

**Using Social Emotional Learning as a Tool to Support Students with Social Anxiety**

by

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## **Abstract**

The stage of adolescence is a period marked by rapid growth, learning, adaptation and neurobiological development (Dahl et al., 2018; Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008). Research indicates that an increase in mental health issues among adolescents, specifically observing a rise in anxiety symptoms among teens (Costello et al., 2011; Ezell et al., 2019; Dahl et al., 2018). Specifically, social anxiety tends to spike during adolescence and can lead to social isolation, poor attendance at school, and development of other mental health issues (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Qualter et al., 2013). As adolescence is also marked with an increase in independent social connections, it is expected that adolescents rely on their own social skills to navigate various situations in their day to day lives (Hartup, 1989; Hartup & Stevens, 1999). An increase in the importance of peer connections among adolescents underlines the importance of social skills to provide a positive sense of social emotional well-being and mitigate symptoms associated with social anxiety (Dahl et al., 2018). To equipped adolescents with the social skills and self-esteem necessary to face a variety of environments and interactions, social emotional learning encompasses a wide range of themes to support this healthy development (Kothari & Wesley, 2022; Albrecht & Brunner, 2019; Case-Smith, 2013). Therefore, after discussing relevant research related to adolescent social anxiety, treatments for social anxiety, and social emotional learning, Chapter Three provides an educational workshop to support educators in incorporating social emotional learning into the middle school classroom in explicit, engaging, and meaningful ways to support students experiencing social anxiety.

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# **Using Social Emotional Learning as a Tool to Support Students with Social Anxiety**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Adolescence is a stage of development marked by many physical, emotional, and neurobiological changes. It is also marked by an increase in independence and an expectation to interact in a variety of social situations with minimal adult support. Research indicates there is an increase in mental health concerns, especially symptoms of anxiety during this development period (Costello et al., 2011; Dahl et al., 2018; Ezell et al., 2019). In the face of an ever-changing education system, teachers and school counsellors face challenges in providing social emotional support and integrating the development of these skills into the classroom. Educators and school counsellors need to work together to provide a multi-tiered approach to supporting the social emotional development of adolescents. Integrating social emotional learning into the classroom bolsters opportunities for students to develop and practice these skills in real-life situations. Research has suggested that when students are exposed to social emotional learning, we see symptoms of anxiety decrease and levels of self-esteem increase (Oberle et al., 2016).

### **Background Information**

In my experience over the past eight years working in an alternative education program for students experiencing mental health issues, predominantly anxiety, I have seen the way students have disengaged from the typical classroom and sometimes the school system altogether. Having worked in a middle school with adolescent students aged 11 – 14 years of age, I understand the challenges students face during this period of development, and many with anxiety have expressed their disconnect with the regular classroom because they don't feel like

they belong. Anxiety can often be misunderstood, especially if adolescents experiencing anxiety symptoms do not fully understand what they are experiencing and how to communicate their struggles to others. Many of the social interactions that adolescents face on a daily basis at school involve invisible skills and social cues that can be misinterpreted or over-analyzed and cause anxiety symptoms to rise. A common behaviour associated with anxiety is avoidance behaviour, which can include avoiding eye contact, hiding from certain environments or interactions, or avoiding attending school altogether. The impact that social anxiety can have on an adolescent's life can be quite staggering. In my experience teaching in an alternative education program for students experiencing social anxiety, I have seen the impact that connection, communication, and explicit teaching of social emotional learning can have on adolescents. By incorporating specific language, observing and articulating our own social emotional wellness to our students, and introducing safe opportunities for social interaction, educators can support adolescents experiencing social anxiety. Educators are overwhelmed with the demands of teaching; however, my research and recommendations are intended to shed light on how current practices are considered social emotional learning, and how educators can shift their intention to make social emotional learning at the forefront of their classroom culture to support students with social anxiety.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Adolescence marks a time of tremendous development and change. The nature of this development can have lasting effects seen well into adulthood. A rise in mental health concerns in adolescence, specifically anxiety symptoms, has caused an increased strain on the health system. Adolescents experiencing social anxiety can begin to withdraw, isolate, and avoid challenging situations which have significant impact on their academic and social lives.

Educators need to find ways of supporting students' development and giving them strategies and skills to cope with symptoms of social anxiety. Social emotional learning provides foundational skills including self-management, social awareness, self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Many of the insights and activities tied to social emotional learning also have similarities to social anxiety treatments such as mindfulness, cognitive behavioural therapy, and social skills training. Educators need research-based information to deepen their understanding of social emotional learning in order to intentionally integrate language, skills, and activities into the classroom.

### **Purpose of the Paper**

The intended audience for this paper is for counsellors, teachers, and educational leaders to understand the impact that social anxiety can have on adolescent development. Further, the intention is to provide a deeper understanding of treatment for social anxiety and reveal the impact that direct teaching of social emotional learning has on decreasing symptoms of anxiety in adolescents. The questions that guide this research are: (1) How does social anxiety impact adolescent development? (2) What are the typical treatments for social anxiety in adolescence? (3) What does social emotional learning in schools look like for adolescents?

Based on the evidence and literature from Chapter 2, I have created a professional development workshop to engage educators in discussion, reflection, and learning about how they can integrate social emotional learning into their classrooms to support adolescent development and specifically those students experiencing social anxiety symptoms.

### **Research Question**

How can counsellors and educators use social emotional learning to best support middle school students with social anxiety?

## Significance of the Study

Research indicates an increase in mental health issues among adolescence, specifically observing a rise in anxiety symptoms among teens (Costello et al., 2011; Dahl et al., 2018; Ezell et al., 2019). An increase in independence and the importance of peer connections among adolescents underlines the significance of teaching social emotional learning to provide a positive sense of well-being and mitigate symptoms associated with social anxiety (Dahl et al., 2018). Social emotional learning is becoming an increasingly popular theme among middle schools; however, teachers need opportunities to deep their own understanding of what social emotional learning is and how they can incorporate it into their own classrooms. There is a need for research-based discussions around the impact of social emotional learning to support adolescent's mental health, specifically social anxiety.

## Definition of Terms

This section briefly operationally defines any terms that are specific to the topic area and/or terms that have a specific meaning in context.

For the purpose of this paper, the following terms are defined as:

- *Adolescence* is defined as “the period of human development that starts with puberty (10–12 years of age) and ends with physiological maturity (approximately 19 years of age)” (American Psychological Association, n.d).
- *Social anxiety* is defined as a strong and persistent anxiety throughout a variety of different social situations including speaking in public, meeting new people, or being observed by others (Pilkioniene et al., 2021).

- *Mindfulness* can be defined as the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us (Keltner et al., 2023, para. 1).
- *Social emotional learning* is defined as a process of acquiring and applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2023).

### **Outline of the Remainder of the Paper**

In the following chapter, a comprehensive literature review will be used to review the impact of social anxiety on adolescent development, understand the most widely used treatments for social anxiety in adolescents, and investigate what social emotional learning looks like in school for adolescent aged students. Following the literature review, I will make recommendations based on my findings.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The stage of adolescence is a period marked by rapid growth, learning, adaptation and neurobiological development (Dahl et al., 2018; Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008;). As adolescents navigate through this stage of development, their lives can bounce in both positive and negative directions (Dahl et al., 2018). Research indicates an increase in mental health issues among adolescence, specifically observing a rise in anxiety symptoms among teens (Costello et al., 2011; Ezell et al., 2019; Dahl et al., 2018). These observations coincide with the increase in independent social connections and for adolescents to rely on their own social skills to navigate various situations in their day to day lives (Hartup, 1989; Hartup & Stevens, 1999). An increase

in the importance of peer connections among adolescents underlines the importance of social skills to provide a positive sense of well-being and mitigate symptoms associated with social anxiety (Dahl et al., 2018). Social emotional learning encompasses a wide range of themes to support the healthy development of social skills (Kothari & Wesley, 2022; Albrecht & Brunner, 2019; Case-Smith, 2013). When school's embrace several tiers of support to bolster social emotional learning, it can help adolescents navigate structured and unstructured social contexts, leading to better mental wellness, higher levels of self esteem, and overall positive well-being (Albrecht & Brunner, 2019; Case-Smith, 2013; Kothari & Wesley, 2020;).

## **Review of Research Literature**

### **Social anxiety and its impact on adolescent development**

#### ***Adolescent development and mental health***

The stage of adolescence is one marked by changes to a person's cognitive, physical, psychological, and social development (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008). These changes can place a great deal of pressure on an individual to use coping skills and past experiences to make sense of a multitude of situations (Dahl et al, 2018). Peer pressure, school demands, and navigating social relationships are some examples of situations adolescents come face to face with on a daily basis. Furthermore, puberty and development can be a stressful situation as adolescents try to make sense of the changes occurring in their bodies (Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2009). Adolescence is also marked by newly acquired independence and there is a greater level of expectation that children in this age range are to lean on their own skills for adaptation to function (Biggs et al., 2012; Han et al., 2016).

Healthy development in adolescent years is critical to create a productive foundation for adulthood (Biggs et al., 2012; Tsai et al., 2020). While there is a growing body of research outlining various factors for adolescent development as well as influences on mental, emotional, and behavioral (MEB) development, there is still a disconnect between the findings of this research and the implementation of mitigating strategies for poor MEB health outcomes (Parodi et al., 2022). New research shows increasing rates of MEB health related conditions including anxiety, depression, and self harm (Parodi et al., 2022).

The increase in MEB health related conditions, including generalized anxiety disorder, is evident in studies conducted worldwide. Research has shown an increase among adolescents in the U.S. with regards to panic disorders, agoraphobia, depression and substance abuse (Costello, Copeland, & Angold, 2011). Global trends have observed the prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder symptoms in teens ranging from 6% - 65%, co-dependent on the time frame they were asked to reflect on symptoms (Burstein et al., 2014; Pal et al., 2022; Spence et al., 2017). Research indicates lifetime prevalence rates of 3% - 9% regarding social anxiety specifically (Garcia-Lopez et al., 2016, & Xu et al. 2017). The idea that anxiety as an MEB health related condition is not isolated to a single country or region signifies the importance of finding the correlating factors related to this rise, as well as strategies to help support adolescents.

### ***Social anxiety and adolescents***

One of the most prevalent conditions affecting adolescents mental, emotional and behavioral development is anxiety (Pilkioniene et al., 2021; Steel et al., 2014). Social anxiety is categorized as a strong and persistent anxiety throughout a variety of different social situations including speaking in public, meeting new people, or being observed by others (Pilkioniene et al., 2021). Symptoms can be so intense that they interfere with an adolescent's daily life and

ability to function, leading to social isolation, poor attendance at school, and development of other mental health issues as a result (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Qualter et al., 2013). Social anxiety tends to spike during adolescence, relative to earlier and later development periods (Grant et al, 200; Kessler et al. 2005). Social anxiety can have a significant impact on an adolescent's mental health and wellbeing, and can lead to depression, substance abuse, and other issues if left untreated (Qualter et al., 2010).

### *Symptoms of Social Anxiety*

#### **Physical**

Social anxiety can manifest itself in three main symptom categories. The first is physical symptoms. Physical symptoms of social anxiety disorder in adolescents and young adults are similar to those reported at other ages and include tachycardia, blushing, trembling and sweating (Alfano & Beidel 2011). Furthermore, adolescents may experience nausea, headaches, digestion upset and excessive sweating (Alfano & Beidel 2011). Physical symptoms can be difficult to manage and can often be mistaken for other illnesses. In a 2019 study, Wauthia et al., looked at the correlation between the Big Five personality traits and anxiety sensitivity, also known as the fear of anxiety. Their research gave attention to the tendency for those experiencing anxiety to interpret their symptoms as signals of social, psychological or physical distress (Wauthia et al., 2019). For example, a person with elevated anxiety might interpret a racing heart as a precursor to a heart attack (Wauthia et al., 2019). Deciphering between physical symptoms of anxiety and just "not feeling well" can be challenging if an adolescent does not have the understanding or acknowledge that what they are feeling is stemming from anxiety (Wauthia et al., 2019).

#### **Cognitive**

A second symptom category is cognitive symptoms including higher levels of worry that the person will do or say something that will result in embarrassment or humiliation (Mesa et al., as cited in Alfano & Beidel 2011). These worries can include negative thoughts, a general unease in social situations, or even specific beliefs that one will not behave "appropriately" in social interactions (Alfano & Beidel 2011). Negative self-talk and self-criticism are also common, especially related to social situations (Wauthia et al., 2019). Hedman et al. (2013), discuss the aspects of social anxiety that are linked to the concept of shame. Hedman et al. (2013), define shame as an "affect involving the cognitive perception that others view oneself negatively and that one's traits and behaviours are unattractive" (pp. 1) It's the cognitive ability of humans to imagine how we are represented in the minds of others that allow us to feel shame and potentially symptoms of social anxiety (Hedman et al., 2013).

