

Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D., and Steven E. Tobias, Psy.D.

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CONTENT LINK



BOOST Emotional INTELLIGENCE in Students

30
Flexible
Research-Based
Activities to Build EQ Skills
(Grades 5–9)

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Praise for **BOOST**
**Emotional Intelligence
in Students**

“Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students provides a wonderful resource for educators to integrate emotional intelligence skills into their classrooms. From identifying emotions to building resilience, the activities in this book can help students develop into healthy, happy, and productive citizens.”

—**Marc A. Brackett, Ph.D.**, director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and professor at the Yale Child Study Center

“All teachers and other school professionals working with students in grades 5 to 9 should read this valuable volume. For experienced educators, it offers a wealth of new strategies to promote emotional intelligence; for novices, it provides an excellent and highly practical introduction to the field. Elias and Tobias have done a masterful job of translating the EQ research into, in their words, ‘pragmatic, accessible, and flexible activities.’ I will be strongly recommending this book to all my colleagues.”


—**Paul LeBuffe**, vice president of research and development, Aperture Education

“Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students is exactly what schools need to support social-emotional growth in students. Drs. Elias and Tobias provide an easy-to-understand, step-by-step guide for schools to integrate social and emotional skills building into the classroom. As school psychologists, we understand the importance of building these skills for success in school and life. This book provides everything we need to begin the process.”

—**John Kelly, Ph.D.**, president, National Association of School Psychologists, 2017–2018

“Using evidence-based lessons, engaging activities, and community-building strategies, this resource provides a valuable tool for educators to build emotional intelligence in students—an essential goal of education in the 21st century. By supporting the development of emotional intelligence, this book helps teachers prepare their students for success in careers and in life.”

—**Andria Amador**, senior director, Behavioral Health Services, Boston Public Schools



“This is an excellent collection of engaging activities to enhance the social and emotional learning of middle school students. It is a valuable resource for educators, counselors, youth leaders, and mental health professionals who aspire to educate and inspire adolescents to become more knowledgeable, responsible, caring, and contributing members of their communities.”

—**Roger P. Weissberg, Ph.D.**, chief knowledge officer, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

“Many educators want to improve their students’ social and emotional intelligence, but don’t know how best to do so. Written by two distinguished psychologists, this wonderful book for teachers is practical, flexible, wise, and consistent with good pedagogical practice. Grounded in research on social-emotional learning and adolescent development, this book equips teachers with the basic knowledge they need to employ the lessons and tools effectively, along with exercises and language that should be attractive to their students.”

—**David Osher, Ph.D.**, vice president and AIR Institute Fellow, American Institutes for Research

“Grounded in their conviction that EQ should be at the center of teaching and learning, the authors of *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students* provide educators with thirty lessons for middle grade students. The powerful lessons on self-talk offer welcome guidance for building this lifelong skill, which strengthens resilience in students who need it most. The lessons on social roles invite students to consider the strengths they bring to their social identities, which are growing in importance and complexity during adolescence. Ultimately, all the lessons in this book promise to draw students into deeper self-awareness and closer reflection on their developing EQ skills. Definitely a key resource that educators will want on the shelf!”

—**Christa M. Tinari**, coauthor of *Create a Culture of Kindness in Middle School* and director of The Peaceful Schools Institute

“There exists an important need to translate academic research into classroom practice quickly and directly. This book answers that need by presenting key ideas and activities that teachers can try out with their students immediately. I wish more resources for teachers were created by people like Drs. Elias and Tobias. *Boost Emotional Intelligence in Students* could have an impact on the ongoing development and implementation of social-emotional learning.”

—**Roisin P. Corcoran, Ph.D.**, associate professor of education at UCD and coauthor of *Developing Emotionally Competent Teachers: Emotional Intelligence and Pre-Service Teacher Education*

BOOST Emotional INTELLIGENCE in Students

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Flexible
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by Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D., and Steven E. Tobias, Psy.D.



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Dedication

We dedicate this book to the hundreds of school psychologists, counselors, social workers, student assistance professionals, other student support staff, and teachers with whom we have worked over many decades. You have inspired us with your dedication, commitment, and love of children. We hope this book will help you as you continue to meet challenges, spread hope, and build skills and character.

Acknowledgments

Maurice thanks his family for understanding the time it takes to do the work that led to this book and for supporting him in doing so.

Steven thanks his granddaughter for being his inspiration to continue to work on improving the emotional and social well-being of future generations.

We both want to thank the editorial, design, and publicity teams at Free Spirit for their confidence in us, their attention to detail and style, and their ability to improve our message in so many ways.

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Foreword

by Norris M. Haynes, Ph.D.

Among my most cherished professional experiences are those during which I've collaborated with colleagues like Maurice Elias and Steven Tobias, who share my commitment to promoting and strengthening social and emotional skills in students and adults alike. Working at the Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab at Rutgers University—and specifically serving on the advisory committee for the Mastering Our Skills and Inspiring Character (MOSAIC) middle school project—has given me insight into how Maurice and Steven approach the valuable work of building students' emotional intelligence (EQ).

The authors' focus in this book on the social and emotional needs of students in grades 5 through 9, in particular, is important. These are years of intense change and growth. And the challenges and dilemmas faced by students this age are more difficult and complex than those faced by younger children. Along with experiencing many developmental changes, students face shifts in their relationships and interactions with adults, including parents, teachers, and others. Additionally, many middle school students express worry about issues including their social standing among peers, their family roles, their academic abilities, and more. Confusion or stress about personal identities and social acceptance become more prominent and can be intensified or complicated by social media platforms that provide access to huge amounts of information and nearly unlimited online social interaction. At the same time, students are in the process of critically examining and assessing who they are, what they need and want, why they make the choices they do, and where they hope to be in the years ahead. These dramatic changes require educators and other caring adults to support students' healthy social and emotional development and guide the self-reflective inquiries that these young people are engaged in—which can lead to mature levels of thinking and behaving. A practical and flexible way to implement this support and guidance is one of the many things this book provides.

One key foundation of this book is social-emotional learning (SEL). As defined by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the five core competencies of SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These five competencies are, in turn, grounded in two major dimensions of emotional intelligence: an internal dimension encompassing a student's capacity to recognize, monitor, manage, and express his or her feelings in healthy ways, and an external dimension concerned with the student's capacity to interact with peers and adults, including being aware of others' feelings and needs and responding appropriately. These skills and others—which young people in the 21st century need more than ever before—are defined, explored, and taught by the lessons in this book.

The benefits of this instruction in emotional intelligence are myriad. Strong social and emotional skills have been linked to improved behaviors and school outcomes, including decreases in school violence, dropout rates, disinterest, and underachievement. In addition, research clearly shows that students do better

academically when their social and emotional needs are intentionally and thoughtfully addressed as part of a school's curriculum, activities and culture. Similarly, students who experience overall school success tend to demonstrate higher levels of emotional intelligence than less successful peers. In other words, to be most effective in supporting students' academic, social, and emotional development, educators must teach and model strong life skills just as they do academic skills. As you'll see, this teaching and modeling can be implemented in a variety of ways and settings, including proactively promoting and strengthening positive attitudes and behaviors through developmental guidance lessons in classrooms, holding small-group meetings to build students' repertoire of adaptive and successful skill sets while enhancing their existing strengths, and working with individual students to address academic, social, and emotional challenges.

The authors also recognize the importance of a conducive and facilitative school climate. In tandem with implementing EQ and SEL instruction, educators, schools, and even districts can take concrete steps to create that climate, including:

- ▶ challenging young people to be the best they can be
- ▶ setting and maintaining high standards and expectations for social behavior as well as academic achievement
- ▶ establishing clear rules and standards for conduct
- ▶ increasing a sense of belonging—as well as the desire to learn—through engaging and meaningful learning activities inside and outside the classroom
- ▶ creating a positive, caring, responsive, and supportive school culture
- ▶ providing tutoring and guidance to enhance academic achievement
- ▶ making students aware of a variety of possibilities for successful futures
- ▶ supporting students' ongoing skill building in EQ and SEL with opportunities such as:
 - ▷ mentoring
 - ▷ cultural diversity and cultural awareness education
 - ▷ conflict resolution and peer mediation education
 - ▷ substance abuse and alcohol prevention education
 - ▷ individual and group counseling
- ▶ creating a plan to support and sustain these initiatives

Maurice Elias and Steven Tobias's careful analysis of and pragmatic approach to EQ instruction provide the tools teachers, counselors, school psychologists, social workers, and administrators need to build and enhance every student's social and emotional competencies, becoming what I call Social and Emotional Support Providers. And when educators at all levels work to give students this support, weaving the concepts of emotional intelligence into the fabric of every school day, results follow. Given the importance of this work—not just to test scores and classroom management, but also to the greater success and happiness of every student—I believe this book is required reading for today's and tomorrow's educators. I wish you success and inspiration in this essential endeavor.





