

THE IMPERATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

By April Gonzalez and Tim Matheny

"They watch us all the time. The students, that is. They listen to us, sometimes. They learn from all that watching and listening."

From [The Students are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract](#)
by Theodore Sizer and Nancy Faust Sizer

These words, profound when written more than twenty years ago, echo even more powerfully today in a vastly different context. Now more than ever, our students are watching us and listening to us for how we react to the current situation of COVID-19. Through us, they have an opportunity to learn social and emotional skills that will empower them for the rest of their lives.

COVID-19 has urgently required educators to develop and create ways for students to learn at home. This has prompted creativity and innovation in teaching our children. While it's important that we develop opportunities for sound academic learning, we have to acknowledge and affirm the challenging circumstances in which learning is taking place for both educators and students. Many are experiencing family stress, separation from family and friends, lack of routine, and fears about health and safety, especially for family members who are first responders or health care professionals. More than ever, **these challenging times reinforce the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL)**. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) [defines SEL as](#) "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the **knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.**"

Now is the time to ask ourselves, are we modeling the knowledge and skills of socially and emotionally capable adults? Do we exhibit hope? Are we managing stress and maintaining motivation? Are we demonstrating empathy? Are the children watching us as we cooperate and support each other? Do they hear and see us problem-solving and reflecting as learners? Do they see us willing to adapt, reflect, and meet their needs?

In this advisory, we are pleased to share suggestions and resources that we hope will foster growth in essential social and emotional knowledge and skills – for both ourselves and our children – which are so critical during this time.



The [Spire Leadership Group](#) is an education-focused consulting firm based in Philadelphia. Spire Leadership is led by founder and president Tim Matheny, who previously served as a high school principal, the New Jersey Department of Education's Chief Intervention Officer, and the founding Executive Director of the Philadelphia Academy of School Leaders. Spire's team includes Consulting Associate April Gonzalez, a veteran principal, assistant principal, and curriculum supervisor. For more information on Spire Leadership, please email Tim (tim@spireleadershipgroup.com), call 732-309-2296 or visit spireleadershipgroup.com.



The [Spire Leadership Group](#) is sharing COVID-19 bulletins for K-12 educators throughout the coronavirus pandemic. If this advisory was forwarded to you, and you wish to receive it in your inbox, **please email the word "SUBSCRIBE"** to tim@spireleadershipgroup.com.

This document is intended to provide resources to school, district, and charter network leaders regarding the COVID-19 outbreak. For authoritative information on COVID-19, consult information from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), your state health department, and your school physician.

Social and Emotional Learning Resources during COVID-19

- [CASEL](#)
- [Panorama Education](#)
- [Inside SEL](#)
- [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence's RULER Program](#)
- Also see articles by SEL experts [Maurice Elias](#) and [Christina Cipriano and Marc Brackett](#)

We are sharing these as resources. Inclusion on this list does not entail any commercial endorsements.

TWO SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Character Week: Identify five character traits that are important to you and your children or students. Celebrate one trait each day of the week. (For example, Monday, honesty; Tuesday, kindness; Wednesday, responsibility; Thursday, generosity; Friday, perseverance.) Together, define the trait of the day. Have students celebrate the day and trait by

- (Early elementary) Drawing what the trait might look like in action.
- (Older elementary and middle school): Listing some actions that a young person could do to live out the trait and share ideas with classmates. Students could create a short skit.
- (High School) Researching and writing a short essay or poem about a person – real or fictional – who exemplifies the trait.

Problem-Solving: Encourage students to take a problem-solving approach to a current challenge we face: how communities can help older adults cope with social isolation during the pandemic. Ask students to brainstorm ideas. Some possibilities that might be suggested:

- Early elementary: Make drawings of happiness-filled scenes and write simple notes of encouragement to older adults.
- Older Elementary and Middle School: Write notes to older adults about activities they're doing with their families and what they're learning about.

These notes could be mailed to nursing homes, assisted-living facilities, and rehabilitation centers.

COPING WELL DURING COVID-19

By employing social and emotional knowledge and skills

- Take time to reflect on your feelings and notice what you are feeling.
- Exercise, meditate, do breathing exercises or practice mindfulness.
- Take time to do something each day that brings you joy, like staying connected and sharing positive messages with others.
- Stay informed, but don't let media exposure overwhelm you.
- Eat well and rest well. Know when you need to take a break.
- Make clear-headed decisions by knowing when you need a minute to think, or need to "phone a friend."

For more ideas, see [5 Strategies for Teacher Self-Care](#) by Jon Harper, an assistant principal in Cambridge, MA.

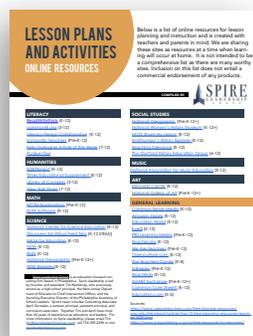
SPIRE LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

The Spire Leadership Group is publishing free resources for parents, teachers and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Follow the links to our most recent resource documents:



[Supporting Children During COVID-19:](#)

This document lists a variety of websites with resources for providing support for the social and emotional well-being of children.



[Lesson Plans and Activities Online](#)

Resources: This document provides a list of websites with learning activities and lesson plans that can be useful to teachers and parents.