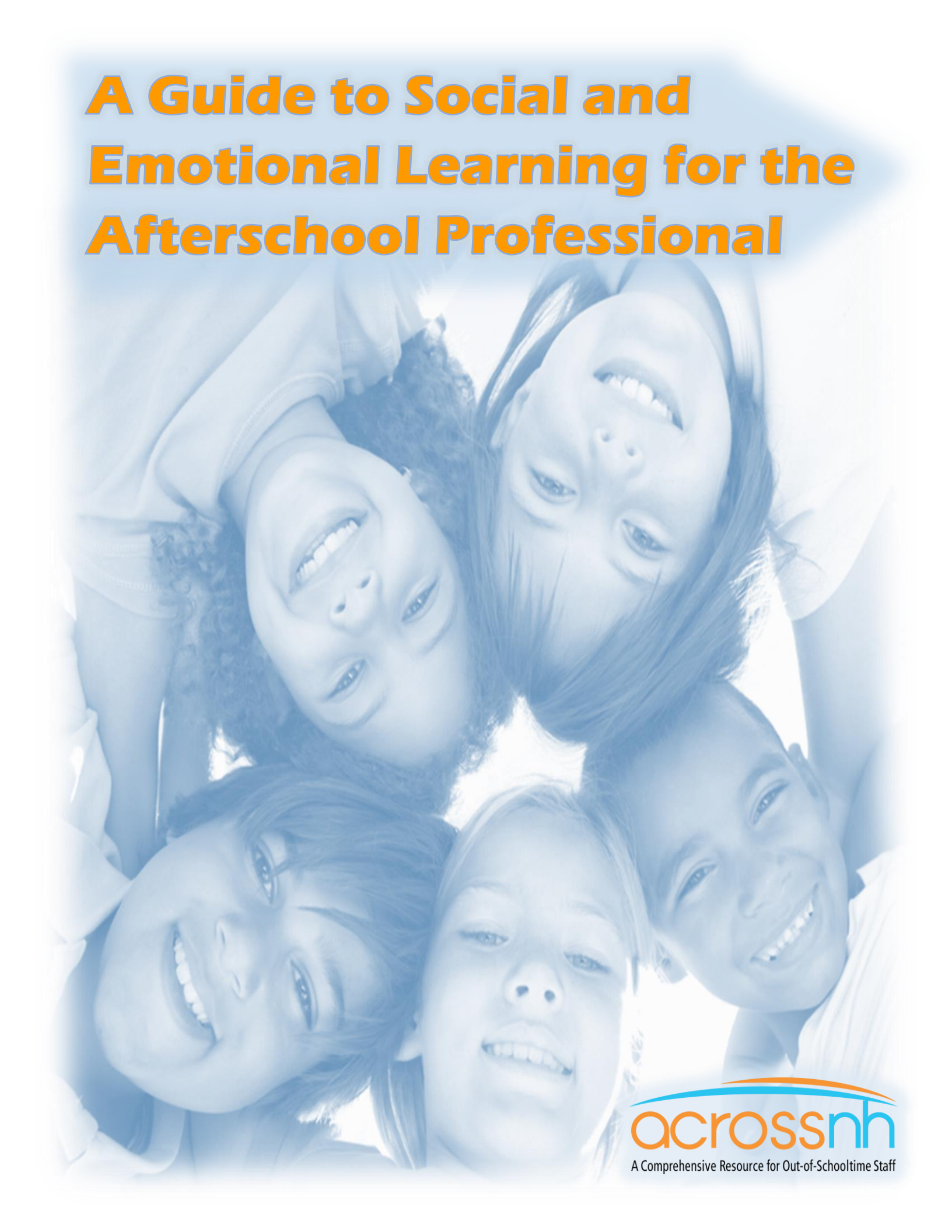
A Guide to Social and Emotional Learning for the Afterschool Professional



acrossnh

A Comprehensive Resource for Out-of-Schooltime Staff

About the Authors

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Purpose of This Guide

This guide provides an introduction to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and explains the connection of growth in SEL skills to values upheld in the field of afterschool, as well as to important life outcomes for children and youth. As an introductory resource, this guide will define and explain key terms and concepts, show the connection of SEL skills to thriving outcomes, and outline features of SEL supportive programs and environments.

About This Guide

The material compiled in this guide has been informed by many resources, frameworks, guides, and ideas with regard to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in the field of afterschool. The authors have drawn from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning framework (CASEL) to help define and describe five SEL competencies. Along with naming and defining these competencies, this guide provides a set of key skills associated with each competency. These key skills have been selected with intentionality for the afterschool field as they are central to growth in SEL while being well-connected to afterschool values. Additionally, this guide references a set of SEL supportive features that foster an environment (a “host environment”) in which SEL can establish roots and thrive.

Mission of ACROSSNH

Our mission is to support New Hampshire's afterschool professionals in their work to create high quality, innovative programs for school-age children and youth.

Social and Emotional Learning Objective of ACROSSNH

Our objective is to create a culture of ***Self-Aware*** individuals who are ***Connected*** to one another and are positive ***Contributors*** to our community.

Social and Emotional Learning Core Values of ACROSSNH

ACROSS NH recognizes the following core values as central to meeting our ***Social and Emotional Learning objective*** and to advancing the ACROSS NH mission.

ACROSSNH Social and Emotional Core Values

To be ***Self-Aware***

To be ***Connected***

To be ***A Positive Contributor***

Foundational Knowledge

- What is Social and Emotional Learning?
- What are SEL Skills?
- Why SEL Skills Matter
- Why SEL in Afterschool Programs?
- What is an Effective "Host Environment?"
- Features of a Host Environment that Make SEL Thrive

What is SEL?

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) **is a process for building competency** in five areas known as social and emotional competencies. **These five competencies are:** *self-awareness, self-regulation, social-awareness, relationship skills, and thoughtful decision-making* (adapted from CASEL).

What are SEL Skills?