Introduction

As an educator, you already understand the importance of emotional intelligence (also called EQ), and you are probably already teaching it, even if you may not be sure precisely how to define it. Whatever your role is at school—counselor, classroom teacher, mental health professional, nurse, recess monitor, aide, administrator, or anyone else responsible for students’ safety and well-being—you are likely teaching, facilitating, and modeling EQ skills like problem-solving and conflict resolution every day. You deal directly with students’ feelings, relationships, and problems, whether they are part of the curriculum or not. If you are a classroom teacher, you are not only teaching students academic content, but also fostering in them essential skills for handling emotions such as frustration, worry, and anger. And you know that kids learn better in a climate of positive relationships—between you and students and between students and their peers.

The purpose of this book is to give you the tools to make your EQ efforts more structured, intentional, and successful—as well as easier. Our experience over three decades has shown us that while teacher training colleges are increasingly aware of the importance of integrating emotional intelligence skills into instruction, many school practitioners are still looking for more hands-on resources. Our intention is to provide you with practical, realistic guidance that is supported by research and has been proven in practice, and we present an organized yet flexible approach to bringing emotional intelligence into the classroom.

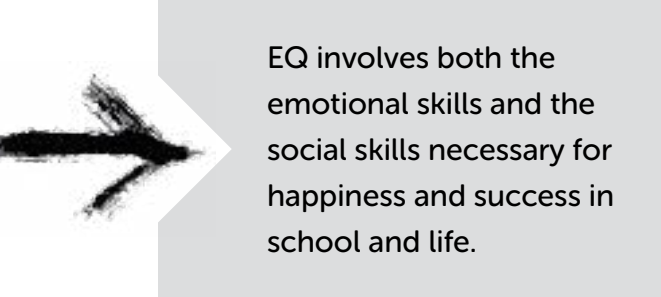
Of course, EQ skills come more naturally to some people than to others, just as academic, athletic, and artistic abilities do. And no matter how bright, social, or confident a student may be, there are always areas in which he or she can improve. EQ skills are like any other skill taught in school: There is always more to learn. *All* students can learn, strengthen, and expand their EQ abilities. Doing so will help them become more self-aware and self-reflective—characteristics that are especially important during the crucial, transitional, and often challenging years of grades 5 through 9.

What Is Emotional Intelligence and Why Should We Teach It?

Emotional intelligence can be concisely defined as:

EQ: The ability to manage one's feelings and interact positively with other people

This is the core of EQ. Yet emotional intelligence goes far beyond this snapshot. EQ involves both the emotional skills and the social skills necessary for happiness and success in school and life, and students who are not prepared with these skills will be at a serious disadvantage in their educational and career trajectories. High EQ is tied to a positive sense of self, as well as to the ability to have meaningful and rewarding relationships with others. Like its partner and complement IQ (which is primarily about a person's reasoning ability), EQ promotes academic achievement and helps students become more available for learning.¹ This is true for several



EQ involves both the emotional skills and the social skills necessary for happiness and success in school and life.

reasons. Strong feelings—especially those related to stress—can interfere with clear thinking, so students who are able to manage difficult emotions will therefore be better able to attend to the task at hand in challenging circumstances.

Additionally, emotional intelligence is more highly correlated with career success than are academic skills.² Most employers value responsible, hard-working employees who can handle stress,

communicate clearly and assertively, act with integrity, find creative solutions to problems, anticipate and manage challenges, resolve conflicts, and get along with coworkers. Every one of these skills is an aspect of emotional intelligence.

Or, as a report from the World Economic Forum put it:

A recent longitudinal analysis by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) across nine countries showed that having a balanced set of cognitive and social and emotional skills is crucial for children to better face the challenges of the 21st century; social and emotional skills in particular play an important role in improving children's chances of lifetime success.³

Also, as human beings, we are social creatures—and this is especially true of pre-adolescents and adolescents. For your students, positive relationships (especially those with their peers) provide emotional support and help them feel more secure about themselves and their world, which in turn can enable them to challenge themselves and grow. Furthermore, students who are good at solving social and emotional problems in keeping with their own values are likely to be more successful in all areas of life. This is what EQ is all about.

For all these reasons and more, we believe that teaching emotional intelligence is not optional or supplemental, but rather is an integral facet of education. The learning of these skills is a developmental right and an issue of social justice and equity. Preparing students for the world of their adulthood—a global community requiring sophisticated understanding of oneself as well as of other people and their motives, perspectives, capabilities, and desires—is one of our most critical jobs as educators. EQ can help.

Teaching emotional intelligence is not optional or supplemental, but rather an integral facet of education. The learning of these skills is a developmental right and an issue of social justice and equity. Preparing students for the world of their adulthood is one of our most critical jobs as educators.



What Are the Essential Skills of Emotional Intelligence?

If you've ever seen a newborn, you know that his or her first smile—usually at a parent—is a major milestone. That smile cements a bond between parent and child, and it's an early example of the importance of relationship skills in all areas of life. Nearly everything we do throughout our lives depends on our emotional intelligence, from maintaining healthy relationships to achieving our goals. So it's essential to understand the components that make up this essential human competency. EQ can be broken down into three main skill areas:

1. Self-awareness and self-management:
 - ▶ the ability to assess and know one's own emotions, values, and capabilities (both strengths and weaknesses)
 - ▶ the ability to cope with emotions and maintain self-control
 - ▶ the ability to persevere to achieve a goal
2. Social awareness and relationship skills:
 - ▶ the ability to understand others and empathize with an awareness of individual and group similarities and differences
 - ▶ the ability to communicate effectively, both perceiving others' messages and expressing oneself
 - ▶ the ability to work cooperatively with others
3. Responsible decision-making and problem-solving:
 - ▶ the ability to establish positive goals
 - ▶ the ability to implement effective behaviors to achieve those goals
 - ▶ the ability to resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively



SHOWING OTHERS THE EVIDENCE

Some people might challenge you on the need for EQ instruction, thinking that it's not worth instructional time or that it's little more than touchy-feely pop psychology. We've laid out the arguments and research showing the value of building emotional intelligence skills not only for students' social-emotional benefit, but also as an academic improvement strategy. But you may also find it useful to have at hand a quick, clear rationale to share with skeptics. Fortunately, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) maintains an ongoing and updated list of research and evidence related to EQ instruction at their website (casel.org). The following is a concise summary of findings across dozens of studies.⁴

Intentional, high-quality EQ instruction is linked to the following student gains:

- greater social-emotional skills
- improved attitudes toward self, others, and school
- increase in positive classroom behavior
- gains of 10 to 11 percentile points on standardized achievement tests

Teaching EQ skills is also tied to the following reduced risks for failure:

- fewer conduct problems
- reduction in aggressive behavior
- less emotional distress
- lower likelihood of substance abuse

Additionally, the evidence supporting EQ instruction is international, which indicates the importance of social-emotional competencies to all cultures and contexts. The World Economic Forum's report on social-emotional education states:

*To thrive in the 21st century, students need more than traditional academic learning. They must be adept at collaboration, communication, and problem-solving, which are some of the skills developed through social and emotional learning (SEL). Coupled with mastery of traditional skills, social and emotional proficiency will equip students to succeed in the swiftly evolving digital economy.*⁵

Further, in an important extended study of reasons why some students (particularly those from low-income environments) have relatively low college entry and graduation rates, researchers Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne M. Bouffard highlight failures to provide these students with opportunities to build their social-emotional competencies, especially their positive self-talk. Savitz-Romer and Bouffard label this shortcoming as one of the most neglected equity issues in our schools and society today, and they argue that this instruction is essential for giving all students a true chance at college, career, and life success.⁶

Although these skills might seem like common sense, as Voltaire observed (and as most of us have seen for ourselves at one time or another), “common sense is not so common.” And because these skills are so important for students’ development and for their futures, we don’t want to take teaching them for granted. We all know smart kids who make poor choices, kids with generous hearts who have trouble making friends, sensitive kids who can be hurtful to others, and kids with great potential who struggle to harness their abilities and direct them positively. These kids, and all our students, can benefit from further development of their EQ skills, which they will need when negotiating everyday challenges, large and small. Indeed, many of these skills may already be familiar to you from other contexts, such as drug abuse prevention and anti-bullying programs as well as character education curricula. The lessons in this book are compatible with and can complement many other forms of instruction that promote students’ social and emotional learning.

Nearly everything we do throughout our lives depends on our emotional intelligence, from maintaining healthy relationships to achieving our goals.



EQ Skills and the Adolescent Brain

The adolescent brain is notable for its advanced development in emotions without corresponding developmental advances in self-control.⁷ During adolescence, the limbic system—a primitive area deep inside the brain that humans share with all mammals—is developing faster than the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for judgment and self-control. The limbic system seeks stimulus, sometimes through risk-taking behaviors and other intense experiences, and is triggered by social and emotional stimuli.⁸ It can feel good to the teen brain to have the limbic system stimulated by things such as horror movies, sexual experiences, social media interactions, recognition from peers, sports and competition, drugs, music, gossip, parties, video games, or even just good friends. These experiences can provide quick and easy stimulation, but not all of them are safe. However, adolescents don’t always reflect on safety when they are seeking excitement.⁹ This failure to evaluate risk or consider consequences has nothing to do with cognitive ability. Middle school students are just as capable of understanding things as adults are. Nevertheless, their capability for thoughtful decision-making can be overshadowed or overridden by their intense responses to social relationships and feelings.

