes of SEL in practice

The Brain, Emotions, Safety and Belonging

In this section we focus on some of the core themes at the heart of effective SEL. Each theme includes:

- An introduction and overview for school staff
- Activities and lesson plan ideas to use with pupils (alongside the 'Brilliant ME!' resources)
- Links to further resources

Neuroscience, The Brain and the Nervous System

“ The brain is made up of a series of complex systems, only one of which (the top part of the brain) is responsible for thinking. These systems are related to and dependent on each other. If a child is emotionally unregulated (upset, distracted, fidgety or bored) and doesn't have self-regulation skills and strategies, learning is that much more difficult and inefficient.

The best way to make the top part of the brain receptive to learning is to make sure these lower parts of the brain are regulated. ”

Bruce Perry, 2009⁵⁵

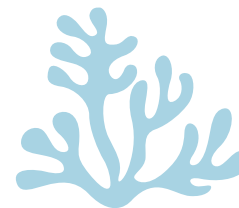


Why teach children about the brain?

“ Children love discovering more about the brain, because ultimately it allows them to understand themselves and the people around them. ”

Adrian Bethune⁵⁶

A solid foundation for any work around social and emotional learning is to help pupils understand how their brain and nervous system works. **Knowledge is power.**



55. Quoted in Gross, J & Seleznyov, S. Improving Behaviour and Wellbeing in Primary Schools: Harnessing Social and Emotional Learning in the Classroom and Beyond, Routledge, 2024

56. Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom: The Updated Guide to Teaching Happiness and Positive Mental Health. (2nd Edition 2023) Bethune, A.

“ A wee P2 boy in my nurture room asked me why his brain went so fast and why he got so mad, so we got to work. The boys are now fascinated, and we are talking about Sabre Tooth Tigers... Neurodiversity... and Brains! ”

Post on social media, 25-03-2025

Research⁵⁷ shows that teaching about neuroscience with children improves self-regulation and reduces anxiety.

When we become overwhelmed with feelings of fear, sadness or anger it can be confusing, even scary, especially to children. Giving children ways to make sense of what's happening is important and reassuring.

Knowledge of the brain alongside a vocabulary to express their emotions and having strategies to cope is, truly, a superpower for children.

Sharing an understanding of how the brain works can help parents and carers support children more effectively.

“ Seeing Jess realise she's not 'mad, bad or sad' just a kid with a brain that's still growing was wonderful. ”

A parent

“ My 5-year-old explained to me that it's OK when she makes a mistake because she's 'growing the neurons in my brain'. I wanted to hug her teacher. ”

A parent (Edutopia on social media)

“ Our children are hungry to know that they are not broken, bad or falling apart... ”

Dr Lori Desautels⁵⁸

Contents

The inner workings of our body are endlessly fascinating for children and the brain can provide a great deal of awe and wonder!

- 🔗 **Brilliant Brain Facts** (click for factsheet)
 - **The Brain:** Parts and functions - a simple introduction
 - **The role of brain chemicals**
 - **Two great ways to help pupils understand their brains:** The Triune Brain and the Upstairs / Downstairs Brain handy model
 - **Stress responses and 'Flipping Our Lid'**
 - **Regulation**
 - **Linking the neuroscience and regulation:**
 - The Window of Tolerance
 - Polyvagal Theory
 - **The magic that is neuroplasticity**

57.E.g. in the work of **Mary Helen Immordino-Yang**.

58. Desautels, L. Body and Brain Brilliance: A manual to cultivate awareness and practices for our nervous systems. Teacher Goals. 2024

The Brain: Parts and functions - a simple introduction

The Prefrontal Cortex

The prefrontal cortex, located at the front of the cerebrum, plays a key role in:

- **Planning** and **organising**
- **Personality** and **behaviour**
- **Decision-making** and **problem-solving**
- **Controlling emotions** and **impulses**

The Limbic System

The limbic area, **the brain's 'emotional centre'**, is involved in memory, hormone production, social connections, and stress responses.

Amygdala

The amygdalae (two small, almond-shaped structures in the limbic area) help **keep us safe** by:

- Scanning for and alerting us to danger
- Fight - Flight - Freeze
- Emotions

The Cerebrum

The cerebrum, the largest part of the brain, is responsible for:

- **Thinking** and **decision-making**
- **Movement** and **coordination**
- Sensing things like **touch, sight,** and **sound**
- **Language** and **communication**

Hippocampus

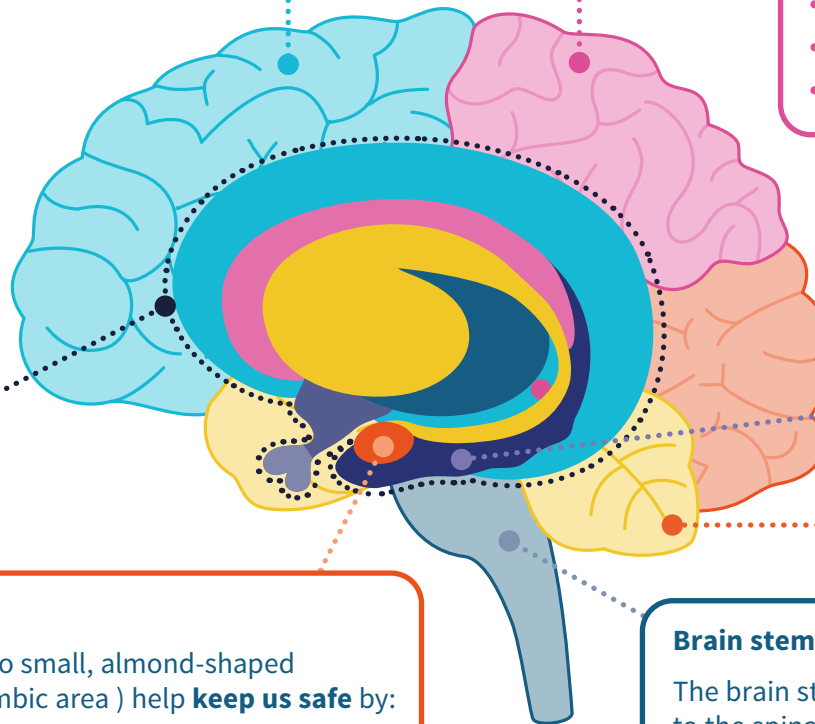
The hippocampi (two structures in the limbic area⁶⁰) are **responsible for memory**. They hold short-term memories, create long-term memories, and attach emotions to these memories.

Cerebellum

The cerebellum helps with **movement, balance,** and plays a role in **emotions**.

Brain stem

The brain stem connects to the spinal cord and **controls basic functions** like sleeping, breathing, circulation, and digestion.



59. One in each of the hemispheres

60. Again one in each hemisphere

Brain chemicals

Our brains are incredible control centres, and a huge part of how they work involves chemical messengers called **neurotransmitters** and **hormones**. We can think of them as the brain's internal communication system. They are produced naturally in the body and play a vital role in everything we think, feel, and do. From how we learn and remember, to our moods, energy levels, and even how we respond to stress, these chemicals are constantly at work, influencing our behaviour and well-being.



Key brain chemicals

Adrenaline

Adrenaline is like our body's "emergency alert" system. When we sense danger, excitement, or stress, our body quickly releases adrenaline. It gives us a burst of energy, makes our hearts pump faster, and prepares us for either "fight" (stand our ground) or "flight" (run away). It's why we might feel a sudden rush when startled or excited.

Cortisol

Cortisol is often called the "stress hormone." While it's vital for many bodily functions, including regulating sleep and energy, high levels of cortisol are released when we're under chronic stress. It helps our body stay on high alert during stressful times, but too much for too long can start to affect our mood, sleep, and even our immune system.

Dopamine

Dopamine is often associated with pleasure, reward, and motivation. It's the chemical that gives us a feeling of satisfaction or joy when we achieve something, learn something new, or even eat something delicious. It drives us to seek out rewards and helps us stay focused and engaged. It's a key player in feeling good about accomplishments.

Oxytocin

Oxytocin is a soothing, 'feel good' chemical. It's released during social bonding, trust, and connection. It promotes feelings of attachment, empathy, and well-being. Hugging a friend, playing with a pet, or feeling a strong sense of belonging can all boost oxytocin levels.

Serotonin

Serotonin is a significant contributor to feelings of well-being and happiness. It plays a crucial role in regulating mood, sleep, appetite, and digestion. Balanced serotonin levels are often linked to feelings of calm and emotional stability, while imbalances can sometimes contribute to feelings of anxiety or low mood.

Endorphins

Endorphins are our body's natural pain relievers and mood boosters. They are released during physical activity, excitement and pain. They create feelings of euphoria and reduce the perception of pain, which is why we might feel a "runner's high" after exercise, or a sense of relief after a good laugh.

Helping children understand the role of brain chemicals can add to their understanding of what might happen to them when sitting a test, standing up in assembly or 'flipping our lid'.

Anxiety in the body

If the amygdala ‘alarm’ goes off when there is no danger, the oxygen and brain chemicals it creates aren’t used up. This is why we feel anxiety. **The unused chemicals can build up and affect our bodies...**

Breathing

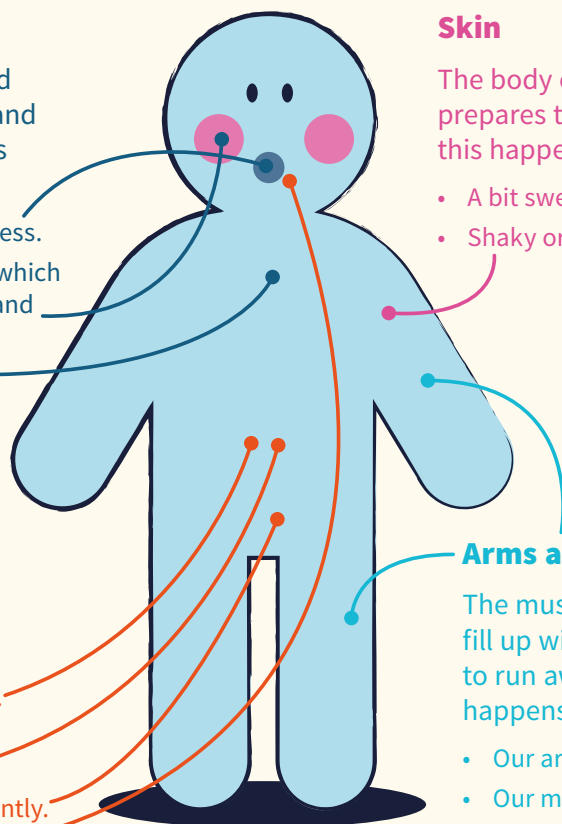
We start breathing fast and shallow instead of slowly and deeply. When this happens we might feel:

- Puffed out or a bit breathless.
- Blood rushes to our face, which makes our cheeks ‘flush’ and feel warm.
- Our heart beats faster.
- A bit dizzy or confused.

Stomach

Our digestive system temporarily stops working properly. When this happens we might feel:

- ‘Butterflies’ in our tummy.
- Sick or nauseous - we might even be sick.
- Need to go to the loo urgently.
- Have a dry mouth.



Skin

The body cools itself down as it prepares to face danger. When this happens we might feel:

- A bit sweaty.
- Shaky or shivery.

Arms and legs

The muscles in our arms and legs fill up with the chemicals we need to run away or fight. When this happens we might feel:

- Our arms and legs tense up.
- Our muscles feel tight.

Teaching about the ‘feel good chemicals’ opens opportunities to encourage self-care and wellbeing through exercise, healthy eating, and good sleep habits.

It is also a great way to show why the 5 Ways to Wellbeing can be effective and it is empowering for them to know they can boost the ‘feel good chemicals’ and take action to deal with the more stressful ones.

Ways to explain the neuroscience

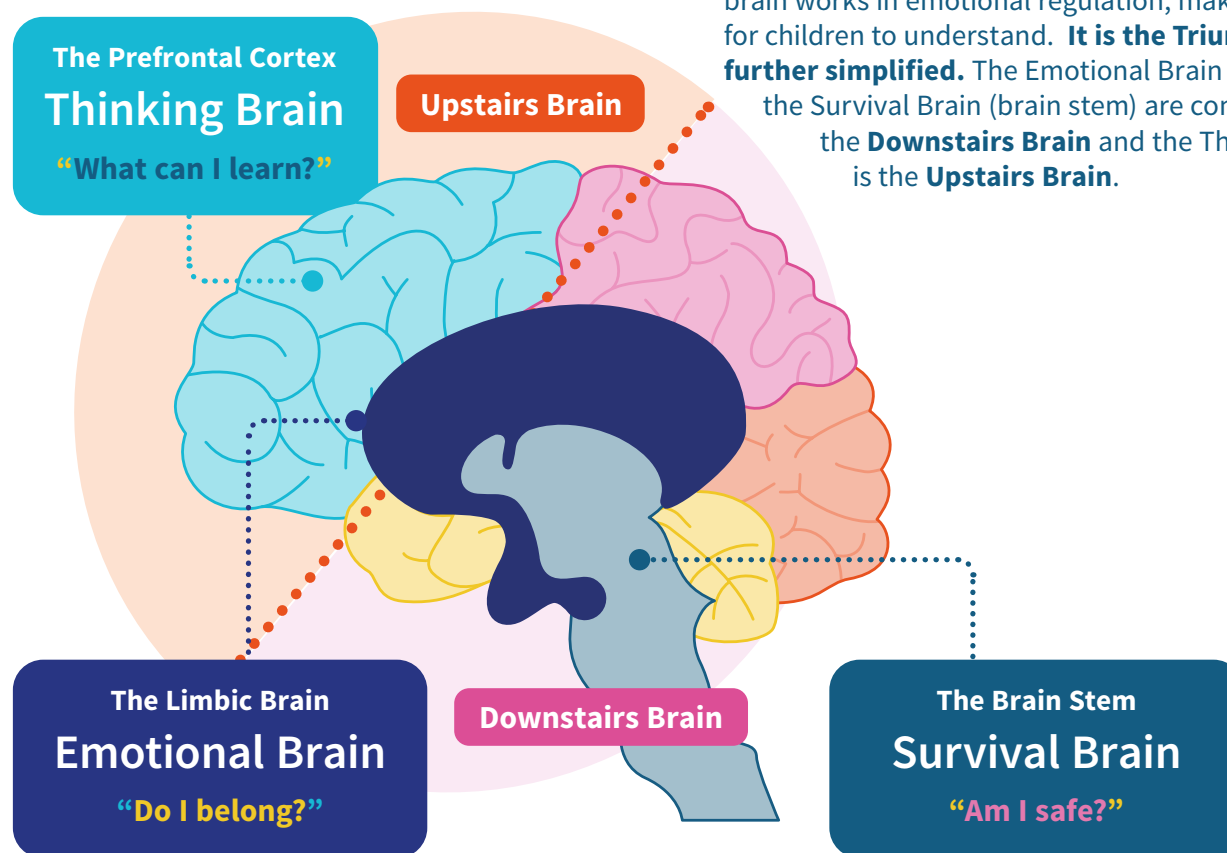
Below we introduce models that can:

- Help simplify and explain the structure of the brain (The Triune Brain and the Upstairs / Downstairs Brain).
- Explain the functions of areas of the brain, brain chemicals and the nervous system and how they lead to different regulation states and responses (The Window of Tolerance and Polyvagal Theory)
- Help children (and the rest of us!) get a better idea of how we learn and what's happening when we experience big feelings.

They all can be used with children and young people and explained in child-friendly ways. But that doesn't mean you have to do so. Choose what you think would work best for your pupils.

The Triune Brain

The **Triune Brain model** focuses on three⁶¹ areas of the brain to simplify our understanding of the processes involved in emotional regulation.



Dan Siegal's 'Upstairs / Downstairs' Brain model

This is an elegantly simple way to explore how the brain works in emotional regulation, making it easier for children to understand. **It is the Triune Brain further simplified.** The Emotional Brain (Limbic) and the Survival Brain (brain stem) are combined as the **Downstairs Brain** and the Thinking Brain is the **Upstairs Brain**.

61. This 'three parts' approach is helpful to understanding the Window of Tolerance and Polyvagal Theory we include below.

The Upstairs | Downstairs Brain model continued...

The Downstairs Brain focuses on survival and includes:

- The cerebellum and the brainstem
- The limbic area (including the amygdala and hippocampus)

The Downstairs Brain is already mostly developed when we're born. Early experiences and the emotions that are attached to the memory of those experiences can help determine how safe we feel in the world.⁶²

In comparison the Upstairs Brain is less well developed at birth, will remain a 'work in progress' throughout childhood and will not be fully developed until the age of around 25 years.

The cerebrum and, more specifically, the pre-frontal cortex, make up the upstairs brain. This also referred to as the thinking brain. It is key to executive functioning; working memory and learning. It is also the centre for impulse control.

Being calm and regulated is the best state for all the parts of the brain to work together effectively and for the thinking brain to be ready to learn and control impulses.

When we become stressed or overwhelmed, the thinking brain can quickly go 'offline', and the downstairs brain takes over.

The Upstairs | Downstairs Brain and flipping our lid

One of the best things about the Upstairs | Downstairs model is that we have that model always to hand. We can use a hand to demonstrate the model and what happens when the alarm goes off and downstairs brain takes over and we 'flip our lids'.

A build-up of low-level stressors at home / school or a single stressful incident - being pushed (or simply bumped into) in the playground, unexpected changes in routine or making a mistake in class - can result in the amygdala triggering the alarm and sending cortisol / adrenaline round the body increasing heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate. The Downstairs Brain is in control, disconnecting the Upstairs Brain and **we're 'flipping our lid'**.

This reaction is not about choice. It is automatic reaction that happens as soon as the downstairs brain sees (what it thinks is) a threat. The reaction is linked to our life and death survival in the times when

In the Brain Box...

...you'll find resources including handouts / worksheets, videos and more to support learning about the brain and nervous system.

sabre-toothed tigers were around. The amygdala doesn't distinguish between levels of threat, which helps explain why the reaction sometimes seems disproportionate, given the circumstances.

For some children (and adults) already struggling with the effects of trauma, the alarm can become 'stuck' in a permanent state of 'hypervigilance' - resulting in the alarm going off frequently⁶³.

When we 'flip our lids' there is often a negative effect or consequence on self (get into trouble, get hurt) and others. This can often lead to feelings of shame which adds to their struggles. It is important to help children understand that 'flipping our lids' is automatic and not their fault. They need to know everyone does it. They also need to be reassured that they can feel more in control through learning about emotional literacy, co-regulation, self-soothing strategies, and being supported to develop a sense of felt safety.

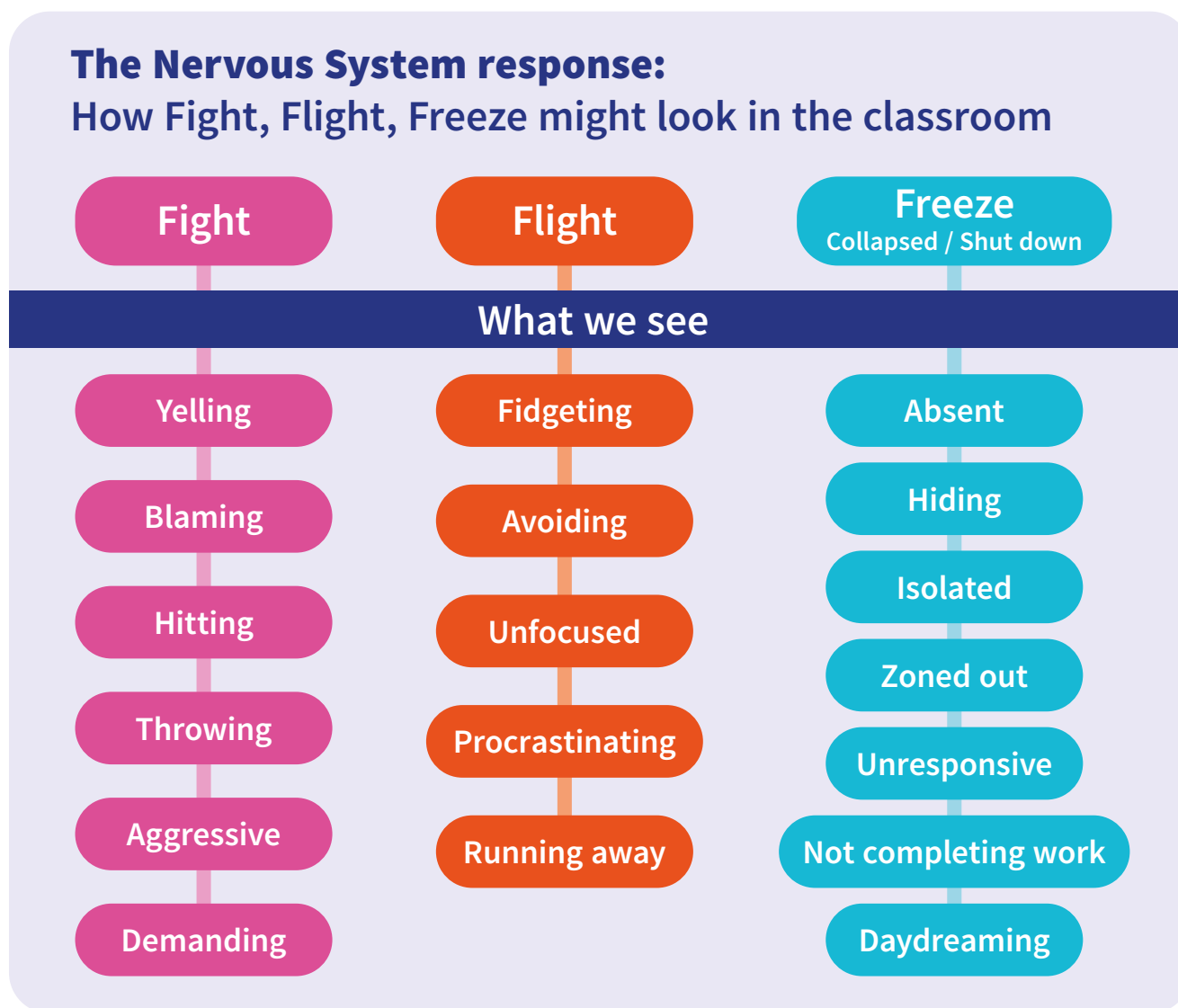
62. Attachment Theory. This is brilliantly described for children (and adults!) in Donovan, Sally, and Emmi Smid. *The Strange and Curious Guide to Trauma*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2022.

63. Help, I've got an alarm bell going off in my head by K.L Aspden (Aspden, K. L. Help! I've Got an Alarm Bell Going Off in My Head! Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2015). is a great way to explain this to children. Another top recommendation is the powerful and moving 'The Strange and Curious Guide to Trauma' by Sally Donovan cited above.

