The Science and Practice of Social and Emotional Learning in Preschools and Schools: A Closer Look

Stephanie M. Jones
Ready At Five Symposium -- WORKSHOP
May 17, 2018
**Agenda**

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<td><strong>Introductions &amp; Background</strong></td>
<td>» Motivation for our work</td>
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<td>» Four trends in recent science of SEL</td>
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<td>» Recap on SEL skills and development</td>
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<td>10 mins</td>
<td><strong>Reflection</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SEL in the Classroom</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The Context of SEL</strong></td>
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<td>» The science of stress, the brain, and behavior</td>
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Motivation for our work.
Four trends in recent science of SEL.
Recap on SEL skills and development.

INTRODUCTIONS & BACKGROUND (20 MINS)
Our Motivation

• Large (growing!) SES disparities in school readiness & school success.

• Some success reducing gaps through early education and home visiting programs – though not sustained.

• Chasms between infant-toddler care – early childhood care and education – elementary education.

• Need to go beyond literacy instruction... growing literature on impact of high-quality supports for social-emotional development.
Our Goal...Success for All Children: The First 10 Years

Build a sequence of high-quality “nurturing environments” using accessible, logical platforms to:

- Mitigate toxic stress,
- Promote prosocial behavior,
- Support self-control
Our Work: A New Approach

- A developmental (sequenced) intervention strategy that bridges transitions across ages/systems
- In existing platforms
- Builds on evidence-based interventions
- Includes opportunities for integration
  - Language/Literacy plus SEL with *Executive Function & Regulation* as core processes
- Supports adults (parents, teachers, school staff, etc.)
- Targets children at risk
Recent science → new understanding of specific brain-based and biologically-based mechanisms for responding to stress, dealing with difficult emotions, and establishing long-term patterns of healthy behavior and effective learning styles (such as relationship building as well as attention/memory processes)

Neuroscience research on executive functioning (prefrontal cortex function)

Relationship between PFC function and stress response, emotion regulation, attention

Pathway for coping (with typical and toxic stress) in childhood
Four Trends in the Science of SEL

1) Social-emotional skills provide the foundation for learning, behavior, and health
   - Toxic stress and neurobiological research

2) Executive function and self-regulation are central to SEL, and vice-versa
   - Neuroscience and intervention research

3) Key strategies and best practices are emerging
   - “common denominators” of evidence-based SEL programs

4) Adults and relationships are the main vehicle for social-emotional development
   - Emphasis on teachers and families/dual-generation
Social-Emotional Supports for Learning

- Focus thinking
- Understand and deal with feelings
- Build positive relationships
- Manage behavior
Why Social-Emotional Learning?

• Social and emotional skills are universal and developmental.
  – They are essential to the tasks facing children in preschool and school settings.

• Effective instruction reaches its limits when children face substantial social and emotional problems.
  – Addressing SEL could enhance the effect of an academic intervention.
  – Programs that intentionally target both are likely to maximize positive outcomes.

• Does SEL programming work?
  **YES**: Social-emotional skills=.57; Academic outcomes=.27
  (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011)
Defining S-E Skills Can be a Challenge

• **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) examples:**
  – Emotion knowledge, emotion vocabulary
  – Conflict resolution, cooperation
  – Empathy

• **Approaches To Learning (ATL) examples:**
  – Filtering (ignoring distractions), attentiveness
  – Flexible problem-solving, initiative and curiosity
  – Understanding of and compliance with classroom rules

• **Executive Function (EF) examples:**
  – Inhibitory control, working memory, attention control/shifting
  – Cognitive control
  – Self-control, self-discipline, delay of gratification
  – Self-regulation, behavior regulation
An Organizing Framework for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

- **Cognitive Domain**: setting goals, planning & organizing, memory, attention, flexibility
- **Emotional Domain**: identifying & expressing emotions, regulating emotions & behavior, empathy & perspective-taking
- **Social Domain**: understanding social cues, resolving conflict effectively, cooperation & teamwork

(Jones & Bailey, 2012)
Cognitive Domain

Regulation

Emotional Domain

Social Domain

Management and modulation of...
- Thoughts
- Feelings
- Attention
- Behavior/Interactions

...in service of goal directed activities
S-E Skills in Concrete Terms

- **Cognitive Regulation/Executive Function**
  
  improve children’s ability focus, pay attention, and use memory for planning and problem solving

- **Emotional Competencies**
  
  help children understand & manage their emotions (e.g., frustration, anger, fear) so that emotions do not inhibit learning

- **Interpersonal Skills/Social Competencies**
  
  enable children to interact positively with teachers and peers, facilitating supportive and cooperative learning environments, and minimizing adult & child distractions related to social interaction
SEL skills emerge and change over time

EMERGE FIRST and GROW SIGNIFICANTLY – provide foundation for cognitive, emotion and social skills and behavior; continue to grow throughout childhood and adolescence.