### **Behavioural Avoidance**

A third symptom category of anxiety is behavioural avoidance of social situations. Avoidance can range from avoiding eye contact with someone to avoidance of social situations altogether (Beidel et al., 1991; Beidel & Turner, 2007). In a study aimed at better observing the relationship between gaze avoidance and social anxiety, Weeks et al. (2013), used covert eye tracking of gaze tendencies in response to computer simulated social interaction. Results from their study revealed a greater gaze avoidance in participants diagnosed with social anxiety disorder when responding to both negative and positive video clips (Weeks et al., 2013). Their findings provide additional support for gaze avoidance to be included as a behavioral marker of social anxiety disorder (Weeks et al., 2013). Social avoidance is another key characteristic linked to social anxiety disorder. As adolescence is marked by an increase in independence relative to childhood, there are more opportunities to spend time outside of the home and thus have peer

interactions and experiences unsupported by adults (Glenn et al., 2018; Alfano & Beidel, 2011). During childhood, parents have significant control over their child's social interactions. For example, arranging playdates, supervising social activities, and registering their children for organized extra-curricular activities (Hartup, 1989; Hartup & Stevens, 1999). During adolescence there is a shift in independence and responsibility to arrange and maintain social connections and engagement (Hartup, 1989; Hartup & Stevens, 1999). Rudaz et al. (2017), discuss how several theories of phobias and anxiety disorders have assigned a critical role to avoidance behaviour in explaining the persistent fear and anxiety. Their research outlined the moderating role of avoidance behavior on anxiety over time and showed a positive correlation between high levels of social anxiety and high levels of avoidance behaviour (Rudaz et al., 2017). These findings highlight the role that avoidance behaviour plays in the maintenance of social anxiety (Rudaz et al., 2017).

### ***Impact on social skills and interactions***

Social skills involve a wide range of behaviour including adequate use of eye contact, initiating of social interaction, interpreting tone of voice, facial expressions, gesture, gaze and posture (Richardson et al., 2019). Adolescence marks a pivotal developmental time where neural changes are thought to increase the motivational importance of engaging with peers (Dahl et al., 2018). Adolescents who experience social anxiety tend to exhibit social skills deficits that negatively impact abilities to make and maintain friendships (Alfano & Beidel, 2011). Research has discovered inconsistent evidence when looking for social skill deficits and social anxiety in adolescents (Pearcey et al., 2021). Some studies suggest that children with social anxiety have poorer social skills than non-anxious children (Greco & Morris, 2005; Morgan & Banerjee, 2006; Scharfstein et al., 2011; Spence et al., 1999; Tuschen-caffier et al., 2011). Other studies

suggest this deficit may reflect inhibited behaviour in social situations, as well as a child's negative perception of their own social skills (Cartwright-Hatton et al., 2005; Halldorsson et al., 2019). It's important to note that these inconsistencies can also be a result of methodological limitations resulting from overlap in social skill difficulties and observable symptoms of social anxiety (Pearcey et al., 2021). Observations and questionnaires are typically used to measure social skills. Pearcey et al. (2021), discuss the difficulty in assessing behaviours that can be influenced by symptoms of social anxiety. It can be difficult to accurately tease apart whether symptoms are resulting in social anxiety, or whether social anxiety is causing a deficit in social skills.

Some researchers have begun focusing on measuring social cognitive abilities that may influence effective social skills (Pearcey et al., 2021). Social cognitive abilities include the processes involved in reading a variety of social situations (Pearcey et al., 2021). These include recognizing emotions, reading body language and gestures, and understanding other's intentions (Frith, 2008; Pearcey et al., 2021). While research has begun to look at the correlation between social cognition and children with social anxiety disorder, as well as elevated anxiety, the results are mixed (Pearcey et al., 2021). Some have discovered significant associations between social anxiety symptoms and social cognitive abilities using parent or self-report questionnaires and experimental tasks respectively (Pearcey et al., 2021). The findings suggested that anxious children may be more impaired at identifying the intentions or perspective of others than non-anxious children (Banerjee & Henderson, 2001; Pile et al., 2017). Other studies suggest that neither social anxiety disorder nor social anxiety symptoms are significantly associated with social cognitive abilities including perspective taking and understanding other's thoughts and beliefs (Batanova & Loukas, 2011; Broeren et al., 2013). Studies have also investigated the

correlation between social anxiety and disorders in which social cognition deficits are a key symptom (e.g. Autism Spectrum Disorder; ASD) and have found higher prevalence of social anxiety disorder among those with ASD (30%-40%; Scahill, et al., 2008; White et al., 2009). compared to neurotypical children and adolescents.

In a study aimed to extend the current findings related to a social skills program called PEERS, researchers found that teaching adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder social skills increased the likelihood of more positive peer interactions and friendships, and thus decreasing levels of social anxiety (Schol et al., 2014). By building the skills to feel confident in social situations, adolescents have a better chance of overcoming persistent anxiety. Better social skills allow for adolescents to make connections with others and build friendships (Schol et al., 2014).

### ***Friendships***

Friendships are an important part of adolescence as they allow for practice of significant skills including loyalty, trust, cooperation, conflict resolution, and emotion regulation (Peets & Hodges, 2017). Making authentic connections in life can have effects on higher self-worth (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Lopez & Rice, 2006; Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson, 2012), greater relationship (Lopez & Rice, 2006) and life satisfaction (Goldman & Kernis, 2002), higher self-esteem (Goldman & Kernis, 2002), and lower depression (Lopez & Rice, 2006; Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson, 2012). Furthermore, Buhrmester (1990) suggests that having friends can buffer negative life events and correlates negatively with anxious and depressive symptoms. Research has revealed a positive correlation between unstructured social contexts and higher reported levels of social anxiety (Glenn et al., 2018). If adolescence marks the beginning of independence, including many unstructured social interactions such as parties, lunch hour at school, and community-based social gatherings, these findings are key to understanding the

dynamic of social anxiety among adolescents and how explicit teaching and discussion of social skills can strengthen functioning during unstructured social contexts.

### ***Loneliness***

Individuals with social anxiety often experience social isolation and loneliness due to their fear of negative evaluation in social situations, which can lead to avoidance of social interactions (Weeks et al., 2005). In turn, social isolation and loneliness can exacerbate social anxiety symptoms and decrease an individual's ability to cope with social situations (Morrison & Heimburg, 2013). Several studies have supported the link between social anxiety and loneliness. For example, a study by Wong and colleagues (2011) found that individuals with social anxiety reported higher levels of loneliness than those without social anxiety. Another study by Tzeng and colleagues (2017) found that loneliness mediated the relationship between social anxiety and depression in college students.

Research has shown that loneliness during adolescence is also associated with negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and poor academic performance (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Qualter et al., 2013). Loneliness during adolescence can have significant impacts on development. Adolescents are at a stage where they are developing their sense of self and their social relationships, and loneliness can disrupt this process (Qualter et al., 2015). One potential explanation for the negative impact of loneliness on adolescent development is that it may lead to a lack of social support and a reduced ability to cope with stress (Qualter et al., 2013). If an adolescent is becoming increasingly isolated, they are most likely absent from school, withdrawing from family and friends, and therefore not accessing the supports available to them at such a vulnerable time in their lives (Morrison & Heimburg, 2013). The importance of

social relationships for adolescent's development means that disruptions can have serious implications (Maes et al., 2019).

### ***Comorbidity of Social Anxiety with other conditions/symptoms***

Comorbidity refers to the presence of one or more disorders either within the same time period (concurrent comorbidity) or across different phases of the life space (cumulative comorbidity) (Saha et al., 2020). There is a body of research relating the comorbidity of anxiety to other conditions such as depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder (Garcia-Lopez et al., 2016; Konac et al., 2021). In a meta-analysis conducted by Saha et al. (2020), the presence of comorbidity between anxiety and mood disorders was reviewed by identifying 171 articles from 37 countries over the last 38 years. Findings showed strong comorbidity between mood and anxiety disorders, regardless of which of the two disorders arose first (Saha et al., 2020). Saha et al., stressed the significance of this analysis and continued research as anxiety and depressive disorders contribute to a significant portion of global burden of disease, as well as the fact that comorbidity between the two disorders is associated with greater symptom severity (Saha et al., 2020). The comorbidity of social anxiety with other conditions is important to understand as it can lead to further debilitation associated with either condition (Konac et al., 2021). Higher suicidality, poorer prognosis, worse treatment outcomes, lower life satisfaction, more physical health problems, less likelihood to attend college, greater overall impairment, and academic difficulties have all been linked to the conditions listed above (Saha et al., 2020).

### **Treatment of Social Anxiety**

#### ***Cognitive model treatment options***

There are two main cognitive models and treatment of social anxiety disorders (SAD) which are recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence; the model by Clark and Wells and the model by Rapee and Heimberg (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). Alden & Taylor (2010) describe the framework that cognitive models assert maladaptive self-beliefs and assumptions (e.g. “I am foolish”) which cause negative interpretations of experience, negative feelings, and counter-productive safety behaviours to prevent failure, embarrassment, and thus play a key role in developing and maintaining social anxiety.

Clark and Wells acknowledged the role cognitive beliefs play in social anxiety, but they also drew on a metacognitive model and described how self-regulatory cognitive processes (e.g. self-focused attention) maintained social anxiety (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). According to Clark and Wells, negative cognitive beliefs (e.g. “I’m boring”) are activated when the person enters a social situation (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). These beliefs lead to negative interpretations of social performance and a shift in attention to self-focus (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). Self-focus is skewed to a negative inner self image, and triggers safety behaviours such as avoiding eye contact or rehearsing sentences in the mind to ensure one is interesting enough (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). Safety behaviours can impair social performance and increase self-focused attention, which in turn leads to further anticipatory worry and post-event rumination (Nordahl & Wells, 2017).

Rapee and Heimberg’s cognitive-behavioural model shares similarities with Clark and Wells model, but also argues that social phobic individuals are characterized by maladaptive self-related processing including external factors such as scanning the environment for negative feedback and evaluation (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). In both models however, cognitive beliefs are highlighted as the underlying mechanism of all negative self-processing (Nordahl & Wells, 2017).

These patterns – negative social expectations, vigilance to negative outcomes, rising symptoms, and negative interpretations of symptoms and outcomes – motivate escape from and avoidance of social situations (Otto, Safren, & Hearon, 2014). To address these patterns, a number of targets for treatment can be translated from this model of maintaining social anxiety (Otto, Safren & Hearon, 2014). These include: (1) direct modulation of the anxiety evoked in social situations; (2) correction of the dysfunctional thoughts that create apprehension and anxiety, including core amplifying cognitions that intensify anxiety experiences in social situations; (3) elimination of failure-focused attention and the perceived social cost of these failures; (4) elimination of safety behaviours; and (5) development of accurate evaluation of performance in social situations (Otto et al., 2014, pp. 780). Modifying the thought patterns which contribute to creating and maintaining social anxiety is targeted by cognitive-behavioural interventions (Otto et al., 2014).

### ***Cognitive Behaviour Therapy***

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) treatments for social anxiety focus on modifying the thought patterns of hypothesizing that maintain the disorder (Otto et al., 2014). Treatment will often combine information, cognitive restructuring, and exposure interventions, as well as social skills training or anxiety management interventions (Otto et al., 2014). Informational components provide a patient with understanding of the disorder, a rationale for treatment procedures as well as a guide for collaborative treatment efforts (Otto et al., 2014). Cognitive restructuring refers to the act of identifying ineffective patterns of thinking, and changing them to be more effective (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles, 2020). It is a skill-based psychotherapy treatment that helps people learn to assert more influence over their thoughts, behaviours, and feelings to effectively solve life's challenges (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los

Angeles, 2020). Identifying the three components that make up emotional experiences, including thoughts, feelings, and behaviours helps patients learn to self-regulate in challenging social situations (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles, 2020).

### **Thoughts**

Thoughts refer to the ways we make sense of situations and may take on a number of forms, including verbal forms such as words, sentences, and explicit ideas, as well as non-verbal forms such as mental images (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles, 2020).

### **Feelings**

The term feelings does not refer to emotions in CBT, but the physiological change that occurs as a result of emotion (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles, 2020). For example, when we experience the emotion of anxiety, we may feel muscle tension or our heart pounding (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles, 2020).

### **Behaviours**

Behaviours are the things we do, but it's also the things we don't do (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles, 2020). For example, if a child is feeling overwhelming anxiety, they might avoid attending school. On the other hand, if a child feels confident in their ability to engage with the activities happening at school, they may attend regularly and consistently.

CBT focuses on thinking patterns as a way to understand the feelings and behaviours associated with them. It highlights the idea that automatic thoughts can trigger negative emotions, and our ability to examine these thoughts allows us to better understand and regulate our emotions before they become too intense or overwhelming (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles, 2020).

