

Social, Emotional & Character Development (SECD)

FOR TEACHERS FOR STUDENTS FOR PARENTS

This guide is designed for teachers and other school professionals who agree with Theodore Roosevelt that, "To educate someone in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society," and with Martin Luther King, Jr, that, "Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education." By doing some small things very often, educators can encourage students' social, emotional and character development (SECD). This will then create a civil, caring and respectful school environment in which learning will flourish for even our most disadvantaged students.

What is Social, Emotional & Character Development (SECD)?

SECD is about teaching, practising, modelling and encouraging essential personal life habits that are almost universally understood as making people good human beings. It is about learning with our heads, our hearts and our hands to be caring and civil, to make healthy decisions, to effectively problem solve, to be respectful and responsible, to be good citizens, and to be empathic and ethical individuals. In school environments, SECD takes many forms, including programs that specifically address safe and drug-free schools, service learning, emotional literacy, bullying and violence prevention, the embracing of diversity and other similar initiatives.

Where Does SECD Come From?

SECD is a blend of two important traditions in education: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character and Moral education (CE). SEL, defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) involves the processes through which children and adults develop fundamental emotional and social competencies to:

- recognise and manage emotions
- develop caring and concern for others
- establish positive relationships
- make responsible decisions
- handle challenging situations.

These skills allow individuals to calm themselves when angry, initiate friendships, resolve relationship conflicts respectfully, as well as make ethical and safe choices. To best develop these capacities in school, students need to experience safe, nurturing and well-managed environments where they feel valued and respected; they need meaningful interactions with socially and emotionally competent others; and they need positive and specific guidance. Thus, SEL takes place within the context of safe, supportive school, family and community environments that provide opportunities and recognition for successfully applying these competencies.

CE leaders Thomas Lickona and Matt Davidson, define character as having two essential parts: performance character and moral character. At the heart of performance character is a "mastery orientation". It consists of those qualities – such as diligence, perseverance, a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, ingenuity and self-discipline – needed to realise one's potential for excellence in any performance environment – academics, extracurricular activities, the workplace and throughout life. At the heart of moral character is a "relational orientation". It consists of those qualities – such as integrity, justice, caring, respect and cooperation – needed for successful interpersonal relationships and ethical conduct.

SECD combines these ideas and clarifies what needs to be done to prepare our students for success in school and life.

"People acquire a particular quality by constantly acting a particular way... you become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions."

— Aristotle

Where Does SECD Come From?

It's our history. SECD is not something new – it is a renewal. From the inception of schools in this and other countries, educators from Horace Mann and John Dewey, to Martin Luther King and James Comer, to Nel Noddings and Larry Cuban, the call is out for education to address essential life habits and competencies.

It's supported by research. Month by month, the evidence grows that SECD and the climate of our schools strongly influence academic and personal success in school and life. Keep track of the findings at www.casel.org.

It's the law. Most states have education standards or guidelines requiring the teaching of social-emotional skills such as listening, empathy, relationship building, impulse control, bullying prevention and problem solving as well as character virtues such as truth, justice, fairness, integrity, citizenship, respect and responsibility.

People want it. All people want safe, caring and successful schools. Polls show that educators, parents and the public at large believe that teaching character and building life skills are an important aspect of educating students. Providing learning environments free of intimidation and harassment serves all students.

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