

**Multi-Component Social Emotional Learning Approach: Improving the Well-Being of
Children and their Caregivers**

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Abstract

Children facing challenges with self-regulation skills and mental health often exhibit negative behaviors, placing significant strain on their caregivers. Caregivers, in turn, may experience burnout as they exhaust their own mental and physical resources while attempting to support their children. Social-emotional learning (SEL) programs have been identified as beneficial for both children and caregivers, providing essential skills for emotional regulation and well-being. However, successful implementation requires the active involvement of caregivers alongside children. Coaching, as a therapeutic modality, offers caregivers new skills and confidence to support their child's development effectively. Occupational therapists employ motivational coaching techniques, fostering competency and confidence in caregivers to address their children's needs. Through a multi-component approach, combining SEL programming, environment modifications to support students' various emotions, and coaching interventions, occupational therapists can effectively support children and caregivers in achieving their desired goals. This paper explores the efficacy of such interventions, drawing upon literature reviews and a pilot program evaluation conducted at Destiny Learning Center. Results indicate that the integration of SEL programs, environment modifications, and coaching approaches can lead to improved well-being, self-regulation, and behaviors for both children and caregivers.

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Research has shown that children having trouble with self-regulation skills and mental health may develop negative behaviors leading to exhausted and stressed caregivers (Leitch et al., 2019; Mofokeng & Van Der Wath, 2017). Caregivers are experiencing burnout because they have exhausted their own mental and physical health to help their “wrecking ball” children and end up living in chaos (Leitch et al., 2011). As children continue to grow, they are faced with challenging situations which increases the importance of preparing them at a young age to manage their emotions. The implementation of social-emotional learning programs (SEL) and resources such as calm down corners, are beneficial for caregivers and children when conducted consistently throughout their day. Utilizing an evidence based SEL program can set up children to succeed in school and their everyday lives (Durlak et al., 2011). However, it is not only up to the child alone to make the changes but also the caregivers. Caregivers can become frustrated and have difficulties with their own emotional regulation within difficult situations. They may use harsh punishments, shame the child, or have consequences that put the child down. Some caregivers are role-modeling negative behaviors and poor regulation skills leading to a downhill spiral.

Coaching is a treatment modality for caregivers to provide them with new skills and newfound confidence to best help their child succeed at home, school, and in the community. Occupational therapists utilize motivational coaching techniques to increase competency and confidence in caregivers by connecting when the person is resistant, clarifying when the person becomes receptive, and creating when the person is resourceful (Kahjoogh et al., 2016). The techniques explained included connecting with the caregiver through open communication and building rapport by actively listening to the caregivers. It can also include seeing the greatness within the caregiver and believing that they can meet their goals. Through a collaborative

problem-solving approach, the researchers found that the treatment of coaching aims towards two goals for caregivers: to enable occupational performance in areas identified by the caregivers for their children and improving parents' ability to manage future occupational challenges. Coaching is used to change behaviors, improve health conditions, and maximize individuals' performances in their daily occupations. Through a multi-component approach, occupational therapists can implement SEL programming including, modification of the learning environment, and activities for children, while utilizing a coaching treatment modality to best support occupational performances for caregivers and their desired occupational goals for their child. The children are continuously growing and changing, and so are their occupational goals.

Literature Review

Socioemotional Development

Children are a unique, growing population. They are growing cognitively, socially, physically, and psychologically (Dymnicki et al., 2012). Social development is a large part of growing up. For children, engaging in family and peer relationships can play a large role in their social-emotional skills development. They are learning appropriate social behaviors like reading someone's body language and facial expression, developing the ability to process social information, and engaging in social cognitive skills. During their emotional development it is important for the children and their caregivers to understand that their identity is being formed. This includes the development of their personal beliefs and standards, self-concept and self-esteem, the ability to evaluate themselves in relation to academics, and social engagements. Finally, their behaviors are developing which determines if they will engage in positive or negative behaviors, as they are at a vulnerable age for risky and unhealthy behaviors. If they go down the negative path it may lead to negative social outcomes and clustering into groups with

peers that take part in the same negative behaviors (Dymnicki et al., 2012). As children are growing up, they are constantly learning and developing by observing those around them. It is important for caregivers to be role models and teach them appropriate life skills in a positive and receptive format yet with that they must have strong self-efficacy and competence.

As children develop, caregivers are also developing in their self-efficacy and competence as a parent, teacher, or guardian. The parents and guardians are responsible for balancing their duties to help their children learn and behave positively while also managing their own mental health levels. If their parental self-efficacy (PSE) is low, it could be linked to long-term negative outcomes for their children such as dysregulation or conduct issues (Albanese et al., 2019). Development of children and their caregivers' competency is addressed over a period through occupational therapy approaches with the development of their caregivers' competency are addressed over a period through occupational therapy approaches with the end goal of improved health and well-being for all. As children are growing, their health and well-being continue to fluctuate depending on their occupations, goals, and relationships.

Many children, from a young age to their teenage years, have poor emotional regulation skills, leading to devastating impacts on their health and well-being. The children and their caregivers see declines in their academics and overall work ethic. Their social interactions can be negatively impacted when the children are experiencing these big emotions but have no appropriate way to express them. Not only are the children impacted, but also their caregivers, teachers, friends, and family are at a loss of how to best support the children. With limited resources and burnout from the caregivers, they watch as their children decline both in the home and in public settings. Tantrums, meltdowns, screaming, and crying are only a few ways that the children show their emotions appropriately, privately, or publicly. By teaching the children

through evidence-based programming of social-emotional skills, they would likely experience more positive outcomes both internally and externally and improve caregiver well-being.

Mental health continues to be a hot topic in today's world, but it is not always talked about in relation to children. Research states that 20% of young people experience mental health problems and 75-80% of them fail to receive appropriate interventions (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). However, there are three tiers of services identified that can be provided to people of all ages, diagnosis, and disabilities for adults and children (Arbesman et al., 2013). They state that tier one or universal services are occupation-activity based and provide general interventions to address topics such as social emotional learning, bully prevention, performing arts, and stress management. For example, a tier one service would be a classroom teacher using visual aids in their classroom. The visual aid utilized could be visual timers, visual schedules, or visual reminders for the students so they can all develop independence rather than relying on the teacher. These services provided strong evidence for effectiveness for children. The next level of services according to the researchers is known as tier two, or targeted services, also has strong evidence to support programming for children. Researchers investigated the social and life skills that were effective for children expressing aggressive behaviors. For example, they looked specifically at programs for children with aggression to participate. The children could be a part of a social skills group, self-management group, or a positive behavioral plan to address negative behaviors. Furthermore, tier three or intensive services work to improve social behaviors and self-management for individuals with specific diagnosis including autism spectrum disorder, mental illness, and serious behavior disorders. For example, this could look like mentoring for the individual, requiring check-ins/check-outs, or behavior meetings with their guardians. Once again, the research shows a strong effectiveness of intensive programs. The intensive programs

vary in duration, time, and type depending on the need of the individual and the goals they are trying to achieve. It is important for occupational therapists to not overlook mental health in children but instead work to find appropriate services and interventions such as social emotional learning programs so we can best support them whether that is in the classroom, home, or community. Children have been experiencing poor mental health at younger and younger ages, including depression and anxiety, which then tends to lead to exclusion from peers and society (Castro-Olivo, 2014; Reicher & Matischek-Jauk, 2019).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Interventions