Each SEL competency is defined by a set of associated skills. **SEL skills are teachable proficiencies** that demonstrate SEL competence. For example, "I am aware of what causes me stress and how I respond," is an SEL skill that demonstrates the competency of self-awareness.

Why SEL Skills Matter

Developing SEL skills in childhood has long-term benefits. **Search Institute** has identified 40 specific **developmental assets (strengths)** for young people that lead to **thriving outcomes** in adulthood. Half of the assets address traits in the young person's family, school, and community. The other half relate to social-emotional strengths and values (see Appendix: 40 Developmental Assets for the assets). Research shows that the **more assets** a young person has, the more likely they are as an adult to help others, value differences, overcome challenges, avoid risks, show leadership skills, be mentally and physically healthy, engage in the community, and be prepared to enter the workforce. **Having fewer assets** increases the likelihood of anti-social behavior, violence, substance use, and depression (Search Institute, 2020). **Growing SEL skills in afterschool can add to a young person's bank of assets, increasing the likelihood of future thriving outcomes.**

Why SEL in Afterschool Programs?

Social and Emotional Learning takes place in **all contexts** that children and youth participate: their homes, schools, out-of-school time environments, and communities. Since the values upheld in the field of afterschool align well with the goals of Social and Emotional Learning, **afterschool programs are an ideal environment** to embed SEL supportive practices and promote SEL skill development.

The field of afterschool values **safe, nurturing environments** where youth are:

- supported in making and sustaining **positive relationships**
- provided **quality learning experiences**
- engaged as **partners in their own learning**

The goals of Social and Emotional Learning are to:

- grow **SEL skills**
- increase positive, meaningful **connections**
- build **relationships**
- enhance **productivity**

"THESE ARE THE PLACES [OUT- OF SCHOOL TIME ENVIRONMENTS] WHERE YOUTH FIND SAFETY AND STRUCTURE, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, AND GET CHALLENGED TO PURSUE INTERESTS, HONE SKILLS, AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE."

-Karen Pittman, Co-Founder, President, and CEO of The Forum for Youth Investment

What is an Effective "Host Environment?"

Where the values of afterschool and the goals of SEL align, afterschool programs have the potential to be effective **host environments** for implementation of SEL. An effective host environment creates a culture and climate that supports the achievement of a **valued outcome**.

Host Environment Example:

An effective host environment that supports the achievement of the valued outcome: ***"teaching someone to cook,"*** might include these components:

- A qualified chef to teach and model
- A kitchen with necessary equipment and tools
- Ingredients and recipes
- Enough time for cooking to be demonstrated and practiced

These components help to create the culture and climate necessary to achieve the outcome of "teaching someone to cook."

A host environment for achieving the valued outcome: **"growth in SEL skills,"** needs the following components to thrive:

1. **Positive Culture, Positive Climate, and Positive Connections**

2. **A Continuum of Support** to foster well-regulated mind (thoughts), mood (feelings), and body (behaviors and body responses)

3. **Valued Voices** where children, families, and staff have a voice in decision-making

Features of a Host Environment that Make SEL Thrive

Well-Regulated Self-Aware Adults

Well-regulated and self-aware adults are necessary for achieving positive culture, climate, and building strong connections. An SEL supportive environment invests in assuring that adults who support children and youth are well-regulated in *Mind* (thoughts), *Mood* (feelings) and *Body* (actions and body responses), that they are able manage stress, that they are **shifted and ready** to begin each session, and that they understand the power of modeling regulation for children and youth.

Valued Voices

Valued Voices is an underlying value in an SEL supportive environment. It speaks to all perspectives being listened to, respected, and appreciated. In an afterschool environment, valued voices come from the staff, children and youth, and families. These voices are truly valued when they are truly heard.

Postive Culture

Positive Culture speaks to *things we do* or *ways we think* that unite us as a community. Common language, common rituals and routines, common values, and ways we communicate are aspects of culture. "*Positive*" culture in an SEL supportive environment refers to *things we do* and *ways we think* that result in "Positive Climate."

