



# HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

**TOOLS TO NAVIGATE THE WAY TO COLLEGE, CAREER, AND BEYOND**

# SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Recent events have forced us to work, learn, and interact with others in new ways. We've all needed to adapt to new situations, navigate uncertainty, and tackle challenges like never before. While we can't directly control what's going on in the world, we can focus on building a set of tools that will help us adapt to and overcome challenges.

Decades of research show that social and emotional skills are exactly what we need in these circumstances. Social and emotional skills help us succeed in school, work, and life; build and maintain healthy relationships; work toward our goals—even when challenges arise; and stay composed and flexible even when situations don't go as planned.

In this eBook, we've compiled downloadable resources and tips

that will help foster some key social and emotional skills: **Sustaining Effort, Getting Along with Others, Maintaining Composure, Keeping an Open Mind, and Social Connection.**

Strategies and lessons within these resources can be used as a guide for you to learn and adapt to new ways of interacting. These resources can be used universally—parents and guardians can use these resources with students at home, teachers can deliver these lessons in person or virtually to students, and all adults can use these resources to hone their own social and emotional skills.

Our goal is to help educators, students, and their families discover social and emotional skills that can help them cope with daily challenges, as well as develop skills to manage future challenges and experiences more successfully.



## Sustaining Effort

How actions demonstrate diligence, effort, organization, self-control, and compliance with the rules.



## Getting Along with Others

How actions demonstrate positive interactions and cooperation with others, and kindness, friendliness, and tactfulness.



## Maintaining Composure

How actions demonstrate relative calmness, serenity, and the ability to manage emotions effectively.



## Keeping an Open Mind

How actions demonstrate open-mindedness and curiosity about a variety of ideas, beliefs, people, and experiences.



## Social Connection

How actions demonstrate a preference for social interaction, assertiveness in social situations, and optimism.



# SUSTAINING EFFORT: DEVELOPING GRIT

## SOME WAYS TO STAY ON TASK AND BE ORGANIZED



**Sustaining Effort, also commonly referred to as Grit,** includes persistence, reliability, attention to detail, and goal striving. A hallmark of Sustaining Effort is persevering, particularly when things get tough. Current situations are creating adversity for all of us and developing grit can help you deal effectively with this adversity.

Like many others, your routine has probably been disrupted. You are probably learning and working remotely, schedules are out the window, and you might be struggling to figure out how to remain focused amid disruptions and distractions. Without structure, we often feel like we have difficulty setting and

achieving goals, lack motivation, and have difficulty staying organized and on track.

The good news is that there are resources and tips that can help you stay on track in all aspects of your life, and these resources might be particularly helpful during times when unpredictability and disrupted routines seem like a new normal. The following are several research-backed resources, culled from the Mosaic™ by ACT® Social Emotional Learning Assessment and Curricula solutions, designed to build sustaining effort in students and their families.

# ACTIVITIES

## THINK ABOUT YOUR GOALS.\*

Even during challenging times, we can remain focused on our goals and/or set new goals that are consistent with what is meaningful to us. One might even argue that challenging times are when we should try to focus hardest on our goals. Two people may have the same goal but for different reasons. If we think critically about why we have certain goals in place, we are better able to evaluate which goals are really important and then will be more likely to achieve those goals. Use these activities to prompt you to think about your goals or help you set new ones.

## OVERCOME OBSTACLES.\*

Disruptive events are bound to interfere with plans and goals. Rather than feel discouraged and give up, it is important for us to figure out ways to overcome the obstacle or “roadblock.” Learn how to reframe your goals so you can steer around roadblocks.

## MANAGE YOUR TIME.\*

When our schedules are disrupted, it's easy to waste time and feel unproductive or unfocused—or even worse, spend a lot of time worrying. To avoid this, it's helpful to track how we spend our time and become familiar with time management tools. In addition to wasting less time and accomplishing more, this can ultimately lead to positive outcomes such as less stress and more time to focus on what's meaningful to you.

