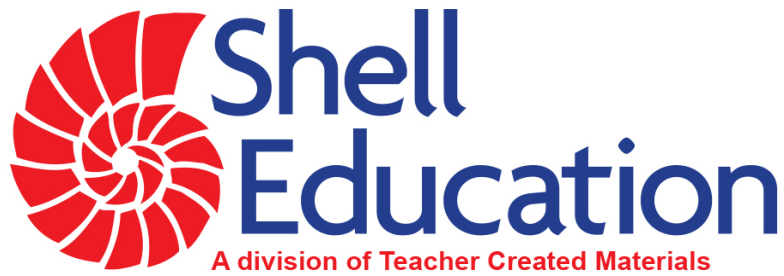Sample Pages from

Shell
Education
A division of Teacher Created Materials

Thanks for checking us out. Please call us at 800-858-7339 with questions or feedback or to order this product. You can also order this product online at **www.tcmpub.com/shell-education**.

For correlations to state standards, please visit
www.tcmpub.com/teachers/correlations

To **Create** a *World* in which
Children Love to **Learn!**

Social-Emotional Learning
Starts with Us

Empowering Teachers to Support Students

TRISHA DIFAZIO AND ALLISON ROESER

Table of Contents

Table of Contents *(cont.)*

Preface

Hi! We (Trisha and Allison) are so happy you are here! The purpose of this book is a simple one: to create connections. We're talking about connections in your brain, connections with others and most importantly—connecting with yourself. If you work in education, chances are you feel overwhelmed. We get it. We wrote this book for you. We want you to feel the same way your students do when they leave your class: supported, empowered, and inspired.

This book supports educators by providing a context for SEL in a way that actively involves all students and adults in developing their social and emotional skills. It also provides educators with a wide variety of SEL strategies and activities that can be easily integrated throughout the day or taught as stand-alone activities.

Inside, you will find personal inventories, reflection questions, captivating stories, educator and student spotlights, and differentiated grade-level appropriate SEL strategies and activities. Each activity, strategy, and tip in this book applies not only to your students, but to adults as well. This resource was designed to be flexible, so whether you'd like to learn solo or do a book study, this book has something for everyone.

In the **Introduction**, we define SEL, outline its long- and short-term benefits, and provide context for when and where it can be practiced. We examine the importance of adults developing their own social-emotional capacities before being able to effectively address those of students. We also explore the concept of *equity* and its relationship to SEL and consider the importance of leveraging SEL skills to provide equitable access to educational resources across race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation, family background, and family income.

In the first five chapters, we look at the five core competencies of social-emotional learning. In **Chapter 1**, we identify and explore various facets of self-awareness, including understanding and labeling emotions, understanding identity, identifying cultural assets, having a growth mindset, recognizing strengths, and developing a sense of purpose. We start with the adult and then explore how those SEL skills can be applied in schools and classrooms. **Chapter 2** explores the

concept of *self-management* and why it's important. We then focus on managing emotions, identifying stress, and setting goals while demonstrating personal and collective agency. We also offer several strategies to increase motivation in adults and students.

Social awareness is addressed in **Chapter 3**. We discuss the importance of understanding perspectives, seeking out resources, calling in support, practicing gratitude, and recognizing situational demands. We also include various suggestions for teaching, modeling, and building empathy. **Chapter 4** takes a deep dive into relationship skills and why they are essential. We provide strategies for how to develop positive relationships, connect across cultures, and create home-school connections. We offer simple and effective ways to connect and build trust with students and their families. In **Chapter 5**, we discuss why responsible decision-making is such an important skill to develop, not just for day-to-day but also for connecting to future goals. We explore the various contexts for responsible decision-making and provide multiple strategies with scaffolded support to aid students in this process. We also examine how reflection, ethics, and morals are incorporated into decision-making.

We have seen firsthand the power of mindfulness in supporting social-emotional learning, so **Chapter 6** focuses on this important concept. We discuss what mindfulness is and also what it is not. We also explore its many benefits for adults and children both in and outside the classroom. We provide helpful suggestions of how to integrate mindfulness practices, particularly breathing exercises, into instruction. We close the book with **Chapter 7**, where we have provided a collection of engaging SEL activities for grades K–12. This chapter starts with a chart showing which competencies are addressed in each activity. Each of the activities includes grade-level ideas, sentence frames, and multiple suggestions for differentiation.

How to Use This Book

A few features have been called out to guide you in the learning process. Look for these sections as you read, and consider what they represent.