In clinical settings, CBT is primarily conducted individually. In a study aimed at observing the effectiveness of school counsellors to deliver CBT for social anxiety, Warner et al. (2016), outlines the unique position that schools are in to address the treatment challenges specific to social anxiety disorder. First, social anxiety disorder appears less responsive than other pediatric anxiety disorders to individual cognitive behavioural therapy (Ginsburg et al., 2011). Group CBT provides social exposure, opportunities to confront social fears, and opportunities to practice appropriate social skills (Beidel et al., 1999; Kendall et al., 2012). School-based treatment is also relevant as social anxiety often manifests in school; thus, treatment at school can address fears in real-life situations (ie., classrooms, library, cafeteria) and with multiple individuals (ie., peers, teachers) (Warner et al., 2016). Warner et al. (2016), reported the effectiveness of a 12-week school-based cognitive behavioural group intervention for social anxiety disorder, called *Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS)*, which is designed for implementation by school counsellors. The program focused on exposure and social skills to address social anxiety disorder challenges (Warner et al., 2016). The study found that school counsellors provided clinically meaningful care to adolescents with social anxiety disorder compared to a generic school counselling group (Warner et al., 2016). Furthermore, the benefits of the program led by school counsellors was comparable to those led by specialized psychologists (Warner et al., 2016). These results support the need for school counsellors to receive specific training in specialized programs to treat social anxiety disorder and potentially other childhood anxiety disorders, all of which are underserved by public health (Warner et al., 2016).

Another study conducted by Scaini et al. (2022), reviewed the efficacy of the Cool Kids Anxiety program in preventing and reducing symptoms of anxiety in school-aged children. The

Cool Kids program is a manualized CBT program for anxiety disorders in youth (age 7 – 18years) (Scaini et al., 2022). Its main components include psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, child management strategies and graded exposure with additional optional modules addressing social skills, teasing and assertiveness (Scaini et al., 2022). The results of this study support the efficacy of the Cool Kids program to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, even when delivered on a universal basis rather than targeted small group implementation (Scaini et al., 2022).

A final program to note from Bierman & Sanders (2020) review was the Cognitive Behavior Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS). CBITS is an intervention consisting of a 10-session small group program with sessions focused on managing anxiety and depression associated with trauma (the use of coping skills, exposure, and creating a trauma narrative) and the use of problem-solving skills to address negatively biased self and other perceptions (Bierman & Sanders, 2020). Results showed that the intervention effectively reduced symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression and psychosocial dysfunction (Bierman & Sanders, 2020). In an elementary school version of CBITS, students participated in 10 small-group sessions, two or three individual sessions, and one to three parent sessions (Bierman & Sanders, 2020). The program proved effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD relative to a wait-listed control group (Bierman & Sanders, 2020).

### ***Metacognitive model treatment options***

A third model relates social anxiety to metacognitive processes rather than cognitive processes. Wells and Matthews argue that social anxiety can be caused by our beliefs about our thinking: e.g. “When I start worrying, I cannot stop” and “I do not trust my memory” (Nordahl &

Wells, 2017). Persistent worry is caused by the belief that the worrying is uncontrollable and the person does not use their mind to interrupt the thinking process (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). Wells and Matthews metacognitive model suggests that controlling attention and regulating excessive thinking such as worry are the most important factors in treating social anxiety (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). Nordahl & Wells (2017) results indicated that metacognitive beliefs concerning effectiveness or memory may be particularly relevant for social anxiety because these beliefs lead to the persistence of the cognitive thought processes (ie. self-processing and worry). Their study results suggest a need to refine the target of treatment from negative social beliefs to the uncontrollability and danger of worry and reduced confidence in memory are especially relevant (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). Thorslund et al., (2020) studied the efficacy of group metacognitive therapy for adolescents with anxiety and depressive disorders. Their study specifically aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of brief metacognitive group therapy for repetitive negative thoughts in adolescents diagnosed with anxiety and/or depressive disorder (Thorslund et al., 2020). Their program included six 2-hr sessions and a 1-month posttreatment follow-up session (Thorslund et al., 2020). Sessions included psychoeducation about factors that maintain repetitive negative thoughts and an explanation of the metacognitive model (Thorslund et al., 2020). Further sessions focused on targeting beliefs about the uncontrollability of worry and introduced attentional training (including mindfulness) and worry postponement (Thorslund et al., 2020). Final sessions focused on active coping (problem-solving) during worry time, challenging positive metacognitive beliefs, and the development of individual management plans and metaphors to assist in developing new ways to relate to negative repetitive thoughts (Thorslund et al., 2020). Results of this study indicated seven out of nine participants appeared to derive benefit from the treatment including high attendance rate, scores on the treatment acceptability

questionnaire, and their ratings on self-report measures of metacognition and repetitive negative thoughts (Thorslund et al., 2020). While this sample is too small to draw significant conclusions, it does shed light on the need for research to further investigate the efficacy of metacognitive therapy in treating adolescents with social anxiety.

### ***Mindfulness-based interventions***

Mindfulness-based interventions can be particularly relevant for addressing maintaining factors for social anxiety as they may target and interrupt cycles of avoidance and de-motivation (Carlton et al., 2020). In a review of current literature supporting the use of mindfulness-based interventions, Carlton et al. (2020) highlight several factors that attribute to the success of such treatment for social anxiety. These factors include: “(1) mindfulness-based interventions demonstrate the ability to directly engage symptoms of social anxiety disorder; (2) mindfulness-based interventions also show consistent reduction of anxiety, including symptoms of social anxiety in adolescent populations; and (3) mindfulness-based interventions demonstrate high rates of feasibility and acceptability in anxious adolescent samples” (Carlton et al., 2020, pp. 1783). Mindfulness can be defined as “the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us” (Keltner et al., 2023, para. 1). The goal of mindfulness is to become aware of our mental, emotional, and physical processes (Keltner et al., 2023). Mindfulness-based interventions primary objective is to identify negative and ruminative thoughts as well as their triggers, and promote a shift in perspective (Carlton et al., 2020). Participants are encouraged to become aware of these thoughts in the present moment and face them with an attitude of non-judgmental acceptance (Carlton et al., 2020). Over time, patterns of repetitive negative thinking can lead to behavioural avoidance of feared situations (Carlton et al., 2020; Thorslund et al.,

2020). It is suggested that mindfulness practice may interrupt the cycle of avoidance by promoting a non-judgemental observation of thoughts, feelings, and sensations, thus diminishing the negative association these may have towards social situations (Carlton et al., 2020). Research is minimal when concerning the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions for socially anxious adolescents (Carlton et al., 2020). Dunning et al. (2019) conducted a systematic literature search of randomized controlled trials of mindfulness-based interventions to gauge the efficacy of improving mental health of children and adolescents. Their analysis included thirty-three independent studies including 3,666 children and adolescents in random effects with outcome measures categorized into cognitive, behavioural and emotional factors (Dunning et al., 2019). They found positive effects of mindfulness-based interventions across all the randomized controlled trials in the outcome categories of mindfulness, executive functioning, attention, depression, anxiety/stress and negative behaviours (Dunning et al., 2019). Dunning et al., 2022, returned with a further literature analysis to include 66 recent studies. Their analysis continued to show the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions to improve symptoms of anxiety in children and adolescents (Dunning et al., 2022).

In a critical review of adolescent mindfulness-based programs, Tan (2016) looked at adolescent clinical interventions and school-wide mindfulness programs offered in schools. Program lengths varied from 6 weeks up to 12 weeks. Tan (2016) looked at small group programs as well as school-wide initiatives. Intervention programs included forms of meditation practices to connect mind-body awareness, mindfulness-based art and craft program, as well as psychoeducation components (Tan, 2016). Overall, this literature review discovered that adolescents who have undergone mindfulness training experienced positive benefits and outcomes (Tan, 2016). Positive outcomes included reductions in worry/rumination and increase

in quality of life for adolescents, increase in self-regulation and improvement in self-esteem (Tan, 2016).

### ***Social Skills Training***

Social skills training is a therapeutic intervention that helps improve social skills by incorporating interpersonal skills training through role play, practice, providing constructive feedbacks, and providing assignments to practice the skills learned in real-life situations (Tetono et al., 2018). Spence (2003) discusses the components of a social skills training program designed for young people aged 7-18, which includes the following components:

*Behavioural social skills training* – instructions, discussion, modelling, role-playing/behaviour rehearsal, feedback and reinforcement to increase the ability to perform appropriate response strategies;

*Social perception skills training* – correct interpretation of social cues from others and social context;

*Social problem solving* – problem identification, generation of alternative solutions, prediction of consequences, selection and planning of appropriate responses;

*Reduction of competing/inhibiting/inappropriate social responses* – contingency management, parent training, relaxation training, cognition restructuring.

Activities related to social skills training include starting and maintaining conversations, assertiveness, paying and accepting compliments, making and keeping friends, and training in public speaking (Olivares-Olivares et al., 2019). Spence's (2003) review of existing research highlights inconsistencies in the efficacy of social skills training overall. Effectiveness of social skills training varies depending on the presenting problem(s) of the child, and research by Kavale et al. (1996) found that effects were highest for anxiety. Spence (2003) notes the importance of

social skills training as an important addition to other treatment interventions for social anxiety disorders (ie. CBT).

More recent research conducted by Beidel et al. (2014) discusses the lack of attention to assessing objective social skill in the treatment trials for social anxiety disorder. Objective assessments are more challenging and time-intensive than subjective measures, leading to less use in empirical research (Biedel et al., 2014). Another reason, however, is that some conceptualizations of social anxiety disorder begin with the idea that people with social anxiety disorder possess the necessary social skills but their ability in certain situations is hindered by anxiety (Biedel et al., 2014). This concept suggests that social anxiety disorder is associated with a performance deficit rather than a skill deficit (Biedel et al., 2014).

Similarly, Olivares-Olivares et al. (2019) discuss the fact that social skills training is frequently used in the treatment of social anxiety disorder for children and adolescents, but there is a lack of empirical evidence to support its efficacy. Their study sought to identify the role and effects of social skills training in the treatment of a sample of adolescents with social anxiety disorder (Olivares-Olivares et al., 2019). Using a group of 108 adolescents diagnosed with generalized social phobia, participants were randomly assigned to two treatment conditions (with and without social skills training) and a control group waiting list (Olivares-Olivares et al., 2019). Results showed that both groups reported a significant reduction in social situations feared/avoided compared to the waitlist group (Olivares-Olivares et al., 2019). However, the group who received social skills training obtained better results in the post-test and follow ups, as well as a lower dropout rate during treatment (Olivares-Olivares et al., 2019).

## **Social Emotional Learning in Adolescence**

### ***Definition of social emotional learning***

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is a process of acquiring and applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2023). SEL has become a focus within the education system to promote social, emotional, and academic development of students, as well as to enhance their overall well-being (Dusenbury et al., 2015). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines social emotional learning as “a process for helping children and even adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness” (CASEL, 2023). Furthermore, CASEL describes SEL skills as consisting of “recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically” (CASEL, 2023). CASEL provides a widely accepted framework for SEL, which includes five core intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competences that reflect the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of SEL (Oberle et al., 2016):

1. *Self-awareness* involves the ability to identify and recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and their influences on behaviour. It can involve understanding one’s strengths, challenges, as well as being aware of one’s own goals and values. Self-awareness also involves understanding how thoughts, feelings and actions are interconnected.
2. *Self-management* includes the ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts and behaviours effectively. This could include stress management, impulse control, motivating oneself, and working towards achieving personal and academic goals.
3. *Social awareness* entails the ability to take the perspective of others – including those who come from a different background and culture, to empathize with others, understand

social and ethical norms, and to recognize resources and supports in family, school and community.

4. *Relationship skills* provide children with the tools to form and maintain positive relationships, communicate effectively, listen actively, cooperate, and handle conflict constructively. It also provides children with the skills to offer and seek help when needed.
5. *Responsible decision-making* involves equipping children with the skills to make informed, respectful decisions about their own behaviour and social interactions.

### ***Benefits of SEL for students***

Research has demonstrated the benefits of SEL for students, including academic achievement, social and emotional competence, positive behavior, and mental health outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Oberle et al. (2016) discuss the links between SEL and academic learning, highlighting the concerns that many educators have allocating time towards SEL as sacrificing time to teach core academics. They acknowledge the traditional perspective this argument takes by holding onto the idea that academic and social-emotional skills are distinct domains of development (Oberle et al., 2016). Research over the past few decades has supported the idea that skills in these domains are actually interrelated and foster one another (Caprara et al., 2000; Hawkins et al., 2008; Izard et al., 2001; Oberle et al., 2016). School learning environments involve highly social processes, including interactions with peers, teachers, and staff members (Oberle et al., 2016). When children feel competent socially and emotionally to navigate these social processes they are better equipped to focus on academic tasks as well (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Payton et al., 2000; Zins & Elias, 2006; Zins et al., 2007).