## PLAN HOW YOU WILL ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS.\*

Research shows that we are more likely to achieve our goals when we unpack them into smaller goals and create a reasonable timeline for reaching each sub-goal. Timelines may have shifted during the pandemic, and that's okay—plans and goals can be flexible. Try an exercise to help you better plan how you will achieve your goals.

## MAKE TO-DO LISTS.

Each day, you could make yourself a to-do list to ensure you're still focusing on what's important to you and to help maintain some structure in your life.

## GET ORGANIZED.

Think of at least one thing you can organize each week (e.g., your desk, your closet, the photos on your phone, etc.). This will keep you busy in the short term and will increase your organization skills in the long term.

## TACKLE THAT TASK.

Is there something you've been putting off doing for a while? Now is a good time to get that done. It will be very satisfying to finally tackle that task!

## PLAN FOR THE FUTURE.

Uncertain times and major life events often prompt people to think about what they want out of life. Think about the future and what's important to you. Where do you want to be? What do you want to accomplish? Why? Think about whether you're prioritizing what matters so you end up where you want to be.



\*[DOWNLOAD SEL RESOURCES:](#)

SUSTAINING EFFORT





# GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS: DEVELOPING TEAMWORK

## WAYS WE CAN WORK TOGETHER



Effects of the recent pandemic continue to challenge us daily in ways we never expected. Our work circumstances are different, the routines of our children and family members have changed, and our social lives have been upended. Our social and emotional skills have certainly been put to the test. One skill that has been unmistakably relevant is **Getting Along with Others, or Teamwork**.

Teamwork reflects one's collaboration, empathy, helpfulness, trust, and trustworthiness.

"We're all in this together." We hear this everywhere. It reflects core aspects of teamwork—working together, helping one another, and empathizing with what others are going through. This skill may be more important now than ever,

but we should not lose sight of its value even under ordinary circumstances. People have pitched in recently to help others, but wouldn't it be great if everyone continues to do such acts of empathy and kindness long after the pandemic is over?

It's unfortunate that sometimes it takes a challenging situation to prompt people to work collaboratively and think carefully about the welfare of others. Regardless, our current situation offers us all an opportunity to practice our teamwork skills, which will undoubtedly have long-lasting effects. Below, we provide some lessons and activities from the Mosaic™ by ACT® SEL Assessment and Curricula solutions designed to help develop teamwork skills.

# ACTIVITIES

## DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVES.\*

Although we're all in this together, everyone's experience of the pandemic is different. Some people have been hit hard—having contracted the virus, having lost jobs, having lost loved ones—while others' experiences are less dire. Even though we might observe or experience the same thing objectively, our subjective observation or experience may differ. This lesson illustrates that not everyone sees the world from the same perspective and helps students learn how to take the perspectives of others.

## FINDING COMMON GROUND: POSITIONS VS. INTERESTS.\*

Given how the pandemic affected our current circumstances, you may find that you are in conflict with others around you more than usual. Many of us were or continue to be stuck at home in close quarters with our families, and as

a result, many of us may be more prone to frustration or have a short fuse. In this activity, students can think about some ways that they can effectively resolve conflicts with others.

## ARE ALL ORANGES ALIKE?\*

Some people may think that all members of a certain group are affected (or unaffected) by events the same way. Group membership may be based on any number of characteristics, such as wealth, geographic location, or race/ethnicity, to name a few. In this lesson, students will engage in an activity that illustrates how different people can be, regardless of how "alike" they may seem at first glance. This concept is illustrated using oranges!

## SERVICE PROJECT.\*

Now is an opportune time to exercise your teamwork skills by reaching out and helping your community. Many service projects can still be done at



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home or by utilizing technology. In this activity, students can think of ways to help others through troubling times.

## PRACTICE PATIENCE.

Here is a great mindfulness activity. Use it to slow down and relax when your patience is being tested. You don't have 10 minutes for the whole activity? That's okay; try a two-minute version, by focusing on steps one (breathing) and two (settling).