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is an evidence-based intervention for children to help them cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally function within society (Greenberg et al., 2017). SEL programs can also be addressed and categorized as tier one, tier two, or tier three services depending on the disability or diagnosis of the child and their caregivers along with their needs to ensure success. In a national survey, 97% of teachers say SEL benefits all socioeconomic statuses and 95% of teachers say that SEL is teachable to children (Greenberg et al., 2017). SEL programs are structured and then delivered to children around five core competencies they believe improve overall well-being, self-regulation, and social behaviors for children. These competencies include relationship skills, social awareness, self-management, self-awareness, and responsible decision making (Durlak et al., 2011). Relationship skills are defined as “giving children the tools they need to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships and to act in accordance with social norms” (Greenberg et al., 2017, p.15). The children demonstrate skills such as cooperating, seeking out assistance when needed, communicating effectively, and actively listening. Social awareness is defined as “the ability to take the perspective of people with different backgrounds or from different cultures and to empathize and act with compassion

towards them” (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 15). Children will demonstrate competence within this area by understanding social norms. Self-management is defined as “the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, and persevere through challenges to achieve personal and educational goals” (Greenberg et al., 2017, pg. 15). If the children can develop self-management skills, then they can learn to regulate their emotions and behaviors within different scenarios appropriately. The fourth core competency is self-awareness, which means having a good understanding of their own values, personal goals, and emotions. The individual can identify and assess their own strengths and weaknesses through a growth mindset. Responsible decision-making is the fifth and final core competency. Responsible decision making “requires the children to be able to make choices based on an accurate consideration of all relevant factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of action, respecting others, and taking responsibility for one’s decision” (Weissberg & O’Brien, 2004, p. 89). Mastery of the five core competencies of SEL takes time. However, by participating in structured SEL interventions and programming, children and their caregivers experience improved well-being, self-regulation, and behaviors.

Social-emotional learning programs beginning at an early age can improve the overall behaviors of a child and their ability to function throughout their daily life. Mastery of the SEL competencies from participating in developed programming leads to improved well-being, self-regulation, school-performance, behaviors, and flow when engaged in preferred activities and occupations (Bazyk & Bazyk, 2009). Furthermore, the children demonstrate skills in setting and achieving positive goals in the home or classroom. The various SEL programs that are developed foster social participation and protective mechanisms for those involved leading to a more caring community of learners (Durlak et al., 2011). Most importantly, it promotes positive youth

development. Durlak (2011) states that students typically do not learn alone but rather in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and with the encouragement of their families. Thus, it is important that everyone is on board with programming to support their child and their goals. Along with the importance of there being a group or family-based effort to improve self-regulation skills for the child, the use of occupational therapy-based groups is also effective. By focusing on occupational engagement during SEL participation, researchers, Bazyk and Bazyk (2009) discovered that low-income urban youths that participated in occupation based SEL programs found them fun because activities were new and challenging. The children also enjoyed the groups because they felt supported by the other participating group members and leaders. The children involved in the occupation based SEL group activities enjoyed participating in creative activities as it allowed for them to make their own choices which in return impacted their mood positively, experiencing more happiness in their daily activities (Bazyk & Bazyk, 2009). Using a multi-component approach, occupational-based activities and SEL programming allow children and their caregivers to begin achieving their desired goals related to emotional regulation and positive behaviors.

Evidence-based SEL programs are supposed to positively help children. SEL programs that are evidence-based provide practitioners with the validity and reliability of the programs, thus helping to determine the best program to implement for their population and setting. Many SEL programs have been created and implemented in school systems and daycares, with various levels of evidence to support implementation. A study using the five competencies of SEL identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), systematically identified the core components that were identified and the rates at which each component was included within evidence based SEL programs (Lawson et al., 2019). Table 1

displays the SEL programs that met the CASEL Guide for “SElect” inclusion criteria along with their key factors (Lawson et al., 2019). The researchers share the core components across the SEL programs that met inclusion criteria included social skills, identifying other feelings, identifying one’s feelings, and behavioral coping skills/relaxation.

Despite all the evidence-based options, there is not one program that is determined to be better than the others or to be the universal best. It is important to note that all school systems and daycares are different and have their own unique needs for their children, making it the provider’s job to determine the best SEL program for their designated population and setting. Other techniques such as mindfulness activities and developing coping skills can also be effective if implemented correctly or consistently alongside the use of SEL programs (Metz et al., 2013). Through a multi-component approach of SEL programs and other activities such as mindfulness activities, coping skills, and use of a designated calm down corner, a program can be developed or adapted to help a child, group, or school system that are displaying negative behaviors and poor social emotional skills. Through appropriate and various interventions, the desired goals for the children can be achieved.

Table 1.0. *Evidence Based SEL Programs*

SEL Program	Key Components
Second Step	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elementary based SEL programming: Digital or Classroom version - Tier 1 SEL curriculum that includes media activities, interactive components, lessons, and more than 100 supplemental resources
Incredible Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Materials for parents, teachers, early childhood educators, counselors, and other professionals working with children ages 0-12 - Curriculum includes skills to promote SEL, academic skills, and positive behavioral outcomes for children in various cultures and socioeconomic groups