1
- Cognitive Domain
  - Cognitive Flexibility
  - Response Inhibition
  - Attention Control
  - Working Memory

2
- Emotion Domain
  - Emotion & Behavior Management
  - Emotion Knowledge & Expression

3
- Social Domain
  - Basic Social Engagement
  - Pro-social & Cooperation
  - Conflict Resolution

EMERGE NEXT – these skills build upon earlier skills as children get better at using them in new ways; increasingly used to support academic and social goals.

- Planning, Organizing, Setting Goals
- Empathy & Perspective-Taking
- Understanding Social Cues

(Jones & Bailey, 2012)
REFLECTION 1
(10 MINS)
Core principles with examples of specific strategies.
Integrating SEL into everyday interactions and instruction.

SEL SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM
(25 MINS)
Social and emotional skills **grow and change**.

Strategies and approaches that are characteristic of effective interventions:

- Short and targeted activities
- Multiple opportunities to practice
- Progressively more difficult/demanding
- Supportive, encouraging environment
- Embedded in social interactions and relationships
What are common, effective STRATEGIES?
SEL is Experience-Based Learning

– Modeling and Exposure
  • Adults and peers who model the language and skills, across environments

– Teaching
  • Children’s literature and discussions
  • Skill-based activities and games
  • Puppet dialogues

– Opportunities to Practice
  • Prepared role-play
  • Real-world experiences as they arise – key context for learning and applying SEL skills

– Discussion
  • There is a language of SEL in and across the setting
What are Routines?

- Anything that happens many times
- An event (recurring incident) or a time of day (component of schedule)
- A way of doing something
  - Greeting/ Arrival
  - Morning Meeting
  - Transition to centers, bathroom, recess, or math block
  - Lining up to wash hands, get lunch, etc.
  - Walking in hallways
  - End of Day/ Departure
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brain Game:</th>
<th>Silly Stories!</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Cognitive Regulation Skill:</td>
<td>Stop and Think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td>To stop and think to perform the correct action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions:</td>
<td>Before playing this game, see the SECURe appendix for sample silly stories. Use these samples as a guide for writing more silly stories. The teacher explains to the students that he/she is going to read a story. Every time the students hear a certain word in the story, they are to perform a different action than the word they hear. For example, the teacher might say that every time the students hear the word cough in the story, they are to pretend to sneeze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Challenging Variations:</td>
<td>- Increase the number of words with substitute actions. - Read the story more rapidly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing Questions:</td>
<td>What helped you be good at this game? How could you get better?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Doing the Opposite”

• Requires that children remember the rule – what they are supposed to do when they heard the cue word

• Requires that children pay attention to the important cue word or relevant information; ignore other (misleading) information

• Requires that children use self-control to inhibit the automatic or dominant response
Other Routine Strategies

• Signals to remind children when they need to draw upon specific “Brain Powers” (EF skills)
  
  – Stop and Think Signal
  – Focus Signal
  – Remember Signal
  – Flip Your Thinking Signal

• Allow teachers to support children’s classroom behavior without interrupting instruction
What are Structures?

- Anything in the room or place that supports you and children
- Reminders, tools, and specific techniques
  - Daily Schedule Board
  - Visual mediators, pictures and posters
  - Physical mediators, manipulatives
  - Technique for dealing with something: for example, classroom way of handling conflicts between peers
SECURRe Feelings Tree

- Build emotions-related vocabulary
- Feelings “word wall”
- Feelings Faces -- picture cards for happy, sad, mad, scared, and more complex feelings (i.e., jealousy, embarrassment, disappointment)
- Identify what different kinds of feelings look like
- Give children the language to talk about about their feelings
SECURe Thinking Spot

Classroom supports for physiological regulation and relaxation:

• Squeeze toy
  – Give your brain a big squeeze

• Feather
  – Practice taking deep breaths
  – Blow the feather as far as you can!