SEL programs also hold importance in the context of mental health issues, behavioural problems, and substance abuse (Oberle et al., 2016). As adolescents are faced with considerable challenges that can have lasting impacts on their future chances for success, it is imperative that SEL create a solid foundation for positive development (Oberle et al., 2016). SEL increases prosocial behaviours, such as empathy and kindness (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). SEL skills are not only relevant for a school environment, but they also transcend outside of school, at home and in the community (Durlak et al., 2011). Their lasting impact can be observed far beyond the school years (Durlak et al., 2011).

### ***Implementation of SEL in schools***

CASEL uses four interrelated approaches to effectively promote SEL in classrooms and school communities:

- General teaching practices that create conditions to foster SEL in the classroom

The classroom environment plays an integral role in the development of social emotional skills for children. A classroom focused on SEL often includes three components – a supportive classroom climate, integration of SEL into academic instruction, and explicit SEL instruction (CASEL, 2023). A supportive classroom climate allows students to feel safe enough to take risks, engage fully, and feel part of a community (CASEL, 2023). Intentional activities that build community, belonging, emotional safety and student-centered discipline are key to a supportive classroom climate (CASEL, 2023). As mentioned above, when SEL involves explicit instruction, it provides the opportunity to develop, practice, and reflect on social and emotional competencies (CASEL, 2023). When the classroom climate supports these skills, it will encourage children to practice and support one another.

In their discussion of implementing SEL in the classroom, Todd et al. (2022) outlines several key characteristics of individual classroom implementation. They discuss the importance of physical layout in the classroom. Simple modifications to avoid sensory overload allow students to focus their energy on emotional regulation (Todd et al., 2022). Lighting can have a significant impact on the senses (Martin, 2016; Todd et al., 2022). Typical school lighting can be very bright, so considerations for using natural light through windows, turning off some of the overhead lights, or using softer light sources such as lamps throughout the classroom can support the emotional regulation of students (Martin, 2016; Todd et al., 2022). Limiting anchor charts or other esthetically stimulating decorations can minimize distraction (Todd et al., 2022). Being aware of smell and the power it has over creating a pleasing learning environment can eliminate additional distractions for students. Consider diffusing pleasant scents using essential oils (Todd et al., 2022). Finally, thoughtful consideration to desk placement can help support the relationship skills associated with social emotional learning (Todd et al., 2022). Grouping tables or desks together can support practice of social skills associated with SEL teaching (Dougan, 2019).

The use of self-regulation strategies are also key classroom strategies to implement in order to support students social-emotional learning (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). Creating a sensory friendly space to practice mindfulness and self-regulation can promote social emotional learning (Todd et al., 2022). Designating an area in the classroom as a calm place, including a timer, a visual element for students to focus on such as painting, breathing cards, a notebook, or another reflection tool helps promote students to regulate their own emotions without having to leave the classroom (Todd et al., 2022).

- Effective classroom-level SEL involves teaching, modelling, and practicing social emotional competencies through explicit lessons (CASEL, 2023). The use of evidence-based SEL programs ensures lessons are grounded by research and are aligned with the principles of child and adolescent development (CASEL, 2023). CASEL outlines four elements of effective SEL programs which include being sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (CASEL, 2023). The sequencing of lessons is important in building connections and coordinating activities to encourage the development of specific skills. Active forms of learning include role playing, discussions, games and help foster deep learning for students. Focused refers to dedicating time and attention to students developing personal and social skills. Depending on the structure of a school's schedule, daily instructional time is given to focus on a particular lesson or theme. Finally, explicit teaching of the competencies is important as it targets specific social and emotional skills for students to learn. The term "learning" is a strong and intentional aspect of SEL (Weissberg et al., 2015). Focusing on learning signifies that social and emotional competences can be acquired, practiced, enhanced, improved and fostered in all children (Bernard, 2006).

In a study aimed at analyzing the effectiveness of a universal social emotional program called Speaking to the Potential, Ability, and Resilience Inside Every Kid (SPARK) Pre-Teen Mentoring Curriculum, Green et al. (2021), investigated whether participants' thoughts, communication, problem-solving and resiliency levels would increase after engaging in the curriculum. Overall, they found positive changes in knowledge of curriculum content, communication, decision-making and problem-solving skills, emotional regulation and resiliency (Green et al., 2021).

Bierman & Sanders (2020) review several SEL curriculum programs to address the importance of teaching explicit social-emotional skills for students with intensive intervention needs. They characterized students with or at high risk of emotional and behavioral disorder to also have an associated deficit in social-emotional and self-regulatory skills including elevated conduct problems, attention deficits, internalizing problems, or autism spectrum disorders (Bierman & Sanders, 2020). One particular program they reviewed is called Collaborative Life Skills Program (CLS). It was developed to strengthen the organization and social skills of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Bierman & Sanders, 2020). Participants reported significant effects on ADHD symptom severity, academic performance, and parent-rated social skills after ten parent sessions and two classroom sessions (Bierman & Sanders, 2020). What's even more profound was the sustained benefits that were evident on parent-rated ADHD symptom severity and functional impairment one year later (Bierman & Sanders, 2020). The residual effects of such programs reiterate the importance of explicitly teaching students social-emotional skills.

#### Integrations of SEL skills in general teaching

Each academic discipline has its own questions, processes and proficiencies (CASEL, 2023). CASEL encourages teachers to consider what students need to know and be able to do when planning their lessons (CASEL, 2023). Emphasizing what students can do with the knowledge in a lesson and not simply the content itself, reflects the elements of social emotional learning within general teaching.

When teachers integrate SEL skills into academic instruction it provides opportunities for students to practice and reflect on social and emotional competencies in real-life situations (CASEL, 2023). Examining the competencies of the B.C. curriculum guide for Grade 8

Mathematics as an example, students should be given opportunities to communicate using mathematical vocabulary and language, explain and justify their ideas and decisions, and reflect on their thinking (2023). Furthermore, students should be able to connect mathematical concepts to each other and to other areas and personal interests (B.C. Department of Education, 2023). These competencies provide several links to social emotional learning including but not limited to relationship skills, self-awareness, and social awareness.

Teachers can approach the integration of social emotional learning with academic standards by using a Frame, Coach, Reflect model (CASEL, 2023). Teachers can frame the social emotional competencies associated with a learning goal by guiding discussions about the competencies necessary to complete a task, asking students to reflect on challenges they may face during the learning, and what strategies they can use to overcome these challenges (CASEL, 2023). Coaching then refers to teachers developing these skills by providing opportunities to perform them in a variety of situations (CASEL, 2023). Finally, allowing students to self-reflect, and teacher's providing feedback on what they saw in terms of student's social and emotional competencies helps strengthen the learning (CASEL, 2023). Research conducted by Morris, McGuire & Walker (2017) identified the importance of integrating social emotional skills in the social studies classroom. They analyzed the effects of integrating story-telling in the social studies classroom, placing emphasis on highlighting key social emotional skills including accepting feedback, taking turns, sharing materials, and working as a member of a small group (Morris et al., 2017). Participating teachers reported that they were able to gather more authentic and realistic data. Teachers also reported as the unit progressed, an increasing independence in students working out conflicts or issues (Morris et al., 2017). Placing emphasis on the specific

skills students need to complete a task helps frame the integration of social emotional skills within the academic goal.

- School-wide approach to social-emotional learning occurs through interactions between students and teachers, among staff, and between students and their peers in the classroom, playground, hallways and cafeteria (Oberle et al., 2016). Recent studies have shown the importance of broadening the approach from classroom-wide to school-wide and community-wide SEL programming (Oberle et al., 2016). In a study conducted by Beets et al. (2008) researchers discovered a direct relationship among teacher perceptions of school climate on teacher beliefs about the importance of teaching SEL concepts. They suggest that in order to provide successful and meaningful SEL curriculum, school leadership needs to promote a culture that encourages a shared vision of an SEL program (Beets et al., 2008). Oberle et al. (2016) offer several suggestions for schools to formulate SEL focused practices and policies including: a code of conduct that specifies social, emotional and behavioural norms, values and expectations for students and staff at school; restorative discipline practices, anti-bullying prevention guidelines; SEL-focused professional learning opportunities; opportunities to notice and reinforce positive behaviours among staff and students; and a general focus on prosocial behaviour, kindness, helping others and having gratitude.

When we use CASEL's four approaches as a framework for integrating SEL into the school curriculum, we see an increase in a child's well-being, positive connections between peers and staff, and ultimately an increase in academic success (Weissberg & Dusenbury, 2017). Direct instruction of the five competencies is key as it allows students to practice skills in a controlled environment and provides teachers an opportunity to model the skills (Oberle et al., 2016). Research indicates that integrating the skills into academic content through intensive SEL programming benefits students overall (CASEL, 2023). When SEL is modelled and practiced

throughout the day, within the curriculum, at school and within the community, it shows students how universal these skills are (Martin, 2016).

### **Summary**

Research has shown that healthy development in adolescent years is critical to create a productive foundation for adulthood (Biggs et al., 2012; Tsai et al., 2020). Research has also shown an increase in mental, emotional, and behavioural development health related conditions, including anxiety (Parodi et al., 2022). Global trends have observed that anxiety is not isolated to a single country or region, signifying the importance of finding correlating factors, as well as strategies to help support adolescents experiencing symptoms. Social anxiety is categorized as persistent anxiety throughout a variety of different social situations including speaking in public, meeting new people, or being observed by others (Pilkioniene et al., 2021). Symptoms can be so intense that they interfere with an adolescent's daily life and ability to function, leading to social isolation, poor attendance at school, and development of other mental health issues as a result (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Qualter et al., 2013). Treatment of social anxiety in adolescents typically includes cognitive behaviour therapy, mindfulness-based interventions, and social skills training (Carlton et al., 2020; Nordahl & Wells, 2017; Olivares-Olivares, 2019; Spence, 2003). The components of these treatment strategies have significant connections to CASEL's fundamentals of social emotional learning, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023). As school learning environments involve highly social processes, including interactions with peers, teachers and staff members, intentionally teaching social emotional learning supports all students' development, including those experiencing social anxiety symptoms.

## Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

### Summary

The purpose of this research plan was to understand the stage of adolescent development and its relevance to increased symptoms of anxiety, specifically social anxiety. According to the research included in the literature review, adolescence is marked by an increase in mental health issues, specifically a rise in anxiety symptoms (Costello et al., 2011; Ezell et al., 2019; Dahl et al., 2018). Adolescents who experience social anxiety can be impacted in the following ways:

- Physical symptoms
- Cognitive symptoms
- Behavioural avoidance
- Impaired social skills and interactions
- Friendships
- Loneliness
- Comorbidity of other mental health issues

The questions I intended to answer in my literature review were:

- (1) How does social anxiety impact adolescent development?
- (2) What are the typical treatments for social anxiety in adolescence?
- (3) What does social emotional learning in schools look like for adolescents?

After reviewing the literature, I have deepened my understanding of adolescence as a stage of development marked by cognitive, physical, psychological, and social developmental changes. With these changes comes an increase in pressure on adolescents to use coping skills and past experiences to make sense of a multitude of situations. Peer pressure, school demands, and navigating social relationships are some examples of situations adolescents come face to

face with on a daily basis. Furthermore, I've discovered the significance that healthy adolescent development can have on creating a productive foundation for adulthood.

Social anxiety is commonly treated using cognitive behaviour therapy, mindfulness-based interventions, and social skills training. These treatments draw on many of the guiding principles of social emotional learning outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Social emotional learning (SEL) is an important component to targeting gaps in self-awareness, social-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023). It isn't enough to just teach these skills in isolation, however, but to embed them into classroom teaching and throughout the whole school community. A multi-tiered approach includes direct teaching, professional development for staff to infuse language around SEL in all classes, and promoting a school climate that is inclusive and supportive of SEL competencies. Integrating SEL into intentional classroom practices provides opportunities for students to practice these skills in a safe, supportive learning environment. Therefore, I have created a professional development workshop that I recommend school counsellors share at a professional development day or broken into several sessions as part of an ongoing learning series throughout the school year. This workshop is designed for educators to bolster their understanding of SEL principles, connect with our own experience of SEL, reflect on our current practice, and provide resources to intentionally increase SEL within the classroom.

## **Recommendations**

My goal in creating this workshop is for school counsellors to have a framework for continuing to introduce SEL into their schools, specifically drawing on activities to support students experiencing social anxiety. By integrating SEL into the classroom with intentional

language and activities, as well as using components of typical social anxiety treatments, we can support students experiencing social anxiety as well as enhance the development of all students. This workshop could be used at a professional development day for teachers or facilitated by counsellors over the course of several staff meetings or lunch and learn series. The workshop slideshow includes information about the statistics of mental health issues among adolescents, a brief overview of each CASEL principle, and engaging activities, discussions, and resources to support further integration of SEL within the classroom. This workshop would be best utilized in conjunction with a school-wide SEL program which provides explicit teaching of SEL principles. Explicit teaching of social emotional learning is important, but broadening the lens of SEL and integrating it into daily language and classroom activities shows its relevance and importance in everyday life (Durlak et al., 2011).