## PRACTICE THINKING BEFORE YOU SPEAK.

At times, we blurt out the first thought that comes into our heads without considering the consequences or hurt feelings that could follow. Instead, pause and go over what you want to say, and think about how it might be received by your audience. If you think it could come across as hurtful or mean, rephrase it (or don't say it) to avoid hurting or offending others.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR OTHERS?

As we mentioned earlier, many people are experiencing the pandemic differently. Do you know someone who is an essential worker right now? How about a hospital employee? Can you help your parents take care of younger siblings in your home? Try to think about how others around you are experiencing events differently and whether there are things you can do to help them right now. A little bit of help can go a long way in times like these. Not only would you be helping others, but, according to research, you'll likely become happier yourself!

## WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY?

This is a common question at dinnertime. Children are asked about what they learned in school, and adults are asked about something that happened at work. Try adding a small twist at the end: What did you do today to be kind? If you get into the habit of asking this regularly, it can signal that being kind is as important to you and your family as school performance or work issues.



**\*DOWNLOAD SEL RESOURCES:**

GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS





# MAINTAINING COMPOSURE: DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

## SOME WAYS TO DEAL WITH WORRY AND ANXIETY



The importance of social and emotional skills during recent events couldn't be more profound. One self-regulatory skill is **Maintaining Composure, or Resilience**, which is how well you manage stress, regulate your emotions, and respond positively to setbacks. In other words, it can help you deal with worry and anxiety.

You may be feeling worried and anxious about the pandemic, or the future in general. You are certainly not alone in feeling this way. Worry can be an adaptive tool that serves as a signal that a change is needed. It can prompt you to develop plans and creative solutions to problems. However, too often, worry can also be detrimental, such as when you worry about things you can't control,

or when you just can't stop worrying no matter how hard you try. In such cases, worry becomes unproductive and can lead to feelings of anxiety and helplessness.

The good news is that there are a variety of resources and tips that can help you to manage worry and anxiety and become more resilient to the stress of living, working, and studying during times of uncertainty. The following are highlights of these resources but be sure to download the full lessons and activities culled from the Mosaic™ by ACT® SEL Curricula and Assessment solutions, particularly from a set of social and emotional supplemental lessons designed to build resilience in students and their families.

# ACTIVITIES

## BE MINDFUL.\*

Mindfulness can help you to focus better, relieve stress, and boost your mood. Most importantly, you do not need a lot of time or a lot of space to engage in mindfulness. However, you are more likely to experience positive effects if you do it consistently (for example, every morning after you wake up). The mindfulness activity can be adapted to do just about anywhere and anytime.

## BE CLEAR ON WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT CONTROL.\*

Worry often preys on things that are outside of a person's control. Make a list of the things that are within your control and refer to that list when you're feeling worried. The lesson provides more info on distinguishing among the things that you can and cannot control.

## WRITE ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS.

Research has shown that even 10 minutes of writing can help reduce anxiety. You can make a worry list or write a diary entry to write about how you're feeling. For kids who are not able to write yet, have them draw a picture and ask them to tell a story about their picture.