" Quotation

Social-emotional learning impacts so many aspects of our lives. It is helpful to see how others have distilled these ideas into succinct nuggets of knowledge.

Personal Reflection

These questions help you think about your relationship to the content and its application to your own life.

Personal Inventory

These self-assessments support you in determining your strengths and areas for growth within each SEL competency.

Spotlight

Enjoy real-life stories and experiences from educators, experts, and students.

SEL in Action

Create opportunities throughout your day to integrate skill building and demonstrate SEL. These interactions offer ways to translate understanding into action for lasting impact on the culture of your classroom.

Storytime

Connect with us as we share our own real-life experiences.

Chapter Summary and Discussion Questions

Recall the major points of each chapter, and use these questions for personal reflection or as group discussion prompts.

Chapter 4: Relationship Skills

What Are Relationship Skills?

Positive relationships are the soil in which SEL skills grow. We are social creatures. We are meant to live in communities where we are connected to others. Relationships provide that connection. When we as adults experience successful relationships and a sense of connectedness and belonging, we feel better. The same is true for our students.

CASEL defines *relationship skills* as "the abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups." This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem-solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed. One who exhibits positive relationship skills can:

- communicate effectively
- develop positive relationships
- demonstrate cultural competency
- practice teamwork and collaborative problem-solving
- resolve conflicts constructively
- resist negative social pressure
- show leadership in groups
- seek or offer support and help when needed
- stand up for the rights of others

Why Are Relationship Skills Important?

At the most fundamental level, we are designed for human connection. Relationships in schools—with stakeholders and peers—have the potential to have long-lasting impacts on students. Specifically, teacher-student relationships can promote school success in the following ways:

- strengthen academic achievement
- reduce chronic absenteeism
- promote self-motivation
- strengthen self-regulation
- improve goal-making skills

Strong connections with students create positive classroom environments where teachers can spend more time and energy on teaching rather than managing classroom behavior. When students have positive interactions with adults, they exhibit fewer behavior issues. Students who have meaningful connections with their teachers are also more likely to form similar relationships in the future (Waterford.org 2019).

Personal Reflection

Think of someone who helped you become the person you are today. How did you feel being around them? How did they treat you?

Developing Positive Relationships

Relationships are a two-way street. It is easy for educators to feel that sharing about themselves will diminish their authority and control. The truth is, showing vulnerability actually generates more respect from students. Generally, when you open up to students, they tend to take the cue that it is safe to open up to you. Your students want to know you. Think about when you run into a student in the store. They feel like they have spotted you out in the wild (this is especially true of younger students). In their minds, you live in the classroom where you sleep in a Murphy bed that comes out of the wall. You can share small things about yourself and your life that can help foster a sense of connection. It can be something as simple as introducing any pets you have or talking about your favorite hobby. The point is, they want to know who you are as a person.

Keys to Connection Checklist

We can all contribute to the emotional development of young people. However, sometimes we just don't know where to begin. Or maybe we can tell something is not quite right with a student, but we just can't put our finger on what it is. This checklist (Figure 4.1 below) gives you a clear and tangible place to start. We have witnessed firsthand how this list has supported educators in transforming and enhancing the quality of their connections with students. Heck, it can even help increase connecting with your in-laws.

Figure 4.1: Keys to Connection Checklist

☐ accepted	☐ forgiven	☐ respected
☐ acknowledged	☐ heard	☐ safe
☐ admired	☐ helpful	☐ supported
☐ appreciated	☐ important	☐ treated fairly
☐ approved of	☐ included	☐ trusted
☐ believed in	☐ in control	☐ understood
☐ capable	☐ listened to	☐ useful
☐ challenged	☐ loved	☐ validated
☐ competent	☐ needed	☐ valued
☐ confident	☐ noticed	☐ worthy

For example, let's say I am having difficulty with a particular student. Let's call him Junior. I can use this checklist to assess how many ways I am currently connecting to Junior. Does Junior feel accepted by me? Does Junior feel acknowledged by me? And so on. Then, let's say I realized that Junior does *not* feel appreciated by me. I can then use this newfound insight and make an effort to communicate to Junior one or two specific ways that I appreciate him. The power of this process is the inventory we take of our relationships with students. This information can then help guide future decisions and interactions. **Note:** You do not need to "check off" every key on the checklist for every student.