Another way to look at this idea is through a distinction drawn by psychologist Daniel Kahneman between what he calls two ways of thinking: System 1 and System 2 in our brains.¹⁰ System 1 (similar to the limbic system) responds quickly, is driven primarily by emotion and intuition, and is highly self-protective. System 2



HOW EQ INSTRUCTION SUPPORTS BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

In addition to its other benefits, EQ education is an important aspect of classroom management. Since EQ, by definition, is the ability to manage emotions, get along with others, and problem-solve effectively, students with strengths in emotional intelligence are less likely to be disruptive, struggle with self-regulation, or get into trouble. Therefore, teaching EQ skills is a proactive way to prevent behavior issues. Similarly, this book's EQ lessons are proactive because they help students work together, develop social skills, and establish relationships. The more connected students feel to their school and their peers, the less likely they are to engage in inappropriate or antisocial behavior.

EQ instruction also provides support for students who have already presented behavior challenges. A child cannot be punished into compliance. Simply telling students that they're doing something wrong is unlikely to motivate them to behave appropriately or help them understand what to do instead. Imagine that a student fails a test but rather than being retaught the material or otherwise supported, is just given a low grade with no additional guidance. We view inappropriate behavior in a similar way. It stems from deficits in skills or motivation, which can and must be addressed through supportive instruction. Once students have been taught the necessary skills, they can be prompted to use those skills in challenging situations.

Naturally, students with particularly challenging behaviors or disorders need more supportive instruction than their peers and more time to unlearn ineffective behaviors and learn helpful ones founded on EQ skills. The materials in this book can be adapted accordingly. Explanations may be given and reviewed again; activities can be repeated; role-play practice can be done again with an adult providing constructive feedback. Whatever classroom management looks like in your school, EQ can help.

(analogous to the neocortex) is more reflective and analytical and takes its time, but is inclined to trust the judgment of System 1 using the principle, "Better safe than sorry." For adolescents, the combination of these systems—and the louder voice of System 1—can be dangerous. Consider a scenario in which a group of kids leaving a party are about to get a ride home with someone who has been drinking. The adult version of "better safe than sorry" would be advising you to call for another ride. But the middle school version may be saying, "It's safer to take this ride than risk all kinds of teasing in school tomorrow." It takes strong EQ in the moment for young people to listen to System 2, which remembers that getting in a car with a driver who has been drinking is never a risk worth taking. Adolescence is filled with stressful changes, both personal and social, that evoke strong emotional reactions in kids. From a developmental standpoint, it is no surprise that feelings and peer

pressure can sometimes overrule what adolescents rationally know to be better perspectives and choices.

So, given these biological and developmental realities, you may ask yourself whether it's truly realistic to teach middle school students how to manage their emotions and use their best knowledge and judgment. Might it be more logical to wait for the prefrontal cortex to further develop, and hope for the best in the meantime?

In fact, this is the perfect time to teach kids emotional awareness and self-regulation. The brain is most malleable while it is growing and developing, which means that at this time in students' lives, we have not only an opportunity but an obligation to promote self-understanding, self-control, and good choices. Teaching adolescents to identify, name, and manage their feelings provides them with foundational skills for decision-making, problem-solving, and healthy interactions with others. The ability to cope with emotions—especially those that are challenging or complex—is an antidote to impulsive or reckless behavior and the key to a lifetime of strong and positive relationships.

“ It takes something more than intelligence to act intelligently. —FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY IN *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* ”

Other Developmental Considerations

As you work to build emotional intelligence skills in your students, you will likely run into challenges, many connected to the fact that middle school is a time of dramatic development and flux for students' independence and identities. At this stage of development, it is useful to keep in mind the following ideas and consider how to adapt your instruction accordingly.

Kids in middle school grades are beginning the work of differentiating and separating themselves from the adults they have known and are looking more to their peer group to help them define their identities, desires, and goals. As they go through this process, increased conflict with parents and teachers is normal. It is important that adults not take it personally when adolescents push them away and recognize that this friction usually stems from the child's growing need for independence and identity rather than from flaws in the relationship with the adult. And to navigate these conflicts with adults, young people need strong skills for coping with social and personal challenges.

Adolescents may also need help resolving conflicts with peers. Because their relationships and emotions tend to be intense, your students may find it more difficult to get along with others than in the past. They tend to have many minor fights and disputes with little awareness of the possible consequences. Teaching restorative strategies and assertive communication for conflict resolution will help



PREPARING FOR EMOTIONAL INTENSITY

Because these lessons deal directly with young people's problems, and because adolescents have a natural tendency to be somewhat dramatic, this work can be emotionally intense at times. Significant issues may come up, which can be uncomfortable for both the students and the group leader. As you're teaching emotional intelligence skills, it's important that you have backup: someone you can go to if a particularly challenging question or problem arises. We do not recommend that anyone implement EQ instruction in isolation. So find and partner with colleagues who can support you and with whom you can discuss what is going well, what could work better, and what you need help with.

If an issue does come up that you are not sure what to do with or how to handle, you can calmly but sensitively express empathy in the moment, and later speak to the student in private. You may also need to follow up with the larger group if something has come up that is upsetting to them. Depending on what issues have been discussed, you may need to follow up with someone else in the school or other authority.

kids manage these situations. When the need for discipline arises, it's helpful to think in terms of learning and corrective opportunities as opposed to punishment.

Students view their world with greater sophistication than when they were younger, and are able to be more aware of different perspectives, as well as being more aware of their own feelings. They are becoming more independent and complex in their thinking, while simultaneously becoming more susceptible to peer pressure. However, because their sense of self is not yet fully formed, they often feel acutely self-conscious and self-critical and may react to their uncertainties about themselves by being critical of others or rejecting them. Adolescents will also be inclined to frequently compare themselves to others, but must learn how to do this in a manner that allows them to accept themselves and others. EQ skills such as self-talk will help students achieve this balance and develop their individual sense of self. (For more information on self-talk, see Lessons 7 and 8.)

Adolescents are coping with rapid physical and hormonal changes, and with each passing year, they will be more aware of and interested in adult behaviors, including drug use, alcohol use, and sex. They will need to make healthy decisions for themselves regarding these behaviors within a context of social and familial values (many of which they will be questioning and evaluating). To do so, they need to develop their *own* values, as well as honing their skills in self-control. This presents a challenge for adults: How do we keep young people safe while also helping them become independent decision-makers? Keeping the lines of communication open no matter what happens is essential. Questionable decisions—even

risky or dangerous ones like experimenting with smoking or visiting inappropriate websites—are best greeted with open conversation and understanding, *along with* firm consequences. And if a student loses some of your trust, he or she must know that it's possible to regain that trust.

Students are increasingly being asked to set personal goals and consider how to achieve them. This helps prepare them for college and careers, where they'll have to manage their own time in goal-directed ways, but many students initially find these skills hard to master. They often need adults' support, guidance, and limits to achieve these skills.

Adolescents continue to require physical outlets. Their bodies and minds need physical exercise. They still need to go outside and play or at least to move around regularly. Yet aside from organized sports, many middle school students do not do this. Their academic and social activities are increasingly sedentary, but the adolescent brain benefits from physical activity, which provides stress relief and aids cognitive refocusing. Whenever possible, giving brief breaks in the middle of these lessons (or in any other class or meeting) will improve students' attention and learning.

Outlets for personal creativity are important. Students need to be able to develop a sense of self and express their individual identities. That's why extracurricular activities are so important in school. Sometimes nonacademic areas are students' greatest outlets for creativity. The EQ lessons in this book encourage creativity rather than rote learning. Students looking to establish their identities appreciate being given strategies more than scripts. Asking open-ended questions and giving your students the chance to explain their reasoning foster greater engagement in learning.

Adolescents accept rules better when they have had a voice in creating them. They need to feel heard and to have a sense of autonomy. In fact, students often surprise adults with the strictness of the rules they will recommend when these guidelines are developed collaboratively.

Kids are consistently testing the limits set for them by adults. This is not defiance, but normal testing to see if the limits will hold and if authority figures will enforce them. It's critical that you set clear and consistent limits and ensure that students are aware of them. When limits are inconsistent, kids are far more likely to act out with negative behaviors. Students who seem argumentative, for instance, are often pushing boundaries to see where they stand with you or other adults. Like many other interactions with kids this age, responding to this behavior requires a balance between making sure students feel heard and maintaining firm limits.

Membership and a sense of belonging in groups, especially groups of peers, are of paramount importance to adolescents. Being accepted by and belonging to a group affirms students' their individual identities and provides them with a much-needed sense of reassurance as they navigate these difficult years. This

is one reason that troubled young people are often drawn to peers who face similar challenges or circumstances. It is important to encourage students to join extracurricular groups and activities, such as sports teams, academic clubs, theater and other arts activities, or faith-based youth groups. These pursuits can eventually be good for students' college applications and job-seeking résumés, and are also good for their social and emotional development right now.

