

Emotional Intelligence Skills: What, Why and How?

What are “Social and Emotional Intelligence Skills” ?

Emotional intelligence and skills (in Finnish, “tunnetaidot”), as well as, social skills are not innate - we are not born with them. In fact, these skills need to be practiced and learned. And because they are learned, in the beginning of their lives, children need help from grown-ups around them.

They can be described with the following five aspects:

- Individual:

- 1) Self-knowledge – the ability to identify your own emotions, evaluate and trust yourself
- 2) Self-regulation – the ability to regulate your own emotional states, cravings and resources
- 3) Motivation that guides you to reach your goals

- Social:

- 4) Empathy – the ability understand the emotions, needs and worries of other individuals and groups
 - 5) The ability to generate wanted reactions in others
- (Daniel Goleman)

In practice, emotional intelligence skills mean, for example, that when we feel angry, we have the ability to word it, say it out loud and cope accordingly with the emotion, instead of showing it physically by, for example, hitting someone or screaming at others. In short, we are using our emotional intelligence skills when we can word our emotions and know how to deal with them.

Why do we need to practice them?

Emotional skills are the base for a healthy self-esteem and the feeling of capability, self-efficacy. Without emotional intelligence skills, a child can feel lost, and like they are not in control of themselves. According to research, emotional intelligence skills enhance well-being in every state of life, facilitate creating meaningful and long-lasting relationships, help reach our potential, do well, and even protect us from diseases.

Our bodies and minds use emotions to communicate their needs to us. If put aside or ignored, the lack of emotional skills can lead to various different outcomes that impair mental health, such as anxiety and depression, without really realizing, why am I feeling this way.

When we are young, it's incredibly difficult for us to understand why we are feeling in a certain way. Different emotions make our bodies feel different and affect our thoughts. Our emotional state influences our actions and behavior that inversely leads to troublesome situations. When we don't recognize what these reactions are, we might feel scared, that we are not in control and that we are somehow different from others.

Emotions are contagious. If parents themselves haven't quite learned to regulate their emotions, these emotions might be strongly awakened by the reactions of the child - such as, feeling annoyed and angry at them for no good reason, if the child manifests negative emotions. If unpracticed, strong feelings can awaken other ones, such as shame.

How can we practice them? Social-Emotional skills at home and at school

Practicing at home

Here are some tips to include in your everyday life. Maybe you have already been doing some of them?

Five strategies for promoting social-emotional learning in children

1. Be a good emotional role model. Children model their behavior from people they admire, such as their parents and teachers. When caregivers model a variety of emotions and coping strategies to manage their emotions, children learn appropriate ways to react in similar circumstances.
 2. Be an “emotion coach.” Accept and talk about children’s emotions and teach them how to label emotions. Tell them what emotions are, what they are for, how to regulate and appropriately express them and why to regulate them. This way, they will get more sense of control in their lives. In a situation where children experience strong negative emotions, you can be there as a grown-up to relieve them through these steps:
 1. Recognize and name the emotion that the child has: “Did you get scared when you fell down? Are you hurt?”
 2. Provide compassion: “Oh shoot, that probably feels awful.”
 3. Help move to the positive: “What you were doing did seem like fun, though. Would you like to try it again?”
 3. Read books with social-emotional plots. Reading books can provide opportunities to learn and discuss social-emotional topics, such as turn-taking and [cooperation](#), walking in someone else’s shoes and diving into diverse worlds and backgrounds, leading to the development of empathy. Asking children to label and explain the emotions of the characters in the story helps them learn a variety of emotions, understanding how they feel and what they are called. In addition to regular children’s books and stories, there is also specific emotional intelligence literature for children. Moreover, for grown-ups, books are a very handy way to teach emotional intelligence since you don’t have to initiate the conversation yourself, and your own emotional intelligence enhances while doing it.
 4. Give choices. Providing children with choices and the independence to make them are linked to higher levels of social-emotional learning.
 5. Use positive discipline strategies. Setting rules and expectations for behavior, giving warnings of potential consequences, offering praise and incentives for positive behaviors and ignoring unwanted behavior are associated with higher levels of social-emotional skills
- Source: Psychology Today

Children rarely need help to learn emotional intelligence skills from an outside provider. The keys lie in their everyday environment and interactions with their close ones. They start learning emotional intelligence and social skills from their parents very early on. Therefore, it is extremely important for parents to be aware of the example they set. If you feel like you haven’t started teaching emotional skills to your child yet, or didn’t think it really mattered, no worries - practicing emotional skills is quite a new concept. Such a thing was not really recognized 20 years ago, because instead of emotional skills, the past generations paid attention to polite and proper behavior. The matter of the fact is, though, that both positive and negative emotions are a part of normal human nature and can be used as means to blossom and thrive. All in all, it’s never too late or too early to start!

Practicing at school

Social and emotional skills come up all the time at school — at recess, in group work, in math class. Taking time to focus on how students interact with each other, how they’re feeling, and how they’re behaving creates conditions conducive for overcoming academic challenges. Being more intentional and taking the time to name and practice these skills, can help them stick. More recently, it has been recognized that by integrating social and emotional learning to the lessons and systematically teaching them in classes and small groups, we can positively affect students’ interpersonal relationships, academic skills and life skills.

Again, feel free to comment or suggest well-being related topics that interest you for future letters :)

Best Regards,

Kira & Ona

Useful links:

<https://www.familyboost.fi/materiaalipankki/tunne-ja-sosiaaliset-aidot/>

www.viitoturakkaus.fi

Tunne- ja turvataitoja 5-11 vuotiaille lapsille <<https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/126027>

<https://www.oph.fi/fi/oppimateriaali/tunteesta-tunteeseen-ohjaajan-opas/3-tunnetaitoja-oppii-harjoittelemalla>

Turvataitoja nuorille <<https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/90817>

Book recommendations

Fanni tunnetaito- kirjat: <https://www.familyboost.fi/fanni-tunnetaitosarja/>

Ympyräiset - kirjasarja: <https://www.ympyraiset.fi/>