Features that Make SEL Thrive

Positive Connections

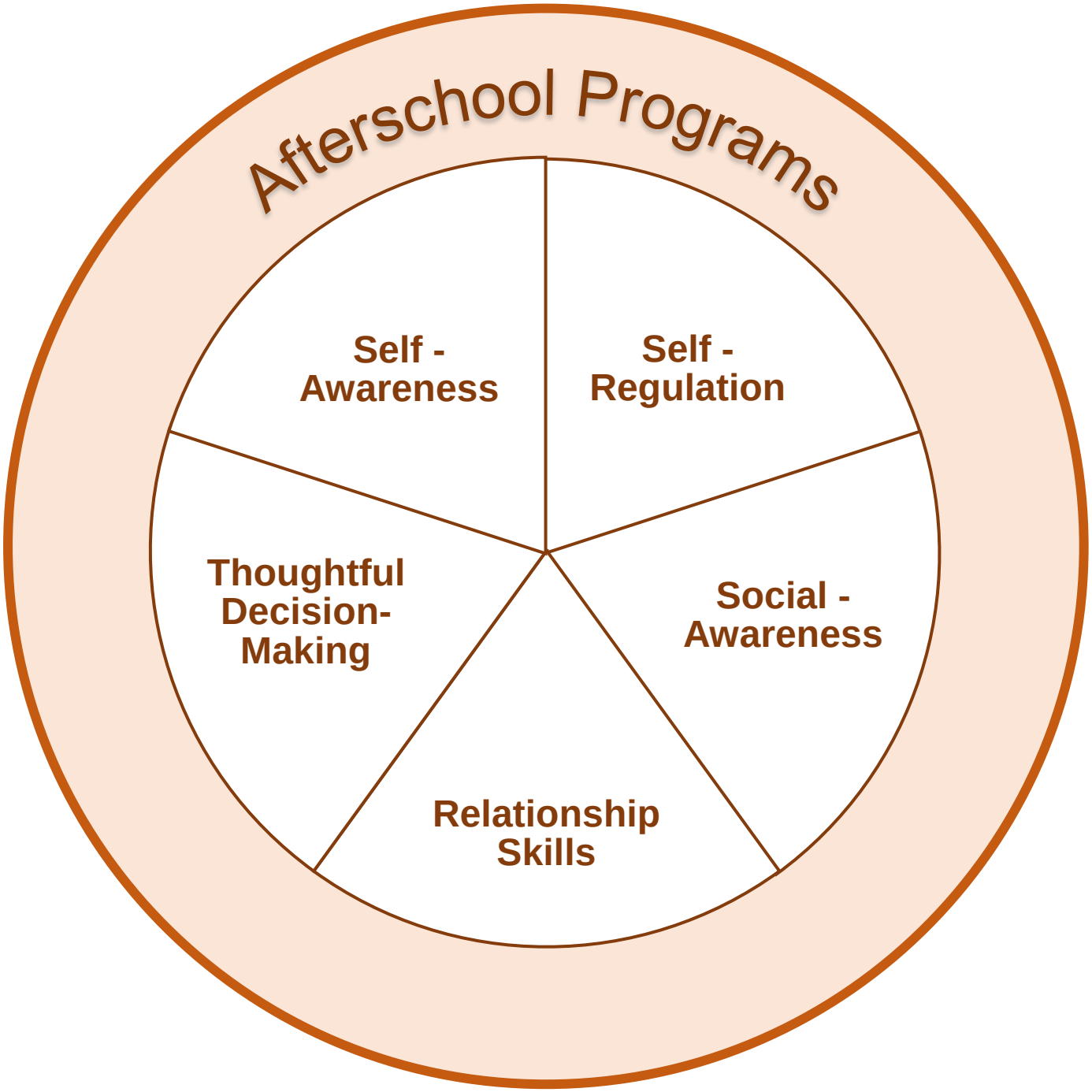
Connections are ties that bind us to one another, to a common space we occupy, to our groups, and to our community. **Positive Connections** build from trust and safety, and require openness to being known and understood. Positive connections contribute to the growth of self, add value to life, and inspire esteem and importance. Positive connections eventually create the ability and desire to think outside of one's self and to want to give and contribute to others.

Positive Climate

Climate speaks to how the things we do or ways we think (our culture) *make us feel.* **Positive Climate** means that our culture results in positive feelings about things we define as important, such as feeling safe, being valued, caring about others, and contributing to the community.

How is our afterschool environment supporting positive culture, climate, connections, well-regulated self-aware adults, and valued voices?

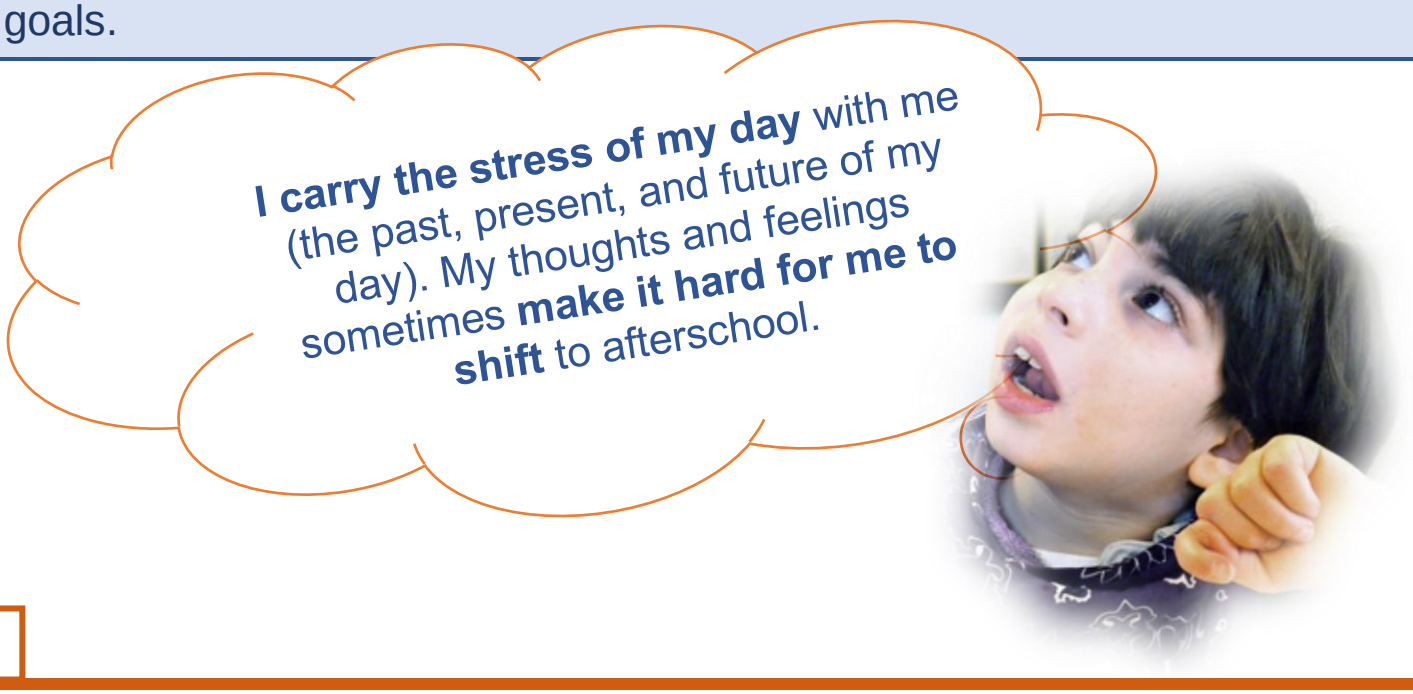
The Five Social and Emotional Learning Competencies



Self – Awareness

Self – Awareness Competency is having awareness of one's stress (i.e., triggers), strengths, limitations, goals, and values and an understanding of how one's stress, thoughts, and emotions influence behavior and the achievement of personal goals.