Prior to presenting this workshop, it is important to consider the audience you are presenting to and create an inclusive experience for everyone. I suggest acknowledging the sacred Indigenous land you are presenting on before engaging in the presentation. I suggest inviting each participant into a moment of quiet gratitude for the land they are on. I would also suggest inviting each participant to think of how they take care of the land they live on. While presenting these slides, I suggest reading the slides aloud and explaining any graphics, vocabulary, or activities. I would also encourage the use of small discussions, hands-on activities, and invitation for participants to share their experiences to further deepen the learning.

At the beginning of the session, I would hand out journals for each participant to jot down notes and support some of the activities throughout the workshop. Breaking up the lecture portion with engaging activities is important to providing a meaningful learning experience. Finally, I would suggest printing out copies of the classroom resources as well as offering a

digital copy of the slide deck so participants can walk away from the workshop with some components to try in their classrooms.

Slide 1 states the title of the workshop, “Supporting social anxiety in adolescents: Integrating social emotional learning into the classroom”. This title encompasses the two key ideas of this workshop: social anxiety in adolescents and the integration of social emotional learning into the classroom. The purpose of this workshop is to highlight the need for teachers to support students experiencing social anxiety by creating a safe environment that promotes social emotional wellbeing.

Slide 2 highlights some key development ideas related to adolescence. The purpose of this slide is to frame why we are focusing specifically on adolescence. Adolescence is marked by a plethora of change including puberty, increase in social independence, school demands, and peer pressure (Biggs et al., 2012; Dahl et al., 2018; Han et al., 2016; Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2009). Healthy development in adolescent years is critical to create a productive foundation for adulthood (Biggs et al., 2012; Tsai et al., 2020). Understanding the changes to a person’s cognitive, physical, psychological and social development during adolescence primes the participants to empathize with why mental health issues are on the rise in this stage of development.

Slide 3 introduces the experience of social anxiety in adolescence as well as the impact it can have on a child’s life. Social anxiety can be defined as a strong and persistent anxiety throughout a variety of different social situations including speaking in public, meeting new people, or being observed by others (Pilkioniene et al., 2021). I suggest discussing the ways that social anxiety can present itself in relation to the classroom. On the slide there are six characteristics highlighted including isolation, avoidance, poor attendance, withdrawn,

loneliness, and disconnect. In the classroom, avoidance, withdrawn and disconnect can often be mistaken for defiance. I would encourage participants to remain curious and open to why a student might not be participating in class. Poor attendance can sometimes go unnoticed if a student shows up in the morning but signs out half-way through the day. Observing patterns of attendance, maintaining supportive communication between school and home, and connecting with your school-based team early in the school year are helpful ways of starting to support a student experiencing social anxiety.

Slide 4 discusses the prevalence of mental health in adolescence and uses statistics from Youth and Mental Health Canada (2023). This slide acts as a segway for introducing teachers as an integral part of a student's mental health support system. I would highlight the fact that an estimated 75% of children with mental disorders do not access specialized treatment services combined with the reality that wait times for counselling and therapy are long, and often have age restrictions to frame the need for classroom support as an important and necessary component to support a student's mental health (Youth and Mental Health Canada, 2023).

Slide 5 provides some examples of thought patterns and experiences that someone with social anxiety may have. It's important for educators to understand what it's like to experience anxiety so they can learn how to best support students with social anxiety in their classroom. This slide is meant to provide a brief overview of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) to give participants an understanding of this therapy style and begin to introduce how SEL and CBT fit together. I would suggest the facilitator use this slide to introduce participants to the following core principles of CBT taken from the American Psychological Association's (2023) website:

1. Psychological problems are based, in part, on faulty or unhelpful ways of thinking
2. Psychological problems are based, in part, on learned patterns of unhelpful behaviour

3. People suffering from psychological problems can learn better ways of coping with them, thereby relieving their symptoms and becoming more effective in their lives

CBT treatment involves efforts to change thinking patterns (American Psychological Association, 2023). Strategies for implementing CBT include learning to recognize helpful and unhelpful thinking patterns, understanding the behaviour and motivation of others, increasing problem-solving skills to cope with difficult situations, and developing confidence in one's own abilities (American Psychological Association, 2023). To transition to the next slide, I would suggest the facilitator comment on how these strategies connect deeply to social emotional learning.

Slide 6 introduces social emotional learning (SEL) as the basis for supporting the healthy development of adolescence. SEL has become a focus within the education system to promote social, emotional, and academic development of students, as well as enhance their overall well-being (Dusenbury et al., 2015; Lawson et al., 2019). The facilitator could introduce the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and ask participants how familiar they are with the CASEL framework. Depending on the responses, I would suggest the facilitator list the five competencies including: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023). The facilitator could also let participants know that we will go into each competency in more detail throughout the workshop. While remaining on this slide, the facilitator could review some of the key research-based benefits of SEL for students, including academic achievement, social and emotional competence, positive behaviour, and mental health outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). The facilitator could address the common concern many educators have of limited classroom time to divide between SEL and core academics by explaining that research

has indicated academic and social-emotional skills are interrelated domains of development and foster one another (Caprara et al., 2000; Hawkins et al., 2008; Izard et al., 2001; Oberle et al., 2014). School learning environments involve social processes, including interacting with peers, teachers, and staff members (Oberle et al., 2016). When children feel socially and emotionally competent, they are better equipped to focus on academic tasks as well (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Payton et al., 2000; Zins & Elias, 2006; Zins et al., 2007). Furthermore, SEL programs address mental health issues and behavioural problems (Oberle et al., 2016). SEL increases prosocial behaviours, such as empathy and kindness (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). The facilitator could refer to the previous slide outlining negative thought patterns of those experiencing anxiety and connect the idea that if our classrooms intentionally promote prosocial behaviours using SEL competencies, it can help support all students, including those experiencing anxiety.

Slide 7 includes the learning intentions for the rest of the workshop. The remainder of the presentation will review each of the CASEL principles: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023). For each CASEL principle, the group will engage in four sections: learning, connect, reflect, and resources. The learning portion will include a brief overview of what type of behaviour defines the CASEL principle. This is important to ensure participants have a good understanding of the principle. It also allows participants to start thinking about how they may already be incorporating these principles into their classrooms without being cognizant of them. The ‘connect’ portion provides a hands-on activity that promotes the current principle and allows participants to practice their own social emotional learning. The activities in this section can also be used in the classroom with middle-school students. The third section, ‘reflect’, is an

opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and ideas related to a question prompt. This reinforces one of the goals for this workshop, which is to celebrate the things we are currently doing in our classrooms by reframing them with an SEL lens. I would recommend the facilitator record the ideas during this section of the presentation in a document that could be shared at the end of the workshop. The final portion of each principle is the ‘resources’ section. This section includes several suggestions for teachers to incorporate into their classroom to strengthen the current SEL principle. These resources use a combination of mindfulness, CBT, and social skills training to reinforce the SEL principle and support students with social anxiety.

Slides 8, 9, 10, and 11 provide information and activities related to the CASEL principle, self-awareness. Slide 8 introduces the principle and provides several examples of behaviour that are related to self-awareness. These include identifying emotions, emotional self-perception, and practicing a growth mindset. A large part of being a human includes understanding the emotions of others. As infants, we read faces, and interpret the emotions of parents and caregivers (Frey et al., 2019). As we grow older, the task of emotional management gets more complex (Frey et al., 2019). Adolescence marks a time of development when children can begin to understand the experience of mixed emotions (for example, being nervous and excited at the same time) (Frey et al., 2019).

Emotional self-perception involves the ability to recognize, express, and regulate one’s emotions (Frey et al., 2019). It isn’t enough to simply label one’s emotions, children need to be provided opportunities to apply these labels accurately to themselves and others through practice (Frey et al., 2019). Opportunities to check their emotional state and talk about what they and others are feeling are important to this SEL principle (Frey et al., 2019). Incorporating daily emotional check-ins, building emotion vocabulary, and giving students opportunities to share

how they are feeling with others are key components to emotional self-perception. This skill connects deeply to the core principles of CBT, including the idea that anxiety can be based, in part, on faulty or unhelpful ways of thinking. If children do not have opportunities to check in with their emotional state and learn how to interpret feelings, they may engage in repeated faulty or unhelpful ways of thinking.

Finally, a growth mindset provides students with the understanding that we are not stagnant, but can learn, shape and grow. Mindset is the attitude that someone has about a specific task (Frey et al., 2019). When we have a growth mindset, we believe that basic abilities can be developed through hard work, dedication, and focused efforts (Frey et al., 2019). A mindset changes based on content area, topic, experience, past success, and environment factors (Frey et al., 2019). That is why it's important to incorporate growth mindset language and activities into all classroom environments and as a school-wide perspective. Growth mindset directly ties to the principle of CBT regarding learning to develop a greater sense of confidence in one's own abilities. Once someone learns strategies to cope with anxiety, they also need to build the confidence in themselves to use those strategies and know they will eventually feel better.

Slide 9 provides an activity for participants to engage in, but also as a suggestion to start their classes with. A body scan image, as well as a link to a 5 minute, kid-friendly body scan video (The Mindfulness Teacher, 2022 ). I would suggest the facilitator acknowledge that performing a body scan at the beginning of a lesson allows students and teachers to become mindful of the present moment. Some students may experience heightened anxiety for a particular class or subject due to past experiences, perceived academic ability, or a variety of other reasons. Break time and lunch can be dysregulating for many students due to the unstructured nature of breaks and the social interactions that require independent navigating.

Giving 5 minutes for students to check in with their bodies and be mindful of how they are feeling gives them an opportunity to identify their emotions and build emotional self-perception. Emotion has the power to enhance or inhibit learning (Frey et al., 2019). The key to SEL is letting students in on the power of their emotions and how knowledge of self can influence everything they do, including learning (Frey et al., 2019).

Slide 10 allows for reflection and sharing of resources for incorporating self-awareness into the classroom. The prompt question - “reflecting on your practice, in what ways have you already incorporated self-awareness into your classroom?” allows participants to celebrate and acknowledge strategies they have implemented in their classroom already that are encouraging self-awareness. Furthermore, the nature of sharing ideas is so valuable during professional development, and the ability for participants to share creates an inclusive learning space where all ideas are valued. Once the 2 minutes partner share is over, I would encourage participants to share their ideas with the larger group if they are comfortable.

Slide 11 provides some additional resources for participants to connect to the principle of self-awareness. The first resource is emotion check-ins to connect students with how they are feeling. There are a variety of different types of check-ins depending on the age of students and class interests. A favorite of middle school students is a set of 9 memes or pictures in a general theme (for example, pictures of dogs or cats making funny faces) and students are asked to choose one of the images they feel connects with their current emotion. Each student gets an opportunity to share why they chose the image (either with the larger group or in smaller groups). The second resource is an activity that asks students to build a booklet with different emotions on each side. The end product allows students to mix and match pages to make a combination of emotions such as excited and happy. Activities like this are a great way to engage

discussion once they are completed. Teachers can ask students to flip to a certain combination of emotions and ask them to share a time they may have experienced these two emotions. While the end product can be valuable as a teacher led activity, the process of coloring, cutting, and putting the booklet together also allows students opportunity to engage in conversation with each other while they work. Providing opportunities for low-risk conversation while completing a simple task gives students the chance to practice starting and maintaining conversations, paying and accepting compliments, and general interaction with peers (Olivares-Olivares, 2019). These skills are all important principles of social skills training, important additions to treatment interventions for social anxiety (Spence, 2003). The workshop facilitator could have a finished product of this resource to show participants, as well as hand outs of the resource.

A third resource is called the Learning Pit (Nottingham, 2023), and it's an excellent way to introduce the idea of a growth mindset. The Learning Pit was developed by James Nottingham (2023) and illustrates learning to help students identify how much progress they have made so far, as well as encourages positive attitudes towards challenge. It includes six stages of learning: first response, complications and contradictions, strategy and focus, organizing and creating, eureka, as well as connect and apply. The overarching idea of the learning pit is that we do not master skills, concepts, or tasks right away. We go back and forth between stages of learning and practicing until something clicks for us. It reinforces the importance of perseverance and a growth mindset to acknowledge that even if we are not successful at something the first time, or the tenth time, we need to gather strength to get through the frustration and keep going. While this workshop will not offer enough time to go into thorough detail about the stages of the learning pit, it would be helpful to recommend the website [www.learningpit.org](http://www.learningpit.org) and provide participants with the learning pit templates to use in their classroom.

The final resource for this section is a 4-week guide on teaching growth mindset to students by Big Life Journal (2023). Big Life Journal has a wealth of resources for teaching social emotional learning, and this free growth mindset guide offers key elements for establishing a routine and language in your classroom. The growth mindset guide includes an introduction week where you define specific terms as a class, a noticing week to create posters and reminders around your classroom, a modelling week to promote the power of “yet”, and a practicing week to encourage positive reinforcement and productive struggle.

