



## Does Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Preschoolers Influence their School Success?

**Researchers have recently begun to focus on the social and emotional development of preschoolers' that is so important for your young child's readiness for school, his/her current and later well-being and mental health, as well as learning and early school success.**

We now know that social-emotional learning (SEL) at the preschool level helps your child to benefit when it comes to school achievement. During schooling, your child's abilities to understand his/her own and other's emotions, regulate the degree of their emotions, attention, and behaviour, make good decisions regarding social

problems, express healthy emotions, and engage in a range of positive social behaviors such as making friends and playing cooperatively—their social-emotional learning (SEL) skills—all work together to grease the cogs of a successful school experience.

But SEL success is not easy for every child just entering pre-academic and academic settings. Unfortunately, many children have delays in these skills by school entry.

A group of North American researchers studied 275 four-year olds who were assessed and observed in aspects of their SEL skills.

In this study, researchers sought to identify subgroups of children characterised by specific SEL profiles, and were particularly interested in understanding how these subgroups varied in their later social and academic adjustment to preschool and kindergarten classroom settings.

Preschool and kindergarten teachers provided information on social and academic aspects of children's school success as regards emotion

knowledge, self-regulation, social problem-solving patterns and emotional behaviours. The children were clustered to typify groups of children who differed in terms of their motivation to learn, participation in the classroom, and other indications of early school adjustment and academic success.

## KEY FINDINGS

→ Three groups of children were identified:

1. Group 1 (SEL At-Risk): Young children with yet-to-be developed social and emotional skills (SEL Risk). Children in the SEL Risk group show significantly lower emotion knowledge and self-regulation. The children in this group were significantly higher in sadness, anger and aggressiveness (lower skills in problem solving). These children were seen by their preschool teachers as less persistent and motivated to learn, sensitive, and cooperative.

2. Group 2 (SEL Competent – Expressive): Young children who have knowledge of their emotions and who can regulate them when upset. Additionally, these young children have well developed social, problem-solving skills, lesser degrees of negative and aggressive behavior and appear more emotional.

3. Group 3 (SEL Competent – Restrained): Young children who also have knowledge of their emotions and who can regulate them when upset. These children have less well-developed social-problem skills and are seen by their preschool teachers as less emotional and less interactive. Kindergarten teachers found them as more sensitive and cooperative than the SEL Expressive group.

- There were a greater number of boys than girls in the SEL Risk group.
- More children from poorer home backgrounds were found to be in the SEL At-Risk group than children in the other two groups.
- Young children with delays in their SEL skills were disadvantaged in their approach to learning and school success in comparison with children who were socially- and emotionally competent.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Talk about feelings with your child and role model coping mechanisms.
- ✓ Help your child to develop an emotional vocabulary – an A-Z of feeling words.
- ✓ Encourage group play sessions at home. Supervise at times if necessary to encourage sharing and cooperation.
- ✓ Rather than toys, provide objects and materials for creative play to encourage your child (and their friends) to problem solve as a team and resolve differences.
- ✓ Make the most of teachable moments when your child is having problems regulating emotions.
- ✓ When your child is happy and positive, encourage them to draw or act out how they feel.
- ✓ Help build your child's confidence, self-esteem and independence.
- ✓ Apply consequences to inappropriate behaviour so that your child has opportunities to learn to regulate their emotions when it comes to failure, frustration and anger.
- ✓ Teach your child ways to start and maintain conversations, listen, take turns, ask for help, express appreciation, negotiate and give feedback.

## TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD  
FOUNDER, YOU CAN DO IT! EDUCATION

Like all skills, social-emotional competencies can be learned...and the earlier the better. Research is confirming that children who can understand and regulate their emotions, who have an emotional vocabulary to express their feelings appropriately, who can play cooperatively, share and socialise, are better placed to learn and succeed at school.

Source: *Social-Emotional Learning Profiles of Preschoolers' Early School Success: A Person-Centred Approach*, Denham et al., *Learn Individ Differ*. 2012 April 1; 22(2): 178-189.