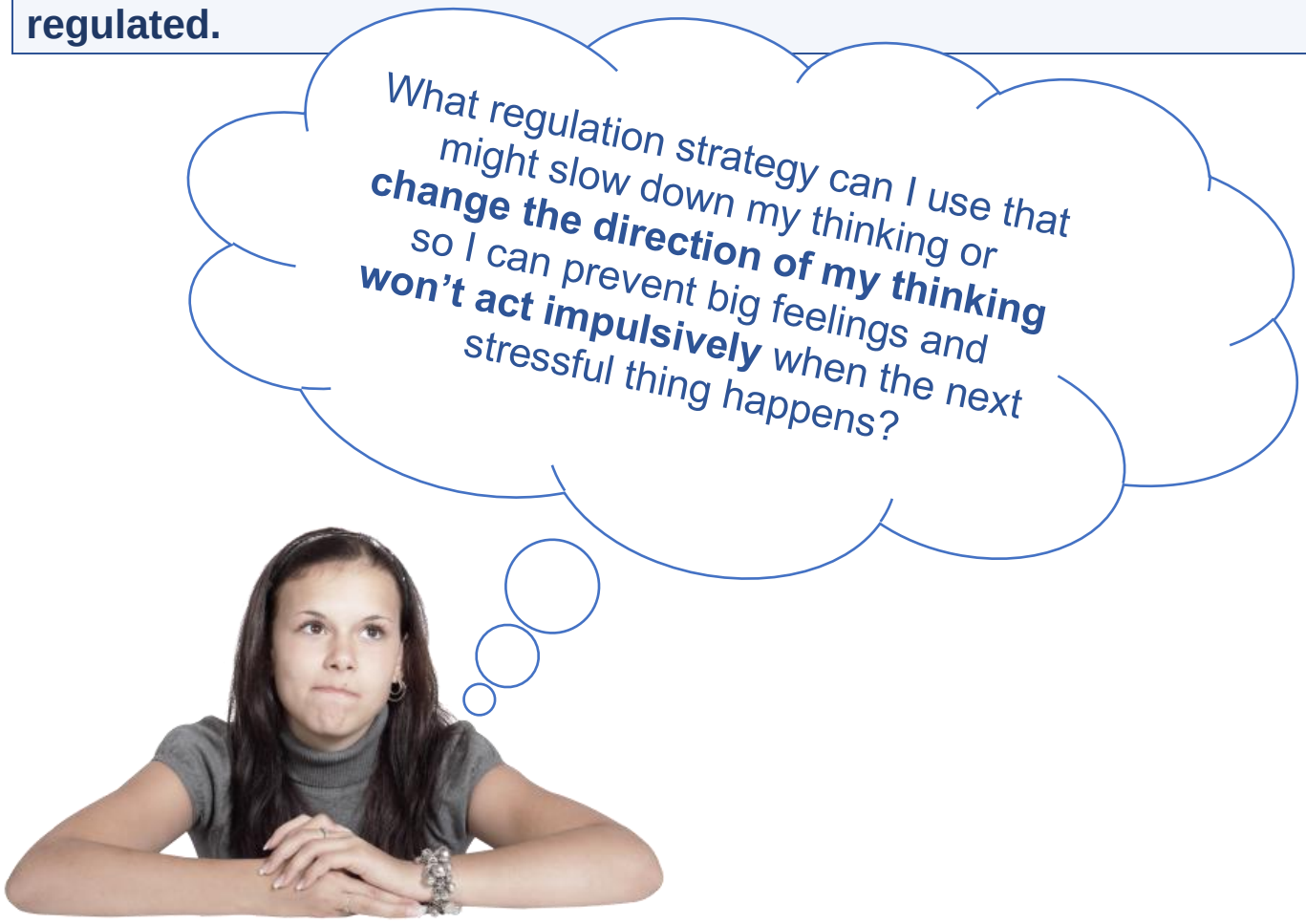
Self – Awareness Skills
I notice my signs of well-regulated and dysregulated: • Mind (thoughts) • Mood (feelings) • Body (actions; body responses)
I am aware of what causes **me stress** and how **I respond** to stress.
I notice how **my thoughts** impact how I feel.
I notice how **my thoughts and feelings** impact what I do (actions and behaviors).
I can tell when I have been impulsive versus when I have made thoughtful decisions.
I am able to assess my level of stress/distress (how stressed I am).
I am aware of my abilities **(strengths)** versus my **challenges.**
I know what matters to me — things I value, are important to me, are my goals.



Self – Regulation

Self – Regulation Competency is the ability to regulate one's thoughts and emotions in order to manage stress, control impulses, shift effectively to new situations, and achieve personal goals.