Friends are tremendously meaningful to kids during these years, as they are growing much more peer-oriented than family-oriented at this stage. As part of this development, kids often need to learn how to select their friends deliberately and carefully. They also may need guidance in understanding that friendships are recip-

rocal, not only about pleasing others nor only about what they personally get from these relationships. While it can be difficult for adults to influence an adolescent's friendships, it is not only appropriate but

“Feelings can't be ignored, no matter how unjust or ungrateful they seem.

—ANNE FRANK

important that caring adults offer their opinions. To help kids hear and consider these opinions, state them in the form of I-messages rather than you-messages—that is, say something like, “I'm concerned about the group of friends you are seeing,” as opposed to, “You have horrible friends.”

Kids are developing leadership skills as well as followership skills—learning how to take charge and also how to be a responsible and supportive member of a group. Adolescents have many opportunities to take leadership roles in formal and informal settings, including the group activities presented in these lessons. As students participate in these activities and discussions, be aware of group dynamics and intervene when necessary to reinforce active listening, respectful communication, and other social and emotional skills.

It's essential to make students your partners as you work on EQ skills. Fill them in; give them details. It is important that students understand not only what these skills are, but also why they are so important to learn. When adolescents feel respected, recognized, and trusted, they are far more likely to buy in to what they're learning.

How to Use This Book with Students

Now that we've discussed much of the *what* and the *why* of EQ instruction, we come to the *how*. We are realistic practitioners, and we recognize that you face many demands and constraints on your time, resources, and priorities. With that in mind, we've designed a sequence of 30-minute EQ lessons that can be implemented in a flexible manner. We've identified 15 key EQ skills, covered in a total of 30 group

lessons and activities in three modules, plus a follow-up lesson focusing on reflection and self-evaluation to use after the rest of the lessons have been completed. The lesson format is designed to fit implementation opportunities commonly available to classroom teachers, school counselors, youth leaders, and mental health professionals. If possible, we recommend that all faculty and staff at your school review the lessons to see which aspects may be relevant to their needs. However, lessons can easily and effectively be used by any individual working with students. Depending on the needs of your students and the time you're able to devote to these lessons, your implementation can be modified to fit almost any schedule or staffing scenario, whether that means using all the lessons, using one or two to target a single skill, setting aside a special instructional period several times a year, or integrating these lessons into an existing program on character education, social skills, bullying prevention, or drug abuse prevention. The more people who are implementing and reinforcing EQ skills, the more likely students will be to learn, practice, and retain them.

In the pages that follow, we've addressed the details of putting these lessons into action, including the lesson format and ideas for implementing EQ instruction in ways likely to connect with students. We also address challenges you may encounter, including the need to explain to others (such as administrators, colleagues, or parents) why you are taking valuable time to teach these EQ skills; the possibility that, especially at the beginning of an initiative like this, some students may be uncomfortable with or resistant to talking about feelings and problems; and questions you may have about your own EQ.

Finding the Time

As you prepare to begin EQ instruction, it's important to carefully assess what you can feasibly accomplish within the time you have available. The flexible nature of the lessons in this book will help you maximize your time. And whatever number of lessons you are able to conduct, the investment you make is sure to yield dividends, especially since developing these skills in students makes other aspects of education more efficient and effective. It is not an either/or proposition: Students need both academic *and* social-emotional skills to succeed.

Each of the 30 lessons in this book is designed to take approximately 30 minutes, but all may be condensed (or expanded) if necessary or desired. Find what works for your time, format, and group. For example, you may choose to limit discussion or to assign homework via email rather than in person as a time-saving strategy. In addition, some lessons include optional extensions that you may add if you have the time.

These skills and lessons build on one another and are organized in terms of developmental considerations and the relative importance of each skill. Ideally, the lessons would be taught sequentially as part of a systematic approach and would be held on a weekly basis throughout the school year. However, the structure of



PARENTS' ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Some stakeholders, from administrators to families, might be resistant to EQ instruction because they see it as being parents' responsibility to address feelings, goals, values, and other personal topics. We agree that this *is* parents' responsibility—but it is also *our* responsibility as educators. It is clear that these skills are more than important enough to merit attention from multiple caring adults. Furthermore, not all parents have the time, resources, knowledge, or desire to fully address kids' emotional intelligence, and not all kids have supportive parents or other family members in their lives. Meanwhile, your students are inundated with a variety of messages and values through both traditional and online media. And as we know, when students do not have these skills, it not only can be difficult for them to learn, but the school's climate and culture may suffer as well.

That said, parents are certainly important partners in this endeavor, and we urge you to inform families about your EQ goals and include them in this work. Some of the lessons' homework assignments involve students interacting with their families, and we hope that the activities are engaging enough to be topics of conversation at home, perhaps in answer to the proverbial parental question, "What did you do in school today?" You can also communicate directly with parents about the EQ lessons through email or other forms of communication. While you can write some of these emails, you might also consider recruiting students to write some, which serves as another way to reinforce what they're learning.

You may also want to consider hosting an at-school event for parents to review what you are working on in school and some of the skills being taught. We have spent many years working on complementary parent programs, and we would not have done so if we did not believe that having parents and schools work in collaboration has tremendous benefits for students. For more information on materials you can use in cooperation with parents, see the Recommended Resources on pages 173–174.

the modules and lessons is extremely flexible and can be adapted to your needs and resources. You may also find that a different sequence is most helpful to you. Feel free to start with the most pressing area of need if your time is limited, or start with and linger on some of the less challenging exercises, such as sharing circles or breathing exercises, if your students need more time or practice to get comfortable with these ideas.

Additionally, to optimize these lessons' benefits to students, depth is always more important than breadth. So, for example, if you have time for only two meetings with students, we'd recommend focusing on one skill and doing both of the lessons on it. Similarly, the greater your students' social and emotional needs, the more difficult it may be for them to learn these skills. If this is the case, it might be necessary to slow down the pace of instruction. Do not feel pressure to move on to a new skill until students have mastered the previous skills.

Also, on pages 167–168, we’ve provided a concluding self-evaluation piece to use after whichever lesson you’ve chosen to end with. Although it may seem supplemental, this exercise is a valuable step. When you hold this self-evaluation meeting, rather than assigning formal homework, we recommend setting up a time in the coming days or weeks to hold follow-up conversations with students, ideally one-on-one. On pages 169–170, you’ll find a questionnaire you can use during this check-in to see how students are doing with implementing EQ skills. This meeting is a great way to help students feel supported as they continue the work of strengthening their emotional intelligence.

Even if you have an open-ended time frame, we strongly urge you to develop a clearly defined plan and schedule so you can focus on the skills you most want to cover and also plan for follow-up and generalization beyond the scope of the lessons. As mentioned earlier, this instruction is compatible with drug abuse prevention programs, anti-bullying curricula, character development lessons, and social skills education. To further maximize your time and efficiency, you might want to integrate some of the lessons into existing programs at your school.

Consider the following examples of how you might implement EQ instruction to fit your context and needs:

A 16- or 31-week program with the same group of students. Full instruction of the book’s 30 lessons and the self-evaluation lesson (either once a week or perhaps once every other week) is the ideal scenario, allowing for the most comprehensive and systematic skill building. This approach would typically be carried out by classroom teachers or counselors in regular, inclusive, or special education settings.

Pull-out lessons for groups of students. This type of instruction would probably be conducted by school counselors or other mental health professionals, or by after-school program providers, and might last for 6 to 12 meetings (though it could include more). For example, many schools have lunchtime programs for social skill development, and EQ lessons could provide the curriculum for meetings like these. This approach might focus on specific skills prioritized at your school or on students in particular need of these skills.

A periodic push-in lesson to provide targeted skill building. This type of instruction would typically be done by school counselors or other school mental health professionals in cooperation with classroom teachers and would likely involve six or fewer visits to a class over the course of a school year (but again, could include more visits if possible or desired). This approach prioritizes students’ needs and focuses on specific skills in order to have as much of a cumulative effect as possible. It is an alternative to coming into classrooms or assemblies and speaking on a one-time basis about topics like bullying, substance use, and respect. Instead, it provides follow-up and reinforcement for the ideas and skills being taught, which over time will lead to greater impact and retention.

A single lesson taught by anyone at any time. While this approach is naturally not equivalent to a more comprehensive effort, it can be extremely useful when you need or want to focus on developing a specific skill, such as self-control or assertive communication. For example, individual school personnel may wish to focus on specific skills related to their roles within the school. Physical education teachers and recess monitors might want to teach and reinforce self-control via breathing exercises (Module 1, Lesson 9: “Breathing Your Way to Self-Control”). Classroom aides may want to prompt students to communicate more clearly (Module 2, Lesson 13: “Learning to Be Your BEST as a Communicator”). Administrators and others responsible for discipline will want to be familiar with the lessons on responsible decision-making and problem-solving (Module 3) to help students develop coping strategies for situations that challenge them or tend to get them in trouble.