Fight, Flight, Freeze⁶⁴

When we ‘flip our lid’ and the downstairs brain takes over we enter a state of ‘**Fight, Flight or Freeze**’ to try and protect us from whatever is threatening us and help make us feel safe again.

- **Fight**
Take on the sabre-toothed tiger directly.
In the classroom: Throw things, aggressive, shouting, slamming doors
- **Flight**
Running away to escape the sabre-toothed tiger and get to safety.
In the classroom: Running away (or if a bit more regulated – avoidance or procrastination)
- **Freeze**
Stay very still and hope that the sabre-toothed tiger doesn’t spot us. We will stay alert and ready to fight or run at the first opportunity.
In the classroom: May be very quiet, very still but noticeably on alert. We may feel the tension in the child.



64. More recently other states have been added to the list – e.g. ‘fawn’ or ‘flop.’

The Window of Tolerance

The Window of Tolerance complements the Upstairs | Downstairs brain model; ‘flipping our lid’ and Fight, Flight, Freeze.

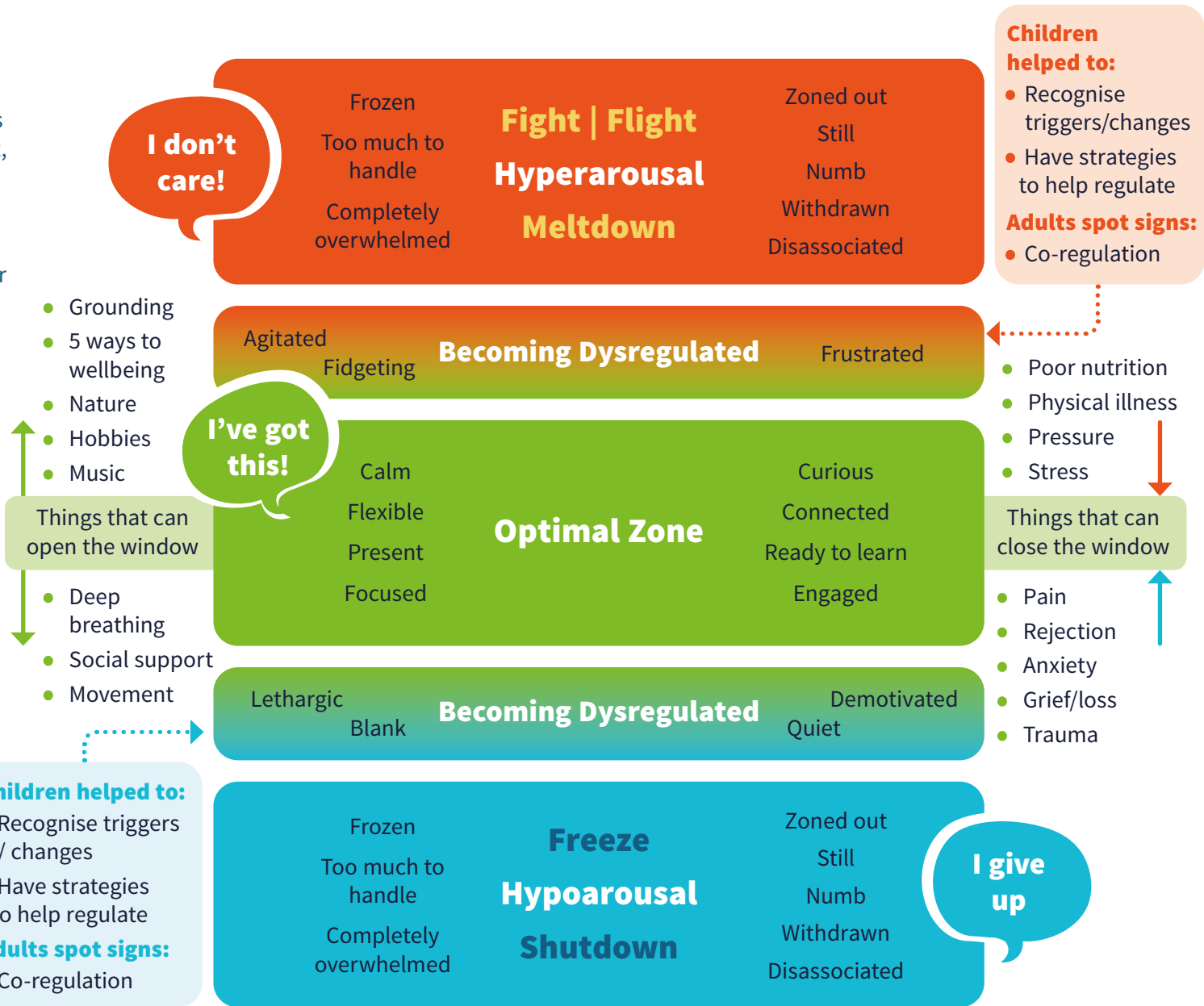
The Window of Tolerance was introduced by Dr Dan Siegel (he of the Upstairs | Downstairs brain) as a helpful way to describe the best emotional ‘zone’ for us to be in to function well. When we are within our Window of Tolerance we are emotionally regulated and have the capacity to cope with everyday things.

For children, the Window of Tolerance is where they feel and are calm, focused and ready to learn.

We all have different sized windows of tolerance depending on:

- Experience of trauma
- Attachment
- Upbringing
- Social supports
- Environment
- Existing coping skills
- Physical wellbeing (sleep deprivation, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, illness / pain, underlying stress can shrink the window).

Internal or external stressors can cause us to move outside of our window of tolerance.



The Optimal Zone

In the Optimal Zone we are at our personal best, the upstairs and downstairs brains are working together and balanced. We can thrive in everyday life and, crucially for schools, are ready to learn.

Hyperarousal (above the window):
I feel unsafe. I feel threatened.

This is a fight/flight response characterised by excessive energy.

Hypoarousal (below the window):
I feel completely overwhelmed; this is too much to handle.

This is a freeze response. A sense of shutting down or disassociating.

These states are biological, not just behavioural. It is not a conscious choice to be like this. It reflects a child's nervous system state. For some children their state is an indication of being so overwhelmed by stress they are 'stuck' in their response.

The Polyvagal Theory⁶⁵

At its simplest Dr. Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory uses 'Fight, Flight, Freeze' in its explanation of how the **Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)** reacts to safety and danger.

The theory divides the ANS into three pathways that describe our shifts between states:

- **Ventral Vagal** (social engagement – safe, calm, connected)
- **Sympathetic** (mobilisation – fight or flight)
- **Dorsal Vagal** (shutdown – freeze, numb, dissociated)

In contrast⁶⁶ to The Window of Tolerance **the three states are hierarchical.** When we feel stressed or scared, we can move from the ventral vagal state into the sympathetic state – feeling under threat and preparing to fight or run.

If the stress becomes overwhelming and we feel we can't physically fight or run from imminent danger, we attempt to escape mentally. We shut down and dissociate from the experience to survive.

This hierarchy is most often depicted as a ladder⁶⁷.

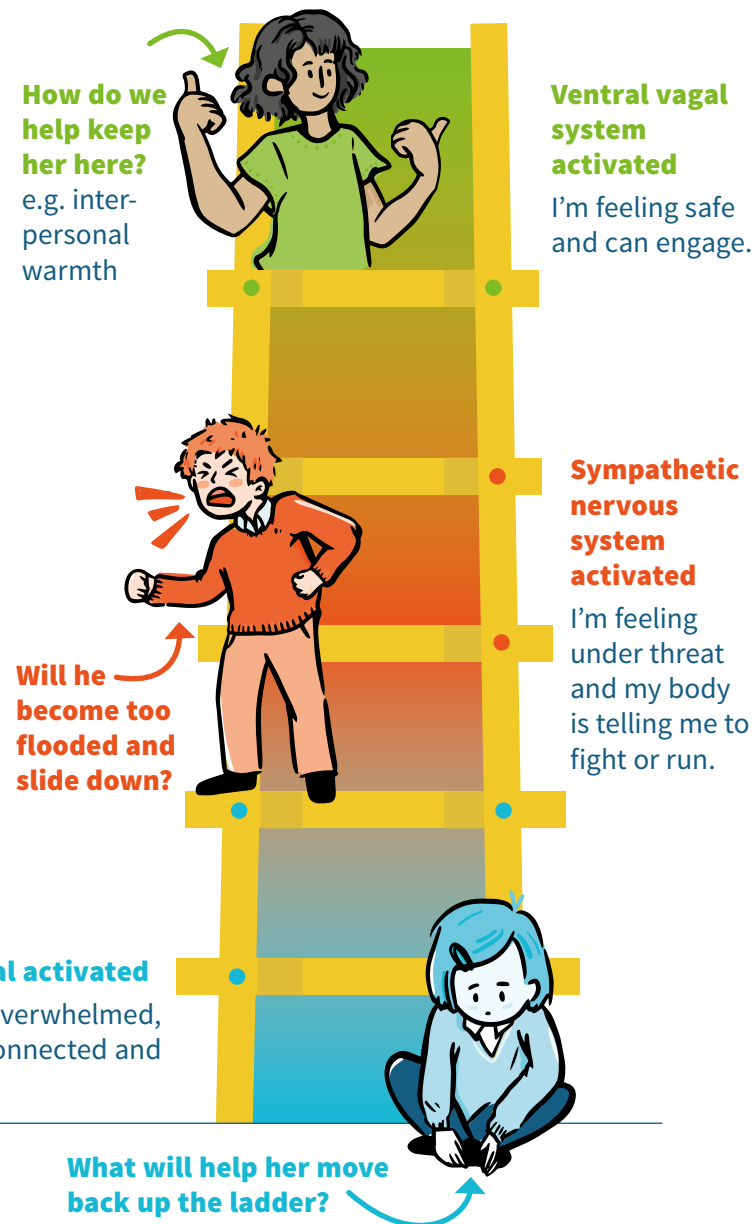
The Polyvagal Ladder

Adapted from the work of Stephen Porges and Deb Dana.



Karen Young's book **Ups and Downs** is the Polyvagal Theory in a picture book!

Dorsal vagal activated
I'm feeling overwhelmed, frozen, disconnected and numb.



65. See the one-page guide for more

66. There are several differences between the two which are **briefly explained here**

67. Find out **more about the Polyvagal Ladder**

Spotting the signs of dysregulation in the classroom

Window of Tolerance			
	The Optimal Zone Inside the Window of Tolerance	Hyperarousal Above the Window of Tolerance	Hypoarousal Below the Window of Tolerance
	In the Optimal Zone we are at our personal best, the upstairs and downstairs brains are working together and balanced. We can thrive in everyday life and, crucially for schools, ready to learn.	I feel unsafe. I feel threatened. Excessive energy.	Danger. A sense of shutting down or disassociating.
		Fight / Flight	Freeze
Looks like	Ability to listen and respond thoughtfully, playful engagement, relaxed posture with appropriate movement, warm facial expressions.	Muscle tension, wide alert eyes, quick to react / short fuse, fidgeting, rapid speech or movement.	Quiet or monotone voice. Slumped posture, no or slow response, lethargy, zoned out.



Note: It is often harder to recognise the signs of hypoarousal in the classroom. For a pupil in this state, they are seeking safety by trying to be invisible. They are not demanding a response from others. They are working hard to be overlooked and so in a busy classroom it is easy to miss them.

How to support children to stay in their Window of Tolerance

Create a classroom environment where adults model self-regulation, positive self-talk and problem solving (“teachable moments”), and children:

- Feel safe, seen, connected and have a sense of belonging.
- Learn about their brain / nervous system
- Know it’s OK to make mistakes and to take risks in learning
- Know all feelings are OK. How they are managed is important and it is not OK to hurt ourselves, hurt others or break things.
- Are helped to recognise early signs of dysregulation
- Are helped to recognise triggers⁶⁸ that can push them out of their Window of Tolerance⁶⁹
- Experience regulation through co-regulation and learning self-regulation strategies.

68. Some people prefer to use the term ‘activators’ instead of ‘triggers’ but so much of the material about this continues to use ‘triggers’ and we’ll stay with that for clarity.

69. Exploration with a child, combined with staff observations and triangulating information the school has about a child, can be helpful in identifying places / situations / activities that tricky.

“ The key message to take from (the) neuroscience is that children cannot learn, cannot develop in healthy ways and cannot fulfil their infinite potential if they do not feel psychologically safe. ”

Mary Meredith⁷⁰

Regulation

Regulation as part of a classroom (whole school) culture centred on connection and belonging is key to creating felt safety for all and creating the best possible conditions for successful teaching and learning.

Regulation is for everyone in the classroom and should be woven into the everyday procedures, routines and transitions. All children should learn about and have access to strategies to help. It is just as important for helping a child nervous about standing up in assembly or who needs to shake off a tricky time in the playground as it is to children who may experience frequent dysregulation and meltdowns / shutdowns through trauma.

And, when we help children understand what is happening for a classmate who becomes dysregulated, we can help them feel safer and

develop empathy for that child. By understanding regulation skills and strategies pupils may also be a position to support each other.

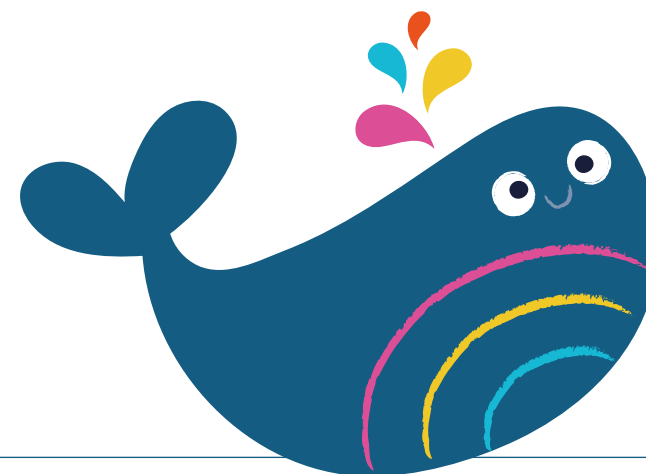
Psychiatrist, Dr Bruce Perry, demonstrates this in “The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog”- a collection of case studies from his work. ‘The Kindness of Children’ (Chapter 10) tells the story of Peter who had been terribly neglected in the first three years of his life. This led to severe developmental problems. When he started school, his classmates were initially fearful of him and rejected him. Dr Perry, with Peter’s agreement, went into the school and talked with the other children about brain science and Peter’s challenges... as a result the children became less fearful and...

“ They included him, protected him and, ultimately provided therapeutic experiences that helped him catch up. They were tolerant of his developmental problems, patient in correcting his social mistakes and nurturing in their interactions. These children provided many more positive therapeutic experiences than we ever could have given Peter.”⁷¹ ”

The brain and emotional regulation

Learning about the brain and emotional regulation is essential for embedding the 5 CASEL competencies in meaningful ways.

By teaching children about brain science, the nature of emotions and a toolkit of regulation strategies, we equip them with fundamental skills to truly enhance each of the CASEL competencies. This approach fosters resilient, empathetic and responsible individuals prepared to thrive in all aspects of life.



70. In Square Pegs: Inclusivity, Compassion and Fitting in. A guide for schools. Morgan, F with Costello, E. Independent Thinking Press 2023

71. Perry, B.D. and Szalavitz, M. ‘The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog’. (revised and Updated Edition) Basic Books 2017.

Co-regulation an essential prerequisite for self-regulation

Children need regular, relational experience through co-regulation. Co-regulation gives them the opportunity to develop self-regulation strategies.

Co-regulation is helping a child to **‘catch your calm’** which means that:

“A dysregulated adult cannot regulate a dysregulated child” - Bruce Perry

Adult self-regulation, **‘school staff taking conscious steps to stay steady and return to equilibrium after times of stress’**, can easily get lost in the pressures school staff are facing every day. There is still a way to go to adequately support staff wellbeing⁷² in general and we still don’t do enough in schools around supervision / opportunities to debrief for all staff.

There is undoubtedly need for a systems approach looking across all the difficulties facing education as a whole. In the meantime, we need a fresh look at how staff can be supported to put on their own ‘oxygen masks’ before helping others...

Dr Lori Desautels⁷³ in her work on **Applied Educational Neuroscience**⁷⁴ highlights the

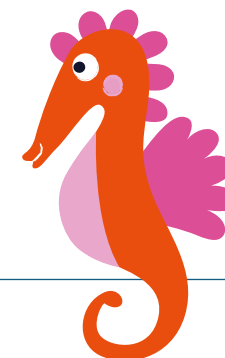
importance of the adult’s nervous system. She believes that if educators first understand and regulate their own body and brain states they will be better able to support a child. Emotions are contagious and an adult’s dysregulation can unintentionally escalate a child’s stress.

Louise Bombèr⁷⁵ and her colleagues at Touchbase also emphasise the importance of staff wellbeing and awareness of levels of regulation / nervous system states. And being **‘curious about our own needs and how they can be met’**⁷⁶. One powerful message they offer school staff is:

“ Know that you matter. Research shows that children who have experienced trauma but have had one consistent, predictable and attuned adult in their life have far better outcomes than those without (Hambrick et al, 2019). We all have the opportunity to make a real difference with every moment of our interactions with children and young people.” ”

Co-regulation

- Is when a calm, steady adult supports a child return to their regulated state by providing safety, structure and connection.
- Models regulation helping children towards self-regulation.
- Is a calming, co-regulating presence alongside a dysregulated child akin to an anchor in a stormy sea.



72. Just have a look at any staff wellbeing survey in recent years (Teacher TAPP, Education Support et al)

73. <https://revelationsineducation.com> and 1-page briefings

74. ibid

75. ibid

76. Bombèr, L. et al. Restoring Education, Educators paving the way to radical change through relationship. Worth Publishing, 2025

77. Jennie Fellows in Bombèr, L. et al. Restoring Education, Educators paving the way to radical change through relationship. Worth Publishing, 2025

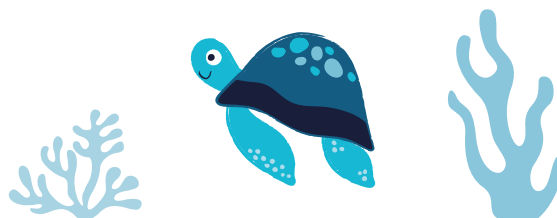
Principles of co-regulation

- **Be alongside**
Simply being with a child when they are dysregulated helps contain their emotions.
- **Acknowledge, name⁷⁸ and accept their feelings**
You can still hold boundaries, e.g. “It’s OK to feel (the feeling) but it’s not OK to hurt yourself / others or break things”.
- **Validate their experience**
(however ‘small’ it seems in comparison to their reaction – it may have been the last in a long list of triggers / stressors).
- **Use posture, body language and eye contact⁷⁹ to create safety and connection**
Get down to their level, show you are interested and alert, arms open.
- **Enhance facial expressions** to show curiosity, warmth and encouragement .
- **Use trauma-sensitive touch⁸⁰** to demonstrate social engagement (e.g. high-fives).
- **Calm, relaxed voice and prosody** modulating vocal tone, pitch, and timing, can help create a feeling of safety and connection.
- **Be curious.** Out loud.

- **Use helpful ‘scripts’**
e.g. “I wonder...”, “I imagine...”, “I notice...”, “I think you might be feeling...”

Alongside this:

- Do a simple grounding and / or breathing activity together (see ideas below).
- Offer the child some choice and control over any (low demand) activity.



“...we regulate ourselves using personal anchors to ground us; we are PACEful⁸¹, paying attention to the young person’s body language and voice, matching their energy and intensity at first, rather than immediately trying to soothe them... We use our physical presence, voices and maybe sensory items to get them back into balance. We do not increase their stress through blame, judgment or power struggles. Stress regulation is ‘being with’ a child...⁸²”

The Purple Folder

If you have a student who just needs a break (a time to just walk around and reset) then you can give them the ‘purple folder’. You can ask them to take it to another teacher. That teacher will automatically know that the child just needed a break out of the classroom or needed a positive adult interaction. The purple folder is the signal for that break. That teacher can then pass it to another teacher if more time is needed.

78. ‘Name it to tame it’. Dan Siegal has shown that helping children recognise and name their emotions is effective in calming down. Another excellent quote of his is “If you can see the emotion, you don’t have to be the emotion”)

79. May need to be aware that proximity and eye contact might be unsettling so adapt to the child’s needs

80. With caveats. Is the child OK with touch. Context of trust. Policies and practice in schools. (safe touch policy?) Louise Bombèr has some excellent guidance on safe touch in her excellent book Know Me to Teach Me. (2020)

81. Find out more about PACE in **the 1 page guides**

82. Louise Kilshaw in Bombèr, L. et al. Restoring Education, Educators paving the way to radical change through relationship. Worth Publishing, 2025

Co-regulation strategies

Co-regulation for Nervous System States			
Possible signs	Responsive co-regulation approaches	Examples	Notes / Comments
Hyperarousal (fight/flight)			
Increased heart rate, rapid breathing, sweating, tense muscles, difficulty focusing, agitation, anger outbursts, fidgeting, shouting, running away, irritability, crying, impulsivity.	<p>Recognise the physiological state: Understand that these are not “naughty” behaviours but signs of a dysregulated nervous system in protection mode.</p> <p>Offer calm presence: Your calm nervous system can help co-regulate theirs.</p> <p>Provide safe space and choices: Give them an opportunity to move or de-escalate.</p> <p>Gentle redirection: Offer regulation strategies rather than direct confrontation.</p>	<p>1. “Heavy work” activities: Suggest pushing against a wall, carrying heavy books, or doing chair push-ups to release energy.</p> <p>2. Deep breathing techniques: Guide them breathing activities e.g. “square breathing” (inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4).</p>	Remember, during hyperarousal, the thinking brain (prefrontal cortex) is less accessible. Focus on safety and physiological regulation first. Avoid logic or consequences in the moment of high arousal.
Signs of dysregulation towards hyperarousal			
Increased restlessness, talking more quickly, heightened sensitivity to noise/light, becoming easily frustrated, slight tension in shoulders, difficulty settling.	<p>Early intervention: Notice subtle shifts and offer support before full escalation.</p> <p>Validate feelings: Acknowledge their experience without judgment.</p> <p>Offer proactive choices: Provide simple options for self-regulation.</p>	<p>1. Sensory break: Offer a fidget toy, allow them to get a drink, or suggest a quick walk to the classroom door and back. Or a task like the ‘purple folder’ (see box)</p> <p>2. Check-in with open-ended questions: “I notice you seem a bit wriggly, is there anything you need right now?” or “How’s your body feeling?”</p>	These are critical moments for prevention. Catching dysregulation early makes regulation much easier for the child and less disruptive for the class.