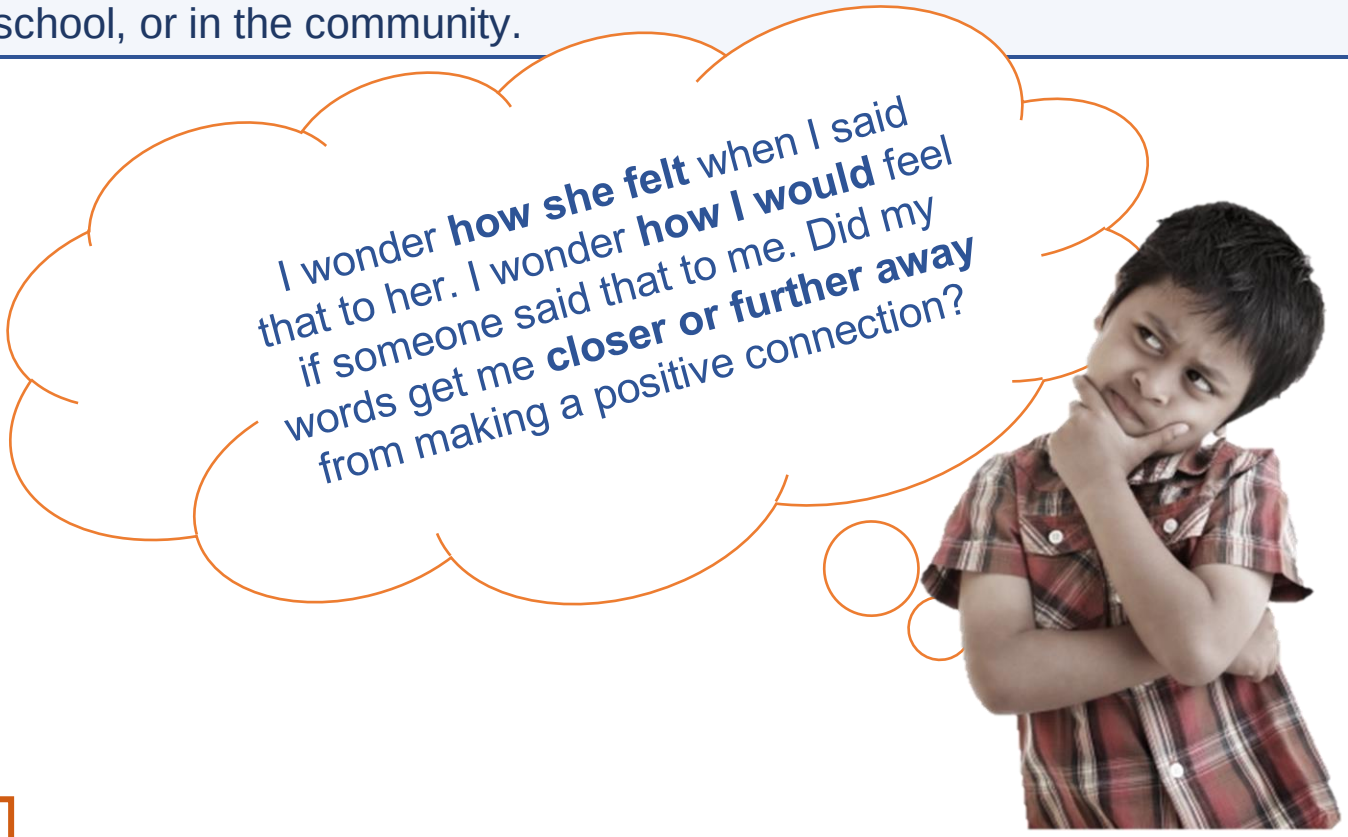
Self – Regulation Skills
I am **able to name** an array of self-regulation strategies.
I am **able to use** self-regulation strategies: • *Proactively* to lessen impulsive responses and prevent stress overload • *In stressful moments* to manage impulses and regulate my mind, mood, and body
I am **able to "shift"** to new situations (transition; "go with the flow").
I am **able to assess** the effectiveness of self-regulation strategies **(what works for me).**
I know that I am more likely to experience positive outcomes if I am **well-regulated.**



Social – Awareness

Social – Awareness Competency is the ability to **understand and respect others' feelings**, needs, points of view, and ways of communicating, including those of different backgrounds and cultures. This competency **includes the awareness of one's social identity**, traits of friendship, value of social connections, and how and when to utilize family, school, and community supports.

Social – Awareness Skills
I notice and accept different points of view.
I notice subtleties and underlying motives of **social communication**.
I notice other people's feelings.
I know my social identity (memberships; social needs and interests).
I know traits of friendship and what meaningful, healthy connections look like.
I recognize my own abilities and challenges in **making meaningful connections.**
I know, and **can access**, social-emotional **resources** when at home, at school, or in the community.



Relationship Skills

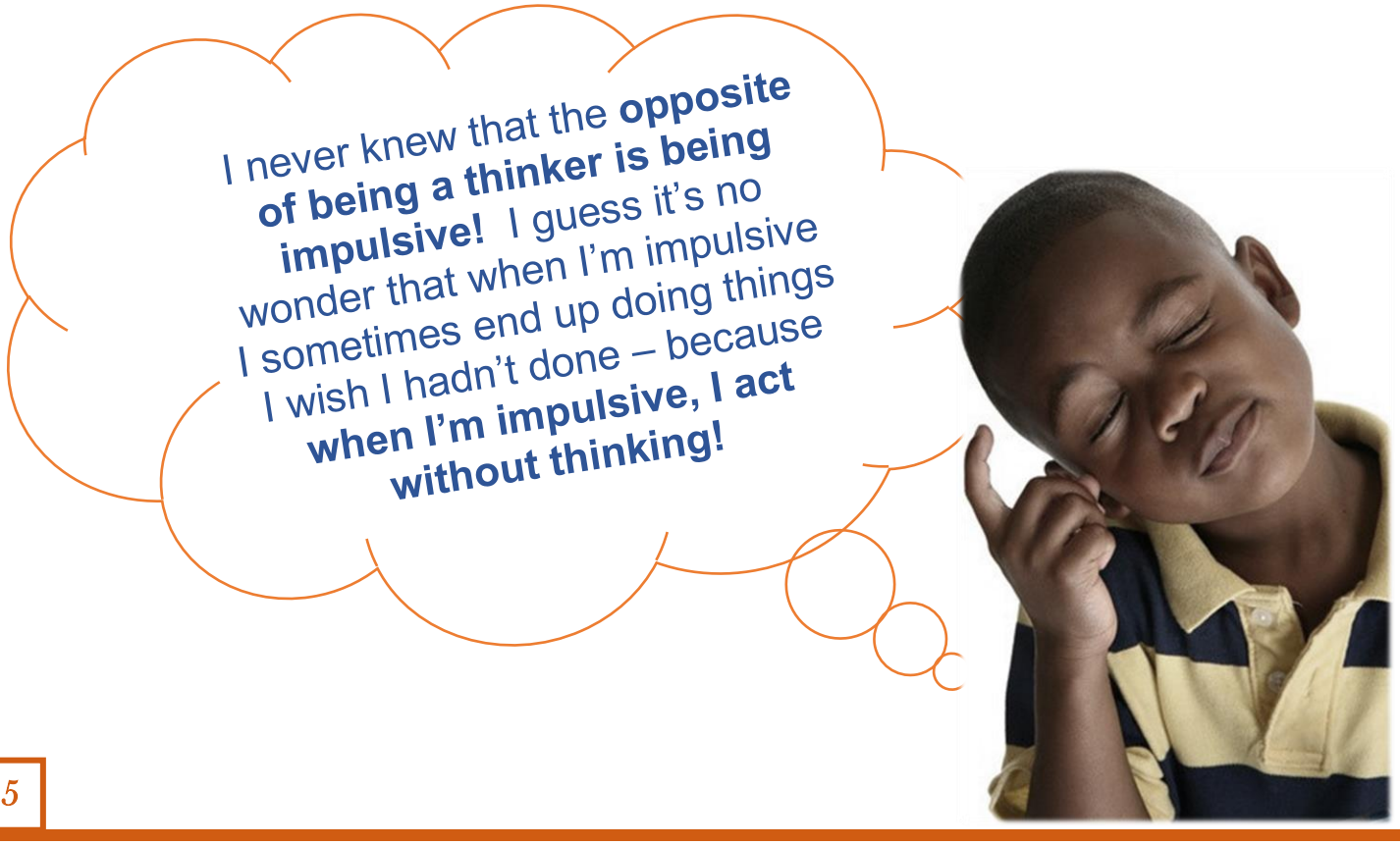
Relationships Skills Competency is the **ability to establish** healthy, safe, cooperative, reliable, and satisfying **connections** to individuals and groups. This competency includes the **ability to communicate** opinions and needs while **responding effectively** to the perspectives and needs of others.