SAMPLE TIME FRAMES AND LESSONS

Time Available	Lessons to Implement
Full school year	Modules 1, 2, and 3, plus the self-evaluation lesson
21 or more meetings	Modules 1 and 2 or Modules 1 and 3, plus the self-evaluation lesson
11 meetings	Module 1, Module 2, or Module 3, or Skills 1, 3, 5, 7, and 11, plus the self-evaluation lesson
6 meetings	1 lesson for each skill of a module, as well as the concluding lesson of that module, or Skills 1, 2, and 3 (Module 1)
1 meeting	Individual lesson as needed in a specific situation

As you can see, pragmatism, flexibility, and adaptability are key considerations. An approach that is tailored to your individual requirements, setting, resources, and circumstances is most likely to be effective. So it is worth taking the time to think ahead and evaluate what students need as well as what you are able to consistently provide. This forethought will help you maximize your EQ instruction.

How to Form Groups

Depending on your role at school, you may or may not have the option of deciding how to form the groups you provide EQ instruction to or what your schedule may be. Take heart: We stand by the philosophy that no matter whom you’re working with on EQ instruction, and no matter how frequent or intense that work is, you *will* be making a positive impact. If you are able to choose your group (or groups), a few guidelines follow.

Regarding group size, we recommend no fewer than five or six students. When groups are smaller than this, it may be challenging to carry out productive and

varied peer practice and small-group work within the lesson. On the other end, we suggest capping group membership at 25 to 30 students. Larger groups can limit student participation and experiential learning, and those students who do participate most are often those who have already mastered good communication skills.

In terms of group membership, the ideal scenario is a preexisting but nonhomogeneous group, such as an entire class or a variety of students drawn from the same class. There are several reasons for this:

- ▶ It is helpful to bring together students with different EQ strengths and challenges. This allows them to learn from one another.
- ▶ It can be difficult, at first, for students to transfer these skills from one group to another, so learning them with peers in their own class gives them the best opportunity to use the skills outside of the lessons themselves. Then, when using the skills with their EQ classmates has become more comfortable, students will be better able to use these skills in broader social circles.
- ▶ Having a preexisting group also provides a certain amount of trust and familiarity that can be helpful when students are learning new or challenging information.

However your group comes together, all students will benefit from participating and learning these skills.

No matter whom you're working with on EQ instruction, and no matter how frequent or intense that work is, you *will* be making a positive impact.



Lesson Format and Materials

You need very little in terms of materials to conduct these lessons. In general, the activities require no more than the following:

- ▶ A group of chairs or desks, ideally set up in a circle formation.
- ▶ A board or other surface on which to take notes if needed.
- ▶ Copies of reproducible handouts from the book. These handouts can be copied or printed and given to students, or distributed in their digital form. To download student handouts, see the directions on page 178.
- ▶ Student EQ journals. These journals are an important tool. Students will use them in many lessons during the reflection step and for homework assignments. While journals may be kept on computers, tablets, or online, we recommend using old-fashioned physical notebooks or binders with loose-leaf paper. Students may then also use these binders to store any handouts.

Additionally, evidence shows that writing by hand can help connect us more deeply to our emotions and that handwritten information is also more likely to be retained.¹¹ However, you can also leave this choice up to students and allow them to do whatever is most feasible and comfortable for them. For example, if students have difficulty writing by hand, they could type or dictate their journal entries. **Note:** Let students know that you will ensure security and confidentiality of their EQ journals whenever possible. However, also be honest with them about the fact that if you read anything of concern in a journal, it may be necessary for you to break that student's confidentiality for the sake of his or her safety. If red-flag issues arise (such as self-harm, harm to others, physical or sexual abuse, neglect, drug use, or suicidal thoughts), follow school or district policies on mandatory reporting.

The lessons in this book have been designed to be engaging without being preachy or threatening to students, and each one follows a clear and uniform format consisting of five main parts: review, sharing circle, skill introduction, reflection, and homework. Having a consistent structure to the lessons helps students settle in and focus faster. This format also sets the stage for skill transfer and application, providing reinforcement and preparing students to use these skills beyond the classroom. Practice and repetition are crucial to this process, as are connections between these lessons and students' everyday lives and issues. Making these connections early and

WHO SHOULD LEAD EQ-BUILDING LESSONS?

A question we often hear from educators is who should provide EQ instruction. As we've said, almost anyone in the school could implement at least part of the plan for EQ education. Emotional intelligence skills are complex and require repetition and reinforcement, so if you're a classroom teacher, you're in an ideal position to conduct these lessons and then ensure generalization of the skills by prompting students to use them outside of the lessons themselves. You might also be a co-teacher of these lessons with other staff members.

If you're a school counselor, you are also a natural fit for providing guidance to small or large groups of students. The same is true of school psychologists, social workers, behavior specialists, and other school support professionals. EQ instruction fits into school mental health as well as into academic skill development. It is curricular in nature and focuses on gradually and progressively building skills necessary for navigating school and society.

Regardless of how you choose to implement EQ lessons, remember that collaboration is key. Every member of the school community—and beyond—has a role to play in supporting students as they learn, practice, and live these valuable skills.

often will build motivation for true learning and retention. Read on to find more detailed information about each of the lesson segments.

Preparation: Some lessons include a preparation section to let you know what you'll need to prepare before the lesson begins.

1. Review: This opening step gives you the chance to refresh students' memories of the skills introduced in the previous lesson (or lessons) and to review any homework given. (See page 19.) Checking in on homework—even if it was relatively informal—lets students know that these skills are important and that you will hold them accountable for EQ assignments, just as you would for any other classwork. When reviewing skills previously taught, you are reinforcing those skills, as well as giving students a chance to ask for clarification or elaboration on anything they did not understand or have more questions about. Again, strive to be patient. The long-term goal is for students to learn to use these skills in their lives, not to simply complete a curriculum. So we encourage you to spend as much time on repetition and reinforcement as necessary, rather than being tempted to rush on to the next skill.

2. Sharing Circle: Introduce the new lesson with a sharing circle. Pose a question—either general or specific to the lesson topic—and have each student answer it. (For a list of possible questions beyond those specified in lessons, see page 35.) You can either ask this question yourself or choose a student to do so. When a student asks the question, he or she is also working on leadership skills such as modeling good communication, facilitating group interaction, and reinforcing group rules.

Depending on your group's comfort level, you may want to use the sharing circle as a warm-up exercise focused on developing trust and basic communication skills like turn-taking, listening, and talking to a group. In this case, the question might be a nonthreatening icebreaker, such as, "What is your favorite song?" If your group has been together longer and is more at ease, the question can also be used to review a skill previously taught or to introduce a new skill, such as, "What is an academic goal you have this week?" Or, the question may be used to broach more open-ended discussion of feelings, such as, "What is something you worry about?"

One question many leaders have is whether students should be allowed to pass rather than answer the question. On the one hand, students who are inclined to pass are sometimes those who could benefit most from participating. On the other hand, it's important that students feel comfortable and do not see these lessons as threatening or as something to avoid. One solution is to start with questions that are low in emotional intensity (such as birth date, favorite food, number of siblings, favorite sports team or player, or favorite movie) until all students seem comfortable speaking in the group. (You may also discover that no question is completely benign for every student; a student with food allergies might never eat ice cream but not want to say why, or a student who doesn't like sports might feel awkward being honest about

this. Try to be aware of such hesitation or discomfort and validate the experiences of all students by sharing anecdotes, empathy, or understanding.)

One strategy that facilitates listening in the sharing circle is, after all members have answered, to ask specific students what other students have said. For example, “Tommy, what did Alice say was her favorite movie? Alice, what was Tommy’s?” Often, students tend to focus only on what they are saying themselves. Knowing they may be asked about what someone else said can help them remember to actually listen to their peers. Consistent use of sharing circle activities reinforces many of the crucial EQ communication and listening skills.

3. Skill Introduction: Introduce the new skill or topic with a clear explanation of why it is important and how it will benefit students. Students need to see how a skill is relevant to them and their lives. Often, students do not connect with what they are learning when it is abstract or when the benefits are distant or long term. However,

EQ skills are immediately useful, and when students see and understand this clearly, they respond positively and are more engaged. For these reasons, we suggest beginning each skill introduction section by asking students when they might benefit from having the lesson’s key skill. For example, “When would it be useful for you to be able to

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Knowing that our feelings are natural and normal for all of us can make it easier for us to share them with one another.

—FRED ROGERS
”

listen carefully and accurately?” The reasons students identify for themselves will be far more powerful than any we adults might present, though we should also support and expand on their comments when relevant with ideas that we especially want them to grasp. Only when students understand *why* a skill is important for them will they buy into it.

To further aid in this process, give students concrete examples of the skill in action. Use discussion, modeling, role playing, small-group work, and other experiential exercises to reinforce the skill. The more hands-on the learning, the better students will process and generalize it. And while students naturally have different learning styles, *all* students can benefit from this type of instruction. In fact, students who most need EQ skills are often those who respond best to this kind of real-world and hands-on learning.

Extension: At the end of the skill introduction section, some lessons also include an extension that provides an opportunity for additional exploration or reinforcement of the focus skill, if your schedule allows it.