Co-regulation strategies

Co-regulation for Nervous System States			
Possible signs	Responsive co-regulation approaches	Examples	Notes / Comments
Calm			
Alert and engaged, able to focus, relaxed body, clear communication, able to problem-solve, regulated breathing, curious, playful, flexible.	<p>Maintain connection: Continue positive interactions.</p> <p>Reinforce positive self-regulation: Praise efforts at regulation.</p> <p>Teach and practice strategies: This is the ideal time to explicitly teach regulation techniques.</p>	<p>1. Brain Breaks: Mobilise different areas of the brain to refresh thinking and focus. A simple stretch, a chance to move, laughter or music for a short time can help us stay emotionally regulated.</p> <p>2. Mindful moments: Practice short gratitude exercises or sensory awareness activities (e.g., “What can you hear right now?”).</p> <p>3. Emotion vocabulary building: Use storybooks or discussions to expand their understanding and expression of feelings.</p>	This is the Window of Tolerance – the optimal state for learning and social engagement. The goal is to spend as much time here as possible and to help children return here when they’ve moved out of it.
Signs of dysregulation towards hypoarousal			
Zoned out, glazed eyes, quiet withdrawal, slumping, slow responses, lack of engagement, difficulty initiating tasks, staring into space.	<p>Gentle activation: Offer soft, non-demanding invitations to connect or move.</p> <p>Sensory input: Provide mild sensory stimulation.</p> <p>Patience: Avoid rushing or appearing impatient.</p>	<p>1. Gentle movement break: Suggest a stretch, a quiet walk, or a few gentle claps.</p> <p>2. Offer a choice of a quiet, engaging task: “Would you like to doodle or look at this book for a moment?”</p>	These subtle signs can be missed, but early intervention helps prevent full hypoarousal, which can be harder to shift.

Co-regulation strategies

Co-regulation for Nervous System States			
Possible signs	Responsive co-regulation approaches	Examples	Notes / Comments
Hypoarousal			
Withdrawn, passive, disengaged, flat affect, low energy, lethargy, unresponsive, frozen, numb, blank stare, appearing sleepy.	<p>Connect gently: Establish eye contact (if comfortable for the child) and / or a soft voice.</p> <p>Subtle activation: Provide very gentle sensory or movement input to bring them back to a more alert state.</p> <p>Avoid overwhelming: Do not demand immediate participation or large movements.</p>	<p>1. Offer warmth/comfort: A soft blanket (if available), a warm drink, or a gentle hand on their shoulder (if appropriate and accepted).</p> <p>2. Sensory input (gentle): Offer a mild scent, a quiet piece of music, or a gentle rock in a chair.</p>	This “freeze” state is also a protective response. Focus on bringing gentle activation back into the system without overwhelming it. Build safety and trust.

“ Self-regulation is the long-term goal..., but this is not where we begin”⁸³

Dr Lori Desautels

Self-regulation develops:

- Through seeing and experiencing co-regulation with an Emotionally Available Adult.
- Being introduced to a range of self-regulation strategies over time.

“ Self-regulation is our gradually developing ability to understand and manage our thoughts, feelings, impulses, attitudes and behaviours and those of others. It is a skill that promotes learning, supports wellbeing and aids effective social communication. ”

Sue Cowley⁸⁴

83. Desautels, L. Connections Over Compliance: Rewiring Our Perceptions of Discipline, Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing (2024)

84. Cowley, Sue. The Ultimate Guide to Self-Regulation in the Classroom: Helping Teachers Improve Outcomes for Every Learner. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2025.

Hey Sigmund!

Karen Young is a psychologist, creator of the outstanding [Hey Sigmund](#) website and author of some terrific books on brain science and regulation for children.

She has found that many children and young people don't use self-regulation strategies because they haven't had:

- 'why' or 'how' strategies work in the body explained
- a chance to find a particular strategy they feel comfortable with (often C&YP think they are silly or embarrassing)
- enough practice to be able to use the strategy successfully when needed

Helping a child to learn self-regulation skills and strategies aims to allow them to:

- Be aware of and able to identify their own state of regulation and recognise signs of dysregulation
- Label their feelings
- Choose a strategy (including asking for help)

85. There is a 'brilliant breathing' factsheet / poster [in resources](#).

86. It's always worth trying stuff out yourself. Is it something you are comfortable doing and would be happy to model in the classroom).

87. See our top tips for setting up a safe space / calm kit below.

Supporting self-regulation guiding principles

- Share and/or teach whole class strategies.
- Make regulation universal and accessible to all (and not just resetting from a 'bad' place –include a moment to reset after a fun or exciting experience or during a transition).
- Teach and practice when calm. Through neuroplasticity our brains can create new pathways most effectively with repetition and when we are in a state of calm, relaxed alertness. This makes it easier for pupils to self-regulate over time.
- Help children understand how / why strategies, like a few simple deep breaths⁸⁵, can be so effective in self-regulation (linking to the neuroscience)
- Introduce a range of strategies and help children to find ones they comfortable with and that they find helpful⁸⁶.
- Encourage pupils to reflect on how strategies felt in their bodies, what went well or felt good, and what did not.
- Offer children choices and avoid rigid rules e.g. "we always close our eyes when we..."
- Encourage children to have a few strategies to use discretely wherever they are – so they don't stand out / draw attention to themselves.
- Provide:
 - visual prompts including posters / cards to keep nearby
 - calm kits / safe spaces / calm areas⁸⁷
 - feelings scales / other check-in tools (see resources)
- Use stories to explore how characters manage emotions
- Help children identify their triggers (activators) – events / situations / days / times / etc.
- Introduce reset moments and brain breaks around transitions
- Create a culture, supported by class agreements, where pupils know it is OK to choose to pause to self-regulate when needed.

See the poster focused on breathing strategies in the 'Brain Box'

Self-regulation strategies | Resources

There are a huge number of resources freely available (just type self-regulation / coping skills etc into a search engine). Here are some favourite links we think are worth exploring (and why):

Revelations in Education | Lori Desautels

Understanding neuroscience and regulation (Applied Educational Neuroscience, AEN) are at the heart of Dr Lori Desautels work. Her most recent book **Body and Brain Brilliance**⁸⁸ is the complete guide to AEN covering what she describes as the four pillars:

- Educator Nervous Systems
- Co-regulation
- Touch Points
- Language of the Nervous System

There are many additional resources on the Revelations in Education site including several collections of regulation/self-regulation strategies freely available. These include **Focused Attention Practices (FoAPs)**.

Edutopia

An excellent site that covers SEL in depth. You can register for free and get alerts on new articles for areas you are interested in. There are plenty of '10 ideas to...' or articles exploring best practice etc.

Touchbase | Louise Bombèr

Louise Bombèr's excellent books are full of insight, wisdom and practical suggestions for supporting children in school. **Know Me to Teach Me: Differentiated discipline for those recovering from Adverse Childhood Experiences**⁸⁹ is a great read and a perfect way to explore regulation. Touchbase also offer (online) training.

Pooky Knightsmith

Pooky has hundreds of resources available including lots of ideas for calming and soothing strategies, plus information / support for parents and more. Pooky is incredibly generous in making her work freely available and encourages sharing (with a credit).

There is a subscription option on her Patreon site.

Examples:

- 80 Ways to Vent Big Feelings
- Co-Regulation Strategies to Soothe, Support, and Strengthen
- Simple Breathing Strategies

Wellbeing resource sites (low/no cost)

- **Whole Hearted School Counselling**
Super blogs / articles full of ideas. Really very good resources. You can sign up for a newsletter and access free resources. Other resources are paid for individually or there is a subscription model too.
- **ELSA**
Support website with lots of free resources plus excellent blogs. Other resources are priced individually (low cost).
- **Be Happy Resources** (mostly paid for via subscription but some free resources and monthly plans are low cost).

More general education resource sites like **Twinkl** or **TES** resources also have SEL content.

If your school already uses **TISUK, ThriveUK** or **Motional** there are tools and resources available - check with your pastoral lead / wellbeing practitioner.

88. Desautels, Lori. Body and Brain Brilliance: A Manual to Cultivate Awareness and Practices for Our Nervous Systems. Teacher Goals 2024


89. Bombèr, L. 'Know Me to Teach Me: Differentiated discipline for those recovering from Adverse Childhood Experiences' Worth Publishing, 2020

Types of strategies and examples

The table below briefly describes different types of strategies.

Regulation Strategies				
Type	What are they?	How do they help?	Regulation state use?	Notes
Breathing*	Deliberate focus on and control of breathing , e.g. deep breaths (belly breathing), square breathing, 5 finger breathing.	Directly impacts the autonomic nervous system to calm or energise. Slow, deep breaths can lead to a reduction in heart rate and blood pressure and reducing the release of stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Faster breaths can provide a gentle energy boost.	Both (Calming for hyperarousal, gentle activation for hypoarousal).	Can be taught as a foundational skill for self-regulation. Visual aids can be very helpful for younger children or children who struggle to read / have English as a second language).
Movement	Engaging the body in physical activity , e.g. jumping jacks, stretching, walking, dancing, pushing against a wall, shaking it out.	Releases stored energy or helps to “wake up” the system. Can discharge excess adrenaline from fight/flight or bring activation to a “frozen” state. Rhythmic movement can be particularly soothing.	Both (Discharges energy for hyperarousal, activates for hypoarousal).	Ensure movement is purposeful and doesn’t further escalate hyperarousal or overwhelm hypoarousal.

*Examples of these activities are included in My Brilliant Place to be ME! journal and Explaining Anxiety booklets (all activities are available to download individually). Find more ideas and resources on the **Brilliant ME in Action web pages**.

Regulation Strategies				
Type	What are they?	How do they help?	Regulation state use?	Notes
Grounding* FoAPs Anchors	Focusing attention on the present moment through sensory input , e.g. 54321 - noticing 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste*. Feeling feet on the floor, holding a comfort object or scanning the room for everything that is coloured yellow.	Brings focus away from internal distress and into the external environment, helping to anchor the individual in the present. Can provide a sense of stability and safety.	Both (Distracts from internal overwhelm for hyperarousal, provides sensory input for hypoarousal).	Practical and easily implemented in the classroom. Can be done subtly.
Sensory 	Using specific sensory input to regulate , e.g. weighted blankets, fidget toys, listening to calming music, strong scents (peppermint for alertness, lavender ⁹⁰ for calm), deep pressure. Splashing cool water on the face or putting hands into cool water. Sucking an extra strong mint is a good one too.	Can either soothe an overstimulated system or activate an under-stimulated one. Provides a direct input to the nervous system to shift state.	Both (Calming for hyperarousal, activating for hypoarousal).	Requires understanding of individual sensory preferences and sensitivities. Be mindful of potential overwhelm.
Visualisation*	Creating mental images to evoke a desired feeling or state , e.g. imagining a safe place, (what can they see, feel, smell, hear, taste in their safe place*).	Engages the imagination to create a sense of calm, control, or safety. Can help shift focus away from distressing thoughts or feelings.	Both (Calming for hyperarousal, can gently activate imagination for hypoarousal).	Can be powerful for children with vivid imaginations. Provide gentle guidance without dictating the image.

90. Use of essential oils can be helpful but with care. A simple guide / risk assessment is important.

Regulation Strategies				
Type	What are they?	How do they help?	Regulation state use?	Notes
Distraction* Brain Breaks	Shifting attention to a neutral or engaging activity , e.g. reading a book, doing a puzzle, drawing, colouring, finger mazes / labyrinths or engaging in a simple task (e.g. the ‘purple folder’ described above).	Temporarily diverts focus from the distressing thoughts or sensations , allowing the nervous system to settle.	Both (Reduces intensity of hyperarousal, gently re-engages hypoarousal).	Use as a short-term strategy, not a long-term avoidance. Aim for a positive, engaging distraction rather than just “zoning out.”

*Examples of these activities are included in My Brilliant Place to be ME! journal and Explaining Anxiety booklets (all activities are available to download individually). Find more ideas and resources in the **Brilliant ME in Action web pages**.

Regulation strategies in detail

Focused Attention Practices (FoAPs)

Dr. Lori Desautels’ work on Applied Educational Neuroscience emphasises practices that help regulate the nervous system and optimize the brain for learning. A key component of this is Focused Attention Practices (FoAPs).

FoAPs are essentially brain exercises designed to quiet the mind and body, promoting a state of “relaxed alertness” that is conducive to learning and emotional regulation. They help to redirect neural circuitry, increasing activity in the prefrontal cortex (responsible for problem-solving and emotional regulation) and calming the limbic brain (involved in stress responses).

Characteristics of an Effective FoAP:

Based on Dr. Desautels’ work, effective FoAPs often incorporate:

- **Sensory Focus:** They provide a stimulus for pupils to focus upon. This can include:
 - **Breathwork:** Deep breaths, intentional inhales and exhales, or even playful breaths like “horse lips”.
 - **Movement:** Slow, intentional movements to calm, or faster movements to energise. Examples include finger raises, body scans, or simple stretches.
 - **Sound:** Focusing on specific sounds, listening to calming music, or using instruments like rain sticks, bells, or chimes.

- **Visualisations:** Imagining colours (e.g., inhaling green, exhaling smoky grey) or specific scenes.
- **Taste/Smell:** Focusing on the sensation of an extra strong mint, for example.
- **Imagination:** Engaging pupils in imaginative scenarios or storytelling.
- **Intentionality and Awareness:** They encourage pupils to notice their sensations, feelings, and thoughts without judgment. Questions like “What are you sensing?” or “Where is this in your body?” are often used.
- **Brief Duration:** FoAPs are typically short, often lasting from 30 seconds to a few minutes, making them easy to integrate into the school day.

- **Choice and Agency:** While guided, pupils can often choose aspects of the practice that resonate with them, fostering a sense of control.
- **Repetition:** Like any brain exercise, repetition helps strengthen neural pathways, making it easier for pupils to self-regulate over time.
- **Preparation for Learning:** The primary goal is to “prime” the brain for learning by calming the nervous system and increasing focus.

There are two main types of FoAPs:

Calming FoAP’s are brief activities involving intentional breathing that calms the brain’s limbic system and enhances executive functioning and emotional regulation.

Energising FoAP’s are brief activities involving novelty, rhythm/pattern, and movement designed to create a state of relaxed alertness, priming the brain for learning.

Lori Desautels shares examples of FoAPs widely in her books and on the **Revelations in Education** website.

Anchors

Anchors are tangible ways for pupils to find ways to ground themselves with feelings of safety, connection

and belonging to restore their calm. If we can help them discover their personal anchors – practices they can access during challenging times to feel more grounded – we will help them be in the best possible state to focus and be open to learning.

Why anchors?

Anchors hold a boat in place, so it doesn’t float or drift away. With an anchor, the boat can still move around in the water, floating with the waves, but it’s held with a gentle force that grounds the boat and keeps it safe. The boat is connected to the anchor for stability and the flexibility to move and float. Children can connect with this.

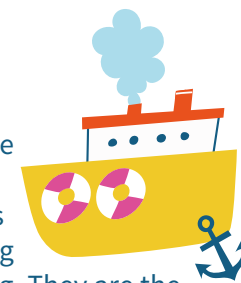
In an anchors activity, we help children identify the people, places, experiences, and things that feel steadying to them. Identifying anchors will help prepare them for moments in school or at home, when they feel overwhelmed or stressed.

Anchors can change over time, in new environments or with new experiences / people. It is important to review our anchors periodically. In schools that could be at the start of a new class or new term.

Anchors can be quick practices that children can access at any time and do in less than a minute to feel a sense of steadiness from a simple stretch, to grabbing a peppermint, or thinking of a trusted adult. Perfect for moments of transition or tension throughout the school day.

Glimmers as anchors

In Deb Dana’s⁹¹ work, “glimmers” are micro-moments of connection and regulation that activate the nervous system’s calming response, fostering feelings of safety, joy, and well-being. They are the opposite of triggers, which are cues of danger that activate a fight/flight or freeze response. Glimmers are subtle cues that gently shape our nervous system, helping us to feel grounded and connected.



“ When we recognise our nervous system’s language and all the sensory changes we feel in our bodies each day, we begin to integrate and appreciate the practices and interventions that help us become aware of what experiences, things, conditions, and people that anchor and ground us when we feel overwhelmed and disconnected. ”

Dr Lori Desautels, *Body and Brain Brilliance*.

Both Lori Desautels⁹² and Louise Bombèr⁹³, amongst others, use anchors in their work.



91. Deb Dana works closely with Dr Stephen Porges on the Polyvagal Theory. She writes about glimmers on her <https://www.rhythmofregulation.com/glimmers>

92. <https://revelationsineducation.com/edutopia-video-using-anchors-for-emotional-regulation/>

93. Bombèr, L. *Know Me to Teach Me: Differentiated discipline for those recovering from adverse childhood experiences*. Worth Publishing, 2020 (p 184ff)

1 Brain Breaks⁹⁴

Our brains pay attention to any and every stimulus in our environment that feels threatening or out of the ordinary. In the past this was important because our survival depended on scanning for safety.

A brain break refreshes our thinking and helps us to discover another solution to a problem or to see a situation from a different angle.

What Are Brain Breaks?

Brain breaks are learning activity shifts that mobilise different networks of the brain.

The Neuroscience of Brain Breaks

For new information to become memory, it must pass through the amygdala and then reach the prefrontal cortex. When pupils' brains become anxious, highly confused, or overwhelmed, the activation of the amygdala can result in the amygdala unable to 'talk to' the prefrontal cortex (flipping our lids).

Even if pupils are not stressed by the pace or content of new learning, a point comes when the amygdala can't process information efficiently.

Brain breaks can restore the emotional state needed to return the amygdala from overdrive and reconnect with the prefrontal cortex.

Brain Breaks 'top up' our brain chemicals

Neurotransmitters are brain chemicals that carry messages from one nerve cell to the next, Neurotransmitters are in limited supply and can deplete after as little as 10 minutes of continuing the same type of learning activity.

Switching the type of mental activity allows the brain's chemicals to be 'topped up'.

Brain Break Strategies

Brain breaks are about optimising the brain's capacity to learn and can also boost mood and motivation.

They do not have to be long or complicated. A stretch, a chance to move, laughter, music amongst others can all help boost dopamine.

When using brain breaks emphasise the links with neuroscience, to help children understand why a brain break is good for everyone.

Some examples

Mirroring

In this game, pupils partner up and take turns mimicking or mirroring each other. For example, two pupils will stand looking at each other. One will start moving, perhaps raising their arms and sticking out their tongue playfully. The mirror student will repeat the actions as if they are one person looking at themselves in the mirror.

Would You Rather?⁹⁵

Questions to prompt children to think about choices and decisions. Pupils find a partner and discuss for 1 minute. When the minute is up the pupils change partners and discuss again. Repeat four or five times.

94. <https://revelationsineducation.com/priming-the-brain-brain-breaks-and-focused-attention-practices-what-is-the-difference/> - The Edutopia website has information and ideas around brain breaks.

95. There are excellent ideas freely available on the internet e.g. 'Thunks' or resources to purchase like the 'Natter Matters' cards. See the resource section for more details.

Some examples

The Junk Bag

Simply anything that one would find in a junk drawer—for example, a can opener or a pair of shoelaces. Pick any object out of the junk bag and ask pupils to come up with two ways this object could be reinvented for other uses. They can write or draw their responses. Once pupils have drawn or written about an invention, they can walk the room for one minute sharing and comparing.

ABC pizza game

This is a whole group brain break that requires quick, creative thinking; visualisation; and memory skills. Pupils sit or stand in a circle, with each student, one at a time, sharing a topping or food that they would like to add to the giant, imaginary pizza that the group is surrounding. They make suggestions in alphabetical order and the entire list must be repeated before adding a new topping.

Squiggle Story

On a blank sheet of paper or whiteboard draw one squiggly line. Give pupils one minute to draw with their nondominant hand, turning the line into a picture or design of their choice.

Opposite Sides

Movement is critical to learning. Have pupils stand and blink with the right eye while snapping the fingers of their left hand. Repeat this with the left eye and right hand. Pupils could also face one another and tap the right foot once, left foot twice, and right foot three times, building speed they alternate toe tapping with their partner.

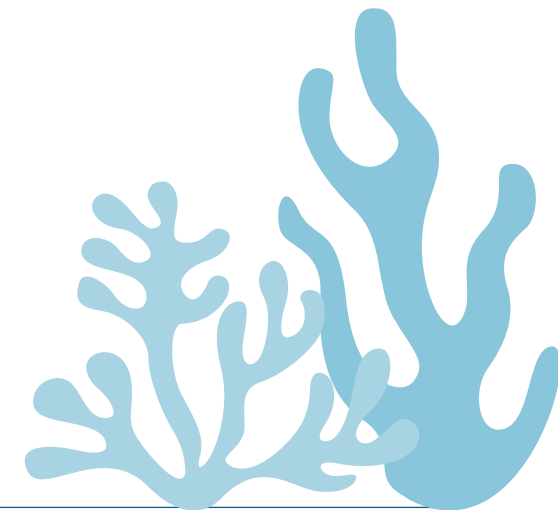


Town End Research School: Self-regulation teaching sequence

Town End Research School, working alongside the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) have written about SEL in the classroom and created some fabulous resources⁹⁶ to support it.

Their **self-regulation teaching sequence** provides an excellent structure to teach children about self-regulation in the context of specific emotions.

- Get
- Spot – how it looks
- Scan – how it feels
- Select a strategy
- Solve it
- Own it



96. All the articles and resources are freely available on their Research Schools website. We gratefully acknowledge their permission to include in this resource.

Self-regulation teaching sequence | Adapted from the 'self-regulation teaching sequence' from Town End Research School

SET the scene

(opportunistic across the school day)

- Use books / stories and curriculum opportunities (people in historical events for example) to highlight and explore emotions.
- Encourage children to identify emotions (how do they know they are feeling like that?) and look for how characters' managed the emotion and identify any coping strategies used.

Specific lesson example - e.g. PHSE

SPOT how it looks

- Use visuals, scenarios, puppets, books or role-play to help children understand and relate to specific emotions visually.
- Explore the size of emotions (synonyms) and their impact on us
- Learn to spot external indicators - body language, facial expressions and actions.

SCAN how it feels in our body

- Help children to scan for physical signs of the emotion. Guide children to observe the physical signs associated with emotions by paying attention to body and brain signals.
- Help them connect these physical cues to their own experiences. Ask:
 - When do you feel this way?
 - What does your body or brain feel like?