Harmony Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade social emotional learning programs - Over 25 lesson plans for teachers and parents to address the 5 core SEL competencies, including stories, activities, and lesson plans offered digitally
PATHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increases emotional well-being and regulation, ease of classroom adaptability & professional development, and increase academic performance. - Modules with SEL objectives specific to each grade level
I Can Problem Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lesson-based SEL program for grades preK-5 that includes positive classroom management, SEL generalization, build interpersonal thinking, and problem-solving skills - Utilizes social emotional learning, early literacy, academic readiness, and executive functioning skills
Social Decision Making/ Social Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used with all students (regular and special education) from kindergarten to eighth grade with various abilities, ethnicities, and socio-economic status. - Curriculum lessons include topics such as self-control, social awareness, social decision making, and applications to academics and “real life” problems.
MindUp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course designed for parents, guardians, and caregivers with children, K-5th to address concepts such as neuroscience, mindful awareness, positive psychology, and social and emotional learning
4Rs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution Criteria - Engages imagination and creativity of children from preK-5 to develop critical skills such as empathy, community building, and conflict resolution
Open Circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive, whole-school SEL program for elementary schools - Strengthens students social-emotional skills related to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving. - Fostering safe, caring, and engaging classroom and school communities.
Raising Healthy Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preventative intervention with teacher, parent, and child components to promote positive youth development. - Enhances protective factors, reducing identified risk factors, and preventing problem behaviors and academic failure
Resolving Conflict Creatively Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Builds community in schools and classrooms. - Strengthens students’ social and emotional skills. - Increases equity through courageous conversations on race
Steps to Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bully prevention program for grades 3-6 - Increasing staff awareness and responsiveness - Fostering socially responsible beliefs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching social-emotional skills to counter bullying and promote healthy relationships
Too Good for Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Program built to provide students with skills, knowledge, and attitudes to create positive development and supportive relationships. - Course content includes identifying and managing emotions, effective communication, and pro-social peer bonding

Note. Lawson, G. M., McKenzie, M. E., Becker, K. D., Selby, L., & Hoover, S. A. (2019). The Core Components of Evidence-Based Social Emotional Learning Programs. *Prevention Science*, 20(4), 457–467. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-018-0953-y>

One therapeutic intervention or approach does not always work for a child or group. Instead, occupational therapists encourage a multi-component approach to meet desired goals. Coaching is a form of treatment modality that is used by OT's that is client-centered using an enablement-oriented framework (Kessler & Graham, 2015). This intervention helps caregivers better manage their children's behaviors and routines, well-being, health, and maximize performance in everyday life through a strengths-based caregiver-directed approach that unlocks people's potential to maximize their occupational performance (Allen et al., 2021). Coaching strives towards two goals for their clients including enablement of occupational performance in areas identified by caregivers and improving caregivers' ability to manage occupational challenges in the future for their children (Kahjoogh et al., 2016). Occupational therapists use a coaching-in-context approach that involves three components: connect, discover, and plan as shown in Figure 1. The OT uses skillful questioning, active listening, reflection responding, the cultivating of connectedness, and leverage of strength to collaborate with caregivers, parents, or teachers, through a problem-solving approach (Gerhardt et al., 2022). When therapists use the coaching approach with caregivers, they observe overall improved caregiver stress, well-being, mental health, and self-efficacy (Miller-Kuhaneck & Watling, 2017). Coaching can be used individually or in a family participation-based group for goal setting and therapy interventions to

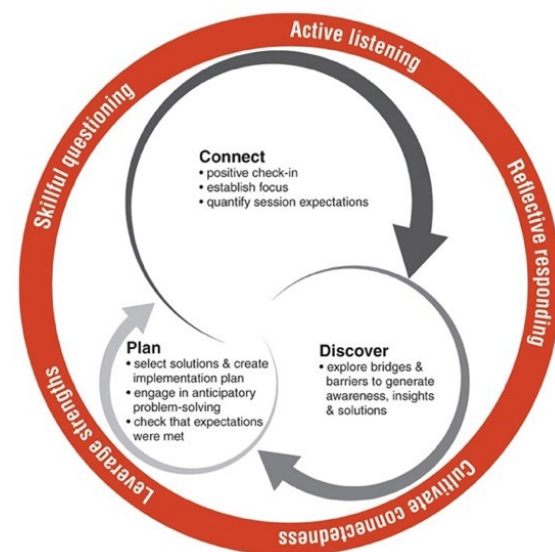
support engagement in occupational performance of the child and caregiver. Through combining evidence-based SEL programs, other occupational therapy-based interventions such as mindfulness, coping skills, or calm down corners, and coaching, large strides towards improved well-being, self-regulation, and behavior are possible.

Figure 1.0. Coaching-in-Context Model

Note. From Potvin, M.-C., Mulcahey, M. J., & Gerhardt, N.

(2021). Coaching in Context. *Department of Occupational Therapy Faculty Papers*, Paper 79.

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Recent research emphasizes the importance of creating supportive classroom environments that cater to diverse student needs, particularly focusing on anxiety management, sensory processing, and self-regulation skills. Maich, Davies, and Van Rhijn (2019) advocate for relaxation stations within classrooms to promote self-regulation among students, including those with disabilities. These stations offer private spaces equipped with sensory tools to manage emotions effectively. Teachers play a critical role in implementing therapeutic techniques to support emotional regulation and coping skills (Brown et al., 2020). Cognitive-behavioral strategies, structured routines, and de-escalation techniques such as soft tones and validation of emotions are highlighted to create a conducive learning environment. Smith and Douglas (2020) underscore the impact of sensory processing and self-regulation on elementary school children's academic engagement. They suggest incorporating calm down corners and occupational therapy interventions to mitigate sensory dysregulation and improve behavioral outcomes. Overall, these studies emphasize the importance of proactive classroom strategies, including relaxation stations,

structured routines, and sensory-supportive environments, to foster an inclusive educational setting that supports both emotional well-being and academic success.

Children are struggling everyday whether they are at home, school, or in a public setting to manage their feelings and behave appropriately, leading to exhausted caregivers. Some caregivers become the negative authoritative individual in their life telling them what not to do, talking down to them, publicly shaming them, and giving them harsh consequences because they are tired and frustrated. However, using a multi-component approach of coaching, evidence based SEL programs, and other occupational therapy interventions such as mindfulness activities and use of classroom modifications can lead to positive changes for children and caregivers. Addressing the caregiver's engagement with a child using a coaching approach and implementation of a structured and consistent SEL program for children can provide children and their caregivers with the tools and skills they need to improve their well-being, self-regulation, and behaviors. It takes a village to care for and raise children, so it is important that everyone plays their part using the appropriate tools, skills, and resources to support children's emotional, physical, cognitive, and psychological development.

Methods

Research Design

In this pilot program, we evaluated the efficacy of a social emotional program for school-aged children while utilizing a coaching approach and environmental modifications at Destiny Learning Center (DLC) faculty and classrooms. Our research question was: "Does implementation of social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions and utilization of a coaching approach improve self-regulation skills and mental health for students and their caregivers?"

Procedures

The pilot program implemented an evidence-based exploratory 4-week program completing 12 lessons with 8 school-aged students at Destiny Learning Center during their Summer Programming in Columbia, Missouri. This pilot program was designed to determine if there was an improvement in social-emotional regulation of children using an evidence-based SEL program, Harmony Academy, led by a capstone doctoral occupational therapy student while completing coaching with the teachers. Environmental modifications were also implemented in the 2-year-old classroom, 3-year-old classroom, and pre-kindergarten classroom to create calming spaces to assist with regulation of emotions.