🖐 Spotlight

One strategy that was extremely helpful to engage my high school students during remote learning was a *daily check-in question.* These check-in questions ranged from thought-provoking to silly. My students generally did not have their cameras on. One day, the check-in question was "Show me something that brings you joy." After much encouragement from me, one of my students, Damian, finally replied. He wrote in the chat box, "The piano my dad gave me." I enthusiastically proceeded to ask him about his playing. Several minutes went by, and he did not respond. I had just moved on to another student when suddenly, we all heard the first tentative notes of a piano being played. Soon, our whole virtual room was filled with this most exquisite piece of classical music. The entire class was enraptured by Damian's playing. Then, just as quickly as it had begun, the piece ended and Damian turned his microphone off. There was total silence for a beat and then, without cue, every student turned on their mics and cheered and applauded uproariously for our talented Damian. For the rest of the year, the class spoke and connected with Damian about his beautiful piano music. We all learned about and connected to Damian that day. Turns out all we needed to do was ask.

—Karen L. Smith
English Teacher, Lloyde High School
Lawndale, California

SEL in Action

Once you have an inventory of different ways you are connecting to a student, you can take positive steps to build on those connections or to address ones you are missing with a few simple moves. Here are several strategies that promote keys to connection.

Keys to Connection	Strategies
Believed In Students want to feel believed in by their teachers, families, and classmates.	• Provide encouragement. • Facilitate and acknowledge small successes. • Tell them you believe in them and why (e.g., "You can do it. I believe in you. You're stronger than you know.").
In Control Students feel in control when they have choices. Choices also help improve engagement and motivation.	• Engage students as leaders, problem solvers, and decision makers. • Have students vote on what, when, or how they do an activity (e.g., "Do you want to work independently or in groups?")
Respected Students are more likely to respect teachers who they feel respect them. It is a two-way street. (This is especially important in secondary and high school.)	• Utilize policies and practices that are restorative and equitably applied. • Create an inclusive culture that fosters caring relationships. • Avoid power struggles. • Show them respect.
Treated Fairly Students feel they are treated fairly when they understand classroom rules and consequences. When rules and consequences are made clear to students, it helps take the teacher out of the equation so that students do not feel judged.	• Include students in creating the classroom rules and consequences. • Clearly communicate and display classroom expectations. • Be mindful of how you issue consequences (e.g., your tone of voice, body language).
Forgiven Without forgiveness, students come into class carrying the weight of their previous day's misbehavior.	• Say the words. While many of us forgive our students, we need to communicate that clearly (e.g., "I forgive you. We start over now.").

Now, you give it a try. Choose three keys to connection and brainstorm strategies to support students. **Hint:** How do you prefer others to connect with you?

Keys to Connection	Strategies

Want to know a quick connection hack? Laughter. Students love when teachers use humor. We all want to laugh and have fun. Sarcasm can be a well-intentioned attempt at connection. However, sarcasm is not always the most effective way to connect with students. The word *sarcasm* comes from the Greek *sarkasmós*, meaning "to tear flesh, bite the lip in rage, sneer." Yowza!

Also, sarcasm can be extremely difficult for English learners and students with learning disabilities to recognize and understand as humor. For younger students, sarcasm can also be very confusing and likely mimicked at inappropriate times.

Be mindful of any negative undertones, especially those directed at any one student. The benefit of potentially getting a quick laugh is never worth the cost of alienating a student. Students need to feel safe emotionally to engage in class.

Classroom Values

You can also use this Keys to Connection checklist by sharing it with your students! In groups, students can use sentence frames to share their thoughts and opinions. (You can differentiate this activity for younger students by modifying the list and incorporating visuals.)

Once students identify which feelings are most important to them personally, they can come together as a class to determine what they collectively value. Then they can create a poster to display in their classroom (see Figure 4.2). That way, whenever anyone behaves out of accordance with the collective values, they can be reminded and hold one another accountable.

Figure 4.2: Classroom Values
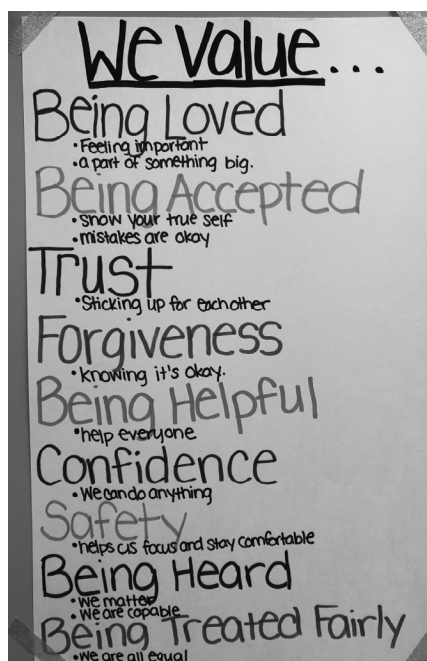
Students loved this activity because they really valued being able to cocreate and contribute to a sense of classroom identity. Decision-making activities during which all students have a say contribute to creating an equitable, student-centered classroom.