Relationship Skills
I know how to start and maintain mutual (two-way) **conversations**.
I know how to show others that **I am "listening."**
I know how to **respond** in helpful ways to **support** the needs of **others**.
I know how to effectively **communicate my needs** to others.
I have meaningful and **healthy connections and relationships** with others.
I know how to be loyal, considerate, cooperative, trustworthy, patient, and empathic, and **I understand** why these **traits** can help with **connections and friendships.**
I know how to voice opinions in ways that are **helpful rather than harmful**.

Thoughtful Decision – Making

Thoughtful Decision-Making Competency is the ability to understand the value of social norms in various contexts and make **thoughtful choices** that create positive outcomes for oneself and others.

Thoughtful Decision – Making Skills
I understand why expected behavior and rules matter.
I think about being dependable, reliable, and following through on my commitments.
I think through the process of setting goals, creating a plan, and following the plan.
I think about creating "win-wins" (acceptable outcomes) **for myself *and* others** when there is a conflict.
Before deciding what to do, I **think about the** positive and negative **consequences**.
Before deciding what to do, **I consider** that doing **the right thing may not be popular** and doing **the popular thing may not be right**.



SEL Supportive Practices

What Are SEL Supportive Practices in Afterschool?

SEL supportive practices are routines, lessons, procedures, and methods that **support SEL growth** and help systems to **achieve valued outcomes** such as:

- Developing positive program **culture** and **climate**
- Building positive **connections**
- Growing **SEL knowledge** (i.e., knowing what SEL is)
- Growing **SEL skills** and **competencies**
- Achieving personal **goals**

Practices That Build Positive Culture, Climate, and Connections

- **Adults Model** "Well-regulated Mind, Mood, and Body"
- **Positive greetings** (glad to see you)
- **Positive Interactions First** (deposits before withdrawls)
- **Well-supported transitions**
- **Learn** about one another
- **Validate** stress and big feelings
- **Notice** when children and youth demonstrate SEL skills
- Program ⇔ Family **Partnership**

Practices That Target Growth in SEL Skills

- Use **SEL connected language**
- Teach/practice **Regulation Strategies:**
  - Mindfulness
  - Grounding
  - Body awareness
  - Visual imagery
- Teach/support **"shifting" skills**:
  - Thoughtful transitions
  - Greeting meeting
- Regulation or "Reset" Stations for **regulation support**

What practices can afterschool programs implement to support growth in SEL skills?

Key Understandings

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a process for developing skills that matter in life. SEL skills **are lifelong learning skills** that influence how well a person **manages daily challenges** and stays aware of and **true to their own** values, goals, and needs. Research tells us that mastering SEL skills can increase the likelihood of **enriched, fulfilling, empathic, and connected human experiences** as opposed to those filled with risk, disengagement, and harm to self or others.

SEL skills build our capacity to:

- **Manage negative thoughts**, worries, sadness, and anger
- Establish and maintain **meaningful connections** and relationships
- Make **healthier decisions**
- **Avoid** the **consequences** of living by whims and **impulses**
- Set and **achieve goals**, plan ahead, and manage time effectively
- **Persevere and be resilient**

SEL is applicable to all interactive human contexts and to social, academic, and occupational outcomes such as being:

- A **dedicated** worker
- A **responsible** student
- A **thoughtful** friend
- A **considerate** neighbor
- A **patient** boss or co-worker
- A **supportive** child, parent, grandparent, or sibling

Afterschool programs can be **an important contributor** for children and youth in fostering growth of SEL skills**. Through dedication** to creating an SEL supportive host environment and by implementing practices that explicitly target the teaching of SEL skills**, the field of afterschool's commitment to SEL can make a profound difference in the lives of the young people served, and in the adults who guide them.**

Glossary

Achievement: refers to a success or something that has been accomplished**.**

Climate: the attitudes and feelings of a community resulting from the community's culture; the major attitudes, standards, or environmental conditions of a group, time period, place, or environment.

Community: an interactive group of any size that shares common interests or purpose.

Competency: a measure of skill, knowledge, qualification, or capability.