4. Reflection: Invite students to reflect on what they’ve learned and how they can practice the skill in the future. This reflection can be a verbal discussion or a written exercise such as journaling. It is a way for students to focus on something they took away from the lesson and consider how they can act on this new knowledge. Over

time, reflection builds a habit of thoughtfulness. Reflection and focused thought are antidotes to impulsivity, lack of emotional regulation, peer pressure, and poor decision-making. The more carefully and intentionally students consider what they are learning, the more likely they are to use these skills when they need to. Every teacher has been frustrated by a student who knows what to do but can't seem to call on that knowledge at a crucial moment. This is why students need to reflect—and reflect some more—until these skills become automatic, personal, and accessible.

The long-term goal is for students to learn to use these skills in their lives, not to simply complete a curriculum.



5. Homework: Assign any homework related to the skill. Some of this homework may be in the form of handouts or other assignments to complete. Or it may be more informal. For example, you might ask students to be on the lookout for certain relevant behaviors or situations in the time between lessons and to be prepared to give examples next time. These examples could come from students' own lives, or they might be drawn from the news, books, or other sources. Each lesson in the book includes suggested homework, but you may choose to adapt these suggestions or replace them with ideas that are a good fit for your group. This homework has two primary goals: to help students become aware of times they can use the skills being taught and to help them report on their attempts and get feedback and support for doing so.

Twelve Tools and Strategies for Leading EQ Lessons

The following strategies are helpful for building students' skills in any area, but especially in emotional intelligence. They will help students not only understand the value of the EQ skills you are teaching, but also feel capable of using the skills in their lives outside of your time together.

- 1. Greet students individually** and by name when they enter the room or after you enter the room. This simple gesture helps students feel welcomed, recognized, and appreciated from the beginning.
- 2. Model EQ skills** yourself, especially self-awareness and self-control, empathy, and effective communication. Showing students how to use ideas from the lessons is more effective than telling them. For example, you may struggle to build self-control in students if you're quick to snap or scold when you're feeling stressed by the very real pressures of your job. Learning to put aside external difficulties to focus on the task at hand is one definition of self-control.
- 3. Begin with a clear and concrete explanation** of each skill's relevance to students' daily realities at school and beyond. Students need to see how new information relates to their lives, so when introducing a skill, ask them to share

when and how it could be effective in situations they face. Don't hesitate to show how the skill is important in your life, too. Again, showing students the real-life applications and benefits of these skills is critical to helping them generalize and use what they're learning.

For instance, when deciding how to help students study for a test, you could brainstorm several options out loud, as well as reflecting on your own experience. You might say something like: "We need to review for the test coming up. I could give you a study guide and let you study on your own, but I know that might be difficult for some of you. I know that when I was taking my licensing exam, I

YOUR EQ SKILLS

As you prepare to teach EQ skills to students, it can be helpful to learn more about your own EQ profile. We all have strengths and weaknesses, and how closely your EQ profile matches those of your students can make a difference to your instruction. You may find that you have the most difficulty working with students who have different strengths and challenges from yours. Being aware of these patterns can help you bridge the divide and make these lessons productive for everyone.

For example, a group leader who is strong in goal setting and planning is likely to present lesson objectives and material in a clear, logical way. Some students appreciate this and feel more secure and confident when they know exactly what is expected of them and are guided through it in a step-by-step manner. However, other students, such as those who face challenges with emotional regulation, may require a more empathy-based approach. They may need to talk and feel heard before they are truly able to listen to others. Group leaders with strengths in goal setting and planning may find this inefficient and frustrating. However, it's unlikely that students will adapt to the leader's style, and this in turn can result in these students interrupting or zoning out—which in the long run is even less efficient and more frustrating.

Fortunately, when you know yourself and your own EQ profile and instructional habits, you are better able to adapt your teaching style and content presentation to the needs of your students. Sometimes you may not immediately realize that there is a mismatch of some kind. But we have found that when we have that feeling that something is not "clicking," it's usually the product of a disconnect between our EQ strengths and those of our students. When that happens, it's time to take a step back and consider how to be more creative, flexible, and inclusive in your approach. If possible, you may also find it helpful to partner with a coleader who has a different teaching style.

To find out more about your EQ profile, take a look at the "Group Leader EQ Survey" on pages 40–41. Taking this self-assessment before beginning your EQ instruction—and perhaps refreshing your memory of it from time to time—will help you be more aware of your EQ skills and how to best reach all students.

didn't find study guides helpful. I found it better to study with others. What ways of studying have worked well for you in the past, both on your own and with others? We can use your ideas to agree on a review strategy." This example models the use of brainstorming, as well as anticipating outcomes (Module 3: Skills 13 and 14).

Two skills that you can often model together when talking with students are: developing and using a feelings vocabulary (Module 1: Skill 3) and expressing empathy (Module 2: Skill 10). Feelings are abstract concepts that can be difficult to talk about. Especially when you are beginning these lessons, some students may not feel confident about expressing their feelings clearly, eloquently, or even accurately. Often when you ask students how they feel, they respond with an explanation of what happened rather than

actually describing their emotional reactions. ("Aidan, how do you feel about what happened?" "Tomas cut in line in front of me, so I pushed him.") Sometimes you'll be able to infer the underlying feeling based on nonverbal cues and other information.

When this is the case, you can express empathy using a specific feeling word to help students feel heard and also to help them associate their feelings with the correct vocabulary. ("Aidan, I understand that you didn't like it when Tomas cut in line, and it seems like you were unhappy. How did you feel when it happened? How were you feeling afterward?") Additionally, students typically benefit more when you *suggest* how they might be feeling, as opposed to *telling* them how they are feeling. For example, if a student is having trouble doing math problems, you might say, "I know I feel very frustrated when I work on problems over and over again and can't find the answers. Is that how you're feeling?"

4. Establish group rules with students' input. Have everyone formally agree to these standards, and agree in advance on what will happen if group rules are consistently violated. Whenever possible, phrase each rule in the positive. For example, instead of saying, "Don't interrupt," you could say, "Allow others to speak without interruption." Other rules might include:

- ▶ Respect what others have to say.
- ▶ Make only positive comments toward others.
- ▶ Keep what is said in the group in the group. (**Note:** This is a common group rule, and one that helps students feel more comfortable opening up. However, absolute confidentiality cannot be assured.)

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Teenagers are learning from us even while they're rebelling against us. . . . We can't transmit our values by words alone; we have to inspire them through our behavior. We, ourselves, are the model we present to our teenagers.

—DOROTHY LAW NOLTE AND RACHEL HARRIS

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- ▶ Allow others to complete their thoughts at their own pace when they are speaking. Wait your turn and indicate that you would like to speak in the designated way. (With your group, establish a way for students to let you know when they want to make a contribution or comment.)
- ▶ Use I-messages when talking about your feelings.
- ▶ Be honest to yourself and group members.
- ▶ If something is bothering you that is difficult to share with the group, you can tell the group leader in private.

Again, as with students' EQ journals, it is important to reinforce the key ideas of trust, respect, and privacy within the group while also making it clear that if a student's safety is at stake, the group leader may need to break confidentiality. Additionally, as you know, middle schoolers tend to enjoy drama and talking about

others, and it will sometimes require a lot of self-control and judgment on their part *not* to relay information shared within the group to someone outside the group. Help students anticipate this challenge and how they will deal with it. And when students do say something in the

“ We are not what other people say we are. We are who we know ourselves to be.

—LAVERNE COX

group that is a safety concern or a violation of others' privacy or confidentiality, quickly label it as such by saying something like, “This is the kind of topic that we discuss privately and not in the group.” Follow up by informing the student that you will talk with him or her as soon as possible. For example, you could say, “After the group is over, please stay and I will follow up with you. I will give you a pass for your next class.”

5. Regularly offer genuine praise for specific social-emotional behaviors.

For example, “You are doing a great job making eye contact and staying focused on those who are speaking.” Try to avoid praise that is generic (such as, “You are so smart”) or unearned. Studies show that nonspecific and unearned praise actually *decreases* motivation in students.¹²

6. Use experiential learning and exercises, such as role plays, having students as co-teachers, making posters, and so on, whenever possible. The more actively engaged students are in learning, the more likely they are to use these skills in their lives.

7. Ask questions and more questions. Vary your questions to include open-ended prompts (“What do you think would be the best way to respond to teasing?”) and questions that offer choices (“When you are teased, is it better to ignore it, respond assertively, or tease back? Why?”). Sometimes with kids this age, you might notice an inverse relationship between adults' talking and students' listening. In other words, the

more the adult talks, the less the students listen. Fortunately, the more the students talk, the more they listen to one another. Asking questions that spark discussion and sharing helps keep the focus on students and engage them with the material.

8. Paraphrase what students say in a reflection back to them. This helps them feel heard and also gives you an opportunity to clarify their statements. Additionally, it's a great way to reinforce and highlight certain things they're saying that you especially want the group to hear and learn. For example, students often have difficulty expressing feelings directly. If you ask how a student felt in a challenging situation and he or she responds with something like, "That guy was being stupid," you might paraphrase this by saying, "It sounds like you were angry and your feelings were really hurt." Or, if a student complains that the group is boring, you can paraphrase back that you understand how difficult some of these skills are and that some of the things you talk about can make people uncomfortable. The strategy here is to use "x-ray hearing" to hear and respond to what may lie just below the surface of a student's statement.