STRATEGIES for self- regulation

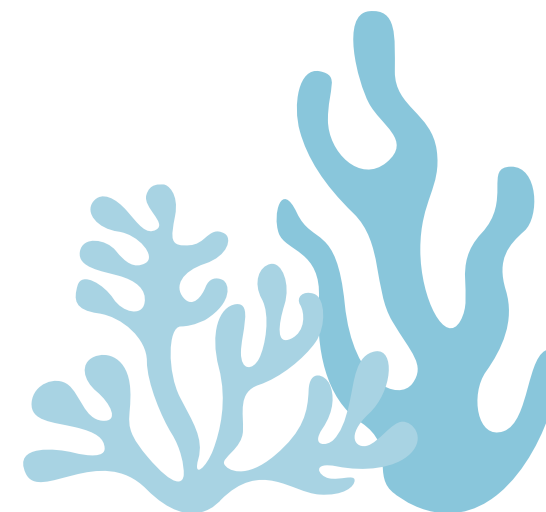
- Introduce simple self-regulation tools and guide children to practice it. Support them in trying out a technique until they are familiar with how it works.
- Help children find strategies that they feel comfortable using and find effective.

SECURE it

- Help children apply the learning to their real-life experiences.
- Use guided questions to identify moments when they might encounter this emotion in daily life and how they can use a strategy to manage it when it arises again.

SUCCESS!

- Reinforce learning by reviewing how to spot and scan the emotion.
- Encourage children to practice using the selected self-regulation strategy throughout the day, making it a routine part of managing their emotions.



Co-Regulation Strategies and Sensory Regulation Tools | A quick guide

A simple understanding of regulation states and strategies to co-regulate can be useful for all school staff.

Hyperarousal

(Sympathetic State: fight/flight)

Signs: Restless, angry, anxious, agitated, fidgety, impulsive, fast speech, can't settle.

Helpful Co-Regulation Strategies:

- **Calm Presence:** Adult uses slow voice and gentle tone to model regulation.
- **Mirroring Breath:** “Let’s breathe together like waves” (slowing pace).
- **Grounding Touch:** Offer a hand on a desk, shoulder (with consent), or a weighted lap pad.
- **Narrating Calm:** “I’m here. You’re safe. We’ll slow things down together.”

Helpful Sensory Tools / Activities:

- **Deep Pressure:** Squishy stress ball, wall pushes, firm hugs (if welcome), weighted items.
- **Breathing Props:** Hoberman sphere, Lazy 8 cards, pinwheel.
- **Visual Focus:** Calming jars, lava lamp, gentle glitter wand, bubble tubes
- **Rhythmic Movement:** Slow rocking, yoga poses, bilateral tapping⁹⁷.

Hypoarousal

(Dorsal Vagal State: freeze/shut down)

Signs: Withdrawn, low energy, ‘zoned out’, slow to respond, floppy, disinterested, tired looking.

Helpful Co-Regulation Strategies:

- **Warm Engagement:** Use name, soft invitation - “Come sit with me...”
- **Rhythmic Voice and Movement:** Clap a beat together, sing, hum.
- **Offer Choice and Predictability:** “You choose – colour or stretch?”
- **Eye Contact from a Distance:** Connection before correction.

Helpful Sensory Tools / Activities:

- **Alerting Input:** Gentle bouncing on a cushion, jumping jacks, up/down stairs.
- **Chewy or Crunchy Snacks:** Apple slices, chewy sweets.
- **Visual Wake-Ups:** Bright colours, light-up timers, movement prompts.
- **Cold or Tactile Stimulation:** Cold water splash, texture play (slime, kinetic sand).

Regulation tools suitable for either state

These help shift children toward the “window of tolerance” (regulated, alert, and connected).

Universal Co-Regulation Strategies:

- **Co-regulation Script:** “You’re feeling (emotion). I’m with you. Let’s (regulate together).”
- **Use of Rhythm:** Clapping games, metronome, music with steady beats.
- **Safe Space or Regulation Station:** Familiar setup with visuals, calming items.
- **Consistent Adult Anchor:** Presence of a trusted, attuned adult.

Universal Sensory Tools / Activities:

- **Bubble Breathing:** Pretend to blow big, slow bubbles.
- **Sensory Bottles:** Watching the glitter settle helps the nervous system settle.
- **Heavy Work⁹⁸ activities:** Moving books, carrying crates, pushing/pulling, digging in the school garden.
- **Nature Connection:** Outdoors, leaves, water, sand—multisensory, regulating.

97. There is a one page guide on ‘Tapping’ in the **resources section**.

98. Risk-assessed.

Supporting Regulation Through Co-Regulation and Sensory Tools

A quick guide for Primary School staff:

Why regulation matters

“S/he’s not giving me a hard time, s/he’s having a hard time.”

Children move through different states of nervous system arousal throughout the day. Sometimes they feel calm and connected, ready to learn. Other times, they may become overwhelmed (hyperarousal) or shut down (hypoarousal). These states are biological, not just behavioural. By understanding these states and responding with attuned, developmentally appropriate strategies, we support children to feel safe, regulated, and ready to re-engage.

Understanding the Nervous System States

- **Hyperarousal (Sympathetic State):** The body is in ‘fight or flight’ mode. Children may be restless, angry, anxious, or unable to focus.
- **Hypoarousal (Dorsal Vagal State):** The body is in ‘freeze or shut down’ mode. Children may appear withdrawn, flat, tired, or disconnected.
- **Regulated State:** The child is alert, calm, and socially engaged. This is the ideal state for learning and connection.

Co-regulation is the process by which adults help children return to their regulated state by providing safety, structure, and connection.

Quick Reference: Co-Regulation and Sensory Tools

Hyperarousal (Fight/flight)

Signs: Child may be anxious, agitated, impulsive, or angry.

Helpful Co-Regulation Strategies:

- **Use a calm, low tone of voice** and slow your pace.
- **Mirror calm breathing:** “Let’s breathe like waves together.”
- **Offer grounding touch** (hand on desk/shoulder if appropriate).
- **Use reassuring language:** “You’re safe. I’m here.”

Helpful Sensory Tools/Activities:

- **Deep pressure:** stress balls, wall pushes, weighted lap pads.
- **Visual calmers:** glitter jars, lava lamps.
- **Slow movement:** yoga, rocking, cross-crawls.
- **Breathing props:** pinwheels, breathing cards.

Hypoarousal (Freeze/shut down)

Signs: Child may seem flat, unresponsive, low energy, or zoned out.

Helpful Co-Regulation Strategies:

- **Use warm, rhythmic voice** to re-engage.
- **Invite interaction:** “Would you like to stretch or draw?”
- **Offer gentle, energising rhythm** (clapping games, humming).
- **Give choice and predictability:** “You can choose...”

Helpful Sensory Tools/Activities:

- **Alerting Input:** Bouncing, marching, jumping jacks.
- **Crunchy or chewy snacks:** apples, chewy sweets, extra strong mints.
- **Cold or tactile input:** splash of water, playdough, bit of Blu-tac.
- **Bright, engaging visuals:** movement prompts, timers.

Quick Reference: Co-Regulation and Sensory Tools

Regulation tools for any state

These strategies can help shift towards the window of tolerance regardless of the starting state.

Universal Co-Regulation Strategies:

- **Co-regulation Script:** “You’re feeling (emotion). I’m with you. Let’s (regulate together).”
- **Consistent presence** of a trusted adult.
- **Use of Rhythm:** Music, games, drumming.
- **Safe Spaces:** Calm corners or regulation stations.

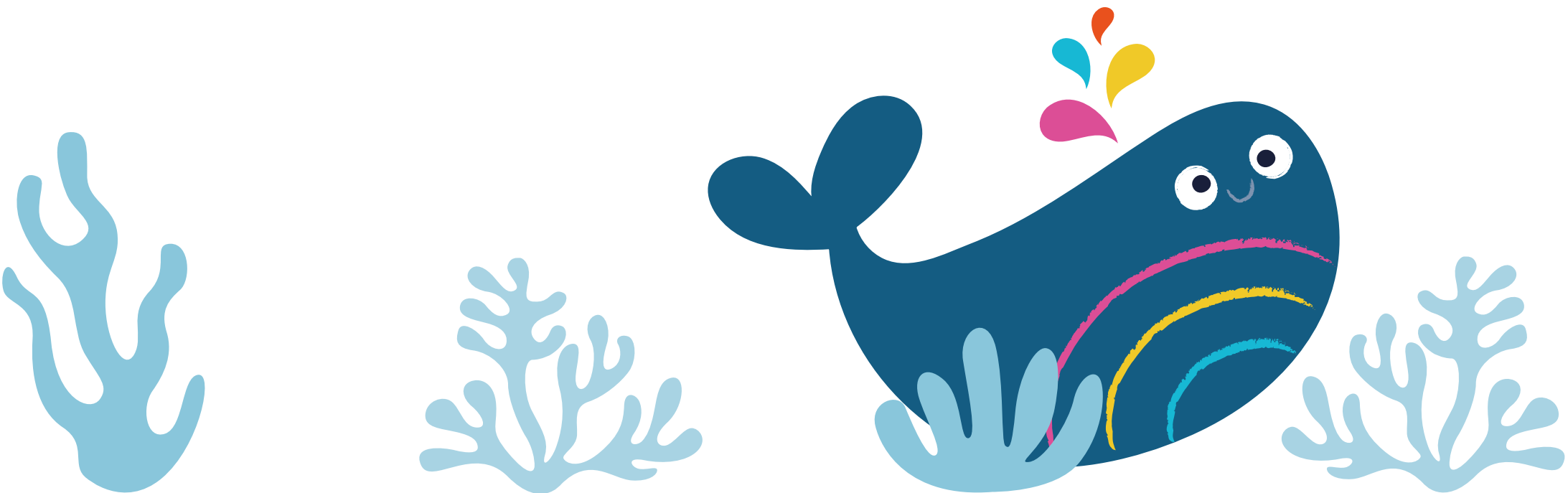
Universal Sensory Tools/Activities:

- **Bubble Breathing:** Pretend to blow big, slow bubbles.
- **Sensory Bottles** and fidget items.
- **Heavy Work:** carrying books, pushing chairs, digging.
- **Nature time:** Sand, leaves, fresh air.

Final Thought

Regulation is a skill that develops over time and with support. The adult’s calm, attuned presence is often the most powerful tool in helping a child move from distress to calm. These strategies aren’t about fixing behaviour, but about fostering safety and connection so that children can thrive.

“Connection first, then correction.”



Safe spaces and calm kits

Also known as regulation stations, calm corners (and a host of other names), Safe Spaces have become increasingly popular in recent years. There was particular interest when children were returning to school post Covid⁹⁹.

There are valued and successful examples already in schools. Many school staff and parents think they are the ‘greatest thing since sliced bread’, whilst others will see them as another ‘pink and fluffy’ way to pander to ‘naughty kids’ and disrupt learning. Others again will be somewhere in the middle – thinking that they sound like a good idea but worried about practicalities.

Safe spaces can be an effective way to support regulation in the classroom. We’d encourage their use but only after careful consideration and planning. Perhaps one of the most aspects for success is communication with the school community to dispel some of the myths.

Setting up a safe space or a calm kit for the classroom

Guidance on establishing safe spaces and calm kits in the classroom to support children’s self-regulation and well-being.

Why have one?

Having a safe space and / or creating calm kits is a great way to support the development of self-regulation strategies in the classroom. The can:

- Support a culture of regulation and the teaching of strategies.
- Provide opportunities for children to explore a range of strategies and encourage ‘practice, practice, practice’.
- Send a clear message that SEL, wellbeing and regulation is important and supported in this class.
- Tell children that they are safe and they belong even and especially when they might feel out of control, frozen or stuck.
- Give access to tangible tools and prompts that can help children focus and feel confident.
- Be good for learning and achievement. Getting the pupils back to a state where the prefrontal cortex is back online and learning can happen.

Things to include

Of course, what is included and how it is set up depends on space / resources available. If possible, make the space comfortable and inviting. Perhaps a comfy chair or bean bag, soft textures, calm colours.

Noise cancelling headphones or music to listen to can be helpful in shutting out background noise.

Include a way for a child to communicate / ask for help. A worry box / “I wish my teacher knew...”.

• Breathing activities and tools, e.g.

- Simple illustrated cards with instructions
- ‘Breathing boards’ e.g. for finger tracing square breathing or lazy eights
- Pinwheels – can physically see what the breath is doing so can help focus and checking if they are breathing deeply
- Hoberman sphere

• Emotion resources, e.g.

- Emotions charts / wheel / check-ins
- Books and stories

• Sensory tools, e.g.

- Fidgets
- Blutac / playdoh / putty
- Kinetic sand
- Glitter jars
- Weighted blankets
- Aromatherapy oils¹⁰⁰

99. E.g. Tina Rae **Creating Calm Corners and Safe Spaces** on YouTube

100. For specific students rather than generally. We would recommend that use of both weighted blankets / aroma therapy is carefully considered, guidelines followed, and a specific risk assessment done (alongside an overall risk assessment for the space).

- **Art materials, e.g.**

- Blank paper
- Colouring sheets
- Coloured pencils
- Crayons
- Glitter / gel pens

- **Simple puzzles and interactive activities, e.g.**

- Mazes / labyrinths to trace with a finger
- A4/A3 Images printed on card, laminated and cut into jigsaw pieces
- Strength Cards
- Affirmation cards
- Simple grounding activity cards
- Blocks
- Sorting¹⁰¹

The Brilliant ME! journal includes breathing activities; emotion check-ins; colouring. All the activities can be downloaded as individual sheets from the website.

Limited space? Want to start small?

Consider a portable, mini calm kit.

Ideas and resources

It won't be hard to find ideas and resources online. For a start you might like to check out¹⁰²:

- **Dr Tina Rae: Creating Calm Corners and Safe Spaces**
- **Whole Hearted School Counselling** - everything from a complete calm corner resource (including

posters / visuals / activity cards worksheets) to mini set ups and a portable version.

- **ELSA Support** - some excellent ideas for contents for a 'calming basket' and lots of activity ideas / resources to download.

Top Tips	
Tips	Notes
Location	Away from busiest / noisiest areas with a sense of privacy if not complete separation. Somewhere children can see and hear you and be seen by you.
Co-creation	Have the class create the space with you. Initially, it might be good to experiment with different layouts, activities, and resources. Have a clear process of reviewing the set-up process and making changes as the space develops Include pupils in creating expectations around use and ways of looking after the space.

101. For example, a box of buttons. Idea: We have a 'proper' treasure chest filled with coins, shells, 'jewels' tumble stones and sea glass. It is a great hit wherever it goes and provides an instant calm corner (with a table cloth and some sea themed soft toys) There is always someone taking time out to sort the contents or create patterns.

102. Disclaimer: We often recommend these people / resources because we know and respect their work. We don't have any financial interest in promoting their work. We also like them for having plenty of free resources alongside others that are relatively low cost.

Top Tips

Tips	Notes
<p>Expectations (opportunity for 'jobs' – sometimes regulation activities in themselves)</p>	<p>Co-create a class agreement on how the space is used and how pupils can access it (e.g., do they need to ask an adult?).</p> <p>How much time will children need?</p> <p>How will the return to the learning be managed?</p> <p>Develop a clear understanding that it isn't a place to skip work.</p> <p>Work together to underline the need to look after the space and keep resources topped up and good condition.</p> <p>Create jobs for checking / tidying / replenishing</p>
<p>Allow pupils to freely use and explore when first set up</p>	<p>Initially there is likely to be a lot of interest and children will be keen to 'have a go' even if not really needed. Give pupils a chance to try it out and what it feels like. This allows them to be familiar with it if they do need to use it in the future. And doing so will allow their curiosity to be satisfied.</p>
<p>Modelling</p>	<p>The whiteboard isn't working properly; I'm feeling a bit frustrated... perhaps I need to try a breathing activity. Ask for suggestions, perhaps.</p> <p>Co-regulation. An adult spending time with a pupil to get them started.</p>
<p>Use lots of visual prompts / guidance</p>	<p>If a child is dysregulated it can be difficult to focus. Some children may not be fluent readers while for others English may not be their first language.</p> <p>Visual prompts provide cues to guide a child through, for example, a breathing or grounding activity including examples from 'Brilliant ME!' or the 'Explaining Anxiety' booklet.</p>

Potential pitfalls and risks

There can be some potential pitfalls and risks, especially for more vulnerable children. Some have already been touched on in the top tips table. For the most part, these risks are associated with poor implementation or follow through and are linked to three important stressors:

- **Unpredictability:** Linked to inconsistent routines / responses from adults
- **Isolation:** Emotional or social disconnection, feeling left out or standing out
- **Restraint:** Lack of autonomy / choice

Reflect

- Is the teaching of regulation strategies, opportunities to practice and access to a safe space haphazard? Dependent on pressures in the curriculum or other factors?
- Are safe spaces/calming kits consistently accessible and well-equipped?
- Do children understand regulation strategies and feel confident to use spaces / resources?
- What if the class have a supply teacher, a room change or any change in routine?

Top Tips

Tips	Notes
<p>Prepare for successful use</p>	<p>Introduce whole class teaching about the brain, emotions and regulation before setting up.</p> <p>Help children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spot signs of dysregulation • recognise emotions and body signals • communicate how they feel (e.g. by using feelings scales, mood meters or similar). <p>Practice, practice, practice.</p> <p>Include brain breaks / resets as part of the school day.</p> <p>Help pupils see it as a safe, supported space where all feelings are welcome and anyone can use it.</p> <p>Be very clear it is not a punishment or time out space and never <i>send</i> a child to use it.</p> <p>If some children need to use it more than others be clear that it is a positive step and avoid any child being stigmatised for doing so.</p> <p>Communicate the ‘what / why / how’ with other staff and with parents.</p>
<p>Consider potential pitfalls / risks (particularly for more vulnerable children)</p>	<p>See sidebar</p>

- Do children feel they ‘stand out’ if using the space, or if they need to use it often?
- Are staff using the space themselves or to co-regulate with pupils?
- Does every child feel it is their space and feel confident to use it?
- Do all children really get that it isn’t a place to be sent to, or a punishment?
- Are there members of the school community (staff, parents) who are dismissive of relational approaches and see regulation and safe spaces as ‘rewarding’ a ‘disruptive’ child? Are children picking up this message?
- Are children holding back due a lack of clarity on when / how they can access the space, the time they can spend there and how to successfully rejoin the learning?
- Is reading a barrier for some children, leading to frustration and discouragement?
- Is there a range of strategies shared / resources available to help children to find something they are comfortable with?
- Do children (know they) have choice and agency when they recognise triggers / signs of dysregulation? Is that a culture widely accepted and supported?

Emotions and Feelings

“ All feelings are important – the messy, the magical and the in-between. ”

Karen Young – Ups and Downs¹⁰³

Contents

- Introduction
- What are emotions?
- Emotional Literacy. The extraordinary power of “name it to tame it”.
- Why teach about emotions?
- What to teach about emotions
- How to teach about emotions
- Feelings Files: tools and resources to support emotional literacy in the classroom.

Introduction

A desire to help children explore their emotions was a key reason for creating ‘My Brilliant Place to be ME!’ journal. Being able to recognise, accept and manage feelings makes a huge difference to a child’s everyday life. The journal includes activities to help children explore feelings, develop vocabulary and track their emotions over time.

In this section we want build on the resources in ‘Brilliant ME!’ to help you support children become more ‘emotionally literate’. Emotional literacy is crucial for acquiring SEL competencies and crucial for learning and achievement.

Emotions? Feelings?

There are differences in the meanings which are worth being aware of. However, ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’ are commonly used interchangeably¹⁰⁴.

“ Emotion ...any agitation or disturbance of mind, feeling, passion, any vehement or excited state. ”

Oxford English Dictionary

Emotions and feelings are different but connected. ‘Emotions’ originate as sensations in the body leading to ‘feelings’, a mental response to emotions.

Feelings are a form of information. They send us messages about what’s going on inside us in response to what we’re experiencing. We need to work out what they’re telling us. The physical sensations in our body can be important clues that if we notice them give a moment to pause, rather than react.

Feelings and emotions described for children

Emotion:

This is a strong feeling that happens in response to something. It might make your heart race, change your mood, or make you want to act in a certain way. For example, feeling happy when you see a friend or feeling scared when you hear a loud noise are emotions.

Feeling:

This is how you experience an emotion. It’s the way you recognise and understand what you’re feeling. For instance, when you’re happy, you might smile and feel warm inside. When you’re scared, you might feel shaky and want to run away. Feelings are like the way you describe what’s going on inside you.

So, emotions are the big reactions you have, like happiness or fear, and feelings are how you notice and understand those reactions, like feeling warm and smiley when you’re happy or shaky when you’re scared.

103. Young, K. Ups and Downs: A book for kids about big feelings. Hey Sigmund Publishing. 2023

104. including here!

Emotional Literacy and the extraordinary power of “name it to tame it”

The memorable “name it to tame it” was coined by Dr Dan Siegel. He explains that the more we notice and name our feelings the easier they are to manage. This is backed up by the neuroscience. When we identify and name our emotions, we activate the prefrontal cortex which calms the amygdala’s stress response and helps reduce the likelihood of ‘flipping our lid’ and going into Fight, Flight or Freeze.

While children can experience a full range of emotions, they are often unable to identify them accurately. Being able to name their feelings can bring order to their emotions and developing an emotional vocabulary enables children to understand and to tell us how they feel. This can reduce their need to act out or withdraw into those feelings.



105. More later

106. Research quoted in Brackett, M. ‘Permission to Feel’ Quercus. 2019

“ ...then we introduced the ‘Mood Meter’¹⁰⁵ to her school. For the first time, it gave those children a way to become aware of what they were feeling before they erupted into violence and other extreme behaviours...

...Once they had irritated and frustrated and annoyed in their vocabulary, they were able to acknowledge what was going on before it zoomed all the way to enraged. They could explain to their teacher what they were feeling and ask for help while it was still a possibility...

Kids could tell the difference between a bit of anger and a lot. ”

Permission to Feel, Professor Marc Brackett, p117

There are about 2000 different words in English to describe emotions. Most of us know / use significantly fewer. The emotions that get our attention the most are negative (variations on anger, fear, sadness and shame). Around 50% of the words used are ‘negative’, 30% positive and 20% neutral¹⁰⁶.

What to teach about emotions

Teaching children about emotions opens a treasure chest of opportunities to explore language and literacy, create poetry and art, tell stories, develop empathy and to get to know and accept the whole of themselves.

In teaching about emotions, we help children understand that:

- Everyone has feelings.
- Feelings are simply feelings and all feelings are allowed.
- They are like visitors that come and go. Some visit briefly, others stay around for a while.
- We can recognise emotions via physical sensations in our bodies.
- We can experience a whole range of emotions over the course of a single day.
- Feelings are important because they are telling us what’s happening in any given moment.
- The link between feelings, thoughts and behaviours.
- The more words we have to describe emotions the better we can understand and manage them.
- Finding out what can ‘trigger’ a particular emotion can help us cope more effectively.