Slide 12 introduces the next SEL principle, self-management (CASEL, 2023). Self-management can be described as the ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively (Oberle et al., 2016). Displaying impulse control, managing stress appropriately, setting realistic goals, and utilizing effective organizational strategies are all components of self-management (CASEL, 2023). In other words, self-management requires a level of self-regulation including strategic, intentional, and metacognitive behaviour to focus and complete a certain goal (Frey et al., 2019). All of these skills require a person to be aware of his or her thinking. Frey et al., (2019), describe metacognition as a three-part skill set: the ability to (1) recognize one’s own and other people’s thinking, (2) consider the actions needed to complete a task, and (3) identify the strategies one might use to carry out those actions. I would suggest the facilitator remind participants that each of these skill sets are aligned with the cognitive restructuring component of CBT. Cognitive restructuring refers to the act of identifying ineffective patterns of thinking and changing them to be more effective (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles, 2020).

Slide 13 asks participants to complete a S.M.A.R.T. Goal in order to practice the metacognitive skills described in the previous slide. A S.M.A.R.T Goal is an acronym used to describe setting a goal that is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. Participants

would be asked to think about themselves for a moment, and come up with something specific they would like to achieve by the end of the day. For example, a specific activity or accomplishment might be to drink 3 glasses of water by the end of the day, or go for a walk at the end of our workshop. They can continue with the activity by writing their answers to the rest of the prompts in their journals. It would be helpful for the facilitator to elaborate on the remaining prompts by asking participants the following questions:

“How are you going to measure whether you were successful in achieving your goal?”

“Will I be able to achieve this goal by the end of the day?”

“What is the relevance for my goal? What will I gain from completing it?”

“What timeframe or schedule can I put in place to help me achieve this goal?”

Once participants are finished journalling, the facilitator could provide a final statement about how this type of activity can help students become aware of their own thinking and what achievements are important to them. It also encourages realistic planning and organization in order to achieve one’s goal. This can be used in a variety of settings including academic and personal.

Slide 14 provides time for participant reflection based on the current SEL principle. The prompt question: “What are some ways you have implemented self-management strategies into your classroom?” allows participants to engage in dialogue and share strategies with one another. It also allows for processing time and questions to arise about the learning so far. I would encourage the participants to share in small groups for a few minutes, then ask for any comments or questions from the group as a whole.

Slide 15 includes several resources for strengthening student’s self-management skills. The first resource is a teaching strategy called “Think Aloud”. It is based on the idea of

reciprocal teaching which highlights summarizing, generating questions, seeking clarification, and predicting outcomes (Frey et al., 2019). As teachers, we can show our own thinking by talking about it with our students. We can share our own thoughts about the content students are learning or how we are experiencing the world at that moment. Sharing our own thoughts and making thinking visible provides students with an opportunity to understand other's thinking.

Introducing a personal goal journal is another excellent resource to encourage students to think about what they want to accomplish, both inside and outside of school. Providing a daily opportunity to think, write, and reflect on personal goals encourages self-management skills including motivation, self-regulation and organization. It can also be a strong visual of growth; allowing students to track their progress. Finally, encouraging goal-oriented journaling can support students with social anxiety by providing a track record of their thoughts. The metacognitive model of social anxiety argues that anxiety can be caused by our beliefs about our thinking: e.g. "What I start worrying, I cannot stop" and "I do not trust my memory" (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). Strengthening metacognitive skill sets through journaling, thinking aloud, and specific goal setting can positively impact a student's ability to control their attention and regulate excessive thinking such as worry. At this point in the workshop, it would be encouraged for participants to take a 10 minute wellness break.

Slide 16 introduces participants to the SEL principle of social awareness, including the skill of perspective taking, empathy, and appreciating diversity (CASEL, 2023). Social awareness includes having an awareness and understanding of the world around us. This includes environments, cultures, communities, societal norms, problems, struggles, and all other areas that make up the social atmosphere in which we live (Success Starts Within, 2022). It would be helpful to point out that when students with social anxiety attempt to understand the world

around them, it is often skewed with negative thought patterns and negative self-image, resulting in avoidance and impairment of social performance (Nordahl & Wells, 2017). Building a classroom community on empathy, kindness and appreciation of diversity can help combat the cognitive beliefs of social anxiety which lead to all negative self-processing (Nordahl & Wells, 2017).

Slide 17 asks participants to change the negative thought statements into positive thought statements. For example, the statement “This is too hard. I’m not smart enough to learn this” could be changed to, “This is hard, but if I keep trying I will get it”. Participants would be given 5 minutes to share in small groups how they could change the negative statements into positive statements. After 5 minutes, the facilitator could ask for some volunteers to share their answers. To conclude the activity, the facilitator could emphasize how valuable this type of activity could be at the beginning of a new unit or before a challenging task. It encourages a growth mindset and could be incorporated into the Learning Pit resource spoken about in previous slides.

Slide 18 encourages further dialogue among the group to discuss how they have incorporated empathy, celebrated diversity as well as perspective taking in their classrooms. The facilitator could continue recording the shared ideas of the group on a document that participants could access after the workshop.

Slide 19 provides several resources to promote social awareness in the classroom, with the intention of helping students with social anxiety. The first resource is from Panorama Education (2023) and is called “Circle of Concern”. The goal of this exercise is to help students develop greater empathy, demonstrate ways to express empathy for others, and appreciate individual differences. The following steps outline how this activity could be taught in the classroom:

1. Explain to students that a “circle of concern” is a group of individuals we think about, care about, and interact with in a kind and thoughtful manner.
2. Illustrate an example by drawing a stick figure within two concentric circles. The smaller circle represents your circle of concern, with those closest to you inside it. The larger circle represents those who are outside your circle of concern.
  - Share a few examples of people who might be inside your circle of concern, and a few who are outside of it.
  - Say: *"We all have circles of concern, and they look different for everyone. Because circles can be both confining as well as inclusive, we usually have people who fall outside of our circle of concern."*
3. Provide students with 5-10 minutes to free-write about who at school they would consider to be inside their circle of concern (and who is not).
4. Ask for volunteers to share their circles of concern. Why are some people outside of their circle of concern? How might this affect those people? How might it affect our community as a whole?
5. Using large chart paper or a whiteboard, work as a group to brainstorm examples of groups/roles (not specific names) in the school community that are usually inside a student's circle of concern, and groups that are usually outside the circle of concern.
6. Ask students to reflect on this and consider how one's circle of concern might be expanded. What actions might they take to expand their circle? What would be easy or hard about taking these actions? Record ideas and responses.
  - Examples: sitting with someone at lunch who they normally wouldn't; organizing an event with students they do not know; learning the names of cafeteria workers

7. Discuss how these actions might impact the school community. What benefits would be seen and felt?
8. Wrap up the activity by asking students to journal about one change or action that they can commit to making within the next few days to expand their circle of concern.

A second resource is using circle practice to promote community and communication (Davenport, 2018). Inspired by restorative justice, circle practice can also be used to serve academic, social and emotional, and reflective purposes with students (Davenport, 2018). Circle practice encourages a space where students can tell their stories, feel heard, and practice empathy. To set up a circle, attention needs to be placed on the physical space. Chairs must be in a circle formation, and in close proximity to foster intimacy (Davenport, 2018). A talking piece acts as a physical signifier of whose voice we are listening to at any time, is placed in the middle. The talking piece could be a rock, crystal, stuffed animal, toy, or any other object that holds significance to your class. Next is setting the purpose and expectations of your circle with the group. Typically, the overarching purpose of circle is to form a community with open lines of communication. Davenport (2018) describes the following circle norms to her students:

- Speak from the heart (only with the talking piece, authentic contributions);
- Listen from the heart (without judgment, with compassion);
- Speak spontaneously (spend time listening, not thinking about what you're going to say);
- Speak leanly (especially important with big groups); and
- What is shared in the circle stays in the circle

Once your circle expectations are set, you can explore a variety of different topics using circle practice. Discussing social emotional wellness, exploring an academic topic, or rectifying a wrong. Circles can be effective at the beginning of the year to start identifying and planning for

student's individual needs (Davenport, 2018). Using prompts like: What kind of learner are you? Who is a teacher who has influenced you greatly and why? What do you need from your peers to be successful? Printing out several "get to know you" questions and letting students pick which questions to use can support peer connections and social interaction. Finally, circles can serve academic purposes as well. At the beginning of a unit, use specific prompts to guide discussions about what students know related to a topic, what would they like to know, or predictions they might have. There are several ways you can close a circle, depending on your comfort level and the prompts being discussed. Closing could include a group high five or a silly group game, or it could be a final share of one word on each person's mind.

Another resource for encouraging social awareness are games which target communication, sharing one's perspective, and involve teamwork or collaboration. Train of Thought, Brain Freeze and Totem all encourage these skill sets, while also being fun and entertaining to play. Games can be an excellent way to encourage communication among students with social anxiety as they give structure to the interaction. Playing games provides rules, order, and instructions to guide a social interaction. Students can rely on the flow of a game to maintain conversation and provide topics to discuss.

Slide 20 introduces the characteristics of relationship skills. Human beings are hardwired to connect and socialize with one another. As Frey et al., (2019) discuss, human development sky-rocketed once we figured out how to cooperate and collaborate with one another. Sharing knowledge, tools, language and processes allowed us to thrive and develop prosocial skills necessary for survival. I would suggest the facilitator include a description of the difference between prosocial and relationship skills. Prosocial skills include helping one another, sharing, and teamwork (Frey et al., 2019). While these skills are foundational, they are different from

relationship skills. Someone can have strong prosocial skills, but lack the ability to make healthy, strong relationships (Frey et al., 2019). Relationships require another set of skills – communication, empathy, and methods of repairing relationships when they are damaged (Frey et al., 2019). According to CASEL (2023), relationship skills include an ability to maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. The first key term on this slide is communication, and this refers to both verbal and nonverbal expression. Communication can represent how we express ourselves and the interactions we have with others. Communication can also include what we don't do or don't say. Students who experience anxiety will often hide, shut down, withdrawal or avoid. These are all forms of communication that express how that individual is feeling. Explicitly teaching and modeling communication strategies is important to supporting students with anxiety. The second term, positive relationships, refers to building connections with others based on healthy commonalities, empathy, support and respect. The third term, collaborative problem solving, is key to maintaining relationships, and a skill set that adolescents often need adult guidance to navigate (Frey et al., 2019). By teaching students to engage with peers and develop respect for one another, we provide them with the skills to deal with conflict more productively (Frey et al., 2019). Adolescence is a challenging time, and teenagers are especially vulnerable to feeling alienated and marginalized (Frey et al., 2019). I would suggest highlighting to participants that during this stage of development, relationships with peers grow in importance, and feeling disliked is associated with loss of learning, with a  $-.19$  effect size (Frey et al., 2019). That is equivalent to roughly half a year of lost learning (Frey et al., 2019). This brings us to the final key word on this slide, teamwork. Relationships are measured by how we relate to others, or how connected we are to others. Relatedness can be described as one's perception that peers care

about you, respect you, and see you as a valuable member of a group or team (Frey et al., 2019). When we create a classroom that encourages teamwork, we encourage connection, relatedness, and a safe space to build strong relationships with one another.

Slide 21 invites participants to play a game called RPS Championship. The objective of this game is to win the rock-paper-scissors championship or actively support the winners if you lose your turn. The facilitator will explain the rules to participants as follows:

1. Participants individually challenge each other to a game of rock-paper-scissors.
2. The person who loses becomes the winner's most ardent fan, applauding and cheering on the winner.
3. The winner (along with their supporting fans) goes on to challenge another person (who will also have their own support fans).
4. The losing person and all their fans become supporters of the new winner. In this way, the winners' fan base/entourage grows exponentially.
5. Repeat this process until there is one "world champion" with everybody else in the class cheering for them.

This activity is taken from a resource called "Social and Emotional Learning in Action – Experiential activities to positively impact school climate" by Tara Flippo (2016). It highlights key qualities of relationship skills by encouraging teamwork, cooperation, and communication. It is low stakes for any students with social anxiety as there is minimal talking involved, but still requires engaging in a brief social interaction. The facilitator could ask participants what it was like to play the game and what they noticed in either position (winner or loser).

Slide 22 invites participants to reflect on their practice of relationship skills in the classroom. The following prompt is given to guide discussion – "In what ways have you

encouraged relationship skills in your classroom?” The facilitator could give participants several minutes to discuss in small groups before asking for responses to the larger group. The facilitator could also record any responses on the ongoing shared document.

Slide 23 includes several resources for encouraging relationship skills within the classroom. The first resource is a suggestion to scaffold the sharing of materials from groups of two students and slowly increasing to larger groups throughout the year. Resources can be limited in a classroom, and sharing materials is a common occurrence. With some intentional scaffolding to the process of working together and sharing materials, students can build communication skills and teamwork in smaller steps.