9. Lay strong foundations for the transfer of learning from these lessons to other real-life situations. Many students will not grasp these skills and ideas the first time: Some will understand them but not retain them; some will grasp and remember them, but still not use them; and some may simply not feel motivated to understand *or* use the skills. However, as we have stated, emotional intelligence is crucial to happiness and success in life, and, ultimately, all students need to learn these skills and apply them in everyday interactions. This generalization requires consistent guided practice so students are thinking of the skills often, and are being prompted to use them in relevant situations. As time goes on, this process will happen more naturally, since once young people see the benefits of these skills, they will be more motivated to use them often. We can get to this point using three main techniques: *review*, *repetition*, and *reminders*.

- ▶ **Review** the immediately prior activities for all students—those who were present, those who were absent, and those who were there in body only. This form of review is standard educational practice and like the review you would do in any academic subject. Before moving on to new learning, you want to make sure that students have mastered earlier material. It is often particularly helpful to ask students who were present to do the review for those who missed the prior lesson. This is also a good way for you to judge whether the message of that lesson got through. You can then adjust your instructional focus accordingly before proceeding to the day's new ideas.
- ▶ **Repetition** helps students learn how to flexibly apply each skill in many circumstances. Be specific: Don't expect students to automatically realize that they can use what they learn in many different situations. Discuss

this explicitly. Even though students may have learned and remembered a skill, the more they use it, and hear how others use it, the more *they* will actually use it. Too often we may assume that once a skill has been taught, it is fully learned. In our experience, repetition and reinforcement are necessary for generalization.

- ▶ **Reminders** are used *before* a skill is needed. This type of practice is important, because until the skills become automatic, students have to make a conscious effort to use them. You can provide these reminders in many ways, including the following.
 - ▷ Develop a specific *vocabulary* for the skills that are being taught. Because it's so important to prepare students to apply their EQ skills beyond your meetings together, many of the skills have specific vocabulary terms associated with them, such as *values*, *self-talk*, and *trigger situations*. This vocabulary is a set of common terms referring to these skills. Within the context of this book's lessons, we mean something very specific when we talk about self-control, I-messages, or ESP. By using a clear shared vocabulary for the EQ skills you are teaching, your school reinforces and supports those skills as a community.
 - ▷ Use *visible reminders* of the skills. These might be in the form of student-made posters explaining or defining certain skills, such as positive self-talk (pages 65–68), BEST communication skills (pages 94–97), or the ESP process (pages 121–122). The posters could be displayed in classrooms, guidance offices, the main office, hallways, and elsewhere. Call students' attention to these visuals when the skills are about to be relevant, such as when students exhibit frustration, voice negative self-talk, or don't seem to be communicating or listening effectively in a competitive situation. Visual reminders are best placed not only in the setting where your group lessons take place, but also in settings where you want students to remember to use the skills, such as classrooms, hallways, the gym, or the bus. Also, try to *anticipate* upcoming opportunities—such as big tests or performances—to use new skills, and remind students in advance that EQ skills can help them in these situations. Additionally, you can refer to these reminders while discussing times EQ skills would have been useful but were not implemented and considering how these situations might have gone better if the skills *had* been used. Other tangible or visible reminders might include notes taped to desks, reminder apps, and phone alarms to help students reflect on whether they are using a particular skill at the moment, or other cues that remind students to stop and think rationally about how to handle a situation. You can also help students make associations between challenging situations and specific skills. For example, when playing sports, they can use breathing exercises. When

doing homework, they can listen for negative self-talk and change it to positive. When disagreeing with parents about rules or responsibilities, they can use their BEST communication skills. You know your group best, so feel free to develop your own ways of reinforcing key concepts and skills and prompting students to practice them.

- ▷ Provide *prompts*, both verbal and nonverbal, reminding students to use skills by connecting them to curriculum content in all areas, including special subjects and school routines. If your school and EQ approach allow for it, this prompting is especially effective when it comes from school adults who are *not* part of implementing the EQ lessons. For example, in physical education classes, teachers might prompt students to use the self-calming strategies they learned in your groups or to engage in positive self-talk. Similarly, whenever students are working in groups in any academic class, teachers can remind them to maintain awareness of their trigger situations and remind them to use their BEST communication skills.

“ Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge. —AUDRE LORDE ”

- ▷ Have students give *testimonials* in sharing circles (see pages 17–18) describing times they used EQ skills or times they could have used EQ skills, had they remembered to do so, to improve a situation.
- ▷ Offer consistent *reinforcement and acknowledgment*. This is especially important because adolescents are highly attuned to appreciation, from both adults and peers. So be alert to students who are “living” the skills they’re learning, and help colleagues and parents also notice and recognize students’ efforts in this area. Specific praise for a specific behavior (“I can tell that you used your active listening skills in that argument”) rather than a broad comment (“Great job”) is the most effective form of appreciation. A good prompt can be to ask, as part of reviewing a prior lesson, “Who saw someone in the group using [skill X] over the past few weeks?” That sets the stage for acknowledgment and subsequent reinforcement. Also be on the lookout for times when an *inappropriate* behavior or response might easily occur but does *not* happen (such as when a student is frustrated but doesn’t blow up), and praise the act of self-control or appropriate expression of emotion. You can also send home emails with positive feedback on a student’s progress or behavior or implement a school system of giving out character certificates and awards. Even a few positive comments or other forms of recognition can decrease negative behaviors.

10. Use natural or logical consequences for discipline when possible. Most of the time, natural and logical consequences are part of how the world operates. If you put things away where they belong, you don't lose them. If you touch a hot stove, you get burnt. If you speak kindly and respectfully to others, they are more likely to listen to you. As you conduct these lessons and discuss the challenges kids may be facing, gently guide them to consider what the natural or logical consequences of their actions and behaviors might be. For example, if they cooperate to get through a lesson efficiently, they may have more free time. On the other hand, if they disrupt a class, they may need to be removed from the room. They might face disciplinary action—and they'll *still* have to do the classwork later. When pointing out a natural or logical consequence, the manner of delivery is crucial. Try to use a matter-of-fact tone. If the tone is critical or blaming, students are more likely to become defensive and *less* likely to learn from mistakes.

This goal of helping students consider consequences is aided by having clear group rules and consensus on the consequences if these rules are broken. Avoid

MEASURING YOUR PROGRESS

As of this writing, there is no commonly accepted, practical way for schools to assess students' EQ. Measures do exist, but they are rarely coordinated with the specific skills that school personnel are trying to build. So while it's possible to assess EQ and social-emotional learning in a general way using tools such as the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory or the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), we recommend another approach—less formal, but more focused and direct. Virtually every skill covered in this book's lessons can be assessed by asking these questions:

- When and how do I see the student having trouble with this skill?
- What would it look like if he or she strengthened this skill?
- How has the student improved at using this skill?

By asking these questions before, during, and after EQ instruction and recording your observations, you can assess how well these lessons are working, which students need more support, and what kinds of EQ goals can help students achieve greater success at school and beyond. We find that this type of student-focused data gathering and monitoring is more meaningful than broader EQ assessment and will better enable you to plan and adjust instruction and intervention. You can also use the "Student EQ: Group Leader Assessment" form on pages 38–39 as an assessment tool by completing it before and after conducting the EQ lessons you've planned.

For more information on assessment options, see *The Other Side of the Report Card: Assessing Students' Social, Emotional, and Character Development*, which provides guidelines and examples for creating reliable and developmentally appropriate rating systems for specific social-emotional and EQ skills, as well as character attributes.¹⁴

punishment that seems arbitrary or overly severe, which tends to erode morale and foster rebellion.¹³ And if *you* find yourself speaking harshly to students or otherwise acting inconsistently with the group rules, don't let pride keep you from apologizing. By being open and honest about how stress and frustration can get the best of us—any of us—you will help your students forgive themselves for their mistakes and understand that no one is perfect.

11. Be patient. New skills take a long time and lots of practice to master, and social skills are no exception. That's why we recommend focusing more intensively on fewer skills if you have a short time. Covering many skills superficially will not help students achieve mastery. Even if you have only a handful of opportunities a year to work on these skills, don't be discouraged. Pick a skill or two to focus on and stick with it. Your patience and persistence will pay off.

12. Have fun! If there aren't a few smiles during the lesson, you may want to take another look at what you are doing and how you are doing it. Research makes it clear that people are more likely to use what they learn when they enjoy the learning process.¹⁵ And since the ultimate goal of these lessons is for students to use these EQ skills outside the classroom, fun is more than a perk—it's a basic instructional principle. This doesn't mean you need to try to compete with the latest video game or blockbuster movie. You know your students, and you'll be able to tell if they've enjoyed a lesson. Use your observations as feedback as you continue to craft and refine your EQ instruction. And remember that just as you must be patient with your students as they learn these skills, it's only fair to be patient with yourself as well. As you get more comfortable with EQ instruction and enjoy the lessons more, so will your students.