- There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ feelings.
- Sometimes we experience ‘big’ or ‘uncomfortable’ feelings.
- How we respond to our feelings is important. E.g.
 - It’s OK to feel angry but it is not OK to hurt ourselves, hurt others or break things.
 - If our feelings feel too big or uncomfortable – it is important to talk to someone.

“ Language matters. We are not our feelings. A child is not ‘angry’, they are ‘feeling angry’. This avoids labelling the child. ”

“ A child’s sense of secure attachment—this idea that I, in all my glory, as well as all my ‘stinkiness’ and imperfection, am loved and accepted—allows him not only to take risks in the world but also to take risks with his own emotions. Knowing he will not be invalidated, rejected, punished, or shamed for feeling whatever he feels, he can test out sadness, happiness, or anger and figure out how to manage or respond to each of these emotions in turn. ”

Susan David¹⁰⁷

What is Emotional Literacy¹⁰⁸?

Emotional literacy describes our ability to understand, label, and manage one’s own emotions, as well as the emotions of others.

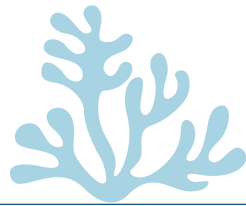
“ Giving children the awareness of, and the precise language they need to describe their emotions. Language is important. It is the bridge between ourselves and others - it allows us to express how we are feeling, and get the help we need. Having the right words allows children to feel better connected to themselves and create the foundation for healthy and sustainable relationships with others. ”

Marc Brackett – Permission to Feel

There are opportunities to explore feelings in sorts of ways across the school day.

Model

Noticing your own feelings out loud... “My shoulders are a bit tight and tense. I’m feeling frustrated that I can’t get the whiteboard to work with my new laptop”.



107. Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life

108. There are various terms used: ‘Emotional Literacy’, ‘Emotional Intelligence’ / ‘EQ’ / ‘Emotional Skills’. These terms are not wholly interchangeable but are often used interchangeably. We prefer ‘emotional literacy’ as we feel it is more meaningful for a school setting. Also emotional intelligence implies a fixed, underlying level whereas ‘emotional literacy’ can be nurtured and developed throughout life.

‘WINE’ with a child who’s dysregulating
‘I wonder if...’ ‘I notice that...’ ‘I imagine...’

Visual

Feelings posters, displays, feelings wheels...

Check-ins

Exploring feelings at points during the day.

Vocabulary

Introduce and use feeling words in class – this teaches feelings words, and by doing so “it also emphasises the value of acknowledging and accepting the full range of emotions. A lesson as important as the vocabulary itself”¹⁰⁹.

“ One of the most effective ways to teach vocabulary is by placing words within the context of meaningful discussions and classroom activities... ..when students encounter words organically within class texts or literature, they are more likely to remember and understand them”¹¹⁰. ”

Identify

What characters might be feeling in books and stories (or when thinking about the characters they learn about from history etc.

Play with words

Introducing unusual words¹¹¹ or even making up new ones, e.g.

- **Mubble Fubbles** | Feeling down in the dumps;
- **Ebullient** | Feeling cheerful and full of energy;
- **Discombobulated** | Confusion
- **Gruntled** | Happy (as opposed to the more familiar disgruntled, meaning unhappy).

Explore

Idioms, synonyms, spectrums

Create

A class feeling dictionary for new words

Games / activities

Feelings bingo; charades, feelings Jenga and more.

Art

Look at feeling and colour, activities linked to specific artists. Pupils create their own bespoke feeling charts.

These ideas and more are explored in the Feelings Files: tools and resources to support emotional literacy in the classroom.

What is Emotional Literacy?

Think RULER¹¹²

Recognising Emotions – noticing clues about how we and others are feeling:

- Facial expressions
- Knowing how emotions affect your body
- Words and actions

Understanding Emotions

Trying to make sense of why we or others might be feeling this way?

Being able to Label to a feeling

What is that emotion called? Are there any other words that help describe how big or small the feeling is? If we can name emotions accurately, we can communicate them to others.

Being able to Express emotions

If we can share our feelings accurately and calmly, we can get our needs met and keep positive relationships.

Regulating Emotions

When we can learn to manage our emotions (including the big and uncomfortable ones) we can stay in control and make safer choices.

109. Brackett, M. ‘Permission to Feel’ Quercus. 2019

110. Jones, S Enhancing Vocabulary through Active Exploration of Words, **Town End Research School**

111. For example lexicographer Susie Dent has produced some lovely compilations. E.g. ‘Roots of Happiness’ and ‘The Roots We Share’

112. The acronym RULER, used here, is a great way to approach emotional literacy. It is taken from a specific SEL programme for schools, called the RULER approach, created by Professor Mark Brackett at the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence. RULER is outlined in his excellent book, Permission to Feel

Safety, Belonging and Resilience

- **Felt safety**
- **Belonging in School** and the **TFF Belonging Framework**
- **‘Ordinary Magic’** and the **‘Boingboing Resilience Framework’**

In this section we look at felt safety, belonging and resilience and explore how SEL strengthens their role in a WSA to wellbeing.

Felt Safety

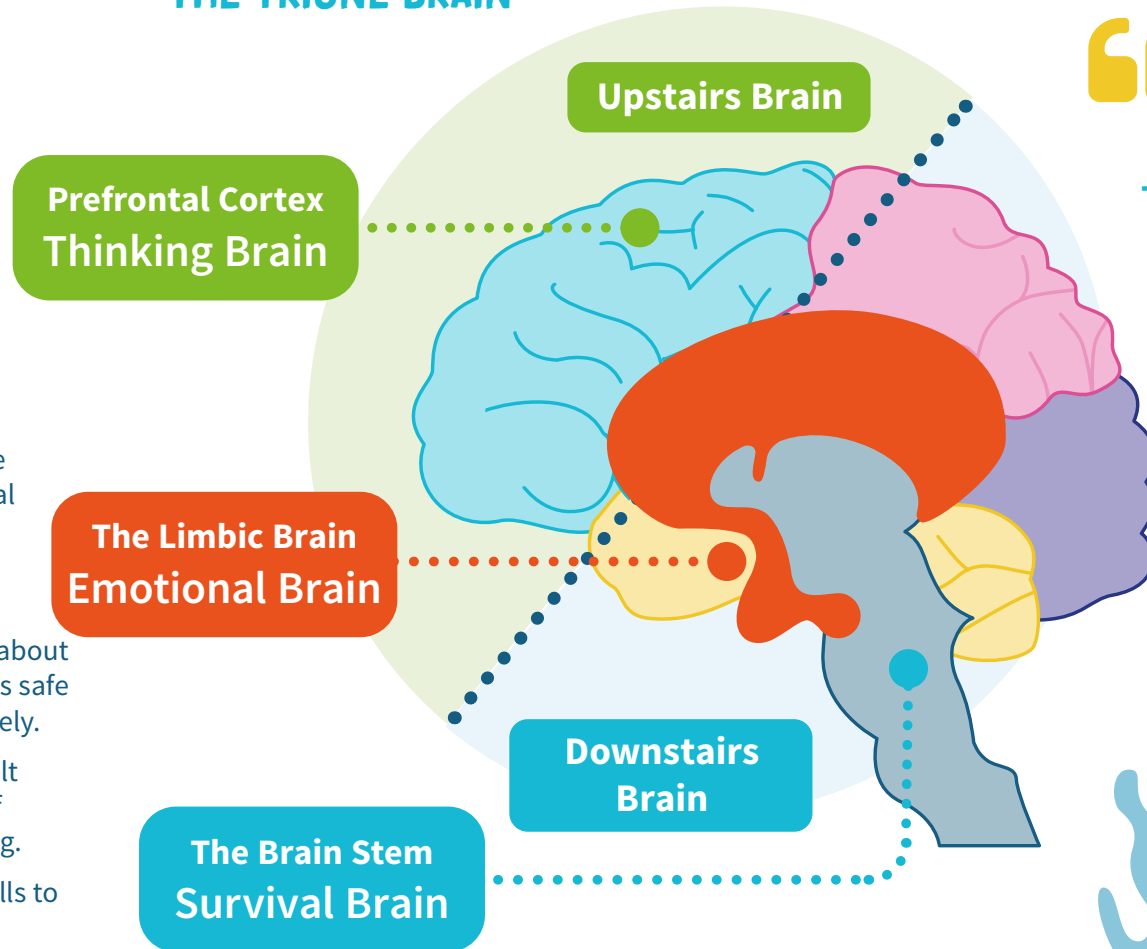
...we know that SEL plays a critical role. Evidence-based practices that build supportive relationships and promote social and emotional skills can help reduce bullying and isolation, promote belonging, and boost engagement.

Creating felt safety means more than keeping children and young people physically safe. It’s about nurturing an environment where everyone feels safe—physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively.

When children and young people experience felt safety, their brains and bodies can move out of survival mode and into connection and learning.

SEL provides the knowledge, language, and skills to build and sustain that safety for all.

THE TRIUNE BRAIN



The importance of felt safety cannot be overlooked. We may assume that safety is a given and there is no tangible reason for children not to feel safe. But Mona Delahooke points out:

“What’s important is the child’s own perception of safety - not what adults think ought to constitute relational or environmental safety. In short, safety is in the “eye” (brain and body) of the beholder: the child¹¹³.”

Mona Delahooke



113. Delahooke, M. Beyond Behaviours: Using Brain Science and Compassion to Understand and Solve Children’s Behavioural Challenges (John Murray Learning 2019),p101

114. Bombèr, Louise Michelle. What about Me?: Inclusive Strategies to Support Pupils with Attachment Difficulties Make It through the School Day. Worth Publishing, 2011.

Felt Safety, experience of trauma and behaviour

Part of Dr Delahooke's work is concerned with a link between behaviour and feeling safe. Similarly, Dr Louise Bombèr¹¹⁴ also writes extensively about attachment difficulties, trauma and felt safety:

“ The experience of safety seems to have a profound effect on pupils. ”

And she recommends that we:

“ ...be explicit in our communication about safety, by, for example, noticing examples of safety out loud: by taking pupils on safety tours around their schools: by creating 'anchors' of safety and through setting up safe places... ”

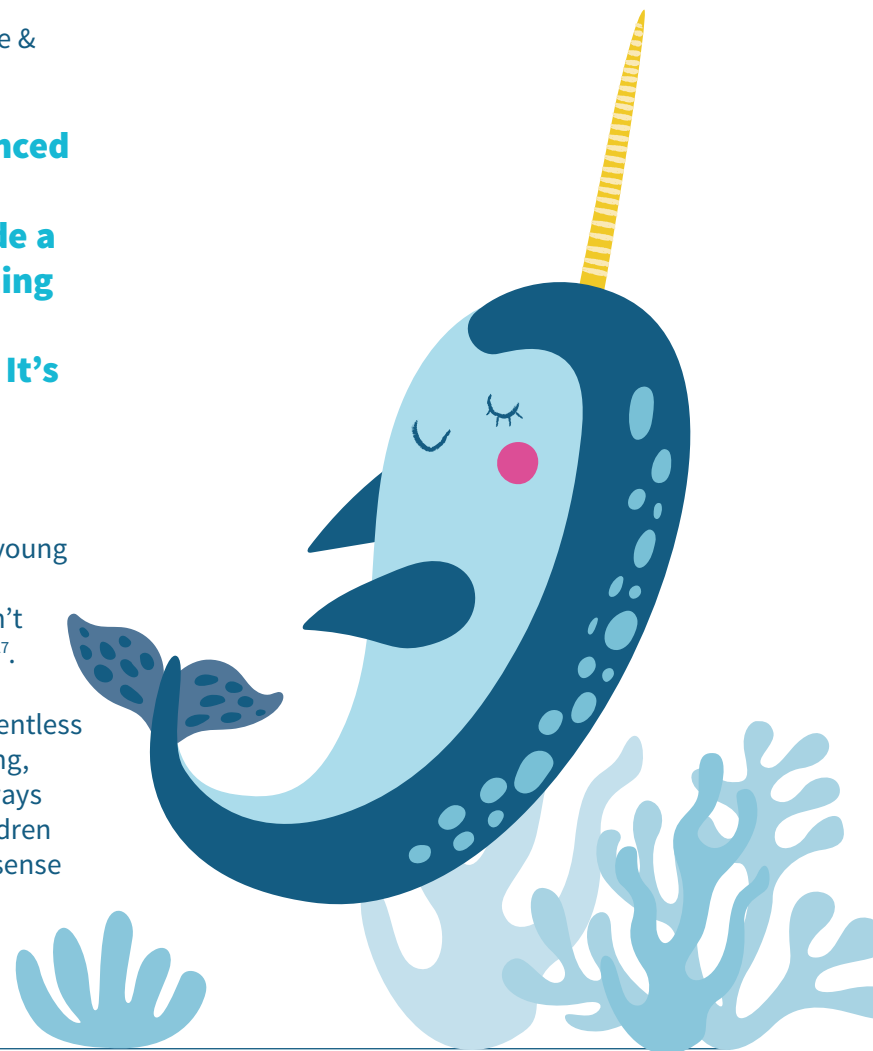
(Chapter 2)



Sally Donovan, in her brilliant book 'The Strange & Curious Guide to Trauma'¹¹⁵ adds:

“ Children who have experienced trauma and learnt that the world is scary may fight, run, or hide a lot... Sometimes this fighting, running or hiding gets confused with what 'Some People' call 'bad behaviour'. It's not bad behaviour it is a sure sign a person doesn't feel safe. YET! ”

There are a significant number of children and young people who report not feeling safe in school¹¹⁶. Including children and young people who haven't experienced trauma or attachment difficulties¹¹⁷. Children, including children of primary age, are finding school increasing difficult due to the relentless pressure on exams and results alongside bullying, increasing sexual harassment and the myriad ways social media and online life can undermine children and young people's confidence, wellbeing and sense of safety.



115. Donovan, Sally, and Emmi Smid. The Strange and Curious Guide to Trauma. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2022. Written for C&YP it is a book I'd recommend everyone to read – school staff, governors, parents and carers as a fabulous way to build an awareness of trauma across the school community.

116. See introduction for recent studies / research reports including Cornwall's Right On survey reports. **The Children's Society Good Childhood Report for 2025** shows wellbeing at since the survey began. With C&YP least happy with school and school work.

117. Vulnerability is no longer seen as a fixed label, but as something fluid. Children and young people may move in and out of vulnerability throughout their school lives, depending on what's happening around them. Recognising this helps schools see wellbeing not as a one-off intervention, but as a thread running through every part of school life.

The Domains of Safety | Being a safe adult

There are different experiences of safety for a child in school. Dr Pooky Knightsmith¹¹⁸ has created excellent tools and resources for school staff to explore safety and support children and young people to experience felt safety. Her description of Four Domains and the Five C's of a safe adult can be particularly useful.

4 DOMAINS OF SAFETY

1. Physical

No physical or health harm will come to me or others. (Sometimes fear for the physical safety of others elsewhere can provoke anxiety).

- Child accessible policies
- Listen and respond to safety worries
- Agree on safety and checking behaviours
- Checking-in with home

2. Cognitive

I can be bold and brave in my learning. I can try new things. I am not fearful about making mistakes.

- Teachers as learning role models
- 'Flearning' - make mistakes part of learning
- Praise the process not the outcome
- Student starts as passive observer

3. Emotional

I can emotionally regulate or co-regulate. I can seek the support of adults as needed. My fear response will not be triggered.

- Key adult student can check in with
- Safe space they can access to regulate
- Understand triggers (modify / remove / warn)
- Self-soothe and anger management strategies

4. Social

I know how interactions work. I know what is expected of me and what I can expect of others.

- Communicate expectations clearly and simply
- Consistent, predictable boundaries
- Social stories, scripts, role plays
- Explain & share changes in good time

THE 5 C'S OF BEING A SAFE ADULT

1. Calm

We regulate ourselves before we try to regulate others. Our calm helps children find theirs.

2. Consistent

Boundaries, routines, and responses that feel fair and familiar. Predictability builds trust.

3. Curious

We look beyond behaviour to what might be driving it. Curiosity invites compassion.

4. Caring

We show warmth through tone, gestures, language. Children notice, and need, this more than we often realise.

5. Communicative

We check in, not just check work. We listen as well as speak. Connection is a two-way street.

118. www.pookyknightsmith.com – lots of excellent resources which Pooky freely shares and allows anyone to use and share – which we gratefully acknowledge

Protective Behaviours and Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing

Another aspect of helping pupils experience ‘felt safety’ is to help them understand what feeling safe looks and feels like. Understanding about feeling safe can help children to recognise feeling unsafe more clearly and combined with explicit teaching of help seeking behaviours.

The **Protective Behaviours** process is a practical and powerful approach to personal safety that:

- Empowers children to recognise and respond to unsafe feelings.
- Builds trust and communication through open discussions.
- Provides tools for self-regulation and emotional literacy

Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing

Education for Wellbeing is a large-scale research programme, funded by the DfE, involving two randomised control trials. Education for Wellbeing evaluated five mental health and wellbeing interventions being delivered in primary and secondary schools.

Of the five interventions, Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing (SSW), was found to be effective and is a recommended intervention for primary schools. SSW is based on the Protective Behaviours process.

SSW aims to improve children and young people’s skills around safety, mental health, wellbeing and accessing sources of support.

Helping children and young people to:

- identify what feels safe or unsafe
- identify support networks for pupils
- recognise, understand and manage our feelings
- identify coping and help seeking strategies for pupils
- challenge stigma around mental illness

Paying specific attention to felt safety and embedding SEL across the school helps every member of the community understand what safety feels like, notice when it’s missing, and know how to rebuild it.

Through consistent, caring relationships and explicit teaching, schools become places where everyone feels calm, connected, and secure — not just safe, but safe inside.

Protective behaviours

- The Protective Behaviours (PBs) process is about every person’s human right to ‘feel safe’.
- It starts by recognising when someone feels safe and enables them to understand when they might not be feeling safe.
- PBs recognises that “Trauma is an overwhelming experience that undermines a person’s perceptions of the world as safe”. So, PBs is intrinsically ‘trauma-informed’ and ‘relational’.
- PBs provides the skills and strategies to help an individual take action and get help when they need it to feel safe again.

- PBs recognises that life is also about taking risks and trying new things and that this is an important part of personal development and an important life skill for learning how to respond to challenges.

PBs supports ‘felt safety’ in schools. It:

- Creates a culture where safety is explicit, not assumed.
- Encourages emotional literacy and self-expression.
- Helps children distinguish between safe and unsafe risks.
- Supports long-term resilience and well-being.

Belonging

“ Belonging is that sense of being somewhere you can be confident that you will fit in and feel safe in your identity. ”

Professor Kathryn Riley¹¹⁹

“ Children develop a sense of belonging through their needs being met, their thoughts and ideas being responded to and their identities being affirmed and acknowledged. Before anything else, children should feel as though they belong. It is the first and most important step on their learning journey. ”

(NEU 2020)¹²⁰

The number of C&YP reporting they do not have a sense of belonging in school has increased in recent years in primary as well as secondary schools¹²¹.

A sense of belonging — feeling seen, valued, and connected within the school community — is a cornerstone of wellbeing, engagement, and learning. When C&YP feel they belong, they are more likely to participate actively, form positive relationships, and take risks in their learning.

What works to support a sense of belonging?¹²²

- High standards / academic support
- Fair and consistent policies
- Parent / community engagement
- For children to have someone to talk to (one emotionally available adult)
- Support and CPD for teachers / school staff
- Pupil voice / agency and children’s rights
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
- On going and intentional actions not one-offs.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) provides a powerful framework for nurturing this sense of belonging across the whole school environment.

Belonging matters

Street gangs and criminal or sexual exploitation networks deliberately use a sense of belonging to attract and ensnare children and young people who don’t feel they belong.

“ ...school is somewhere that our children need to feel safe, to feel unconditionally accepted for who they are and to feel successful, and to know that they matter. ”

If they don’t get that sense of belonging with us, children and young people will find that sense of belonging somewhere else. ”

Jarlath O’Brien, author of several books about behaviour in schools.

119. More about belonging and an introduction to Professor Riley’s work

120. ‘Place and Belonging in School: why it matters today’, The National Education Union (NEU), 2020

121. E.g. in Impact Ed research on attendance and engagement published during 2025

122. National Children’s Bureau, Belonging Matters <https://www.ncb.org.uk/belongingmatters>

Resilience

First things first. For us...

Resilience is...

‘Ordinary Magic’

Why Ordinary Magic?

Ann Masten¹²³ describes the process of building resilience as ‘Ordinary Magic’ because:

“to build resilience all children need are the right environments, the right relationships and the right chances to be able to safely explore themselves and the world around them.”

Resilience isn’t...

Innate ‘grit’, ‘determination’ or ‘character’ in the narrow sense, often linked to ideas around a ‘stiff upper lip’.

“Resilience is not a personality trait. Children become more or less resilient depending on the opportunities they are given, not because they are born with a quality called ‘resilience’.”¹²⁴

“There is a real danger in people thinking that ‘resilience’ is the same as ‘grit and determination’ and that it’s somehow the responsibility of the child to display it.”¹²⁵

Professor Angie Hart, founder of Boingboing and who developed the Resilience Framework, approaches resilience like this:

When people think about resilience, they usually think about overcoming difficulties, despite the odds stacked against them.

They might describe resilience as beating the odds, doing better than expected given the circumstances or bouncing back when things get tough. While overcoming adversity is an important aspect of resilience, we think resilience is more than that.

The Boingboing approach also recognises inequality plays a big part in making things tougher in the first place, and so resilience is also about challenging inequalities too (**changing the odds**).

The Boingboing Resilience Framework promotes inclusion and equity, supporting all children—but especially those facing disadvantage—by helping adults in their lives respond to their needs in consistent, relational, and strengths-based ways.

Which brings us back to Ann Masten:

“...the right environments, the right relationships and the right chances to be able to safely explore themselves and the world around them”

123. Masten, A. ‘Ordinary Magic’

124. Newman, 2011 - quoted in **Research in Practice Building child and family resilience - Boingboing’s resilience approach in action**

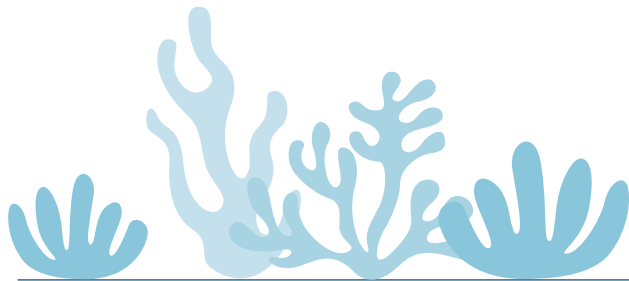
125. ‘Has the resilience ship sailed? A reply to Marc Smith’ by Professor Angie Hart.