Component: a part of something.

Connected: having a meaningful link to a person or community.

Context: the set of circumstances that surround a specific situation.

Continuum: a scale that covers a range of something (e.g. a "continuum of support" refers to the range and levels of support provided).

Contributor: a person who gives assistance to others.

Core-Value: a guiding principle that is highly valued within a community

Culture: the common behaviors, actions, routines, beliefs and characteristics of a specific community of people.

Dysregulated: thoughts and feelings are (or are becoming) unsettled or overloaded often leading to impulsive actions or distressed body responses. Thoughtful decision-making and new learning are less likely to occur when dysregulated.

Embed: to incorporate as an essential part of something.

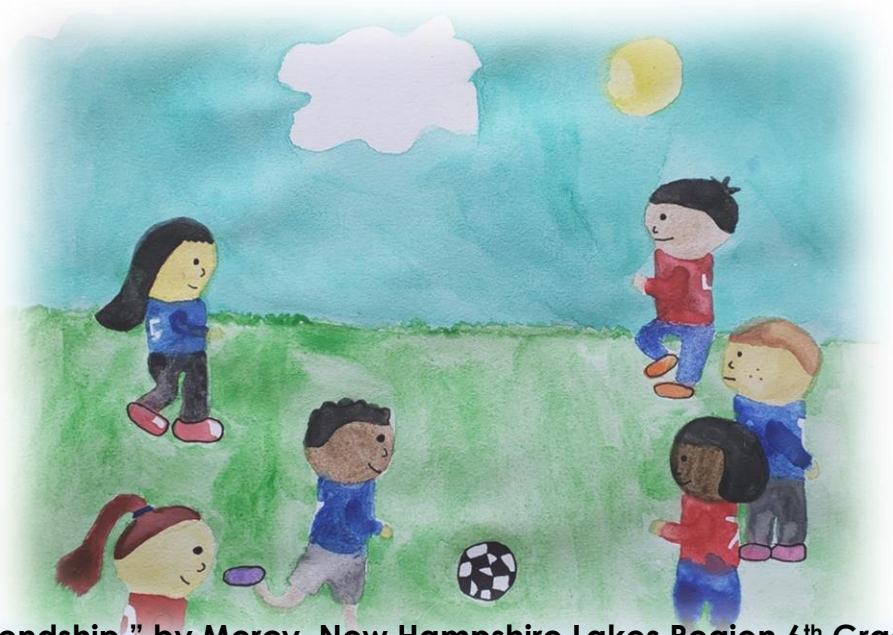
Engage: to occupy the attention or efforts of a person; to attract and hold fast; to occupy oneself; to become involved.

Environment: the surrounding conditions that influence and shape the life of a person or a community.

Implementation: the act of putting something into action.

Mind: the part of a person's brain that enables perceptions, awareness, thought and reasoning.

Mood: a state or quality of how someone is feeling at a time.
Objective: a purpose, goal, and/or target.
Outcome: a final product or result.
Regulated: thoughts, feelings, and body are managed, settled, and in control. Thoughtful decision-making and new learning are much more likely to occur when well-regulated. (Ready to Engage)
Relationship: a connection, association, or involvement between people.
Shifted: the ability to adjust, transition, or "go with the flow." To be ready as new situations or new stress arise.
Stress: anything that causes tension and uses up mental or physical energy.
Thriving: to be successful, grow, and flourish.
Thriving Outcome: a result that can be described as highly successful.
Triggers: a factor which causes a person to react; may be the source (or starting point) of dysregulated mind, mood, or body. (Stressors)
Value: the relative importance of something (i.e., how much something matters to someone).
Valued Outcome: a final product or result that is held in high regard or importance to a person or community.
Values: the beliefs, principles, ideals, customs, that matter to a person, group, or community.



"Friendship," by Mercy, New Hampshire Lakes Region 6th Grader

Appendix: 40 Developmental Assets

Search INSTITUTE

40 Developmental Assets® for Children Grades K–3 (ages 5-9)

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as **Developmental Assets®**—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

External Assets

Support

1. **Family Support**—Family continues to be a consistent provider of love and support for the child's unique physical and emotional needs.
2. **Positive Family Communication**—Parent(s) and child communicate openly, respectfully, and frequently, with child receiving praise for her or his efforts and accomplishments.
3. **Other Adult Relationships**—Child receives support from adults other than her or his parent(s), with the child sometimes experiencing relationships with a nonparent adult.
4. **Caring Neighborhood**—Parent(s) and child experience friendly neighbors who affirm and support the child's growth and sense of belonging.
5. **Caring School Climate**—Child experiences warm, welcoming relationships with teachers, caregivers, and peers at school.
6. **Parent Involvement in Schooling**—Parent(s) talk about the importance of education and are actively involved in the child's school success.

Empowerment

7. **Community Values Children**—Children are welcomed and included throughout community life.
8. **Children as Resources**—Child contributes to family decisions and has opportunities to participate in positive community events.
9. **Service to Others**—Child has opportunities to serve in the community with adult support and approval.
10. **Safety**—Parents and community adults ensure the child's safety while keeping in mind her or his increasing independence.

Boundaries & Expectations

11. **Family Boundaries**—The family maintains supervision of the child, has reasonable guidelines for behavior, and always knows where the child is.
12. **School Boundaries**—Schools have clear, consistent rules and consequences and use a positive approach to discipline.
13. **Neighborhood Boundaries**—Neighbors and friends' parents help monitor the child's behavior and provide feedback to the parent(s).
14. **Adult Role Models**—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior and encourage the child to follow these examples.
15. **Positive Peer Influence**—Parent(s) monitor the child's friends and encourage spending time with those who set good examples.
16. **High Expectations**—Parent(s), teachers, and other influential adults encourage the child to do her or his best in all tasks and celebrate their successes.