Quantitative data was collected over a four-week period on 12 SEL lesson days, both in the morning and at night. Students were assessed using a 1-3 scale across the five core competencies of SEL, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship development, and responsible decision-making. A score of 1 indicated that students demonstrated these competencies and positive behaviors independently, without needing teacher assistance. A score of 2 was given if students required occasional reminders or assistance to engage in positive behaviors and use SEL skills appropriately. A score of 3 indicated significant challenges in behavior and SEL skill application, requiring frequent breaks and redirection from teachers. This data was analyzed to determine whether there was a correlation—positive or negative—between the development of SEL skills and the duration of the lessons over the four-week period.

Participants

Both teachers and students will participate in this study. For this study, one summer programming facility, Destiny Learning Center (DLC) in Columbia, MO agreed to participate in the doctoral capstone experience. There were three teachers and one administrator with diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and experiences that all work with school-aged children.

Teachers at this community program participated in the study as partners with the student researcher. The researcher utilized a coaching approach with the teachers and administrator to improve their confidence in caregiving and overall mental health while working with children. Teachers also agreed to modify their current classrooms to allow for a calming corner space that is to be utilized for self-regulation for the children.

The children were from 5-12 years of age with diverse ethnicity, home life experience, and education. The inclusion criteria for the children were as followed (a) registered at Destiny Learning Center for summer programming, (b) attended 3 or more days per week, (c) between 5-12 years of age, and (d) demonstrated frequent dysregulation of emotions and/or negative behaviors reported by the staff at DLC.

A student from the University of Missouri School of Health Professions-Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program conducted the study as part of the requirements for their doctoral capstone experience (DCE). To develop familiarity, the student researcher worked in the community program for one school semester; this experience provided background for designing this study.

Materials

Social-Emotional Learning materials used in group treatments were sourced from Harmony Academy, an approved provider by CASEL. Harmony Academy provided digital

lesson plans, activity materials, and stories for 12 lessons conducted over four weeks. These materials were easily accessible for printing, with straightforward download and printing instructions for both students and teachers. A behavioral data collection chart specific to SEL was developed and used to monitor the morning and afternoon behaviors of eight students, focusing on their application of the five core SEL competencies. See Figure 2.0.

At Destiny Learning Center, a new Calm Down Corner procedure has been introduced, featuring custom handouts and carefully selected materials for each classroom including comfortable seating, fidgets, age-appropriate picture books, and weighted blankets and/or stuffed animals. This initiative aims to provide students with effective tools for managing anxiety and improving sensory processing skills. By developing these resources, the school demonstrates its commitment to enhancing the learning environment and promoting social emotional well-being across the community. See Figure 3.0, 3.1, 3.2. and 3.3.

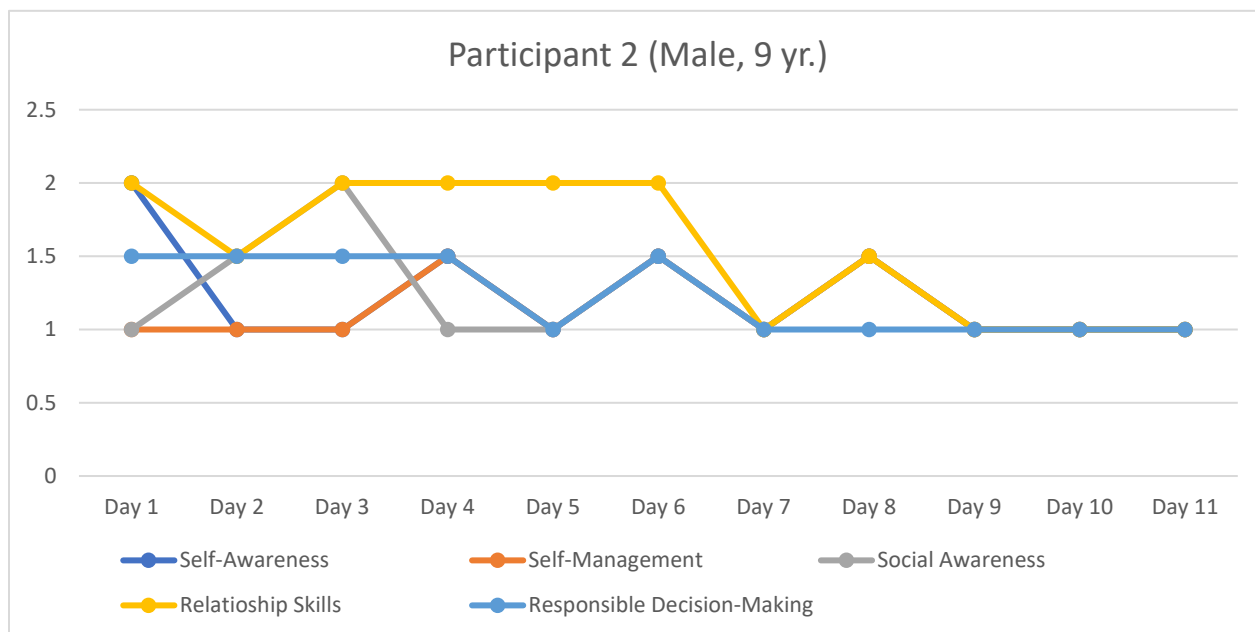
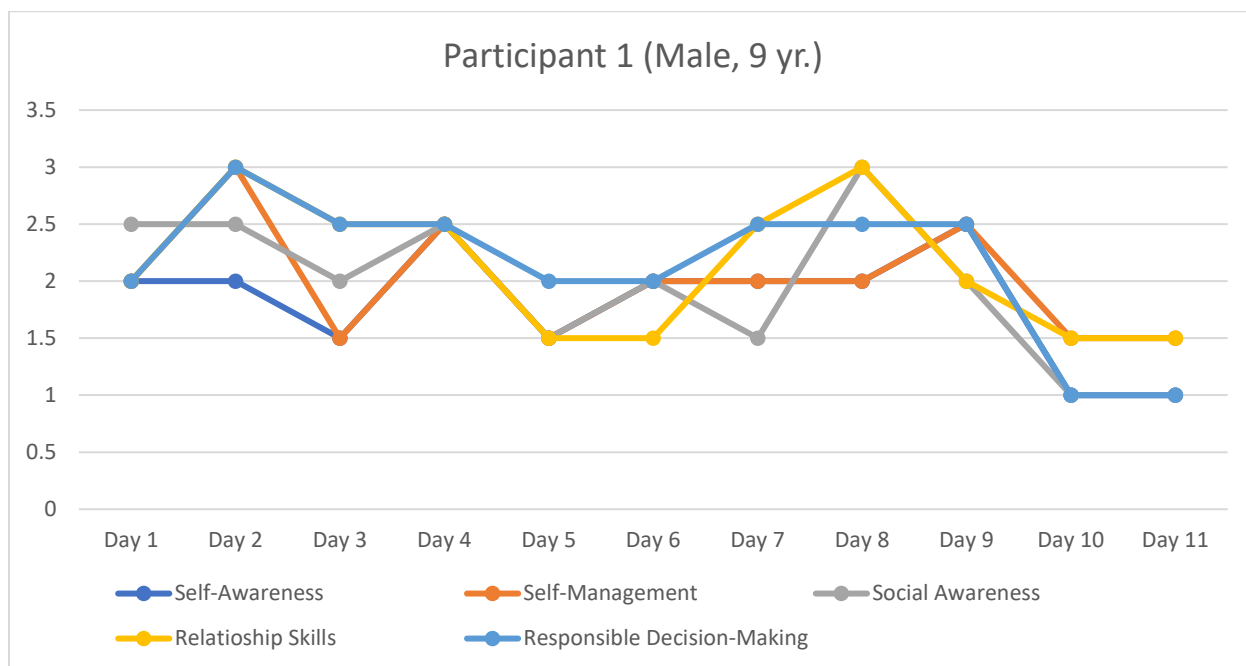
- **Relationship Development:** Students will establish and maintain positive relationships by respecting others and demonstrating good sportsmanship.
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** Students will stop, think, and act to make safe and smart choices.