“ Resilience is beating the odds whilst also changing the odds¹²⁶ ”

The Boingboing Resilience Framework¹²⁷

- Basics
 - Belonging
 - Learning
 - Coping
 - Core self
- **42 ‘resilient moves’** (an everyday action that can help build resilience)
 - **5 pillars** (headings under which resilient moves are grouped), supported by...
 - **4 noble truths** (underpinning principles)

We have co-created some **resources to help children and young people** to explore the resilience framework.




Resilience Framework | The 5 Pillars

1 Basics

Basics means making sure you’ve got the necessities needed for life in place, like:


- food
- sleep
- exercise
- money
- housing
- a safe space
- freedom from prejudice and discrimination



2 Belonging

Belonging is all about...


- **encouraging good relationships**
- **focusing on positive times and places**
- **feeling connected to your local area**
- **having people in your life you can count on**



3 Learning

Learning is about you having opportunities inside or outside of school or work to:


- **develop your interests or talents**
- **learn new life skills, including mapping out or having a view of the future**



4 Coping

Coping is all about developing the skills you need to manage the knocks of everyday life, like:


- **problem-solving,**
- **staying calm**
- **leaning on others or asking for help, if you need it**



5 Core Self

Core Self means working on those qualities that help you:

- **develop a strong sense of self**
- **building your self-esteem and confidence**
- **nurturing your character**



126. **Uniting Resilience Research and Practice with an Inequalities Approach**, Hart et al, 2016

127. The Resilience Framework originated from the research and work of Professor Angie Hart, Dr Derek Blincow and Helen Thomas in 2007. See www.boingboing.org.uk for further details.

CASEL Mapped to safety, belonging and resilience

CASEL Competency	Felt Safety	Belonging	Resilience
Self-Awareness	Helps pupils recognise body signals and emotions linked to feeling safe or unsafe, building trust in their own ability to notice and respond to their Early Warning Signs.	Helps children understand and value who they are, building confidence allowing them to bring their authentic selves to school.	Builds self-confidence through understanding strengths, values and emotions.
Self-Management	Teaches calming and regulation skills that enable C&YP to restore safety and control when they feel anxious or threatened.	Supports emotional regulation, creating a calm and safe environment where pupils can engage positively.	Teaches strategies to manage stress and recover from setbacks. Resilience grows when children can manage stress, impulses and emotions in a healthy way.
Social Awareness	Fosters empathy and respect, reducing exclusion and misunderstanding and creating socially safe spaces.	Develops empathy. Fosters understanding and respect for others, encouraging inclusion and appreciation of diversity.	Promotes empathy, belonging, and understanding of others' struggles. Reminds children they are not alone.
Relationship Skills	Builds trust and gives children tools of communication, boundary-setting and asking for help.	Builds trust, communication, and connection — the foundations of friendship and community.	Teaches communication, co-operation and repair. Builds supportive, trusting connections that help pupils both seek and offer help.
Responsible Decision-Making	Develops the ability to assess risks, make safe choices, and take action or seek help when situations feel unsafe.	Involves pupils in ethical, caring choices that consider the wellbeing of themselves and others. Gives them voice and ownership within the school.	Encourages problem-solving, reflection, and persistence. Resilient thinking encourages reflection, weighing choices and learning from experience.

Part 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

- **What to look for**
- **Tools and ideas**
- **Reflective practice**

Introduction

Key Stage 2 marks a significant stage in children’s social and emotional growth. As they move towards adolescence, the development of robust SEL skills is crucial in supporting their ability to form lasting friendships, handle peer pressure, and cooperate effectively in group settings. Furthermore, these skills lay the groundwork for increased independence and the capacity to solve problems and manage risks more confidently.

Why assess SEL?

- Assessing pupil needs / areas for development
- Measuring pupils’ skills and progress
- Monitoring the implementation of SEL work
- Inform teaching practices and identify need for additional, targeted support.

What to look for

In the 8-11 age range, children are developing more nuanced understandings of social dynamics, peer relationships become increasingly important, and they are gaining a greater sense of independence. Therefore, assessments will often look at how these competencies are demonstrated in their interactions with peers, their approach to group work, their ability to navigate social conflicts, and their growing understanding of social norms and responsibilities.

Progression

While individual children will progress at their own pace, we can identify general progressions or “milestones” in SEL competencies within Key Stage 2.

See appendices.

Approaches to SEL monitoring and evaluation

- **Surveys and Questionnaires**
 - Pupil self-reporting
 - School staff questionnaires and rating scales
 - Parents / carers
- **Observations**
 - School staff using a structured protocol for what is being looked for / pro forma for recording
- **Performance based assessments e.g. simulated scenarios**
- **Interviews**
 - 1:1
 - Small groups
- **Reviewing data**
 - Behaviour incidents
 - Participation in school clubs
 - Sociograms¹²⁸
 - Attendance / punctuality

128. A sociogram is a visual representation of interpersonal relationships within a group. It can be especially useful in an educational context, in order to help teachers and other staff understand more about pupils’ peer relationships. It is often a useful starting point for identifying and addressing the social and emotional needs of pupils. **More information and sociogram tool (free)**

Approaches to SEL assessment	Notes	
<p>Surveys and Questionnaires</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupil self-reporting • School staff questionnaires and rating scales • Parents / carers • Implementation self-evaluation / reflection tools for staff 	<p>Provides opportunities for children to reflect on their own skills, feelings, and behaviours, educators can gain insights into pupil' self-awareness and their understanding of their own social and emotional landscape.</p>	<p>Choice and suitability of the tool chosen are important.</p>
<p>Observations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School staff using a structured protocol for what is being looked for / how it is recorded 	<p>Observation can be used to assess SEL competencies by observing pupils in real-time situations and noting specific behaviours and skills they demonstrate. These observations can be formal, using structured checklists or rating scales, or more informal, focusing on specific behaviours or skills related to the SEL competencies.</p>	<p>Important / rich but can be time-consuming.</p> <p>Inter-rater reliability (are 1 or more observers looking for the same things and assessing / recording in the same way).</p>
<p>Performance based assessments, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role play scenarios • Developing (group) presentations on learning 	<p>Can be helpful for some SEL skills especially if tasks are completed by groups.</p>	<p>Require careful preparation to be clear about the criteria for evaluation.</p> <p>Time consuming to deliver / record / review</p>

Approaches to SEL assessment	Notes	
<p>Interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:1 • Small groups 	<p>Interviews can provide rich qualitative information about a pupil's understanding and application of SEL skills compared to surveys or other assessment methods, allowing for a deeper understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.</p>	<p>Engaging in conversations with children to explore their understanding of social and emotional concepts.</p> <p>Time consuming to deliver / record / review</p>
<p>Reviewing data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour incidents • Attendance / punctuality • Records of participation in school clubs / activities • Sociograms 	<p>Possible to identify patterns in behaviour / attendance / punctuality as indicators of difficulties and to track any improvements over time.</p>	<p>Participation in clubs and activities may indicate social engagement etc.</p> <p>Sociograms offer powerful insights into peer relationships.</p>

A combination of methods may provide a more comprehensive and rounded view of a child's SEL development and may overcome some of the difficulties of individual approaches.

There are many, many tools / resources available with varying degrees of complexity. Some available free of charge whilst for others there is a cost. You may be using some already as part of your Thrive or TIS work. Some Cornish schools buy in tools created by, for example, Motional, Bounce Together or

GL Assessments. The Pupil Attitudes to Self and School (PASS) measure and the Boxall Profile are also widely used.

One benefit of purchasing is support they provide to analyse / report results. In many cases they can also compare your data to cohorts in similar schools nationally. There is also the Right On survey – offered to schools in Cornwall on a 2-year cycle (next due in early 2027).

The table on the next page contains examples of tools based on useability, ease of access, and no cost¹²⁹.

SEL tools:

- To monitor / assess pupil SEL skills
- For schools to use for auditing practice / self-reflection

129. There is also information about measurement tools on the Whole School Approach area of the **Headstart website** including Cornwall's Right On survey and tools to explore belonging, hope, strengths and more.

Pupils		
Name	What/who for?	Notes
CORC: Measuring Wellbeing for Schools Modular Surveys	<p>Developed to support schools to design their own questionnaires and surveys to understand more about the wellbeing of their pupils. Each module collates tried and tested sets of questions covering different areas of wellbeing, grouped into these five broad areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional health • Emotional strengths and skills • Relationships • School life • Help and support 	<p>An excellent set of surveys to help assess need and monitor progress. All freely available to download and use.</p> <p>There are paid options for support (e.g. handling the data / comparisons to national data sets)</p> <p>CORC also offers the Wellbeing Measurement Framework and Staff Wellbeing surveys. (Cost involved).</p> <p>There is an excellent and informative database of available measures on the CORC website too.</p>
Darlington EPS Tracking Social and Emotional Skills	<p>A handy tracker for completion by school staff, parents / carers or other professionals working with pupils.</p> <p>The tracker is divided into 5 areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Managing feelings • Motivation • Empathy • Social skills <p>There are separate sections for: Foundation; KS1; Lower KS2; Upper Key Stage 2 and KS3/4</p>	<p>We are grateful to Darlington EPS for allowing us to share their excellent resource.</p>

130. Used in ELSA training and structured around Goleman's 5 areas of Emotional Literacy.

Pupils		
Name	What/who for?	Notes
<p>Professor Robin Banerjee, Sussex University</p> <p>Socio-Emotional Profile Questionnaires</p>	<p>Two questionnaires are currently available for pupils in primary schools: My Feelings (concerns pupils' social and emotional experiences) and My Class (builds on Sociograms mentioned above. Pupils are asked to nominate pupils they see as, for e.g., kind, shy or disruptive etc.)</p> <p>They are designed to help you gain additional information about a child or young person's emotional health and well-being, as well as to give a picture of the peer relationships and levels of social acceptance and rejection within a class or tutor group.</p> <p>There are separate versions for KS1 and KS2 (Y3 and above).</p>	<p>The questionnaires are freely available to use and accessible via the weblink. You can have a look at each survey using a test login.</p> <p>Although the online tools seem a bit 'low tech' and require a bit of work uploading class lists. They work well and provide excellent insights.</p> <p>If you are also planning to use 'sociograms' the 'My Class' questionnaire can add another helpful layer of understanding the class dynamics and relationships.</p>
<p>CASEL Student Survey: How I feel about my classroom and school</p>	<p>This simple survey has pupils rate their perception of school climate, adult support and sense of belonging. It is intended as an informal measure to get a sense of where pupils are and to reflect on areas for future work.</p>	<p>Not a validated tool but a good way to get to know a class and plan work to respond to the results.</p>
<p>SEL 'I can...' statements sample (pdf)</p> <p>Used to describe areas of the 5 core SEL competencies.</p> <p>CASEL has developed / promoted the use of 'I can...' statements in the context of SEL</p>	<p>SEL 'I can...' statements are concise, child-friendly declarations that describe specific skills or behaviours related to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).</p> <p>Using 'I can...' statements is empowering for pupils as they are framed from the student perspective, they can also make learning more tangible and</p>	<p>Whilst not an assessment tool they can inform assessment and provide opportunities for teachers to monitor progress (e.g. before and after a piece of work or across the school year). They are also helpful for pupils to reflect on their progress.</p> <p>As well the sample we've provided here there are plenty of examples of 'I can...' statements created for all key stages which can be found on the internet.</p>

Pupils

Name	What/who for?	Notes
<p>SEL mini assessments</p> <p>Quick focused scale of 1 – 5 pupil self-assessments on very specific elements of SEL e.g. ‘Anger’</p>	<p>A suite of quick and easy self-assessments for pupils. Useful for creating a conversation starter for individual children or small groups.</p> <p>Similarly, can be used with a whole class pre and post a specific lesson or activity (including when addressing a specific issue that may have arisen).</p>	<p>Not intended to be anything other than a quick snapshot if where pupils may be in a specific aspect of SEL competencies / emotional literacy.</p> <p>Link also includes blank template to create your own.</p>
<p>The Happiness Line Measure</p> <p>By Dr John Ivens</p>	<p>The HLM is a simple way to understand how happy young people feel. It uses a line with a happy face at the top and a sad face at the bottom. Pupils are asked to make three marks on the line:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where they’ve felt closest to being the happiest person at school. • Where they’ve felt closest to being the unhappiest person. • Where they feel on the line today. 	<p>This quirky and quick tool helps pupils think about their feelings and what makes them happy or unhappy.</p> <p>It’s an easy way to start conversations about well-being. You can also explore with the child ideas and strategies to move further along towards feeling happier “What would it take to get you a bit higher?”</p> <p>Works well with younger children and quick to deliver in a group / whole class. Scoring is a little fiddly at first but fine once you get the hang of it. The follow up conversations will take the most time but can provide rich insights.</p>

School audit / reflection

Name	What/who for?	Notes
<p>CASEL: SEL in the classroom self-assessment</p>	<p>This tool can be used to assess strengths and areas to develop for promoting SEL through explicit instruction, integration into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom climate.</p>	<p>It is a bit ‘full on’ in terms of reviewing practice in quite some detail. Suggest it would be useful to give a sense of how SEL can be delivered across the curriculum and to perhaps focus on 1 or 2 areas that offer quick wins now / in the medium term (next term) and longer term (next year).</p>
<p>The Applied Trauma Responsive Classroom Model (ATRCM)</p> <p>Created by Dr Jemma Carter (2023)</p>	<p>The ATRCM provides a framework / planning and observation tools to help schools identify current level of need of individual children, including those who may have experienced adversity.</p> <p>It can help schools to create a safe and supportive environment that understands and responds to the potential impacts of trauma and creates a foundation for effective SEL.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds a Foundation of Safety and Trust • Helps Regulate Emotions • Promotes Positive Relationships • Supports Self-Awareness and Self-Efficacy • Creates a Whole-School Approach 	<p>Whilst not a specific SEL skills assessment tool, the ATRCM provides a lens through which schools can understand and respond to the needs of children. It can help staff notice what a child might need to feel safe, connected, and ready to learn.</p> <p>It is a sequential approach that starts with considering safety and belonging moving towards resilience and coping and the ability to acquire / develop SEL skills.</p>

Part 7: Resources and appendices

Useful weblinks

Education Endowment Foundation

Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools (Guidance Report)

Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Primary Schools reviews the best available research to offer school leaders six practical recommendations to support good SEL for all children.

This was our starting point for 'Brilliant ME! in Action'.

Town End Research School¹

Town End is part of the Research School Network (RSN) which is funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to support schools by developing evidence-informed practices and processes. Town End Research School is one of only 33 in England. They specialise in all areas of literacy, social and emotional learning, behaviour and metacognition.

Check out their excellent blogs and resources.

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

We have drawn on the CASEL approach extensively. There is much to explore on the CASEL website. The following may provide a good starting point:

A free 60-minute course introducing the CASEL Approach

Learn more about social and emotional learning (SEL), reflect on how it connects to your daily life and your relationships with young people, and plan opportunities for SEL in the next month.

SEL: What does the research say?

A guide to latest research and extensive evidence base supporting SEL.

SEAL Community

Created and run by Jean Gross (an expert in the field of SEL). The SEAL Community website maintains access to the entire DfE Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) resource alongside an excellent repository of SEL resources, research, articles and more. There is a free termly newsletter (note: there is a small subscription to access all of the resources – well worth it in our opinion).

Centre for Emotional Intelligence

(Marc Brackett / RULER)

RULER Resources

Professor Marc Brackett leads a large research team in investigating how emotional intelligence can make the most positive difference in children's and adults' lives. This research informs the development and continuous improvement of the centre's evidence-based approach social and emotional learning (SEL) approach, RULER.

1. We are grateful to Town End Research School for allowing us to freely share / adapt their excellent resources.

Harvard Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Lab SEL Kernels

SEL Kernels are short, flexible, easy-to-use strategies and routines that build social and emotional skills. Each Kernel is designed to target a specific skill or competency. Kernels take 5-15 minutes to implement and can be taught quickly by classroom teachers or other adults. Kernels are stand-alone strategies; they do not require extensive training or preparation to use.

Find an excellent **collection of downloadable Kernels activities** here.

Edutopia

Edutopia is an American educational website sharing good practice / evidence of effectiveness. Although it is linked to the American education system / structures it provides excellent articles and information on all aspects of SEL. It is also a good idea to follow them on Instagram.

Revelations in Education

This website focuses on the work of Dr Lori Desautels. It provides information about using neuroscience in education to support the SEL and wellbeing of the whole school community. The site offers webinars / podcasts / resource downloads and provides an excellent introduction to Dr Desautels' work.

Cornwall's Healthy Schools Toolkit (Public Health / Healthy Cornwall)

The Healthy Schools Toolkit is the result of a strong collaboration between many partners, all dedicated to supporting schools across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly in creating environments that promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

This Healthy Schools Toolkit helps schools that want to improve the health and wellbeing of their whole school community. It can be used as a general school improvement tool to enable the whole school workforce to be creative in their approach to improving health and wellbeing.

Anna Freud Mentally Healthy Schools

An introduction to Social and Emotional Skills. This is an excellent brief introduction to SEL in a good resource for all aspects of wellbeing in schools.

Bouncebackability!

The Beano gang and some well put together lessons on resilience (and more)- what's not to like?

BBC Teach Primary PSHE Resources

A series of videos, created by the BBC, help to introduce children to topics around emotions, relationships, wellbeing and more.

Save the Children: The Happier Schools Project

Save the Children have created a series of lesson plans based on the CASEL Framework. Suitable for KS2. They are quite quirky (with a lot of emoticons!) but well grounded in the CASEL competencies. There are a range of activity types from teacher-led to ideas to go home . All the activities are grouped into 5 theme areas and all can be used flexibly.

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Picture books and story books for SEL

There are many excellent picture books and stories to support SEL.

Here are just some of our favourites:

Feelings and Emotional Literacy

- **Giraffes Can't Dance** - Giles Andreae
- **The Grand Hotel of Feelings** - Lidia Branković
- **What Are You Feeling?** - Daniel Gray-Barnett
- **Being Me: Poems About Thoughts, Worries and Feelings** - Liz Brownlee et al.
- **My Heart Is a Poem** - Caterpillar Books
- **An Emotional Menagerie: Feelings from A-Z** - The School of Life
- **Ups and Downs: A Book About Big Feelings** - Karen Young and Norvile Dovidonyte

Stories of Kindness, Identity and Empathy

- **Voices in the Park** - Anthony Browne
- **The Truth Pixie** - Matt Haig
- **Wonder** - R. J. Palacio
- **Mud Boy: A Story About Bullying** - Sarah Siggs and Amy Crosby

Resilience, Worry and the Brain

- **Help! I've Got an Alarm Bell Going Off in My Head!** - K. L. Aspden
- **Your Fantastic Elastic Brain** - JoAnn Deak
- **The Amazing A-Z of Resilience** - David Gumbrell
- **Hey Warrior** - Karen Young & Norvile Dovidonyte
- **Dear You, Love From Your Brain** - Karen Young and Norvile Dovidonyte
- **But We're Not Lions** - Karen Young and Norvile Dovidonyte

Tom Percival Series

(Brilliant for KS1-2 Emotional Development)

- **The Invisible**
- **The River**
- **The Sea Saw**

Details, reviews and a more comprehensive list can be found in our **Wellbeing Book Club** – Use SELBM as the keyword search.

Empathy Lab UK produce a fantastic Read for Empathy collection each year as part of Empathy



Week, providing a rich selection of books to support SEL (which are great reads too).

(Example SEL activities based on some of these titles can be found in the **Feelings Files** on the Brilliant ME in Action web pages).

Appendix A: SEL and Ofsted

New Ofsted Framework 2025 Personal development and wellbeing evaluation area

“ Personal development and wellbeing are being inspected as a standalone area, evaluating how schools promote resilience, confidence and emotional health, alongside staff wellbeing. ”

As Ofsted moves to a new inspection framework from November 2025 there is a welcome emphasis on inclusion and the experience of vulnerable and disadvantaged children. This sits alongside (a possible?) increased focus on wellbeing.

As implementation unfolds it will be good to see how expectations will be translated across individual school contexts and a recognition of the real challenges schools face e.g. capacity, funding, access to external support etc.

We are pleased to see that staff wellbeing is being taken into consideration as part of the overall inspection process and hope that something robust and meaningful is put in place. Staff wellbeing is at the heart of a WSA.

Supporting Schools

From the current information and resources² available about the new report cards we believe that Brilliant ME! in Action and wider HSK support can contribute to a school's capacity to be able to demonstrate a coherent, curriculum-embedded, equitable and sustainable approach to pupil wellbeing:

- We highlight step-by-step social and emotional learning activities that help pupils build skills in managing their feelings, becoming more resilient, and reflective.
- We offer strong tools for listening to pupils, collecting feedback, and tracking wellbeing data, so schools can see what's working, spot trends, and find areas to improve.
- Our approach puts fairness and inclusion first, making sure wellbeing support is suitable for everyone, including those facing disadvantage or trauma.
- We support school leaders and staff to build their skills and confidence, helping them put wellbeing at the centre of school life and keep good practices going over time.
- We emphasise that staff and pupil wellbeing are linked together, to encourage a joined-up approach that makes sense for everyone.

2. State-funded school inspection toolkit, Ofsted, September 2025 (p42ff Personal development and wellbeing)

Example of what inspections could look for and how a Whole School Approach / SEL curriculum could support schools:

Inspection interest	What inspectors may ask	How WSA / SEL may help
How pupils understand and manage emotions	Do pupils talk confidently about emotions, coping strategies, challenge, resilience?	Age-appropriate Emotional Literacy support & brain / regulation materials, help pupils build language and self-understanding.
Consistency of wellbeing across cohorts / year groups	Is wellbeing taught ad hoc or coherently sequenced across the school?	Our SEL progression frameworks show how skills are built year by year.
Wellbeing for vulnerable pupils	How are pupils with additional needs, trauma histories or disadvantage supported?	Our differentiation, scaffolding, safe space strategies and resources for universal & targeted work help schools evidence inclusive practice.
Leadership and accountability structures	Who is responsible for wellbeing oversight, how is it monitored and reviewed?	Our planning templates, WSA reflection tools help schools embed governance and continuous review.
Staff wellbeing and capacity	Are staff workload, support, training, culture considered in wellbeing strategy? Inspectors may look for signs of sustainable practice.	Staff wellbeing is a key principle of a WSA. The ‘Brilliant ME in Action’ approach emphasises that it is not ‘one size fits all’ and that wellbeing is a thread not another thing to be added.
Pupil voice and agency	Do pupils inform decisions about wellbeing provision?	Our co-design tools, feedback suggestions and pupil involvement guidance support strong pupil voice evidence.