The second resource is an article produced by educational speaker Mark Finnis, an Associate for Independent Thinking in the United Kingdom. His article discusses 33 ways you can build better relationships. The facilitator could click the link within the powerpoint and show participants several highlights of the article. This list could be used in the classroom as discussion prompts or as a poster in the classroom to remind everyone of the ways we can positively interact with one another.

A final resource is the use of gratitude practices to encourage expression of feelings, reflection of how we have interacted with others, and observing the positive. Negative thought patterns can become too automatic when experiencing social anxiety that it is hard to find the positive and express gratitude. Providing explicit opportunities for students to see the good in themselves and the good in others can help create new pathways for positive thinking patterns in all students, but especially those with social anxiety. Expressing gratitude can be done in a variety of forms. Providing students an opportunity to reflect on their gratitude is step one. Next, it would be helpful to scaffold the act of gratitude. Perhaps every student has an envelope located

in the classroom. Students could drop an anonymous note in someone's envelope to express their gratitude. Over time, the teacher could integrate more ownership of gratitude by signing their name or handing it directly to the individual. Hosting a "gratitude circle" once a week, during which students can share their appreciation for one another can be a healthy transition back to the learning environment, provides practice in oral language and of course strengthens relationship building (Frey et al., 2019). Learning how to accept compliments can be really challenging for students, especially students with social anxiety who may experience negative self-image and perception of self-worth. When we build opportunities like this into our classrooms, we offer kids the ability to practice tough skills in a safe and comfortable environment.

Slide 24 introduces the final CASEL principle, responsible decision-making. Responsible decision-making includes the ability to make caring and thoughtful decisions about personal behaviour and social interactions across a variety of situations. This includes being open-minded and curious about other's perspectives and experiences. It also involves learning how to make a reasoned judgement after analyzing data, information and facts. Finally, it includes anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions. I would suggest the facilitator share a case study by Fisher et al., (2019) of eighth grade science teacher, Katie Basilone, in which she uses this set of norms to frame what occurs within her classroom:

- Take care of yourself
- Take care of each other
- Take care of this place

This simple set of norms acts as a framework for behaviour and decision making. Having a set of norms provides boundaries for behaviour, which can be helpful for students experiencing social

anxiety. By giving guidance to the appropriate behaviour for an environment, we can help ease negative thought patterns including questioning how to act or not wanting to look silly or weird.

Slide 25 invites participants to engage in a final activity to practice the principle of responsible decision-making. The activity is called “Suit Yourself” and can be found on the CASEL website in a download entitled “SEL 3 Signature Practices Playbook”. The activity encourages reflection and evaluation, two skills that are important to responsible decision-making. You could use this activity when you would like your class to hear a broad range of what was perceived as valuable from an engagement. The facilitator could pass out a playing card to each participant. Each suit describes a category of responses:

- Hearts: Something from the heart. How did you feel? What did it mean to you?
- Clubs: Things that grew – new ideas, new thoughts, a new point of view.
- Diamonds: Gems that last forever. What are some of the gems of wisdom gathered from people or content?
- Spades: Used to dig in the garden. Generate conversation about planting new ideas or things participants dug up during class.

Give participants 2-3 minutes to think about their response in relation to their card suit, and the engagement of today’s workshop. Once everyone seems ready, debrief by either asking for a few volunteers to share their ‘suit’ and response, or inviting participants to turn to their neighbour and share together. If time allows, you could also allow everyone an opportunity to share their response or provide an exit ticket for participants to leave on their way out.

Slide 26 invites participants a final opportunity to share their experiences and ideas from their own classrooms and schools. The following prompt, “What are some ways you’ve incorporated responsible decision-making into your classroom?” provides a starting point for

discussion. The workshop facilitator should record any ideas on the shared document and support the flow of conversation.

Slide 27 provides a few resources for participants to encourage responsible decision-making in their classrooms and schools. The first resource is a suggestion to engage students in discussions about courage. Courage is the persistence in the face of fear (Norton & Weiss, 2009). It is a behaviour or action rather than an innate disposition (Fisher et al., 2019). Courageous actions draw on many of the elements already discussed in this workshop, including resiliency, the capacity to cope, a positive sense of agency and identity, and a host of prosocial behaviours (Fisher et al., 2019). Courage involves tackling a goal even in the face of personal risk, usually psychological or social (Fisher et al., 2019). The facilitator could encourage the use of examples from literature and current events to explore the concept of courage with students, but also highlight the fact that ordinary, everyday people quietly use courage, grit, and determination to overcome challenges. Courage can manifest itself in different ways depending on the individual and the situation. A student with social anxiety might express courage by choosing to wear their hair down one day at school, rather than putting a hat on. It would be helpful for the facilitator to reinforce that courage does not have to be a grand gesture, but quiet determination to take positive steps forward.

The final two resources are Makerspaces and Genius Hour, two concepts that originated through Google's commitment to protect 20 percent of their engineers' time to work on projects of interest to them (Frey et al., 2019). Providing time for students to investigate personal interests, build structures, practice a skill, can help build the grit and perseverance needed to complete hard tasks. It can also boost productivity in other areas of school because students are learning how to problem-solve and persevere through a challenge. Frey et al., (2019) outline the

need for Genius Hour and Makerspaces efforts to include expectations that the projects address ways to aid others. When students submit an application for their project, it should include a rationale for how their exploration will benefit others. One book they suggest is “The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind” as well as watching William Kamkwamba’s TED Talks about his work. William’s work shows how he linked his passion for science with a need to improve the lives of his family and village (Frey et al., 2019).

Slide 28 provides a look at two main resources used in this workshop. The book, *All Learning is Social and Emotional* (Frey et al., 2019), as well as the CASEL website. The facilitator could suggest participants engage in a book study and further exploration of these resources in order to incorporate social emotional learning into the everyday fabric of their classroom and school culture.

Slide 29 simply thanks participants for their engagement and participation in the workshop. It also offers a time for questions or comments before officially dismissing participants. The facilitator should be open and inviting to questions or comments, as well as stay behind in case any participants want to talk one on one rather than in front of the larger group.

## **Conclusions**

The development stage of adolescence is marked with physical, emotional, and neurobiological changes. An increase in independence and expectation to interact in a variety of social situations can increase mental health concerns, specifically symptoms of social anxiety. Mental health resources for youth are often accompanied by long waitlists, making it challenging to gain access to support in a timely manner. Educators and school counsellors face challenges in providing social emotional support and integrating the development of these skills into the classroom. Social emotional learning can decrease symptoms of social anxiety and increase

levels of self-esteem and prosocial behaviours. This workshop is a research-based resource intended to provide educators with an understanding of what social anxiety looks like in their classroom, and a deepened understanding of the principles of social emotional learning. The workshop uses hands-on activities, discussions, and a curated list of resources to further implement these skills within the classroom. These activities have been selected to bolster skills and support the needs of students with social anxiety but are beneficial to all students. The workshop includes quite a bit of information and could be broken up into several segments over the course of the school year. It could also be offered as a professional development workshop. Overall, the learning in this workshop is valuable for igniting conversations about how social emotional learning can become the lens through which our teaching practice is projected to create classrooms and schools where all students can flourish.

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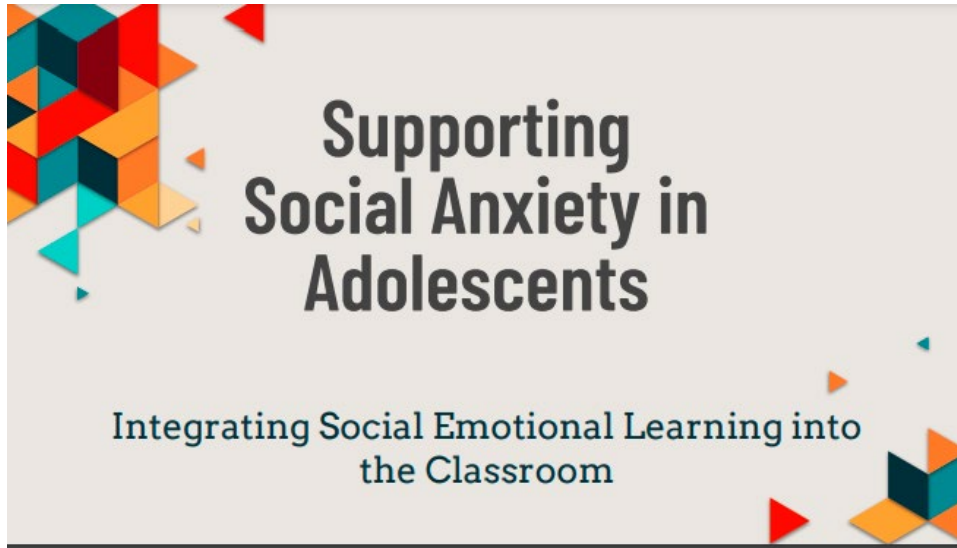
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**Appendix A: Workshop Slide Deck – Supporting Social Anxiety in Adolescents:  
Integrating Social Emotional Learning into the Classroom**

Slide 1




Slide 2



Slide 3

## SOCIAL ANXIETY IN ADOLESCENCE



Isolation


Avoidance

Poor Attendance

Withdrawn

Loneliness

Disconnect



Slide 4


## SOCIAL ANXIETY IN ADOLESCENCE

70% of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence

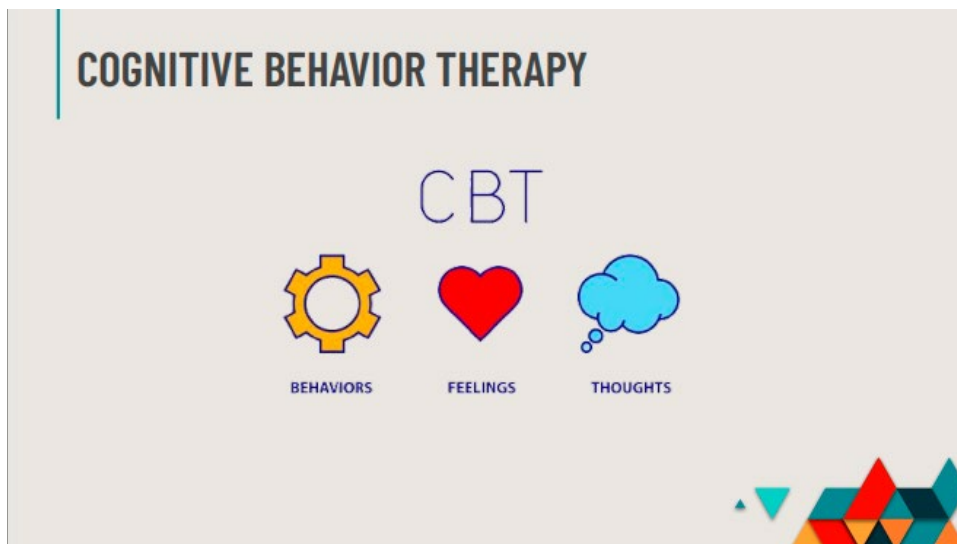
An estimated 75% of children with mental disorders do not access specialized treatment services

Wait times for counselling and therapy can be long, especially for children and youth

Statistics taken from Youth and Mental Health Canada  
<https://ymhc.ngo/resources/ymh-stats/>



Slide 5



Slide 6



Slide 7

## LEARNING INTENTIONS

- 01 LEARN**  
Describe each SEL principle
- 02 CONNECT**  
Hands-on learning
- 03 REFLECT**  
Bring intention to current practice
- 04 RESOURCES**  
Discuss further activities to integrate into practice



Slide 8

## SELF-AWARENESS

- ★ Identifying emotions
- ★ Emotional self-perception
- ★ Growth mindset



Learning



Slide 9



# SELF AWARENESS

Body Scan

**Connect**

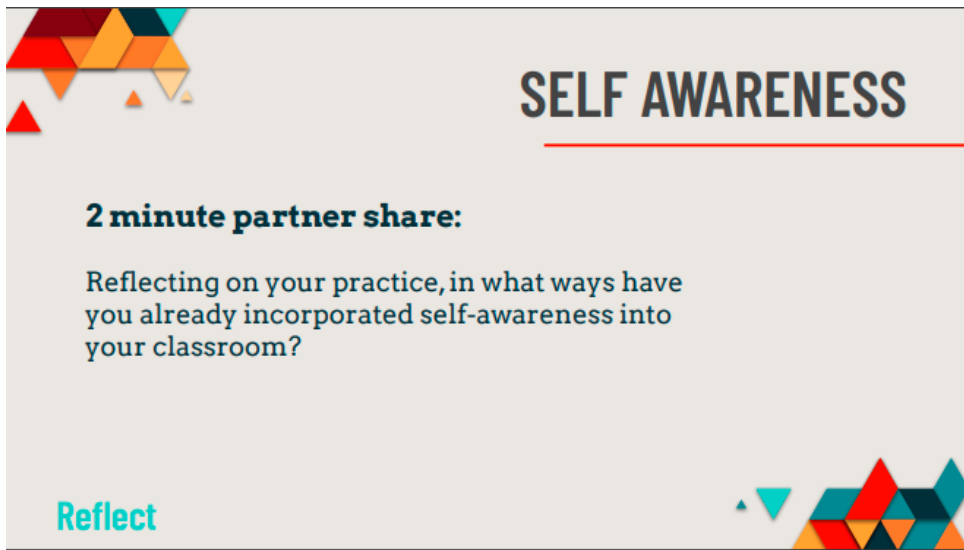
**Five-Minute Body Scan**

1. STRETCH BY TUCKING A FEW SHOES UNDER DESK FEET.
2. NOW PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR FEET. NOTICE HOW THEY FEEL.
3. MOVE YOUR FOCUS TO YOUR LEGS. OBSERVE HOW THEY FEEL. YOU DON'T NEED TO TRY TO CHANGE ANYTHING.
4. CONTINUE YOUR SCAN, MOVING UP YOUR BODY. PAY ATTENTION, WITHOUT INTERLUPTING, TO EACH PART.
5. NOTICING AND ACCEPTING YOUR BODY EXACTLY AS IT IS, IS ONE WAY OF BEING MINDFUL - IT MAKES SOMETHING MORE REAL.