Connecting Across Cultures

To truly connect with students, we need to be aware of and respect their perspectives, cultures, languages, and differences. Building meaningful relationships with all students means understanding who they are at their core. Language and culture are essential to our identities. Stakeholders who are culturally and linguistically responsive create more meaningful, sustaining connections with students. As you might remember from earlier chapters, cultural and linguistic responsiveness (CLR) is the validation and affirmation of indigenous (home) culture and language, with the purpose of building and bringing students into success in the culture of academia and mainstream society (Hollie 2018). When we validate and affirm students around these essential aspects of their identities, they feel seen, heard, and valued. Why is this so important? We know from research that students are better able to learn and take risks when they feel emotionally safe and when they feel their cultures and languages are a valued part of their school community. We support our students, families, and communities best when we communicate messages of respect and acceptance. In contrast, anxiety and toxic stress are

created by negative stereotypes, biases, unfair discipline practices, and other exclusionary or shaming practices. These become impediments to learning because they preoccupy the brain with worry and fear (Darling-Hammond et al. 2021).

Home-School Connections

Communication is essential to any relationship. When I was a high school teacher, I used to think I did not have the time to communicate personally with all my students, but I realized that making an investment in a relationship with a student early on pays dividends throughout the year. Oftentimes, we cite lack of time as the thing that keeps us from truly connecting and getting to know our students. What we find is that these relationships make our lives and our jobs easier—not harder—which saves us time in the long run!

Take a look at this note that was given to a student.
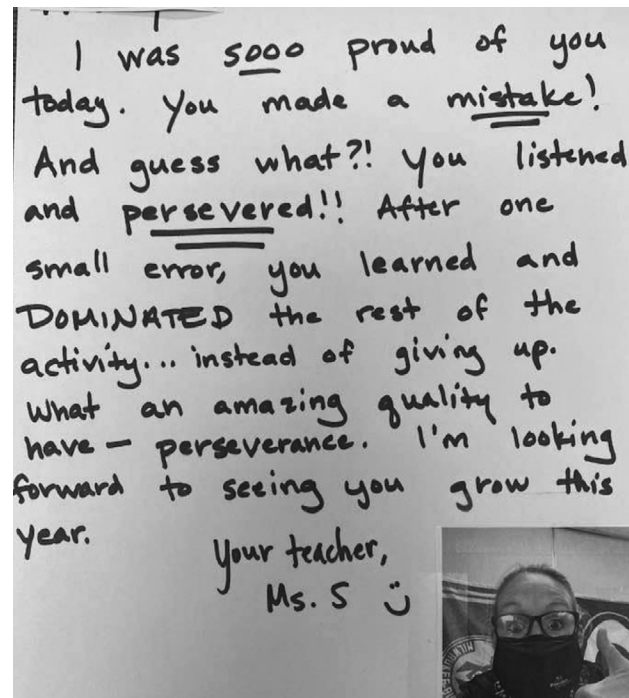
Notes build relationships.

This is also a fantastic example of how to encourage a growth mindset by giving specific and meaningful praise.

⊘ Personal Reflection

How long do you think it took this teacher to write this note? What kind of impact do you think it had on the student?

Positive Phone Calls Home

The simple act of calling home is one of the most effective relationship-building strategies, especially during remote learning. We have heard many heartwarming stories and received such positive feedback from teachers, students, and parents. Parents have shared that hearing something kind about their children "made their week." In turn, the student's good behavior is acknowledged and positively reinforced.

This practice also helps "flip the script" on students who have become accustomed to teachers reaching out to their parents or guardians for disciplinary reasons. During those points of contact with parents, our connection with the student is likely strained. We understand now more than ever, connecting with students in a virtual setting can be especially challenging. One way to connect with students *and* parents is to make positive phone calls home. You can "catch" the student doing something positive and call home. And since many students might not have a mom or dad at home, we like to use the word "adult."

"Tasha, thank you so much for sharing today. Who is the adult that I can call to share how much I appreciate your participation?"

♡ Storytime

My eighth-grade teacher, Mrs. Montgomery, was my favorite teacher of all time. She believed in me, challenged me, and took the time to help me after school. She called me a "good writer." She was passionate about teaching. Her passion was contagious. After eighth grade graduation, I lost track of her. However, I thought about her often. I went on to become a bilingual teacher—just like her. I even went on to teach in her classroom in my former school. Later, when I moved to Los Angeles to teach at USC, I shared stories about Mrs. Montgomery with my students.