We will continue to refine our mapping / support for schools around wellbeing as more information emerges and we can see how this evaluation area is being addressed / reported on by Ofsted.

Appendix B: SEL and PSHE

The new statutory guidance for RSHE³ strengthens the case for SEL:

More emphasis on skills, not just knowledge

- The updated guidance emphasises helping pupils **apply** what they learn (for example: **emotional regulation**, coping with hurt/frustration) rather than simply being taught facts.
- **Pupil engagement**, relevance and positivity are elevated as guiding principles.

Stronger focus on digital, online risks, and modern relationship issues.

Expanded Health Education content

- **Greater attention to mental health, emotional wellbeing and the notion of “normal” emotional experiences** (for instance, that feeling low is not always a mental health condition) has stronger emphasis.
- More attention paid to **personal safety**⁴.

Relevant Extracts from the new Guidance:

Health and wellbeing

37. The aim of teaching about health and wellbeing is to enable pupils to make good decisions about their own health and wellbeing, to understand the links between physical and mental health, to recognise when things are not right in their own health or the health of others and to seek support when needed. Schools should support pupils to develop strategies for self-regulation, perseverance and determination, even in the face of setbacks.

38. Effective teaching should aim to reduce stigma attached to health issues, in particular relating to mental health, and discourage the pejorative use of language related to ill health. Schools should promote openness, so that pupils can check their understanding and seek any necessary help and advice.

Health and wellbeing: Primary

40. Health education in primary starts with the benefits and importance of physical activity, good nutrition and sufficient sleep, and **supports pupils to develop emotional awareness.** Schools should emphasise the relationships between physical health and mental wellbeing, and the benefits of physical activity and time spent outdoors.

3. Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education. Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, and teachers, DfE, July 2025

4. Although the guidance focuses on physical dangers we would strongly advocate for the addition of a more nuanced focus on safety. Particularly in light of the recent evaluation of **Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing** programme.

Primary health and wellbeing - content to be covered by the end of primary:

General wellbeing

Curriculum content:

1. The benefits of physical activity, time outdoors, and helping others for health, wellbeing and happiness. Simple self-care techniques, including the importance of rest, time spent with friends and family, as well as hobbies, interests and community participation.
2. The importance of promoting general wellbeing and physical health.
3. The range and scale of emotions (e.g. happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, nervousness) that they might experience in different situations. Pupils should understand that worrying and feeling down are normal, affect everyone at different times, and are not in themselves a sign of a mental health condition.
4. How to recognise feelings and use varied vocabulary to talk about their own and others' feelings.
5. How to judge whether what they are feeling and how they are behaving is appropriate and proportionate.
6. That isolation and loneliness can affect children, and the benefits of seeking support.

7. That bullying (including cyberbullying) has a negative and often lasting impact on mental wellbeing and how to seek help for themselves or others.
8. That change and loss, including bereavement, can provoke a range of feelings, that grief is a natural response to bereavement, and that everyone grieves differently.
9. Where and how to seek support (including recognising the triggers for seeking support), including who in school they should speak to if they are worried about their own or someone else's mental wellbeing or ability to control their emotions (including issues arising online).
10. That it is common to experience mental health problems, and early support can help.

Personal safety⁵

1. About hazards (including fire risks) **that may cause harm, injury or risk and ways to reduce risks.**
2. **How to recognise risk** and keep safe around roads, railways, including level crossings, and water, including the water safety code.

5. Strategies for **Safety and Wellbeing** / **Protective Behaviours** for example.

Appendix C: SEL and NICE guidance⁶

NICE guidance: Promoting Social, Emotional, and Mental Wellbeing in Children and Young People in Primary and Secondary Education⁷

The NICE guidance NG223 focuses on promoting social, emotional, and mental wellbeing in children and young people in primary and secondary education, including those up to 25 years old with special needs.

Key recommendations include adopting a whole-school approach, integrating wellbeing into the curriculum, identifying at-risk pupils, providing targeted support, and aiding transitions during school-related or life changes.

It emphasises collaboration among education, health, and social care professionals to foster a supportive environment.

Key recommendations relevant for SEL

1.1 Whole-school approach

1.1.1 Adopt a **whole-school approach** to support positive social, emotional and mental wellbeing of staff, children and young people

1.1.2 Ensure that the school has a culture, ethos and practice that strengthens **relational approaches** and inclusion, and that recognises the importance of **psychological safety**.

1.1.3 Review the school's policies and procedures regularly to make sure that they promote social, emotional and mental wellbeing positively and consistently. This should include making them consistent with relational approaches to social, emotional and mental wellbeing.

1.1.4 Review regularly the school's ...approach to understanding behaviour, considering neurodiversity and communication needs. Also take into account the value of **trauma-informed approaches** and parental co-production.

1.1.5 Consider monitoring and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the whole-school approach as part of a school improvement strategy.

1.2 Universal curriculum content

1.2.1 Ensure that the curriculum for all pupils includes evidence-based, culturally appropriate information about social, emotional and mental wellbeing to develop children and young people's knowledge and skills as part of the **whole-school approach**.

1.2.2 Take account of the **Department for Education's relationships education, relationships and sex education, and health education guidance** when selecting or developing **universal curriculum content**.

1.2.3 Use an approach that builds on children and young people's previous learning (for example, a **spiral curriculum**) when planning and delivering a curriculum intervention for all pupils.

6. NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) provides national guidance and advice to improve health and social care in the UK. Their guidelines are valuable because they are based on the best available evidence and the expertise of professionals, service users, and carers. To create this guidance, NICE convenes independent committees who review research and consider the experiences of people affected by the recommendations. Draft guidelines are then consulted on widely before being finalised and published, ensuring they are robust and relevant for practitioners like yourselves in supporting the children you work with. By using NICE guidelines, you can be confident that your practice aligns with the most effective and up-to-date approaches, ultimately leading to better outcomes for your pupils.

7. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng223>

- 1.2.4** Integrate relevant activities into all aspects of education to reinforce the curriculum offer about social, emotional and mental wellbeing and skills.
- 1.2.5** Use non-judgemental ‘strengths-based’ approaches to support children and young people’s social, emotional and mental wellbeing. These are approaches to improve or develop their:
- self-worth (for example, self-esteem, empowerment, self-care)
 - skills (for example, problem solving skills, social skills, communication skills)
 - resilience (for example, coping skills and strategies, perseverance).
- 1.2.6** Use universal interventions that align with the whole-school approach, for example ‘child- (or young person) to-**trusted-adult**’ support.
- 1.2.7** Consider universal interventions informed by mindfulness or cognitive behavioural approaches (including trauma-focused cognitive behavioural approaches) for all children and young people. These should be delivered by trained staff who can teach children and young people how to use the approach and support them when they do.

For further details, **access the full guidance here.**

Appendix D: SEL and Oracy

Talk as a tool for belonging, agency, connection

November 2025 saw the publication of the Curriculum and Assessment Review⁸. In the report oracy was identified as an ‘applied skill’ that should be explicitly incorporated across the curriculum. The review also emphasises the importance of oracy in preparing young people for life, citizenship and the world of work.

This was heartening to hear as we believe oracy is an important of wellbeing and Social and Emotional Learning.

What is oracy?

“ **Oracy is our ability to communicate effectively using spoken language. Oracy is the ability to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through spoken language.**

In school, oracy is a powerful tool for learning; by teaching pupils to become more effective speakers and listeners we empower them to better understand themselves, each other and the world around them. It is also a route to social mobility, empowering all pupils, not just some, to find their voice to succeed in school and life. ”

<https://voice21.org/what-is-oracy/>

8. Department for Education **Building a World-Class Curriculum for All: Final Report**. Nov.2025

Research by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists submitted to the Speak for Change inquiry (2021)⁹ noted a link between weak spoken communication skills and low levels of wellbeing. It highlighted how, of the 10% of children under the age of 16 known to have a clinically significant mental health illness, nearly half of these are likely to have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

“ Children who struggle to talk and understand words are: six times more likely to be behind in English at age 11, eleven times more likely to be behind in Maths at age 11, have more mental health problems, and twice as likely to be unemployed as an adult.”¹⁰ ”

“ Spoken communication skills are associated with self-confidence, self-esteem and emotional literacy, enabling children to regulate and express their thoughts and behaviour. Oracy education can support mental health and well-being by giving students the tools and opportunities to share their feelings, ask for help, engage positively with others and feel understood and valued.”¹¹ ”

Oracy is important for helping children to be and feel safe, build connections and develop a sense of belonging. Oracy skills enable children and young people:

- to develop positive help seeking behaviours and be able to express needs clearly
- to communicate their feelings effectively, engage in inquiry, practise active listening and empathy, and manage conflict.
- to feel valued and respected by ensuring that every voice is heard and valued in the classroom, providing opportunities to connect and feel part of a community

Without these skills, young people may externalise their emotional processing through aggression and physicality, which can lead to school exclusions.

Alternatively, young people may internalise their feelings, and become muted or absent from school. Neither path supports the building and maintenance of healthy relationships. Without a positive network of relationships, feelings of isolation, frustration and low self-esteem can take root, leading to deteriorating mental health.

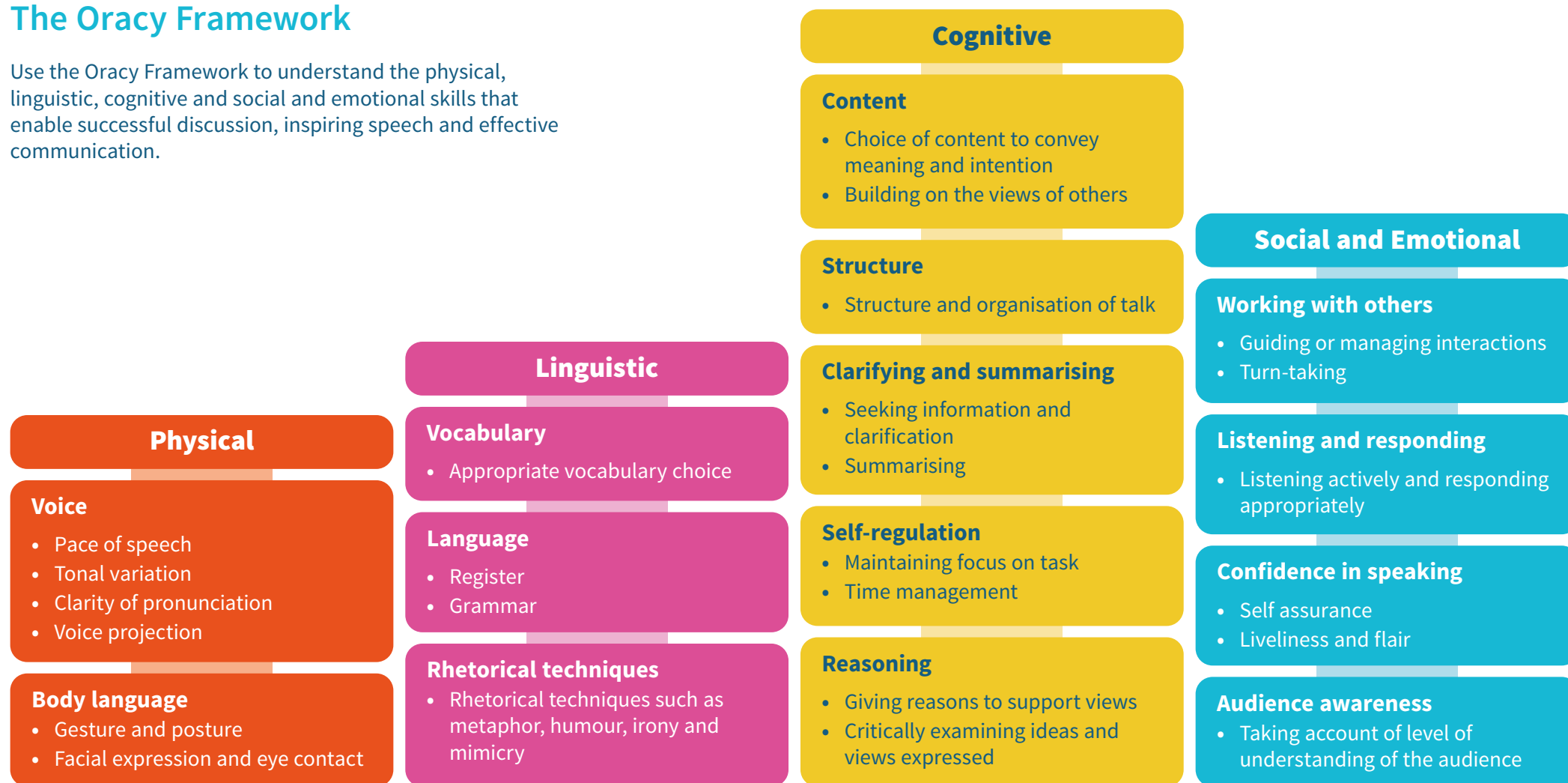
9. Speak for Change. Final report and recommendations from the Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry April 2021

10. **Listening to unheard children: A shocking rise in speech and language challenges** September 2023, www.speechandlanguage.org.uk

11. We need to talk. The report of the Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England October 2024 <https://oracyeducationcommission.co.uk/oec-report/>

The Oracy Framework

Use the Oracy Framework to understand the physical, linguistic, cognitive and social and emotional skills that enable successful discussion, inspiring speech and effective communication.



CASEL 5 × Cambridge Oracy Framework (SEL Skills)

CASEL Competency	Relevant Cambridge Oracy Framework Skills (SEL-related)	Notes
Self-Awareness	Social and Emotional: Self-regulation in talk, confidence in speaking, awareness of audience and purpose.	Understanding feelings, strengths, emotions; noticing how they affect communication.
Self-Management	Social and Emotional: Managing turn-taking, staying on task in dialogue. Physical: Control of voice, posture, and breathing.	Managing behaviour and emotions during communication; using physical skills to stay calm and focused.
Social Awareness	Social and Emotional: Showing empathy, active listening, recognising others' viewpoints. Cognitive: Understanding social norms in discussion.	Understanding perspectives and responding sensitively in dialogue.
Relationship Skills	Social and Emotional: Collaboration, turn-taking, negotiating, resolving disagreements. Linguistic: Using language to include others, build on ideas, clarify.	Strong overlap—relationship skills are explicitly built through collaborative talk.
Responsible Decision-Making	Social and Emotional: Considering the impact of words on others. Articulating decisions / choices in face of, for example, peer pressure. Cognitive: Reasoning, evaluating information, weighing evidence, making justified decisions.	Thinking skills used in thoughtful discussion and making considered choices in group talk.

Example SEL / Oracy Activities

In the Brilliant ME in Action webpages Resource section there are some example Oracy / SEL example activities. These include:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision making
- My Strengths and Growth Areas
- Managing Our Emotions Through Storytelling
- Empathy Interviews
- Conflict Resolution Role-Play
- Debating Current Issues

The power of oracy – a snapshot

The London Violence Reduction Unit's **Talk Matters**¹² programme, launched in 2023 with a £3 million investment, aims to improve oracy for disadvantaged primary pupils. Working with schools across seven boroughs, it provides targeted support for speech, language, and communication needs—especially those often missed in children with behavioural issues. The initiative delivers whole-school strategies, focuses on narrowing the gap for disadvantaged children, involves parents and carers, and uses evidence-based approaches to upskill staff. Strong oracy is recognised as vital for academic achievement, well-being, and reducing youth violence.

Appendix E: SEL and Closing the Attainment Gap

Reducing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers remains one of the most urgent priorities in education. The gap begins early, widens through primary and secondary school, and is strongly shaped by children's experiences of stress, insecurity, language development, and their sense of belonging and agency.

The current picture: national and local

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) 2025 Annual Report¹³ shows that all disadvantage gaps are still **wider than before the pandemic**:

- **Age 5:** 4.7-month gap
- **End of primary (KS2):** 10-month gap
- **End of secondary (KS4):** 19.1-month gap
- **Absence:** Particularly among disadvantaged pupils — absence is now a major contributor to widening gaps.

In Cornwall, the picture is more encouraging in the early years:

- Cornwall's early years disadvantage gap **narrowed by 1.3 months** between 2019 and 2024 — one of the largest improvements nationally.

However, Cornwall still faces high levels of rural poverty, SEND need, and persistent absence — meaning targeted intervention in primary school remains essential.

12. <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/londons-violence-reduction-unit-vru/our-programmes/talk-matters>

13. Education Policy Institute. Annual Report 2025: The Disadvantage Gap in England – Foreword, Executive Summary, “Disadvantage” and “Local Authority Gaps” Sections. Education Policy Institute, 2025, <https://epi.org.uk/annual-report-2025/>. (Education Policy Institute)

Factors in the attainment gap

Building on the work of Rowland (2021)¹⁴, four evidence-informed factors are central:

1. Relationships

Strong, consistent relationships with adults help children feel safe, connected and ready to learn.

2. Metacognition and self-regulation

The EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit identifies metacognition/self-regulation as one of the highest-impact strategies, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

3. Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH)

Stress, anxiety, and emotional dysregulation have a direct impact on working memory, attention, and learning readiness.

4. Language development and comprehension

Oral language is a powerful predictor of later attainment. Disadvantaged children often enter school with significantly lower vocabulary and comprehension skills (Jean Gross, 2025¹⁵).

Other key evidence includes:

- Children with stronger emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing show **higher academic achievement** and greater school engagement (DfE, 2012)¹⁶.
- Children from working-class backgrounds tend to show a **lower sense of agency** from an early age, affecting motivation and long-term outcomes (Betthäuser et al., 2020)¹⁷.

Why SEL is a powerful tool for closing the gap

SEL directly addresses the developmental factors that disadvantage often disrupts. High-quality SEL:

a. Strengthens emotional regulation and executive functioning

Children learn to understand their emotions, calm their bodies, stay focused and persist with learning. For pupils exposed to stress or instability, this is essential.

b. Improves relationships, belonging and behaviour

SEL promotes empathy, connection and restorative responses. This leads to safer classrooms with fewer exclusions and better attendance.

c. Supports language development

Talking about feelings, perspective-taking and problem-solving all build vocabulary and oracy — crucial for literacy development.

d. Increases sense of agency

Activities that help pupils reflect on strengths, set goals and solve problems boost self-efficacy and counter the lower agency observed in working-class pupils.

e. Enhances wellbeing and mental health

Improved wellbeing supports better concentration, fewer absences, and greater engagement.

f. Raises academic outcomes

For example, the EEF finds **+4 months' additional progress**¹⁸ when SEL is well-implemented in primary schools.

14. Rowland, Marc. Addressing Educational Disadvantage in Schools and Colleges: The Essex Way. John Catt, 2021.

15. Gross, Jean. Reaching the Unseen Children: Practical Strategies for Closing Stubborn Attainment Gaps in Disadvantaged Groups. Second edition, Routledge, 2025 (chapter 4)

16. Department of Education, **The impact of Pupil Wellbeing on Educational Outcomes** 2012

17. Betthäuser, Bastian A., Mollie Bourne, and Erzsébet Bukodi. "Understanding the Mobility Chances of Children from Working-Class Backgrounds in Britain: How Important Are Cognitive Ability and Locus of Control?" British Journal of Sociology, vol. 71, no. 8, Jan. 2020, pp. 1-17.

18. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/primary-sel>

Appendix F: SEL and Strategies to Improve Attendance

In the second edition of her book ‘Reaching the Unseen Children’, Jean Gross added a new chapter looking at attendance having noted “a rapid increase in absence, particularly persistent absence, in disadvantaged pupils” since the publication of the 1st edition.

Among the key takeaways from the chapter are:

- The importance of school climate and culture and the need to foster a sense of belonging.
- How much relational approaches including building strong relationships between staff and pupils (as well as among pupils) matter.
- The importance of working with parents and carers.

The DfE^{19,20} has been actively focusing on strategies to improve school attendance, recognising the significant impact it has on children’s attainment, wellbeing, and future life chances. A core principle of their guidance is ‘**Support First**’. Several strands of work are underway, with increasing consideration given to the role of social and emotional learning (SEL).

For example, **ThriveUK**^{21,22} is part of the Attendance Mentoring Pilot Expansion programme, a three-and-a-half-year project across 40 secondary schools in England. Thrive is providing expert training to the mentors, equipping them with the skills to address the emotional and social barriers that often prevent young people from attending school. The Thrive Approach focuses on improving wellbeing, attendance, behaviour, and learning outcomes by creating nurturing environments and fostering emotional resilience. Mentors trained in the Thrive Approach work with pupils through one-on-one sessions to build trust, identify barriers, set goals, implement action plans, and plan for reintegration into school.

Cornwall

Locally The **Transforming Attendance in Cornwall Toolkit**²³ is a resource developed through a partnership of education professionals in Cornwall, coordinated by the Cornwall Education Partnership (CEP) and supported by the One Cornwall Teaching School Hub.

Key aspects include:

Key Principles:

Central to the toolkit’s approach are positive relationships and fostering a sense of belonging for children, young people, and their families within the school community.

Model for Improvement:

The toolkit outlines a model for improving attendance that includes:

- Improving universal provision for all pupils.
- Communicating effectively with families.
- Building a culture of community and belonging.

19. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-pupils-receive-support-to-boost-school-attendance--2>

20. Department for Education (England). Working Together to Improve School Attendance: Statutory Guidance for Maintained Schools, Academies, Independent Schools and Local Authorities. Aug. 2024, <https://bit.ly/4g9xSbg>

21. <https://www.thriveapproach.com/news/thrive-joins-national-dfe-initiative-to-tackle-school-absenteeism>

22. Thrive Approach. Being in School Matters: Your Guide to Tackling Low Attendance. Volume 3, Expanded & Updated February 2025. Thrive Approach, 2025, <https://web.thriveapproach.com/hubfs/Thrive/ThriveAttendanceGuide.pdf>

23. **Transforming Attendance in Cornwall**: One Cornwall Teaching School Hub, 2024

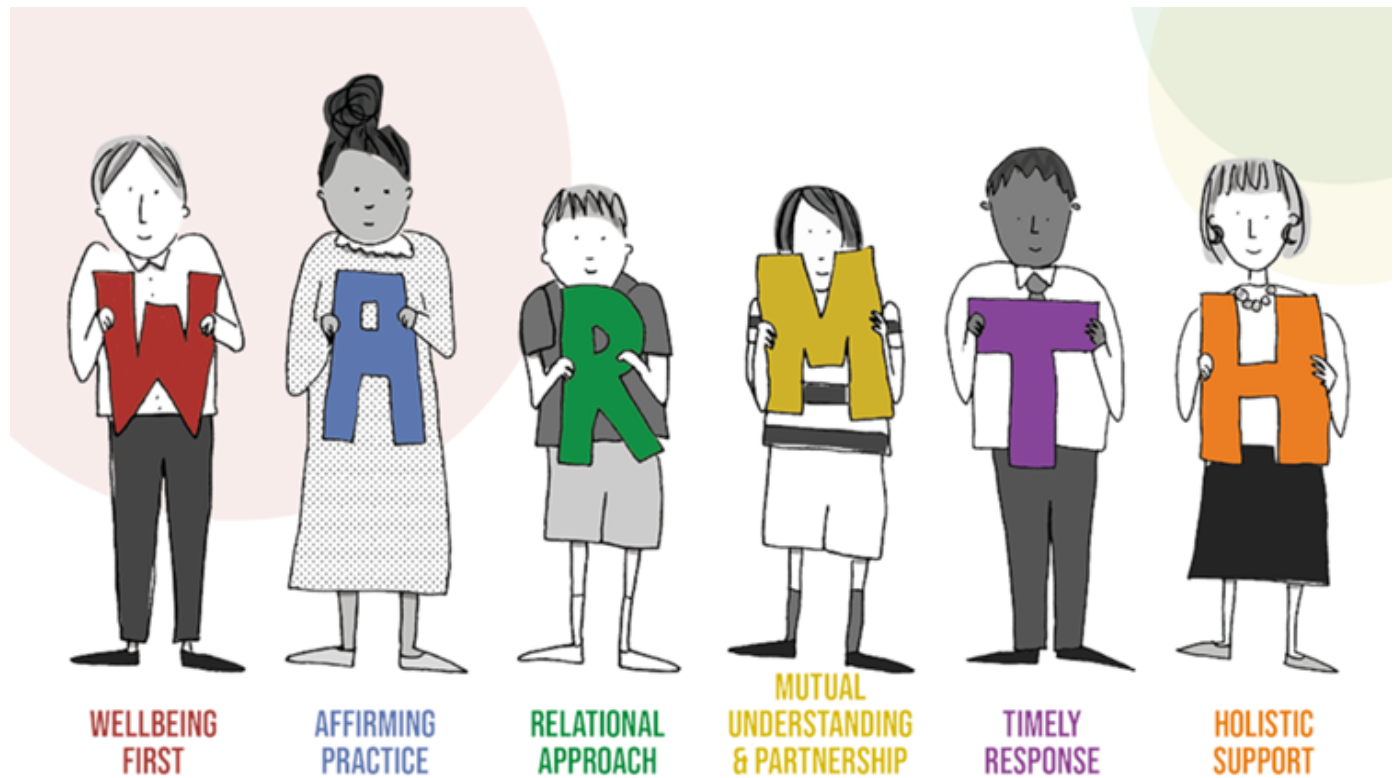
Barriers to Education

Barriers to Education is a website designed as a practical, flexible resource to support everyone working to reduce barriers to education. It offers tools and resources to support children and young people struggling to be in school. At the heart of the project is

The Warmth Framework.

The framework focuses on 6 key areas to enable young people to feel safe, foster a sense of belonging and have their needs met.

<https://barrierstoeducation.co.uk>



Appendix G: Town End Research School

Town End Research School is part of the **Research Schools Network** (including the Cornwall Research School) which aims to support schools to break the link between family income and education attainment through better use of evidence.

The Research Schools do this by working with schools, colleges, and early years settings in their region to improve teaching and learning.

Alongside the EEF SEL Guidance Town End have shared some excellent and thoughtful work on SEL often linked to literacy.

- **A series of informative and reflective blogs on SEL**
 - **Synonym spectrums to support Social and Emotional Learning:** Research school director, Stella Jones, shares how to use books in a targeted way to develop Social and Emotional Learning.
 - **Four books for teaching social and emotional learning:** Stella Jones explores how books can be used to develop social and emotional learning
 - **Seizing upon SEL with Structured Talk:** Stella Jones describes her school's approach to promoting students' SEL through fostering conversations.
 - **Reading strategies to support social and emotional learning:** Use these strategies to systematically teach SEL through books.

- **How to weave Social and Emotional Learning skills into everyday teaching habits:** Explaining Evidence from the **EEF's guidance report "Improving Social and Emotional Learning in primary schools"**
- **Executive Function: the engine of learning and writing:** In this blog, Stella Jones explores how executive function supports writing through planning, focus & self-monitoring skills.
- **Weaving social and emotional learning (SEL) habits into whole school routines:** Introducing the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Pick and Mix Tool.

- **Classroom resources for SEL**
 - SEL Pick and Mix
 - Scenarios
 - Pooch Template 1
 - Pooch Template 2
 - SEL Booklet
 - SEL Reading Strategies
 - Emotions Chart
 - Shades of Intensity
 - Shades of Intensity - faces
 - Body Signals
 - Self-regulation toolkit
 - PSED Teaching Sequence
 - Executive Function Case Study

Through the Research Schools Network and Town End's work we have also discovered additional material that we think is well worth sharing:

- **How can weaving Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into daily practice crack even the hardest nut and lift just a little of that teacher guilt?:** Billesley Research School. Our Evidence Lead in Education, Martin Hill, uses his own experiences & EEF guidance to give an honest, accessible guide to SEL.
- **Right Time, Right Place: proactive approaches to support social emotional learning:** Considering social emotional learning. Donna Brown and Tom Gray from The Exchange Research School.

We are very grateful that Stella Jones, Director of the Town End Research School, has kindly allowed us to draw on, share and adapt their work in this resource.

Appendix H: The RULER²⁴ Approach²⁵ to SEL

The RULER approach is a framework for teaching emotional skills developed by Professor Marc Brackett. The acronym stands for:

- **Recognise:** Identifying and noticing emotions
- **Understand:** Understanding the causes and meaning of emotions
- **Label:** Naming emotions accurately
- **Express:** Expressing emotions in healthy and appropriate ways
- **Regulate:** Managing and controlling emotions

By teaching children to recognise, understand, label, express, and regulate their emotions, the RULER approach can help them to improve their social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

There are 4 tools used as part of the RULER Approach. Perhaps the most familiar one is:

The Mood Meter: A Visual Tool for Emotional Awareness and Regulation

The Mood Meter enhances self- and social awareness and supports the development of a nuanced emotion vocabulary and a range of strategies for regulating emotion. It is a visual tool that is as part of the RULER approach (and more widely). It is a simple, color-coded chart that helps children to identify and label their emotions.

The Mood Meter typically includes four quadrants: green for positive emotions, yellow for neutral emotions, blue for calm emotions, and red for uncomfortable emotions.

By using the Mood Meter, children can learn to recognise and express their emotions in a more nuanced way. They can also learn to identify patterns in their emotions and develop strategies for managing them. The Mood Meter can be a valuable tool for helping children to develop emotional literacy and improve their overall well-being.

THE MOOD METER



24. Where R, U & L are about decoding what we and others are feeling, and E & R are concerned with managing and navigating our feelings.

25. <https://www.rulerapproach.org> (Although access to the training / full suite of resources is difficult – and expensive! – information about all aspects of the programme are covered in the book, ‘Permission to Feel’, and publicly available and we include an overview in the appendices). This is an interesting article about **using RULER in a London primary school** and their **school website** is worth a look too.

26. <https://marcbrackett.com> Professor Marc Brackett is a leading expert in the field of emotional intelligence. His work focuses on understanding and teaching emotional regulation skills, particularly in children and adolescents. Brackett’s research has had a significant impact on the field of education, and his RULER approach has been implemented in schools worldwide. Brackett is the author of Permission to Feel. The book explores the importance of emotional literacy. The book argues that we need to give ourselves and others permission to feel our emotions fully, without judgment or shame. Brackett emphasises the importance of understanding and managing emotions as a key component of emotional literacy.

The other RULER Tools²⁷

Charter

The emotional climate of a school affects the community's well-being and pupils' ability to learn. The Charter is a collaborative document that helps schools establish supportive and productive learning environments. It is created by members of the community, outlining how they aspire to treat each other. Together, the community describes how they want to feel at school, the behaviours that foster those feelings, and guidelines for preventing and managing unwanted feelings and conflict. By working together to build the Charter, everyone establishes common goals and holds each other accountable for creating the positive climate they envision.

Meta-Moment

Emotions can either help or hinder relationships, and we all have moments that get the best of us. The Meta-Moment helps pupils and educators handle strong emotions so that they make better decisions for themselves and their community. The Meta-Moment is a brief step back from the situation when we pause and think before acting. We ask ourselves; how would my "best self" react in this situation? What strategy can I use so that my actions reflect my best self? Over time and with practice, pupils and educators replace ineffective responses with

productive and empowering responses to challenging situations. They make better choices, build healthier relationships, and experience greater well-being

Blueprint

How everyone in a school treats each other has a powerful effect on classroom performance and school climate. Conflict between pupils, especially bullying, gets in the way of learning and success, and it also increases the time teachers spend off task. The Blueprint helps pupils and educators manage conflict effectively. Using the Blueprint, children and adults consider a disagreement from the other person's perspective, as well as their own. They develop empathy by considering each other's feelings and working collaboratively to identify healthy solutions to conflicts. The Blueprint helps repair relationships and build stronger ones, creating safer and more productive schools where pupils can learn and thrive.

Although the full RULER training / resource package is not easily accessible to schools in the UK (yet...?) we believe it is helpful to explore the 5 RULER skills, perhaps reading Marc Brackett's 'Permission to Feel' and exploring how the Mood Meter could be used (with some introduction to help children understand it and be able to use it well) to support your SEL work regardless of the programmes or resources you use.

Charter: Builds and sustains positive emotional climates by creating agreed-upon norms for how people want to feel and how they can help each other to experience those feelings.

Meta-Moment: Provides a process for responding to emotional situations with strategies that align with one's best self and that support healthy relationships and personal well-being.

Blueprint: Supports the development of empathy and conflict resolution skills by serving as a guide for reflecting on conflict and restoring affected communities.

27. <https://rulerapproach.org/about/what-is-ruler/> These tools are similar to resources familiar to a Whole School Approach and may already be in use in school. For example, Charter – part of a co-created relational policy? Blueprint – perhaps similar to Restorative Approaches? Meta-Moment – “Stop, Feel, Think, do.” or the 90 sec pause technique (both of which can be found in **the resources section**).

Appendix I: Approaches to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) - one-page guides

There are a wide variety of ideas, concepts, and approaches that could come under the heading ‘Social and Emotional Learning’ (SEL). The one-page guides provided offer concise overviews and introductions to some of these methods, offering a helpful starting point when considering how to integrate.

As with many elements within education, each approach comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Some have strong advocates, while others attract criticism. What proves successful in one educational setting may not necessarily be suitable in another, highlighting the importance of context and adaptability.

The effectiveness of a particular approach often depends on securing appropriate buy-in and commitment from staff, as well as ensuring that those involved receive adequate training. Additionally, adhering closely to the recommended strategies and maintaining fidelity during implementation are key factors in achieving positive outcomes.

The guides below offer a brief introduction to some of the approaches. Others aim to highlight aspects of current government guidance where links may be made with SEL.

- Allen Mendler’s 2x10 Strategy
- Applied Educational Neuroscience and 4 Pillars (Dr. Lori Desautels)
- Attunement
- Boingboing Resilience Framework
- Brain Breaks
- Brain Chemicals / DOSE
- British Values in Primary Schools and SEL
- Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory
- CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)
- Children’s Rights and SEL
- CLANGERS (Extended 5 Ways to Wellbeing)
- EASEL (Ecological Approaches to Social and Emotional Learning) SEL Kernels
- EFT (Tapping) and Self-Regulation
- Emotion Coaching (Emotion Coaching UK)
- Empathy
- Executive Function
- Five Ways to Wellbeing (Start Now Cornwall version)
- Incredible 5 Point Scale
- Neuroplasticity
- Oracy
- Ordinary Magic (Dr. Ann Masten)
- PACE (Dr. Dan Hughes)
- Parent Carer Engagement Framework (Cornwall)
- Polyvagal Theory
- Protective Behaviours
- Regulate, Relate, Reason (Dr. Bruce Perry)
- RULER (Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence)
- SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning)
- Self-Reg (Dr. Stuart Shanker)
- Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural (SMSC) Development
- UN Rights Respecting Schools and SEL
- VIA Strengths
- Wellbeing Foundations (including CLANGERS elements)
- Whole School Approach to Wellbeing
- Window of Tolerance
- Zones of Regulation

The **one-page guides**– can be found on the accompanying Brilliant ME in Action webpages

Appendix J: Progression in SEL

Progression of CASEL Competencies in Primary School

The CASEL Framework

The five CASEL competencies:

- 1.** Self-awareness: Understanding one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, and values.
- 2.** Self-management: Regulating one's emotions, setting goals, and persisting in tasks.
- 3.** Social awareness: Understanding the perspectives of others, building empathy, and respecting diversity.
- 4.** Relationship skills: Communicating effectively, cooperating with others, and building positive relationships.
- 5.** Responsible decision-making: Making constructive choices about personal behavior and considering the ethical implications of decisions.

Progression of CASEL Competencies by age group

EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage)

- Self-awareness: Recognising basic emotions, identifying personal likes and dislikes, developing a sense of self.
- Self-management: Managing simple emotions, following basic routines, showing persistence in play.
- Social awareness: Showing empathy for others, sharing toys and materials, cooperating in group activities.
- Relationship skills: Developing basic communication skills, taking turns, playing cooperatively.
- Responsible decision-making: Making simple choices based on personal preferences, understanding basic rules and expectations.

KS1 (5-7 years old)

- Self-awareness: Identifying a wider range of emotions, recognising strengths and weaknesses, developing a sense of self-efficacy.
- Self-management: Managing stronger emotions, setting and achieving simple goals, showing persistence in tasks.
- Social awareness: Understanding different perspectives, showing empathy for others' feelings, appreciating diversity.
- Relationship skills: Developing effective communication skills, cooperating with others, building friendships.
- Responsible decision-making: Making choices based on consequences, understanding rules and expectations, showing respect for others.

Lower Key Stage 2 (8-9 years old)

- Self-awareness: Understanding complex emotions, recognising personal values, developing self-confidence.
- Self-management: Managing strong emotions effectively, setting and achieving more complex goals, showing self-discipline.
- Social awareness: Taking others' perspectives, understanding group dynamics, appreciating diversity and inclusivity.
- Relationship skills: Building strong friendships, resolving conflicts peacefully, cooperating in group activities.
- Responsible decision-making: Making informed choices based on consequences, understanding ethical dilemmas, showing responsibility.

Upper Key Stage 2 (10-11 years old)

- Self-awareness: Understanding and managing a wide range of emotions, reflecting on personal strengths and weaknesses, developing self-esteem.
- Self-management: Setting and achieving long-term goals, showing self-control, managing stress effectively.
- Social awareness: Understanding and respecting different cultures and viewpoints, empathising with others' experiences, promoting inclusivity.
- Relationship skills: Building and maintaining positive relationships, resolving conflicts constructively, leading and collaborating effectively.
- Responsible decision-making: Making ethical choices, considering the impact of decisions on others, demonstrating civic responsibility.

Note: The specific learning objectives will vary depending on the school context and curriculum. It's important to adapt this progression to meet the needs of your students and to ensure a smooth transition between key stages.

A progression in social and emotional learning

Based on the work of Dr Julie Casey. These progression tools were created alongside the national SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) programme. All the assemblies, lesson plans and supporting resources developed for the SEAL programme are available free to download at www.sealcommunity.org

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Self-awareness	Early Years Foundation Stage	Y1 + 2	Y3+ 4	Y5 + 6
Feelings of belonging	Knows and plays with most of the people in the class/ group.	Can communicate about people who are important to him/her.	Can talk about why it is important for everyone to belong to a group, and how it feels to belong.	Understands the effects of change and loss on feelings of belonging.
Perception of self-efficacy	Can make choices for him/herself.	Understands that he/she has the power to make choices (e.g. about behaviour and friendships).	Understands that he/she can influence outcome by his/her choices.	Understands that he/she can change things (e.g. in school) by challenging them appropriately.
Knowing and valuing self	Can tell you why he/she is special.	Can identify what he/she is good and not so good at. Can identify his/her strengths as a learner.	Can talk about his/her personality, giving examples (e.g. if he/she likes surprises). Uses his/ her learning strengths in the classroom.	Knows and accepts his/her strengths and weaknesses and values self. Knows him/ herself as a learner and uses strengths and works on weaknesses.
Recognising, labelling and understanding feelings	Can identify and express basic emotions.	Can identify and express a range of feelings, indicating intensity.	Can identify and predict an increasing range of feelings.	Can identify and express a broad range of feelings, including mixed feelings.

Self- management	Early Years Foundation Stage	Y1 + 2	Y3+ 4	Y5 + 6
Knowledge and understanding that support feeling management	Understands that all feelings are OK, but not all behaviours are OK.	Recognises the internal and external effects of anger, and how it can overwhelm us.	Understands the triggers, and physical effects, of anger and why it is important to calm down before being overwhelmed.	Understands anger triggers, why they can overwhelm and the consequences of uncontrolled anger.
Impulse control	Demonstrates some ability to control impulses, e.g. waiting turn.	Can identify when he/ she has acted impulsively, and when he/ she has thought his/her actions through.	Can control impulses (stop and think before acting) even when angry or stressed.	Can control impulses in a range of situations and make positive choices.
Skills and strategies for managing uncomfortable feelings/ promoting positive feelings	Uses appropriate strategies to manage emotions (such as relaxing him/ herself or doing something different) with support.	Uses appropriate strategies to calm down and manage emotions (such as relaxing him/ herself/ doing something different/ thinking differently) with or without support.	Uses appropriate strategies to calm down and manage emotions in an increasing range of situations and with increasing independence.	Uses appropriate strategies to calm down, manage a range of emotions and change uncomfortable feelings independently.
Social awareness	Foundation Stage	Y1 + 2	Y3+ 4	Y5 + 6
Knowledge (social cognition)	Understands that all people are equally important and deserving of respect. Understands that everybody has the same range of feelings.	Understands that all people are equally important and deserving of respect. Recognises that there can be more than one way to view, or feel about a situation.	Understands that all people are equally important and deserving of respect. Understands that intolerance of difference can lead to bullying and can identify bullying behaviours.	Understands that all people are equally important and deserving of respect. Can explain people's behaviour with reference to what they might be feeling and thinking.

Understanding feelings and points of view of others	Can tell when other people are angry, happy or sad.	Can tell if other people are feeling a range of basic emotions. Can see a situation from somebody else's point of view.	Can tell if others are feeling a range of emotions. Can see a range of situations from someone else's point of view.	Can recognise a range of feelings in other people, including more subtle ones. Can see a situation in which they are involved from another person's point of view.
Motivation and skills to help others	Demonstrates spontaneous kindness to others, e.g. children who have been bullied, or feel sad.	Makes people feel welcome and respected in the classroom. Wants to make people feel better if they are sad or scared or have been bullied.	Makes others feel welcomed and respected at school. Uses a range of strategies for helping others.	Makes others feel valued and welcome in a range of contexts. Uses a range of strategies for helping others, and will actively tackle bullying/ stereotyping behaviours.
Relationship skills	Foundation Stage	Y1 + 2	Y3+ 4	Y5 + 6
Group-working skills	Can share and work in a group, e.g. taking turns in a game; waiting his/her turn to say something; asking for help when stuck.	Can work well in a group. Can evaluate how well his/ her group have worked together.	Can take on a role in a group and contribute to the overall outcome helping others to reach a goal. Can evaluate how well a group is working together.	Can work well in a group, e.g. agreeing/ disagreeing assertively; listening to, and taking on board, constructive criticism. Can evaluate how well a group is working together. Demonstrates qualities of a good group leader.
Rights and personal/social responsibilities	Knows and keeps to routines and rules in the classroom.	Understands, contributes to, and keeps to rules in classroom.	Understands, contributes to, and keeps to rules in classroom, recognising his/her own and others' rights and responsibilities.	Understands, contributes to, and keeps to rules in school, recognising his/her own and others' rights and responsibilities, taking responsibility for his/her own behaviour.

Friendship	Plays well with other children, sharing toys and taking turns.	Knows what being a friend means. Can make and keep friends, using skills such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening • giving compliments 	Can make and keep friends, using skills such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using friendly behaviours • being a good listener • giving and receiving compliments. 	Can make and keep friends at a variety of degrees of closeness. Does not see difference as a barrier to friendship. Is able to forgive others, and/or break the friendship as appropriate.
Assertiveness	Is able to say what he/she wants or needs.	Knows when and how to stand up for him/herself, and does so appropriately and without hurting others.	Uses assertiveness skills appropriately (including body language, tone, appropriate vocabulary).	Uses skills of assertiveness appropriately, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disagreeing with someone and accepting disagreement from others without falling out. • listening to others' views, but standing up for own viewpoint and making own choice, even if the majority viewpoint is different.
Problem- solving and conflict resolution	Can say sorry when he/she has been unkind or done something wrong. Can make up when he/she has fallen out with a friend.	Is able to apologise appropriately. Has strategies for making up with a friend, e.g. 'peaceful problem-solving'.	Is able to apologise appropriately and make amends when he/she has done something unkind. Can make up with a friend using e.g. 'peaceful problem- solving', showing understanding of the other person's point of view and seeking a 'win- win' solution.	Is able to apologise appropriately. Can make up with peers using e.g. 'peaceful problem- solving'. Can support others in solving their conflicts. Knows how to de-escalate a conflict (e.g. using 'I messages'; talking about the behaviour rather than the person).

Relationship skills	Foundation Stage	Y1 + 2	Y3 + 4	Y5 + 6
Goal setting and planning/ review	Can set, work towards and achieve a self-selected immediate goal.	Can set, work towards and achieve a self-selected short-term goal, breaking it down into small steps.	Can set, work towards and achieve a self-selected medium-term goal, breaking it down into small steps, identifying and planning for obstacles, setting success criteria and evaluating outcomes and learning.	Can set, work towards and achieve a longer-term goal independently, breaking it down into small steps, identifying and planning for obstacles, setting success criteria and evaluating outcomes and learning.
Learning behaviours and skills: Motivation Focus Persistence Resilience	Understands that you have to work hard to achieve a goal. Can complete a task, focusing attention and concentrating appropriately.	Will work towards a reward, including the satisfaction of completing a task. Can usually resist distractions. Has some strategies for overcoming feelings of boredom and frustration.	Can motivate self to work. Can concentrate and resist distractions. Perseveres with a task. Manages frustration when tasks are difficult or boring. Can delay gratification.	Can motivate self to work. Can concentrate and resist distractions. Perseveres with a task. Manages frustration. Can delay gratification. Is willing to try again if he/she doesn't succeed.