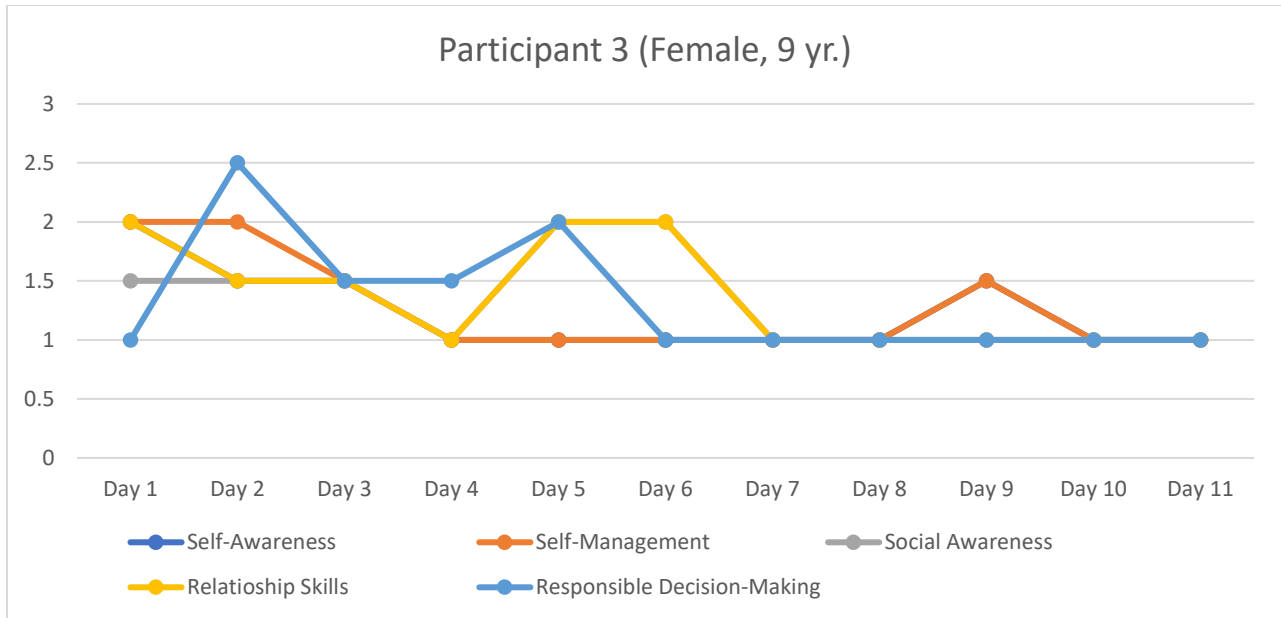
Data was gathered for eight participants, including both female (3) and male (5) students aged 5 to 11 years. Collection occurred each morning and afternoon on days when SEL lessons were conducted, utilizing a 1-3 scale to assess the children's ability to meet their goals. The high scoring SEL lesson day was discarded for each participant to take into consideration external circumstances that could possibly impact their behaviors such as being overly tired due to poor night sleep, medication changes, hunger, etc.

Results

Overview of Pilot Program Findings

Overall, the data shows a positive correlation between the duration of SEL lessons and the development of SEL skills, particularly in younger female children who demonstrated significant independence. The older participants showed varied levels of independence and required more teacher support, indicating that further SEL instruction and practice may be beneficial. See Table 2.0 for the summarized SEL competency trends in the 3 of the 8 participants.

Table 2.0. Participant Social Emotional Learning Outcome Trends



Trends in Children's Social Emotional Learning Skills and Behaviors

The data analysis indicated a general trend where younger children (aged 5-7) scored closer to 1, demonstrating higher independence in exhibiting SEL skills and positive behaviors. This suggested that these children were able to self-regulate and apply SEL skills with minimal assistance. Specifically:

- Female participants aged 6 and 7 consistently scored 1 across all competencies, indicating strong independent skills.
- Male participant aged 5 showed slightly higher scores, indicating occasional assistance was needed, particularly in self-management and responsible decision-making.

For older children (aged 9-11), there was a trend of slightly higher scores, indicating a need for more reminders and assistance:

- Participants aged 9 generally scored closer to 1.3-1.5, indicating occasional assistance.
- Participants aged 9 and 10 scored closer to 2 in some competencies, suggesting more frequent reminders were necessary.
- Participant aged 11 displayed a consistent score of around 1.1-1.2, indicating independent skill application with minimal assistance.