We wish you all the best as you engage in this important work with students. We'd love to hear from you about what worked well and also what challenges or obstacles you encountered. Please feel free to reach out to us in care of our publisher at help4kids@freespirit.com.

Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D., and Steven E. Tobias, Psy.D.





Group Lessons and Activities

As discussed in the introduction, we strongly recommend that you use these lessons in order if possible, even if you won't have time to conduct all 30. But wherever you begin, it's helpful to cover a few overarching ideas in the first lesson you conduct with your group. One of the key messages to convey is the main purpose of the group, which is to learn important social and emotional skills necessary for success and happiness in life. You might ask if students have been in classes or groups like this before, and if so, what they have learned from them. However, many students may not have had experience with this type of material, so to help them feel comfortable and prepared, you might find it valuable to share some examples of the kind of skills they will learn together, such as how to identify their feelings, how thoughts affect feelings and behavior, and how to solve problems related to their relationships with others.

You can also explain that each lesson will begin with a sharing circle in which someone will ask a question, and all members of the group will have the opportunity to answer it. In your first few meetings, you'll probably be the one to ask questions of the group. However, you can let students know that, as time goes on, they may also get the chance to ask questions and lead the sharing circle. Remind students that it is important for them to listen to others' answers. When allowing students to help lead the group, make sure all participants get a chance to lead if they want to, rather than letting the most assertive individuals dominate. The student leader can either think of a question or use one from the "Sharing Circle Questions" list on page 35. Remember to make sure that the student leader prompts other students to be respectful, wait their turn, and stay on topic. Leading the sharing circle promotes leadership skills in all students.

The first lesson is also the time to discuss the schedule or timeline for these lessons, to ensure that every participant has an EQ journal (see page 16) and will bring it to every lesson, and to establish the rules for your group (see pages 21–22). It's a good idea to put these rules in writing so they can be displayed and reviewed whenever you meet. Let students know that you will assign homework as part of these lessons and that you expect them to complete it thoughtfully, just as they would for any academic class.

Above all, help students understand that you will be doing important work together, and that you will all be supporting one another as you learn valuable skills.

MODULE 1

Self-Awareness and Self-Management

self-awareness: knowledge of how you are feeling in various situations and the ability to accurately label those feelings

self-management: having a strategy and techniques to deal with a range of strong feelings (positive and negative) in the moment

self-control: a subskill of self-management focused on the ability to recognize an impulse and control the urge to act immediately and without reflection, usually in response to a provocation (real or perceived) or change

This module focuses on helping students gain knowledge of who they are and who they want to be. Many students in grades 5 to 9 are becoming more self-aware. They have a growing sense of themselves as individuals, and this self-awareness enables them to reflect on and discuss their thoughts and feelings in greater detail and with a more precise emotional vocabulary. This is the first step to self-management—exercising control over thoughts and feelings. But this same increase in awareness also can lead to feelings of insecurity and negative self-talk. Adolescents are drawn to peers as they begin to separate from their parents and establish their identities as individuals. At the same time, they must reflect inwardly on their own feelings and needs, resist peer pressure, and identify their true personal values, along with doing a great deal of other emotional work, much of it challenging. And while students' cognitive abilities to think abstractly and reflect on themselves increase at this time in their lives, so does the intensity of their emotions. These powerful forces of thought and feeling can collide and confuse. The lessons in this module can help students navigate this difficult but important process by increasing their understanding of themselves: their strengths, values, feelings, and thoughts.

The five skills surveyed in the following lessons are:

Skill 1: Knowing Your EQ Strengths and Challenges

Skill 2: Understanding Your Values and Being Your Best Self

Skill 3: Thinking and Talking About Feelings

Skill 4: Recognizing Negative Self-Talk and Practicing Positive Self-Talk

Skill 5: Achieving and Maintaining Self-Control

Skill 1

Knowing Your EQ Strengths and Challenges

EQ: a set of skills that help you manage your feelings and interact positively with other people

feelings: emotions, sensations, or internal states that affect your behavior

thoughts: internal dialogue or conversation with yourself that can be conscious or unconscious, verbal or nonverbal

values: principles or beliefs that you try to live by

As educators, part of our role is to help students become confident and resilient individuals. But we can only do so much. We can teach them skills and tools, but they must put the skills into action. True belief in oneself and the ability to persist to overcome obstacles in life come from accurate self-evaluation and concrete experiences of challenge, failure, and success. The following lessons encourage this kind of objective and truthful self-knowledge and teach skills to confront challenges and persevere.

Lesson 1

Survey of EQ Skills

This lesson focuses on introducing key social and emotional skills and helping students identify where their emotional strengths are, as well as what skills they might want or need to work on. To begin this process, students will complete the “EQ Quiz for Students” (pages 36–37), which will help them assess their own awareness of these skills. As the leader, you can also use the “Student EQ: Group Leader Assessment” (pages 38–39) to evaluate your view of your students’ social-emotional strengths and needs. (See the form for additional information about when and how to use it.) Both of these forms can be used again at the end of the planned lessons to evaluate and reflect on the progress students have made in building their EQ skills.

Preparation: Before meeting, make copies of the “EQ Quiz for Students” (pages 36–37). If you plan to use the “Student EQ: Group Leader Assessment” (pages 38–39) at this point, or if you’ve already filled out one for each student, you may also want to bring these forms to this lesson for your use.

1. Review

Flexible implementation is key to this approach to EQ instruction, so if this is not your first lesson with students, you can begin by reviewing any previous lessons, concepts, or homework. Keep in mind important concepts you want to reinforce or areas your students may not have mastered. Although these lessons are not cumulative, it’s best not to move on to a new skill until the previous one has been mastered. Doing fewer lessons more intensely will maximize the benefits to students.

If this *is* your first lesson, you can start with some basic definitions of skills you will be working on. You can list several words or concepts and have students guess what they mean. The goal is not to develop precise definitions, but to have students start thinking about these ideas. The definitions on page 32 are some examples of what you might say if students get stuck.

2. Sharing Circle

If this is your first meeting with students, you may want to use a gentle icebreaker here, such as, **“What do you like to do outside of school?”** or, **“If you could be any animal, what would you want to be and why?”** (For a list of other suggested sharing circle questions, see page 35.) If you like, you can also pose a question that might guide students toward thinking about EQ skills, such as, **“If your friends were asked to describe you in one word, what would it be?”**

3. Skill Introduction

Hand out the “EQ Quiz for Students.” Explain that this is not a graded quiz. Instead, it’s a good way for students to understand what you will be working on together. It’s also a chance for students to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses in these areas. After students have taken the quiz, ask them to talk in pairs or groups of three about skills they feel they’ve already mastered, and to give examples of times when they use these skills during the school day or outside of school.

After students have had a few minutes to talk in pairs or small groups, reconvene the larger group and discuss situations when the EQ skills from the quiz are important or useful. If your time allows, go through the quiz and discuss each point or choose a few to highlight.

Collect the quizzes and save them for use in Lesson 2, as well as for evaluation and comparison after you administer the quiz again once you’ve conducted all your planned EQ lessons.

4. Reflection

Have students discuss what they think about some of these skills and how they feel about learning them in the lessons you’ll be doing together. Invite them to share any concerns—or hopes—they might have about this process and subject matter.

If time permits, ask students to write in their EQ journals about what they learned about themselves by taking the quiz.

5. Homework

Ask students to notice, in the days following this lesson, when they are using some of the skills they discussed during the lesson. Have them write about these experiences in their EQ journals. They may also observe times when they could have handled a situation differently by putting an EQ skill into action.

Also, ask students to identify one skill they want to work on improving and write about why they chose this particular skill. For additional reinforcement, you might want to pair up students and have them point out to each other when they are using some of the skills during times they are together throughout the school day.

Sharing Circle Questions

While each lesson in this book has one or more suggested sharing circle questions tied to the lesson's focus, you may sometimes want to go in a different direction or expand your sharing circle time with an additional icebreaker question. You can use the following list of ideas for these supplemental questions.

- What do you like to do after school?
- What is something interesting you did yesterday?
- What is an event you have planned for the future?
- What would you like to do or be when you finish school?
- What is your favorite subject in school?
- If you could change one thing about school, what would it be?
- What is your favorite _____?
pizza topping place song movie
ice cream flavor sports team book TV show
color game to play animal place to visit
- Who is your favorite _____?
musician athlete actor artist
- If you could be anyone now or in history, who would you be and why?
- If you could be an animal, what animal would you be and why?
- Where do you like to go to relax?
- Who is someone you admire as a role model?
- When are times you feel _____?
angry disappointed excited calm
sad upset joyful content
annoyed stressed hopeful
frustrated happy proud
- What qualities do you look for in a friend?
- What trait in others do you have trouble accepting or find annoying?
- What is one thing you like a lot about yourself?
- What is an ability you have that you are proud of? (This ability could be academic, athletic, artistic, social, or personal.)
- What country or other place that you've never been would you like to visit? Why?
- If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
- What character from a story (in a book, TV show, movie, graphic novel, or other format) do you really identify with? What character do you *not* like?
- If you could witness any event from the past, what event would you choose?