In the summer of 2019, I was about to walk out on stage in front of an auditorium of Chicago Public School teachers when I looked out into the audience and saw none other than Mrs. Montgomery.

Naturally, I freaked out and cried and told everyone the story. Mrs. Montgomery (now Dr. Montgomery) and I hugged and cried. Twenty-three years later, I finally got to tell my favorite teacher just how big of an impact she had on my life.

Trisha DiFazio with Dr. Montgomery in 1995

Trisha DiFazio with Dr. Montgomery in 2019

The moral of the story: Relationships matter (and also, Dr. Montgomery DID NOT age). Teaching is hard work, but every single day we are given the opportunity to be someone's Mrs. Montgomery.

Chapter Summary

One of the most important and rewarding things educators can do is build and maintain healthy relationships with their students. Students flourish socially and academically when they feel they are connected to their teachers and peers. Connection provides us all an elevated sense of well-being. Adults create meaningful connections with students when we affirm and promote the understanding of our students' identities, values, languages, and cultures.

Discussion Questions

1. What are your biggest takeaways from this chapter?

2. How can you apply the knowledge you have gained from this chapter?

3. Which aspects of relationship skills are you interested in learning more about?
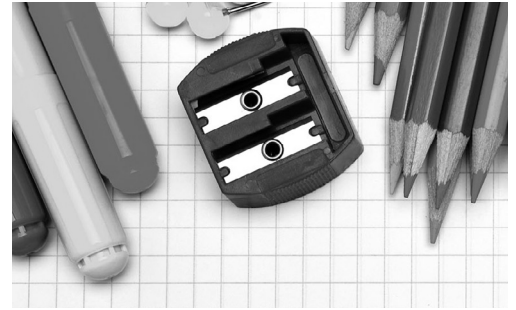
Keys to Connection

Grade Levels: 3–12

Target Competency

- Relationship Skills

Integrated Competencies

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness

Purpose

Students identify how to establish connections and develop positive relationships.

Materials

- *Keys to Connection Checklist* (page 149)
- chart paper, one sheet for each small group
- markers for each group
- sentence frames written on chart paper or on the board

Preparation

- Display sentence frames.

Procedure

1. Explain that having positive relationships helps us all feel connected to one another.

2. Share the *Keys to Connection Checklist*, and review terms.

3. Define any unfamiliar vocabulary, and provide examples.

4. Have students collaborate in small groups to choose five keys that are most important to them, and record the words on chart paper.

5. Groups select a presenter to share their answers.

6. Have students complete the reflection questions independently.

Specific Grade Level SEL Sentence Frames

Grades 3–5

Use a modified list of connection vocabulary words. Make sure students understand the meaning of all the words before you begin the lesson.

> "It is important to me that I feel _____ in a relationship because _____."

> "I feel _____ in a relationship when _____."

> "I do not feel _____ when _____."

Grades 6–12

Emphasize the importance of students being able to justify their thinking. Feel free to extend this lesson over multiple class periods.

> "I want my teacher to know _____."

> "In my opinion, I think _____ is important because _____."

> "I value _____ because _____."

> "While I understand _____'s point, I think _____."

Student Reflection Questions

What did you learn about yourself that you did not know before? What did you learn about your classmates? What did you like about this activity?

Opportunities for Differentiation

- Support English learners by providing them with visual and written supports.

- Expand the lesson by compiling individual answers to create a Classroom Values poster. Turn this into a Classroom Contract for group or classroom accountability.

- Incorporate math by creating a bar graph of student choices.

- Gamify this activity by having students create a gesture for each word and then playing charades.

Between Us

- There are no right or wrong answers. The power is in the students sharing their voices and being validated by adults and their peers.

- Give students specific and meaningful praise when working in groups and sharing their ideas.

- Step back and let your students take the wheel on this one.

- This list can be used many ways, so feel free to get creative with it.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Keys to Connection Checklist

❏ accepted   ❏ needed

❏ acknowledged   ❏ noticed

❏ admired   ❏ respected

❏ appreciated   ❏ safe

❏ approved of   ❏ supported

❏ believed in   ❏ treated fairly

❏ capable   ❏ trusted

❏ challenged   ❏ understood

❏ competent   ❏ useful

❏ confident   ❏ validated

❏ forgiven   ❏ valued

❏ heard   ❏ worthy

❏ helpful

❏ important

❏ included

❏ in control

❏ listened to

❏ loved