Constructive Use of Time

17. **Creative Activities**—Child participates weekly in music, dance, or other form of artistic expression outside of school.
18. **Child Programs**—Child participates weekly in at least one sport, club, or organization within the school or community.
19. **Religious Community**—Child participates in age-appropriate religious activities and caring relationships that nurture her or his spiritual development.
20. **Time at Home**—Child spends time at home playing and doing positive activities with the family.

Internal Assets

Commitment to Learning

21. **Achievement Motivation**—Child is encouraged to remain curious and demonstrates an interest in doing well at school.
22. **Learning Engagement**—Child is enthused about learning and enjoys going to school.
23. **Homework**—With appropriate parental support, child completes assigned homework.
24. **Bonding to School**—Child is encouraged to have and feels a sense of belonging at school.
25. **Reading for Pleasure**—Child listens to and/or reads books outside of school daily.

Positive Values

26. **Caring**—Parent(s) help child grow in empathy, understanding, and helping others.
27. **Equality and Social Justice**—Parent(s) encourage child to be concerned about rules and being fair to everyone.
28. **Integrity**—Parent(s) help child develop her or his own sense of right and wrong behavior.
29. **Honesty**—Parent(s) encourage child's development in recognizing and telling the truth.
30. **Responsibility**—Parent(s) encourage child to accept and take responsibility for her or his actions at school and at home.
31. **Self-Regulation**—Parents encourage child's growth in regulating her or his own emotions and behaviors and in understanding the importance of healthy habits and choices.

Social Competencies

32. **Planning and Decision Making**—Parent(s) help child think through and plan school and play activities.
33. **Interpersonal Competence**—Child seeks to build friendships and is learning about self-control.
34. **Cultural Competence**—Child continues to learn about her or his own cultural identity and is encouraged to interact positively with children of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.
35. **Resistance Skills**—Child is learning to recognize risky or dangerous situations and is able to seek help from trusted adults.
36. **Peaceful Conflict Resolution**—Child continues learning to resolve conflicts without hitting, throwing a tantrum, or using hurtful language.

Positive Identity

37. **Personal Power**—Child has a growing sense of having influence over some of the things that happen in her or his life.
38. **Self-Esteem**—Child likes herself or himself and feels valued by others.
39. **Sense of Purpose**—Child welcomes new experiences and imagines what he or she might do or be in the future.
40. **Positive View of Personal Future**—Child has a growing curiosity about the world and finding her or his place in it.

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Search INSTITUTE

40 Developmental Assets® for Middle Childhood (ages 8-12)

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as **Developmental Assets®**—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

External Assets

Support

1. **Family support**—Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. **Positive family communication**—Parent(s) and child communicate positively. Child feels comfortable seeking advice and counsel from parent(s).
3. **Other adult relationships**—Child receives support from adults other than her or his parent(s).
4. **Caring neighborhood**—Child experiences caring neighbors.
5. **Caring school climate**—Relationships with teachers and peers provide a caring, encouraging environment.
6. **Parent involvement in schooling**—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping the child succeed in school.

Empowerment

7. **Community values youth**—Child feels valued and appreciated by adults in the community.
8. **Children as resources**—Child is included in decisions at home and in the community.
9. **Service to others**—Child has opportunities to help others in the community.
10. **Safety**—Child feels safe at home, at school, and in his or her neighborhood.

Boundaries & Expectations

11. **Family boundaries**—Family has clear and consistent rules and consequences and monitors the child's whereabouts.
12. **School Boundaries**—School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. **Neighborhood boundaries**—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring the child's behavior.
14. **Adult role models**—Parent(s) and other adults in the child's family, as well as nonfamily adults, model positive, responsible behavior.
15. **Positive peer influence**—Child's closest friends model positive, responsible behavior.
16. **High expectations**—Parent(s) and teachers expect the child to do her or his best at school and in other activities.

Constructive Use of Time

17. **Creative activities**—Child participates in music, art, drama, or creative writing two or more times per week.
18. **Child programs**—Child participates two or more times per week in cocurricular school activities or structured community programs for children..
19. **Religious community**—Child attends religious programs or services one or more times per week.
20. **Time at home**—Child spends some time most days both in high-quality interaction with parents and doing things at home other than watching TV or playing video games.

Internal Assets

Commitment to Learning

21. **Achievement Motivation**—Child is motivated and strives to do well in school.
22. **Learning Engagement**—Child is responsive, attentive, and actively engaged in learning at school and enjoys participating in learning activities outside of school.
23. **Homework**—Child usually hands in homework on time.
24. **Bonding to school**—Child cares about teachers and other adults at school.
25. **Reading for Pleasure**—Child enjoys and engages in reading for fun most days of the week.

Positive Values

26. **Caring**—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to help other people.
27. **Equality and social justice**—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to speak up for equal rights for all people.
28. **Integrity**—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to stand up for one's beliefs.
29. **Honesty**—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to tell the truth.
30. **Responsibility**—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to accept personal responsibility for behavior.
31. **Healthy Lifestyle**—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to have good health habits and an understanding of healthy sexuality.

Social Competencies

32. **Planning and decision making**—Child thinks about decisions and is usually happy with results of her or his decisions.
33. **Interpersonal Competence**—Child cares about and is affected by other people's feelings, enjoys making friends, and, when frustrated or angry, tries to calm her- or himself.
34. **Cultural Competence**—Child knows and is comfortable with people of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and with her or his own cultural identity.
35. **Resistance skills**—Child can stay away from people who are likely to get her or him in trouble and is able to say no to doing wrong or dangerous things.
36. **Peaceful conflict resolution**—Child seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Positive Identity

37. **Personal power**—Child feels he or she has some influence over things that happen in her or his life.
38. **Self-esteem**—Child likes and is proud to be the person that he or she is.
39. **Sense of purpose**—Child sometimes thinks about what life means and whether there is a purpose for her or his life.
40. **Positive view of personal future**—Child is optimistic about her or his personal future.

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For further resources and support, contact the Social and Emotional Coordinator at ACROSS NH.
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