Discussion

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study highlight the potential benefits of implementing a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program to enhance emotional regulation skills and behaviors in children. The data suggests that younger participants, aged 5 to 7, demonstrated significant independence in applying SEL skills, indicating that early intervention may be particularly effective. However, the varied results among older children aged 9 to 11 underscore the importance of tailored approaches to meet different developmental needs and individual circumstances. The positive trends observed suggest that SEL programs can play a critical role in supporting children's social and emotional development. These findings imply that educators and therapists should consider incorporating SEL curricula into early childhood education and adapt strategies to address the unique challenges faced by older children.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the promising results, this study had several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the diverse age range of participants (5 to 11 years) introduces variability in developmental stages, which may influence the effectiveness of the SEL program differently

across ages. Younger children may naturally exhibit different emotional regulation capabilities compared to older children. Secondly, participants came from varied home life experiences, which could significantly impact their behavior and emotional regulation skills. The presence of different family dynamics and support systems can contribute to inconsistencies in how children respond to the SEL program. Additionally, a few children in the study had different diagnoses, which could affect their ability to engage with and benefit from the program in unique ways. This diversity in diagnoses adds another layer of variability to the results. Lastly, the children's schedules were subject to constant changes while at DLC, leading to inconsistencies in their daily routines and potentially impacting their ability to consistently apply SEL skills. These factors together contribute to the variations observed in the study results, highlighting the need for more controlled and homogeneous study conditions in future research to better isolate the effects of the SEL program.

Future Directions

Further research could explore the long-term impact and strategies to enhance SEL skill retention and independence in older children. It can also focus on different diagnosis that children must help them successfully engage in their everyday life, at home and at school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs into educational environments by occupational therapists, environment modifications, and coaching educators represents a vital approach for supporting children's emotional regulation and behavioral development. Through structured interventions targeting core competencies such as

self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, children can enhance their abilities to navigate social interactions and manage their emotions effectively. The effectiveness of SEL is underscored by empirical evidence demonstrating improvements in children's well-being, academic performance, and social behaviors across diverse settings. In addition to SEL evidence-based programming with the students, the use of a coaching approach with teachers to address their self-confidence and mental health along with implementation of calm down corners to improve self-regulation of children. Combining evidence-based SEL programs, other SEL interventions such as mindfulness techniques, coping skills, environmental adaptations and coaching, provide large strides towards improved well-being, self-regulation, and behavior for both children and their caregivers. However, challenges such as varying developmental stages and individual needs highlight the importance of tailored approaches and ongoing support from caregivers and educators. Moving forward, continued research and implementation of evidence-based SEL strategies within occupational therapy practice are essential to fostering a supportive environment that promotes positive youth development and equips children with essential life skills for lifelong success.

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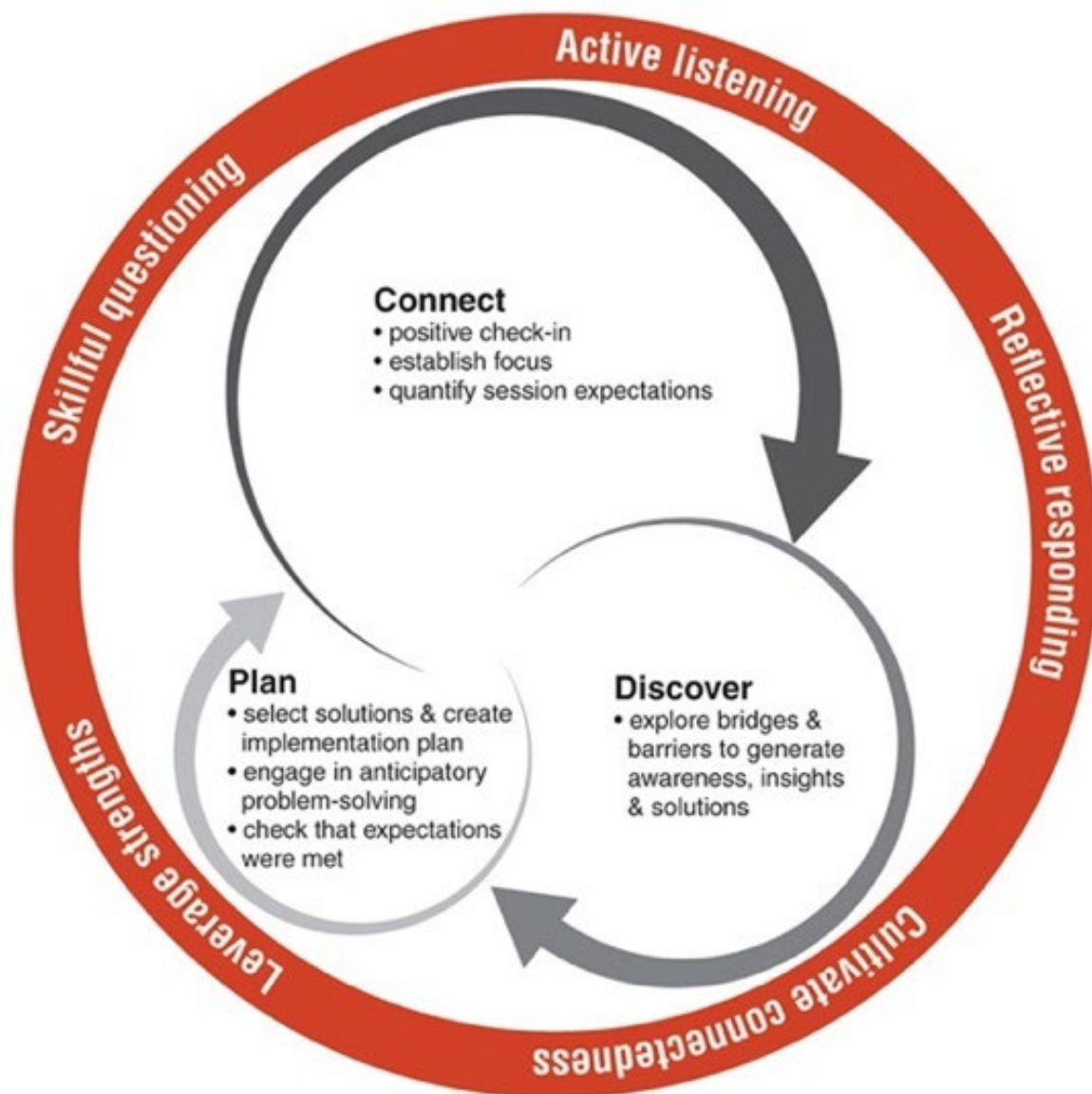
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Appendix

Figure 1.0. *Coaching-in-Context Model*



Note. From Potvin, M.-C., Mulcahey, M. J., & Gerhardt, N. (2021). Coaching in Context. *Department of Occupational Therapy Faculty Papers*, Paper 79. <https://jdc.jefferson.edu/otfp/79>. Copyright by Creative Commons, Attribution 4.0 International.

Figure 3.0. Procedure for Implementing a Calm Down Corner

Purpose: The calm down corner is designed to provide children with a safe and supportive environment where they can regulate their emotions and develop self-control skills. It is not a time-out or negative space.