## GIVE YOUR EMOTIONS A NAME.\*

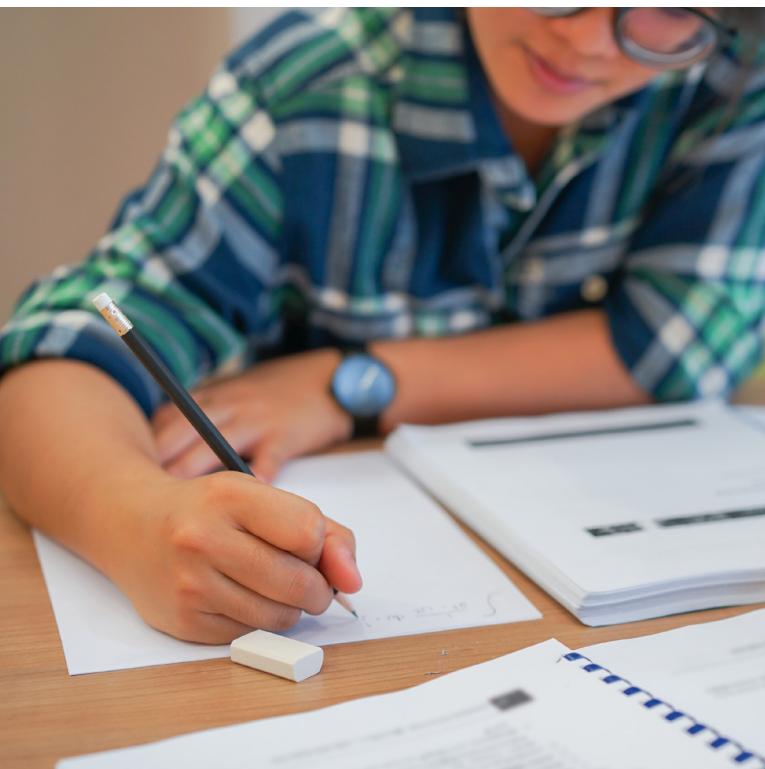
We all experience a wide range of emotions during our lifetime. In addition to worry and anxiety, adults and children are likely flooded with other recent emotions—disappointment from cancelled events, loneliness from lack of social contact, frustration toward others in confined environments, or even employment or financial difficulties. It's normal to experience these emotions, and identifying and discussing them can help alleviate feelings of stress.



# ACTIVITIES

## PRACTICE GRATITUDE.\*

Research shows that practicing gratitude can improve overall well-being. One way to do this is to create a gratitude journal. Each day use the journal to write down things for which you're grateful. Another way to practice gratitude is by writing a gratitude letter. Choose a person in your life you'd like to write your letter to—it can be a friend, teacher, or family member—anyone for whom you are grateful. Write a letter to them telling them why you are grateful for them, and then deliver your letter.



## SET A WORRY BUDGET.

One of the more harmful aspects of worry is that it can take up a lot of mind space and a lot of time. Setting a worry budget, where you give yourself a set amount of time to worry (start with 20 minutes), allows you to control how much time you give to worrying. When the time is up, consciously redirect your thoughts and your activity to something else. This exercise works well to manage “doom scrolling” and social media use in general.

## DISTRACT YOURSELF.

Distraction can be a helpful tool to limit your worrying and boost your mood. Create a list of distractions and keep it handy. The list can include listening to music, reading a book, watching TV, practicing a sport on your own, working on a hobby, or doing a creative activity. If you need help transitioning from your scheduled worry time (see item above), use your distraction list.

## EXERCISE.

Exercise has many positive effects, among them is consuming energy that might otherwise be used to worry. Go outdoors, go for a walk, run, or bike ride. If you're at home, there are still activities you can do; for example, run in place, do jumping jacks, go up and down a set of stairs, or practice yoga.

## EAT HEALTHY FOOD.

Diet can influence how we feel. During times when people experience worry and anxiety, it is particularly helpful to avoid eating lots of sugar, or consuming lots of caffeine or other stimulants. Because these substances stimulate your body and your brain into a state of alertness, they can increase feelings of anxiety.



\***DOWNLOAD SEL RESOURCES:**

MAINTAINING COMPOSURE





# KEEPING AN OPEN MIND: DEVELOPING CURIOSITY

LOOK AT THE WORLD IN A  
DIFFERENT LIGHT



By now, you may be used to engaging in new routines as a result of pandemic challenges: working from home (or continuing to work at your workplace if you have an essential job), attending school virtually or in person, socializing differently and/or caring for loved ones from a distance. You're likely having to use your social and emotional skills in new ways. As you continue to adjust to these new situations and prepare for future ones, you may need to improvise to complete a task or meet a need. Remember this well-known quote: "Necessity is the mother of invention." Do you ever wonder what this quote really means?