• Timer
  – Stay for two minutes
  – Then return to classroom activities
Other Cool Down Strategies:

• Feelings Journals
  • Draw a picture
  • Write a story

• Deep breathing
  • Pretend to be the wind
  • Blow out 10 candles

• Stop and Stay Cool Steps
  • Give yourself a Chilly Hug
  • Breathe, count to 5
Tools for Solving Conflicts

Taking Turns Bag (PreK-1)
- Flip A Coin – who goes first
- Timer – length of turn
- Talk and Listen partner strips

SECURe Conflict Solvers (K-3)
- Apologize
- Take turns
- Get help
- Compromise
- Laugh it off
- Fix the problem
- Find something else to do
What is SEL Talk / Why SEL Language?

- Emotions-related language (identifying & expressing feelings)
- Social interaction-related language (talking about relationships, conflicts, etc.)
  - Adults draw children’s attention to important information in the environment – use language to build children’s awareness of and ways of thinking about SEL issues (feelings of self and others, ways of handling conflicts, managing attention and exerting self-control, etc.)
- For example, use “Think Aloud” strategy
Discussion about SEL Ideas and Concepts

• Using books and story time to:
  – Talk about characters’ thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires
  – Talk about characters’ behavior and why (motivation, antecedents and consequences, and intent of behavior)
  – Build academic language, engage children in rich, relevant discussions, supports joint-regulation and question asking
“I Messages”

• Communication strategy for managing big feelings, difficult situations, or escalating conflict

• Use “I Messages” to:
  – Help child identify and label emotions
  – Acknowledge your own feelings
  – Tell how you feel, and why (what happened)

\[I \text{ feel } \underline{\text{___________}} \text{ because } \underline{\text{______}}.\]

(Me siento...) (...porqué...)
“I Messages” and Say It Back

• Use “Say It Back” to:
  – Show that you are listening
  – Show empathy and understanding
  – Acknowledge other person’s feelings
  – Practice taking turns

I Message: I feel ____ because ...
Say It Back: You feel ____ because ...

  – Then offer a compromise or problem-solve together
“Think Aloud”

• Strategy for managing thinking, behavior and interactions with others

• Use “Think Aloud” to:
  – Notice and describe what you see (w/out judgement or anger)
  – Describe what you think, say, or do in similar situations
    • How do you think about these situations?
    • What do you tell yourself?

➢ Share your successful strategies!

Adults often use strategies without realizing it
Telling children what we do when faced with a similar challenge can help them learn how to be successful
“Think Aloud” Examples

When I feel angry at another person, I tell myself to take 5 slow, deep breaths before I say anything.

I can see it is hard to be quiet during church. When I need to sit still for a long time, I sing a favorite song silently in my head, or I doodle on a piece of paper.

Sometimes I have trouble remembering. I make a list and cross things off as I finish.

When I have to do something I don’t like, I pretend it’s a game or remind myself of the fun things I’ll get to do when I’m done.
SEL can be implemented:

• In structured “SEL-specific” time
  – Classroom Lessons and Activities
  – Playground, Gym and Lunchroom
  – Home
  – Afterschool

• In spontaneous interactions with others
  – When conflicts arise
  – When kids get mad, frustrated, upset
  – When kids make YOU feel mad, frustrated
  – When kids are struggling with behavior
SEL skills are learned by watching what other people (adults, teacher) do and say. Gradually, over time, children learn these skills for themselves. Moments of freedom are ESSENTIAL, but with teachers ready to support.

**Other-Regulation (adult direction and support):**
- Adult helps you to calm down when frustrated
- Adult helps you to identify how you are feeling
- Adult helps to manage conflicts

**Self-Regulation (child direction and independence):**
- Opportunities to practice with a caring adult
- Opportunities to see an adult using in-the-moment
- Opportunities to practice with peer and on own

**PRACTICE with SUPPORT**
Try & Make Mistakes!
REFLECTION & PLANNING (20 MINS)
Integrating SEL into the Everyday: Interactions & Instruction

• Community Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECURe Strategy</th>
<th>What does it look like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Council</td>
<td>Class Council is a weekly, classroom-wide meeting designed to address issues that commonly arise in group settings (such as name-calling, interrupting, or not following rules). Although this meeting is intended to be flexible and classroom-driven, it typically follows the same format each time: reviewing previous goals, raising classroom concerns, brainstorming solutions, setting new goals, and celebrating progress.</td>
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Jones, Brion-Meisels & Bailey (2017); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
Daily Routines and Structures

• Brain Games

- Focus
- Remember
- Stop and Think

Daily Routines and Structures

Jones, Brion-Meisels & Bailey (2017); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
# Activities and Lessons