Materials Needed:

1. **Designated Space:** Identify a quiet corner/area of the room that is away from high-traffic areas and distractions.
2. **Comfortable Seating:** Place soft cushions, bean bags, or a small rug for children to sit or lie down comfortably.
3. **Visual Cues:** Use calming visuals such as pictures of nature and soft colors.
4. **Tactile/Sensory Tools:** Provide stress balls, sensory toys (like squishy toys or textured items), stuffed animals, weight animals/lap pads, etc.
5. **Books:** Include a few age-appropriate books about feelings and emotions.

Steps to Implement:

1. **Introduce the Calm Down Corner:**
 - Gather all children for a brief explanation. Use simple language to explain that the calm down corner is a special place to go when they feel overwhelmed, upset, or need some quiet time.
 - Emphasize that it's not a time out or a punishment but a place to help them feel better when they're having big feelings.
2. **Set Clear Guidelines:**
 - Explain the guidelines for using the calm down corner:
 - It's okay to use the calm down corner whenever they feel upset or overwhelmed.
 - Encourage them to use quiet voices and gentle movements in the calm down corner.
 - Respect others who may be using the area.
3. **Model the Behavior:**
 - Demonstrate how to use the space, including how to enter and exit without disturbing others.
 - Show children how to choose a comfort item (like a stress ball), sit quietly, take deep breaths, and calm down.
 - You are also encouraged to go to the calm down corner with the child if you are able and in ratio to help them calm their body
 - After multiple uses of the calm down corner, students may go by themselves however make sure to check in with them and assist in their reflection
4. **Explain the Purpose:**
 - Let students know when and how to use the space.

- Post a "calm-down menu" with activities that can help them feel calm.
- 5. **Make it Positive:**
 - Help students see the calm down corner as a positive experience and a choice they can make to feel better.
 - Gently suggest that a student might benefit from using the space.
- 6. **Provide Materials:**
 - Fill the space with soft seating, books, toys, art supplies, blankets, and stuffed animals.
 - Include strategies like fidgets or sensory items.
- 7. **Set a Timer:**
 - Let students know how long they can stay in the area.
- 8. **Practice Using the Calm Down Corner:**
 - Encourage children to practice using the calm down corner during times of low stress, so they become familiar with it.
 - Praise children who use the calm down corner appropriately, reinforcing positive behavior.
- 9. **Encourage Self-Regulation Skills:**
 - Teach calming techniques such as deep breathing, counting to ten, or using imagery (like imagining a favorite place).
 - Guide children in expressing their feelings verbally or through drawing if they prefer.
- 10. **Regular Check-ins:**
 - Check in with children who use the calm down corner to see how they're feeling afterward.
 - Encourage them to talk about their feelings and validate their emotions.
- 11. **Review and Adjust:**
 - Periodically review how the calm down corner is working. Adjust the materials or layout if necessary, based on children's feedback and needs.
 - Ensure that all staff members are familiar with the purpose and procedures of the calm down corner to maintain consistency.
- 12. **Promote a Positive Environment:**
 - Emphasize to children that using the calm down corner is a positive way to take care of themselves and manage their emotions.
 - Celebrate successes and improvements in self-regulation skills across the daycare community.

Figure 3.1. *Calm Down Corner Educator Handout*

Destiny Learning Center: Calm Down Corner

Purpose:

- Designated space in a home or classroom with the sole intent of being a safe space for a child to go to when they feel their emotions are running too high and they need to regain their emotional and physical control. These spaces are equipped with comforting objects and soothing materials that can promote mindfulness, breathing, and reflection (Action for Healthy Kids, 2022).

I am SAFE.
I can CALM my body.

I am SAFE.

Social- Emotional Learning Competencies:

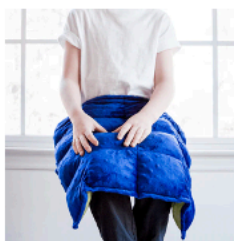
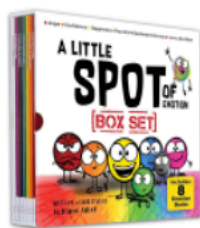
- *Self-Awareness:* Identify the emotions the children are experiencing
- *Self-Management:* Ability to self-regulate when having high emotions
- *Relationship Skills:* Improve communication skills to share how the child is feeling and what they may need to regulate.

In your Classroom:

- Find a corner in your classroom that can permanently act as your new calm-down corner. **KEEP IT IN THE SAME PLACE.**
- Designate the space as a special area where your students can spend time on their own when their emotions are running high.

Optional Materials:

- Soft, plush seating options
 - [Bean Bag](#)
 - [Small Pop-up Tent](#)
- Options for books
 - SEL Books from Training
 - [World of Kids Emotions](#)
 - [A Little Spot of Emotion](#)
- Sensory basket with quiet toys/fidgets
 - [Monkey Noodles](#)
 - [Sensory Timer](#)
 - [Fidgets](#)
- Drawing or journaling supplies
- Blankets
 - [Weighted Lap Pad](#)
 - [Weight Lap Blanket](#)
- Stuffed animals



- [Plush Hugging Pillow](#)
- [Weighted Stuffed Animal](#)
- A photo of your family. Research shows that when children see a photo of their trusted adult, it helps calm them.
- A chart showing faces with different emotions
- A small jar of glitter to shake
- Bubbles (because blowing shifts us into deeper, slower breathing)



Things to Consider:

- How old are the children? What is their reading ability? Are pictures/visuals a better option?
- Is the calming space truly calming or is it overwhelming? How many things are on the walls? Too much? Not enough?
- Do I have options for calming activities the children to pick



Deepen your Understanding:

- <https://childmind.org/article/can-help-kids-self-regulation/>
- <https://theartofeducation.edu/2019/01/how-to-create-a-calm-down-corner-in-5-easy-steps/>

Resources:

Calm Down Corner. Action for Healthy Kids. (2022, February 18).
<https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/activity/calm-down-corner/#:~:text=A%20calm%20down%20corner%20is,their%20emotional%20and%20physical%20control.>

Figure 3.2. Calm Down Corner Rules

The poster features a light blue grid background. In the top-left corner, there is a rainbow with several hearts falling from its base. In the top-right corner, there is a grey cloud with yellow stars. In the bottom-left corner, there is a grey cloud with yellow stars. In the bottom-right corner, there is a rainbow with a red heart in the center. The text is centered on a white background.