If so, you are making use of your **Curiosity, or Keeping an Open Mind**, which reflects your creativity, inquisitiveness, flexibility, open-mindedness, and embracing of diversity. This is an important social and emotional skill that can help us not only to cope with challenges but to thrive in a world that's continually changing. It's quite possible that today's challenges

may fuel innovation across the world for many fields: medicine, teaching and learning, economics, and personal services, to name a few. In fact, we've entered an era where never before will so many people engage in concerted efforts to work from home, teach and learn using online tools, share scientific findings that can accelerate work, or come up with policies to help people navigate new waters.

The bad news is that the pandemic has imposed a variety of constraints on our daily lives, which may still be fluctuating. The good news is that this situation provides us with the opportunity to develop our curiosity, creativity, and flexibility. In fact, recent research reveals that anyone can develop these skills in the same way that they develop any other set of skills: by engaging in deliberate practice. Below, we offer some lessons and activities from the Mosaic™ by ACT® SEL Assessment and Curricula solutions, designed to help anyone develop their curiosity and look at the world from a different perspective.

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## PAPER PLANE FLYING CONTEST.\*

Everyone knows how to make paper planes, right? Turns out that your assumptions and previous knowledge often constrain how you think of the world, even for something as simple as building a paper plane. This activity helps you to make those assumptions more explicit and frees up your ability to think outside the box when designing something new.

## EVERYDAY OBJECTS.\*

What uses do you have for a hammer? You probably think of pounding nails. But did you also think about using it as a weight, or a doorstop, or to summon Thor's powers? This activity helps you to see everyday objects in a different light and to practice thinking of less typical ways to use those objects.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?\*

Have you ever wondered about the

origin of your name or what would it have been like to live at the time and/or in the place where your name originated? This activity is designed to help you appreciate how something as simple as a name has a rich cultural heritage.

## FOLK TALES.\*

We've all been exposed to folk tales such as The Tortoise and the Hare or The Little Engine that Could. Folk tales are common in every culture, and so are the values and themes that these tales communicate. In this activity, you can combine analytical thinking skills, creativity, and information about other cultures to create a new folk tale reflecting a common value or theme.

## FLIPSIDE OF THE COIN.\*

Important issues are often complex and multi-faceted, yet social media often tries to present things as one-sided



# ACTIVITIES

and clear-cut. In this activity, you can develop an appreciation for different perspectives by picking an important topic that has two sides to it and develop arguments that support each of the two sides.

## TREASURE HUNT.

Treasure hunts can be fun for people of any age. Depending on your current living circumstances, you can make your hunt something that can easily be done indoors. For example, identify anything with circles, or anything that has red in it. The possibilities are endless!



## SHIFT YOUR PERSPECTIVE.

What do Pablo Picasso and Georgia O'Keefe have in common? Yes, they became famous artists, but part of their fame arose because of how their paintings reflected a shift in perspective. Picasso focused on objects' shapes and then arranged these shapes in unconventional ways in his paintings. O'Keefe looked at the details of natural objects (such as flowers) and then presented these details on a large scale.

Try looking at the world from a different perspective, such as pretending you're a toddler, pretending you're looking down at Earth from the space station, or that you have a special power. What insights come to you as a result of your shift in perspective?

## BUILDING CHALLENGE.

Start a daily challenge to build something fun out of materials available to you. These materials can include LEGO® bricks, wooden blocks, popsicle sticks, paper clips, rubber bands, or stacking cups. Just about anything can be used to temporarily build something and then reused to build something else. Your challenge can range from building something simple (a model of a tiny house) to something much more complicated (a Rube Goldberg machine).

We hope that you find these resources and tips useful. We believe everyone can develop their curiosity, creativity, flexibility and openness to new ideas and people.



**\*DOWNLOAD SEL RESOURCES:  
KEEPING AN OPEN MIND**





# SOCIAL CONNECTION: DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

## SOME WAYS TO SOCIALIZE WITH OTHERS AND STAY OPTIMISTIC



Another social and emotional skill that can help us get through challenging situations is **Social Connection, or Leadership**. Social Connection is defined as the extent to which a person's actions demonstrate assertiveness, influence, optimism, enthusiasm, and social interaction with others. Social distancing recommendations certainly limited our ability to interact with and connect with others face-to-face, and even challenged those of us who thrive on social activities! It is easy to feel isolated, lonely, and even defeated with life as we know it changing so drastically, so quickly.