- **Conflict Solvers**

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<tr>
<td>Conflict Solvers</td>
<td>Conflict Solvers provide students with possible actions they can take to prevent conflicts from happening or keep conflicts from escalating. Students learn about each conflict solver and practice using it through role-play and other simulations. Conflict Solvers include apologizing, taking turns, asking for help, and talking it out. These are a key part of the Peace Path process.</td>
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Targeted Scaffolding

• Cool Down Strategies

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<th>SECURE Strategy</th>
<th>What does it look like?</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cool Down Strategies</td>
<td>Teachers create a toolbox of Cool Down strategies in their classroom (for example, a feather for deep breathing, squeeze toys, paper for drawing). Students can opt to use a Cool Down strategy when they feel themselves beginning to lose control of their feelings. Over time, students will become more independent in their ability to manage feelings.</td>
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Jones, Brion-Meisels & Bailey (2017); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
Settings as ecosystems.
The science of stress, the brain, and behavior.

THE CONTEXT OF SEL (25 MINS)
Children develop social and emotional skills in interaction with their environment.

There are multiple contexts in which SEL develops.
Ecosystem:
A community of living organisms in conjunction with the nonliving components of their environment (things like air, water and mineral soil), interacting as a system.
Environmental Stress

Every environment has moments of stress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive stress</th>
<th>Tolerable stress</th>
<th>Toxic stress</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is a normal part of healthy development.</td>
<td>is more severe but the effects can be managed.</td>
<td>is strong, prolonged stress and can disrupt brain development, and increase risk of disease and cognitive impairment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It leads to brief increases in heart rate and mild elevations in stress hormone levels.

It leads to serious but temporary stress responses buffered by supportive relationships.

Research from the Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University
Toxic Stress

When individuals face frequent, high levels of stress, we often refer to this as toxic. **Toxic stress typically results from:**

... a deeply distressing or disturbing experience

... an accumulation of distressing or disturbing experiences over time.

Research from the Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University
Toxic Stress and Trauma

Frequent experiences with toxic stress effect our brain structure and function in ways that can challenge learning, including making it more difficult to remember, pay attention, self-regulate, plan and organize our thoughts.

Jones, Brion-Meisels & Bailey (2017); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
Toxic Stress, Trauma, and the Brain

Prefrontal Cortex:
• Decision or “Control Center” of the brain ... slow thinking
• Planning, goal setting, inhibiting impulses (executive functions)

Amygdala and limbic structures:
• Reactive center of the brain
• Arousal, fear, anxiety, anger, motivation, aggression
• Fast thinking

Brain regions are closely linked via “Stress Response System”

Jones, Brion-­‐Meisels & Bailey (2017); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
Toxic Stress, Trauma, and the Brain

All human beings face high levels of stress at some moments in their lives; all of us experience this stress response system.

BUT, frequent experiences with toxic stress can make it harder to access and use the control center (to deploy or develop EF). When this occurs, we are more likely to respond to situations with heightened reactivity or to withdraw altogether.
The bottom line...

- It’s not about deficits... **stress impedes the deployment of executive functioning, self-regulation, and s-e skills.**

- **It is harder to use what you know,** to plan and monitor, and to access your better judgment **under conditions of complex trauma and stress.** This true for everyone.

- **School(s) and places can reinforce trauma,** or create new experiences of **stress,** when they do not provide opportunities to feel safe, valued, or cared for.

- **School(s) and places can heal trauma** and respond to **stress** when they provide opportunities for...
Children who live in contexts where there is persistent, toxic stress often struggle with social-emotional skills including self-regulation, emotion management and communication/interpersonal skills.

The adults that live and work with these children also experience persistent stress.

Jones, Brion-Meisels & Bailey (2017); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
The Context of Social-Emotional Learning

Child stress

Child behavior

Adult response to behavior

Adult stress

Jones, Brion-Meisels & Bailey (2017); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
Challenging classroom context makes it difficult for teachers to model self-regulatory strategies.

Students begin getting off task/misbehaving.

Potentially punitive response from teacher.

Increased misbehavior, increased teacher upset.

Decreased student learning and increased negativity in student-teacher relationships.

**How Can We Reverse This Cycle?**

- Provide strategies and opportunities for teachers to model and teach effective self-regulation.
Adult Self-Regulation

What is adult self-regulation?
The ability to manage stress and challenging situations in positive and productive ways

Classroom and School Context

- Unpredictable interactions
- Emotions run high
- Challenging student behaviors
- Little time for breaks

Jones, Bailey, & Partee (2015); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
Adult Self-Regulation is Central

Teachers draw upon and model self-regulation strategies → Positive relationships, Effective classroom management → Classroom climate supports learning and positive behavior

Jones, Bailey, & Partee (2015); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate

(Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)
De-Escalating Adult Stress

- Everybody faces stress, everybody has a stressed self.