Origo

Slide 10



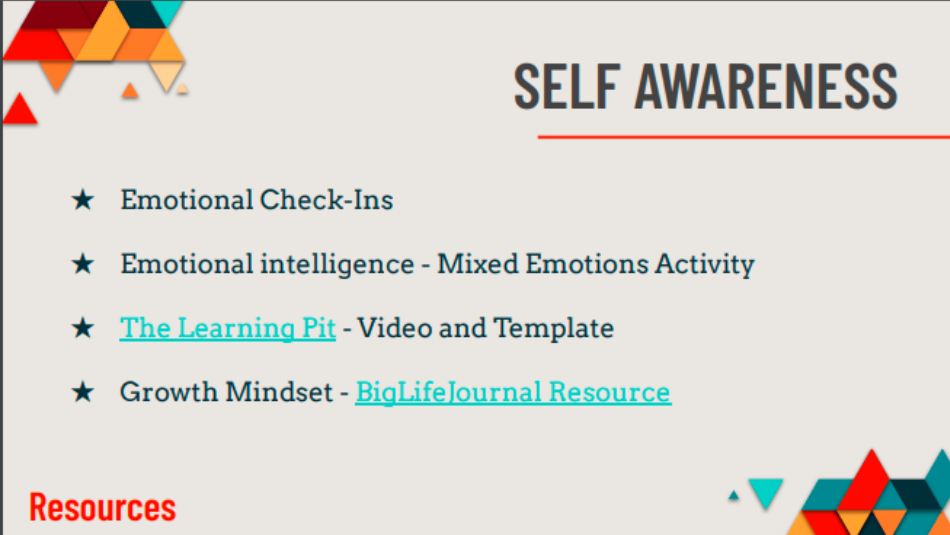
# SELF AWARENESS

**2 minute partner share:**

Reflecting on your practice, in what ways have you already incorporated self-awareness into your classroom?

**Reflect**

Slide 11



## SELF AWARENESS

- ★ Emotional Check-Ins
- ★ Emotional intelligence - Mixed Emotions Activity
- ★ [The Learning Pit](#) - Video and Template
- ★ Growth Mindset - [BigLifeJournal Resource](#)

**Resources**

Slide 12



## SELF MANAGEMENT

- ★ Cognitive regulation
- ★ Impulse control
- ★ Stress management
- ★ Goal-setting
- ★ Organizational skills



**Learning**

Slide 13



# SELF MANAGEMENT

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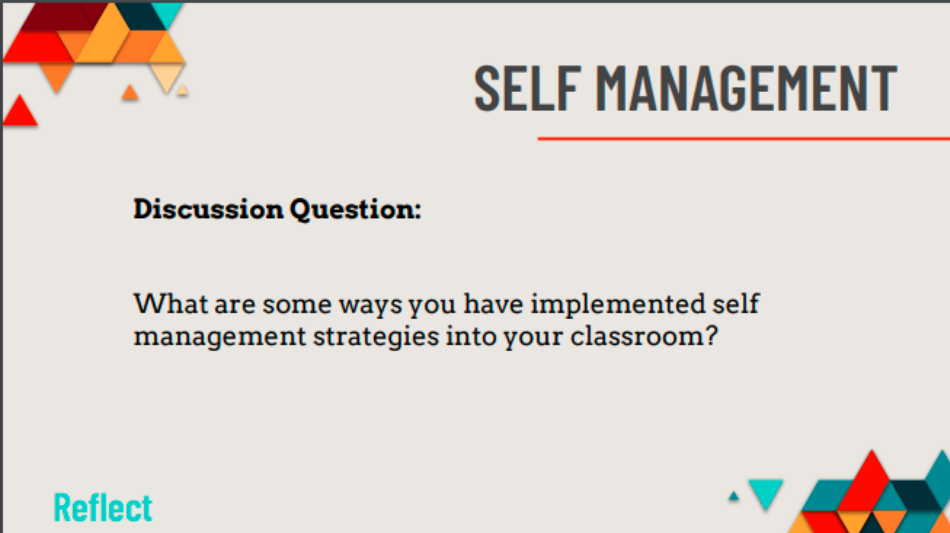
**TASK: Think about something you would like to accomplish today**

Create a S.M.A.R.T. Goal:

- Specific statement
- Measurable outcome
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Timely

**Connect**

Slide 14



# SELF MANAGEMENT

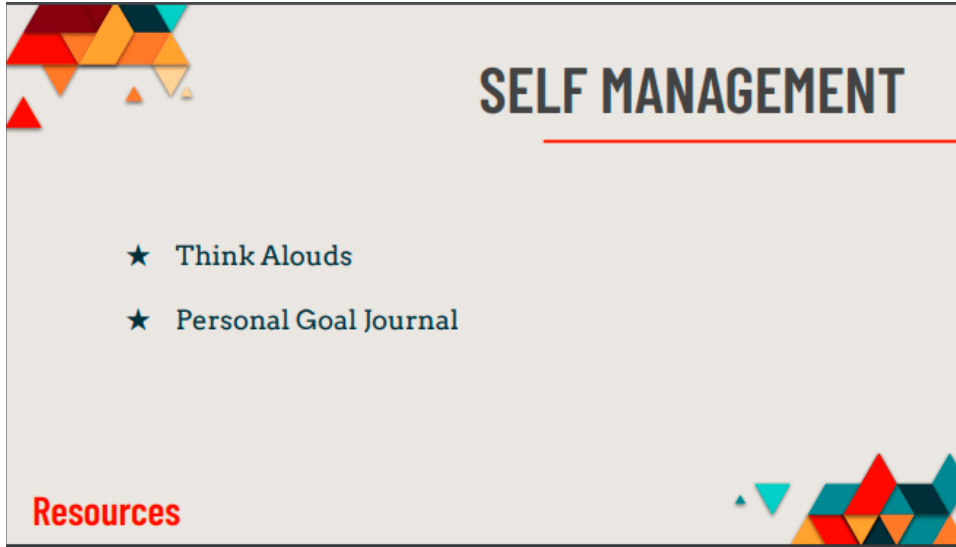
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**Discussion Question:**

What are some ways you have implemented self management strategies into your classroom?

**Reflect**

Slide 15



# SELF MANAGEMENT

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- ★ Think Alouds
- ★ Personal Goal Journal

**Resources**

Slide 16



# SOCIAL AWARENESS


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- ★ Perspective taking
- ★ Empathy
- ★ Appreciating diversity



**Learning**

Slide 17



## SOCIAL AWARENESS

---

**Negative Thought**


- I'm not good at this
- I will look silly if I do that
- I don't know what to say

→


**Positive Thought**

- I'm not good at this yet
- Everyone is having fun and being silly together
- I could start by saying "hello"

**Connect**



Slide 18




## SOCIAL AWARENESS

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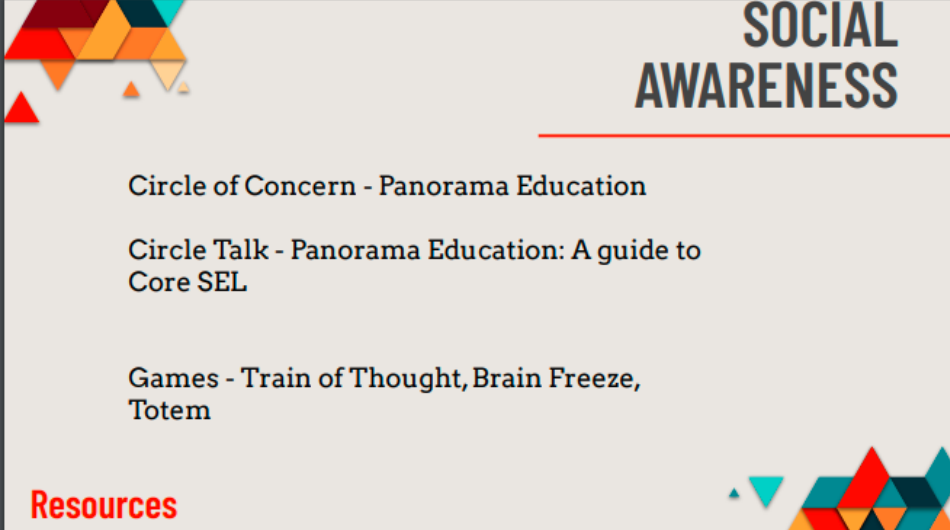
Discussion question:

What are some ways you've incorporated empathy, celebrating diversity, or thinking of others into your classroom?

**Reflect**



Slide 19



## SOCIAL AWARENESS

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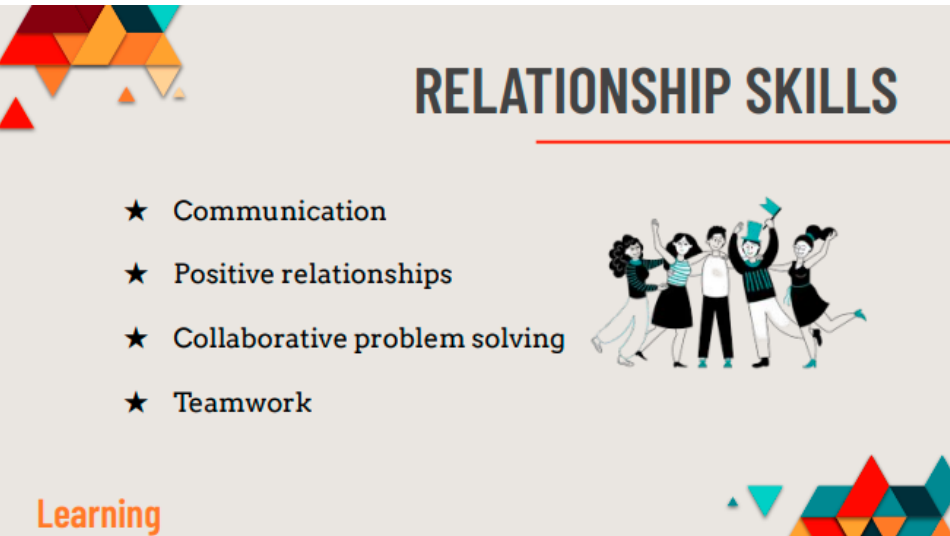
Circle of Concern - Panorama Education

Circle Talk - Panorama Education: A guide to Core SEL

Games - Train of Thought, Brain Freeze, Totem

**Resources**


Slide 20



## RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

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- ★ Communication
- ★ Positive relationships
- ★ Collaborative problem solving
- ★ Teamwork



**Learning**

Slide 21

## RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

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**RPS World Championship**

**Connect**

Game rules

Scissors beats paper

Paper beats rock

Rock beats scissors

Slide 22

## RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

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Discussion question:

In what ways have you encouraged relationship skills in your classroom?

These could include team work, empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving

**Reflect**

Slide 23



# RELATIONSHIP SKILLS


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Sharing materials in the classroom (scaffold 2 students, increased to 3-4)


[Independent Thinking - Mark Finnish \(2018\) Relationship Building](#)

Gratitude Practices

**Resources**



Slide 24




# RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

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Demonstrating open-mindedness and curiosity

Learning how to make a reasoned judgement after analysing data, information and facts

Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions



**Learning**



Slide 25



# RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

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[Suit Yourself](#)




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**Connect**



Slide 26




# RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

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Discussion - How was this activity for you?

What are some other ways you've incorporated responsible decision-making into your classroom?

**Reflect**



Slide 27




# RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

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Courage

Makerspaces

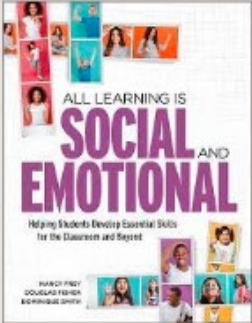

Genius Hour





**Resources**



Slide 28

[CASEL.ORG](http://CASEL.ORG)

Slide 29