The good news is that there are a variety of resources and tips that can help you stay positive and meaningfully connected to others despite limitations such as social distancing. You can work to demonstrate leadership at this time—to advocate for things that are necessary to keep people safe, to stay optimistic despite trying circumstances, and to be a leader to whom others look for guidance and support.

The following are resources, some of which can be found in longer lessons and activities from the Mosaic™ by ACT® SEL Assessment and Curricula solutions designed to build leadership in students and their families.

# ACTIVITIES

## REACH OUT (AND REALLY LISTEN) TO OTHERS.\*

Just because social distancing calls for cutting off physical contact with others, this doesn't mean that social connection needs to end. Despite physical distancing, it is possible to develop and maintain even tighter social connections with those close to us. Take time to check in and connect with those closest to you—friends, family members, colleagues—and engage in meaningful conversations with them. Ask how they are doing and really listen to what is going on in their world. The Active Listening lesson can help you, your children, or your students become better listeners and engage with others more meaningfully.

## TRY TO FIND THE SILVER LININGS.\*

Even when things go awry, it's always possible to try to find the positives in every situation. The Optimism lesson will

challenge your students to find positives in every situation.

## SPEAK UP.\*

How do you convey to friends or family members that they should not be engaging in risky behaviors without upsetting them? Being able to communicate assertively about your needs and the needs of others is key. In the Assertiveness lesson, you and your students will learn how to confidently communicate effectively, while remaining respectful to others.

## ENCOURAGE OTHERS.\*

It's likely that you and others have faced some challenging circumstances. Many are faced with cancelled plans, navigating school schedules, remote work, financial difficulties, and adapting to new situations. The Encouraging Others lesson can help you and your students lift one another up during these trying times.



# ACTIVITIES

## MAKE USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS.

In addition to phone calls, there are so many ways to check in and connect with others. Make use of video conference platforms to schedule a virtual game night or plan to watch the same movie at the same time with friends! Technology affords us countless opportunities to socially connect.



## CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITIES.

Community can mean different things to different people, but try to connect to your community at this time and get involved in activities your community is organizing. Do you have a hobby, such as dance or karate, where your instructors are holding virtual classes online or in person? Can you organize weekly virtual meetings with your family members or friends? Take advantage of these opportunities to remain connected with your communities.

## TAKE INITIATIVE.

There are countless things that you can do to take initiative. You can lead an effort to help elderly neighbors obtain groceries or supplies so they don't have to go to the store. You can arrange for meals to be sent to essential workers. You can even organize and teach a group how to protect others. You can always take initiative on any of these, or other projects, to help make a difference.

## START YOUR DAY ON A POSITIVE NOTE.

Make positivity a part of your morning routine. You can start off your day by practicing mindfulness or writing down things you are grateful for, checking in with a different relative, friend or colleague, jotting down some positive affirmations in a journal, listening to music, or reading a good book. The possibilities are endless, but starting your day off by doing a positive activity that you enjoy will help you maintain a positive outlook.



**\*DOWNLOAD SEL RESOURCES:  
SOCIAL CONNECTION**



# DEVELOPING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

**Social and emotional skills are like muscles**—the more you practice them over time, the more they will grow. In fact, research shows that social and emotional skills can be developed over time. So, the more you practice these skills, the more they will be able to help you in any challenging circumstances you or your students may face.

We encourage you to use the downloadable resources in this eBook to guide the development of social and emotional skills. Some of these resources are also available in Spanish.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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The linked lessons in this e-book were developed collaboratively by researchers in ACT's Center for Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning. The Center development team included Cristina Anguiano-Carrasco, Jeremy Burrus, Alex Casillas, Dana Murano, Jason Way, and Kate Walton.