- When we understand the brain and body response to stress, we are better able to see when it is happening.

- Recognizing our own signs of stress in-the-moment helps us to put the “control center” back in control.

- Then, we can make good decisions and think carefully about the best plan of action.
From *Stressed Self* to *Best Self*

**My “Stressed Self”**
- Reactive
  - Emotions-driven
  - Impulsive
  - Punitive
  - Inconsistent

**My “Best Self”**
- Responsive
  - Goal-oriented
  - Reflective
  - Supportive
  - Consistent

Jones, Bailey, & Partee (2015); Harvard Graduate School of Education; Do not circulate
PRESSURE POINTS & PLANNING (20 MINS)
Pressure Point Activity 1

Consider the activities that happen every day, which involve students. For example: transitioning into the classroom, morning meeting, lunch, recess, transitioning back to class after recess, getting ready to go home, etc. **Map them here:**

Looking over this list, what are the most difficult times of the day – the **pressure points**? Mark them with a star.
Pressure Point Activity 2

Consider the activities that happen every day, which involve students. For example: transitioning into the classroom, morning meeting, lunch, recess, transitioning back to class after recess, getting ready to go home, etc. **Map them here:**

Looking over this list, what are the most difficult times of the day— the **pressure points**? Mark them with a star.

**Pick 1 Pressure Point.** Think about what happens during that moment and answer the following questions.

**What are you thinking?**
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

**How do you act?**
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

**How do you feel?**
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
Describing a Pressure Point

Pick 1 Pressure Point and imagine you are describing this event to your best friend, trusted mentor, or therapist... what would you tell them about your thoughts and feelings in the moment?

Answer the following questions:

• What happens during that moment? What do you see?
• What do you think?
• How do you feel?
• How do you act?
• Do you have any physical symptoms of stress?
What is hard about this?

Noticing takes practice. Reflection is difficult.

Imagine someone is observing you and your student(s), like a camera-man for a reality TV show... what would they see?

Imagine you are describing one of the events to your best friend, trusted mentor, or therapist... what would you tell them about your thoughts and feelings in the moment?
### Negative or Unproductive Thoughts, Feelings, Words/Actions

- Choose 1 “Pressure Point” from your daily activities
- Think about what happens during that moment and how you think, act, and feel. Answer the questions on your Pressure Points Sheet.

#### What happens...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Words/Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Why does this always happen?”</td>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>“I can’t believe you did that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I can’t handle this.”</td>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>“Stop it right now!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I shouldn’t have to do this.”</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
<td>“I’m so tired of this!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I told you so.”</td>
<td>Exhausted</td>
<td>Roll eyes, use sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What is wrong with him/her?”</td>
<td>Apathetic</td>
<td>Escalate voice level, angry tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pressure Point Activity 3

Consider the activities that happen every day, which involve students. For example: transitioning into the classroom, morning meeting, lunch, recess, transitioning back to class after recess, getting ready to go home, etc. Map them here:

Looking over this list, what are the most difficult times of the day – the pressure points? Mark them with a star.

Pick 1 Pressure Point. Think about what happens during that moment and answer the following questions.

What are you thinking?
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

How do you act?
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

How do you feel?
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Goal: Replace negative or unproductive thoughts with positive and productive thoughts (mantras).

Replace with positive thoughts:
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Replace with positive actions:
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Remember: It is okay to feel frustrated, angry, tense, impatient, anxious… All adults have these feelings sometimes. Try to notice your feelings, tell yourself it is okay to feel that way, and then focus your energy on positive thoughts and actions. Students are probably also feeling frustrated during these difficult moments! Focusing your energy on positive talk and positive actions will help students learn how to manage themselves.
Replacing with Positive and Productive Self-Talk, Words and Actions

**Self Talk** – something you say over and over to yourself in a difficult or stressful situation (or aloud...)

– “Okay, I know how to handle this.”
– “This isn’t her/his fault. She/he is still learning.”
– “This isn’t my fault, but I can help.”
– “I’ve seen this before. I have an idea.”
– “I can see you are angry, let’s take a deep breath”

• Actively replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts
• Can help to manage your own thoughts and feelings
Positive Mantra

Unproductive Words, Actions

This too shall pass

Negative Thoughts and Feelings
The most effective SEL work is multi-tiered, meaning that they include families, classrooms, schools and communities in the work.
Thank you!
(jonesst@gse.harvard.edu)