Calm Down Corner Rules

1. Go when you feel sad,
mad, or need quiet time
2. Use a safe body
3. Pick 1 or 2 comfort items
(Stuffed animal, fidget, breathing tool, etc.)
4. Breathe slowly take deep
breaths in and out
5. Be KIND ♡

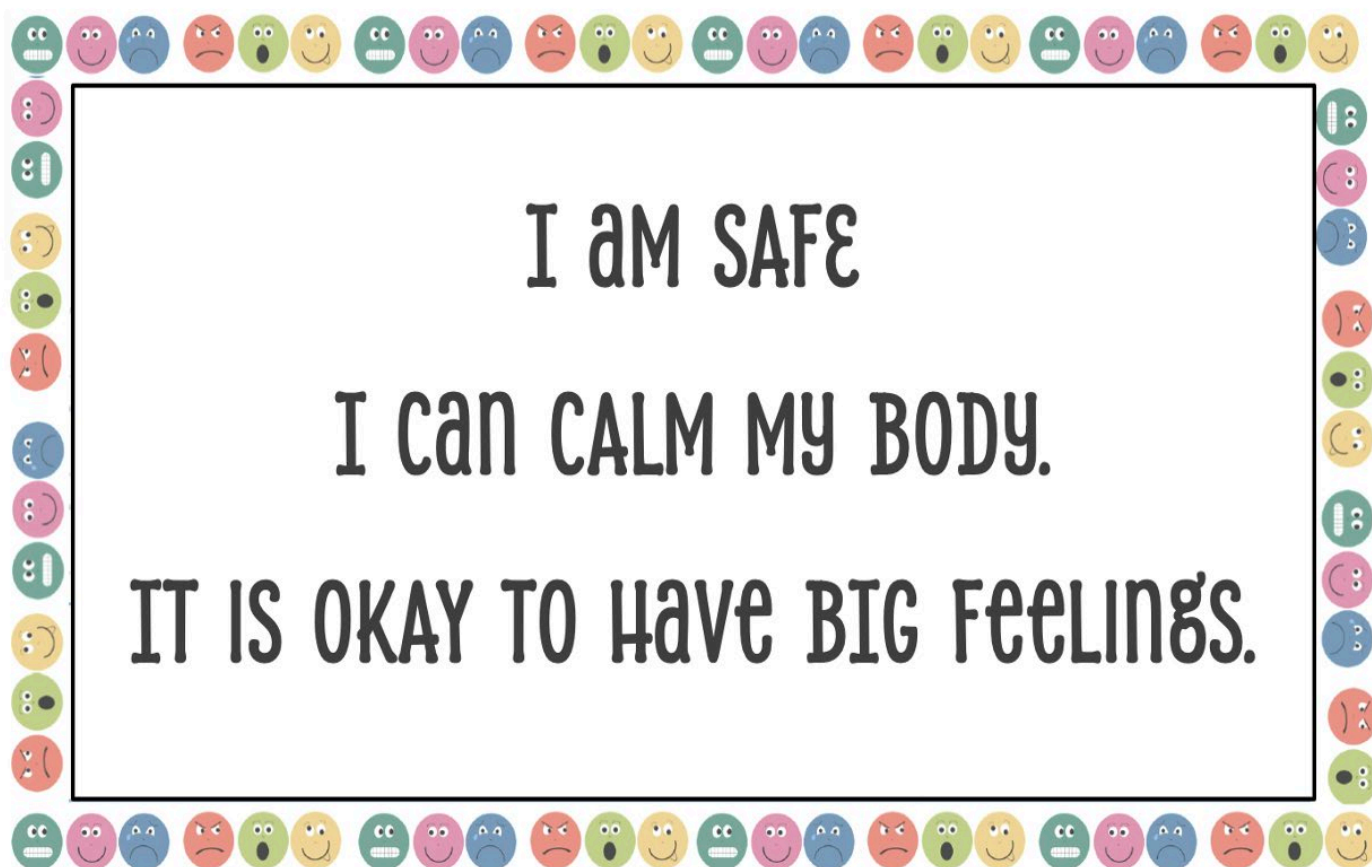
Figure 3.3. Calm Down Corner Phrases

Table 1.0. Evidence Based SEL Programs

SEL Program	Key Components
Second Step	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elementary based SEL programming: Digital or Classroom version - Tier 1 SEL curriculum that includes media activities, interactive components, lessons, and more than 100 supplemental resources
Incredible Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Materials for parents, teachers, early childhood educators, counselors, and other professionals working with children ages 0-12 - Curriculum includes skills to promote SEL, academic skills, and positive behavioral outcomes for children in various cultures and socioeconomic groups
Harmony Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade social emotional learning programs - Over 25 lesson plans for teachers and parents to address the 5 core SEL competencies, including stories, activities, and lesson plans offered digitally
PATHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increases emotional well-being and regulation, ease of classroom adaptability & professional development, and increase academic performance. - Modules with SEL objectives specific to each grade level
I Can Problem Solve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lesson-based SEL program for grades preK-5 that includes positive classroom management, SEL generalization, build interpersonal thinking, and problem-solving skills - Utilizes social emotional learning, early literacy, academic readiness, and executive functioning skills
Social Decision Making/ Social Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used with all students (regular and special education) from kindergarten to eighth grade with various abilities, ethnicities, and socio-economic status. - Curriculum lessons include topics such as self-control, social awareness, social decision making, and applications to academics and “real life” problems.
MindUp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course designed for parents, guardians, and caregivers with children, K-5th to address concepts such as neuroscience, mindful awareness, positive psychology, and social and emotional learning
4Rs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution Criteria - Engages imagination and creativity of children from preK-5 to develop critical skills such as empathy, community building, and conflict resolution
Open Circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive, whole-school SEL program for elementary schools

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthens students social-emotional skills related to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal relationships, and problem-solving. - Fostering safe, caring, and engaging classroom and school communities.
Raising Healthy Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preventative intervention with t4eacher, parent, and child components to promote positive youth development. - Enhances protective factors, reducing identified risk factors, and preventing problem behaviors and academic failure
Resolving Conflict Creatively Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Builds community in schools and classrooms. - Strengthens students' social and emotional skills. - Increases equity through courageous conversations on race
Steps to Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bully prevention program for grades 3-6 - Increasing staff awareness and responsiveness - Fostering socially responsible beliefs - Teaching social-emotional skills to counter bullying and promote healthy relationships
Too Good for Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Program built to provide students with skills, knowledge, and attitudes to create positive development and supportive relationships. - Course content includes identifying and managing emotions, effective communication, and pro-social peer bonding

Note. Lawson, G. M., McKenzie, M. E., Becker, K. D., Selby, L., & Hoover, S. A. (2019). The Core Components of Evidence-Based Social Emotional Learning Programs. *Prevention Science*, 20(4), 457–467. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-018-0953-y>

Table 2.0. Participant Social Emotional Learning Outcome Trends

