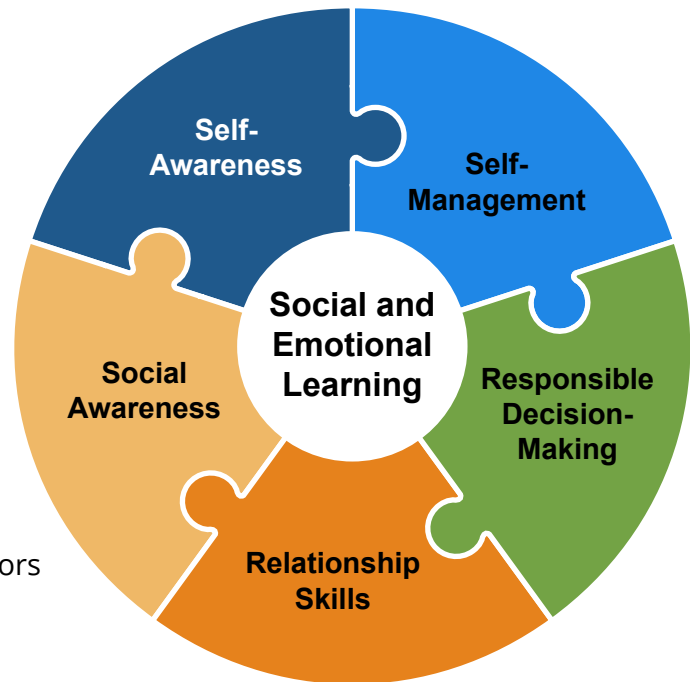


Adapting the CASEL Framework for Students with IDD

What is SEL?

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) helps children and adults grow both personally and academically. SEL provides the foundation for helping students develop a healthy sense of self, manage their emotions, work toward personal goals, show empathy, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. SEL promotes educational equity and student empowerment through authentic school-family-community partnerships to create learning experiences where students are active collaborators who are engaged in a meaningful curriculum.



The CASEL Framework

CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) is an organization that developed a widely used framework for teaching SEL.

CASEL Competency	What It Means
Self-Awareness	Recognizing one's emotions, values, strengths, and challenges
Self-Management	Managing feeling and behaviors, using coping strategies
Social Awareness	Understanding other's perspectives and showing empathy
Relationship Skills	Communicating, cooperating, and building positive relationships
Responsible Decision-Making	Making safe, respectful, and caring choices

SEL is most effective when students are given high-quality and consistent opportunities for application in meaningful activities. SEL in the classroom is best supported with explicit instruction, positive relationships, a supportive classroom environment, and integration of SEL into academic instruction (CASEL, 2024). Positive relationships allow the student to feel comfortable in their learning environment as they engage in SEL-focused activities that reflect daily activities.

Why Adapt SEL for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)?

Students with IDD have difficulty developing social and emotional skills, including:

- Self-regulation
- Empathy
- Communication
- Social interactions

Standard SEL instruction may not be accessible to students with IDD due to their unique learning styles. SEL instruction often needs to be adapted to meet the needs of *all* students.

Adaptations to Effective SEL Approaches

Research-based SEL approaches often include four key elements to support the instruction of SEL, represented by the acronym SAFE (Cipriano et al., 2023; Durlak, 2023). Adaptations for how these elements can be adapted to support students with IDD are depicted below:

Element	Guidance
<u>S</u>equenced: Connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development	• Break SEL instruction/skills into small chunks with incorporated break times. Breaks allow the student to understand SEL concepts more deeply while reducing anxiety and promoting active engagement. • Use IEP-identified SEL goals and present levels of performance to break SEL skills into small, individualized steps that support increased processing time. • Use visual schedules or step-by-step charts to show the sequence of skills. • Repeat and review previous steps before moving on.
<u>A</u>ctive: Employing active forms of learning to help students strengthen new skills	• Use peer modeling or video modeling to practice skills actively. • Provide materials and activities that engage multiple senses (tactile charts, calming sounds) versus only verbal instructions with visual aids.
<u>F</u>ocused: Dedicated time and attention to developing personal and social skills	• Schedule short, consistent SEL sessions. • Provide breaks between activities to reduce fatigue or anxiety. • Focus on one skill at a time rather than multiple skills in a single lesson.
<u>E</u>xplicit: Targeting specific social and emotional skills	• Use clear language and visual supports. • Model the skill step-by-step and provide repeated practice. • Provide prompting, guided practice, and repeated opportunities until mastery is demonstrated, with supports faded as appropriate.

SEL Activities & SAFE Adaptations for Students with IDD

Self-Awareness

Activity	SAFE Adaptations
"All About Me" boards highlighting strengths and preferences	Sequenced: Break activity into smaller steps with modeling and visual sequence (e.g. Identify personal information, identify preferences, identify strengths). Active: Include multisensory supports (e.g. textured letters) as students physically manipulate materials to create their boards. Focused: Dedicate instructional time to explicitly define personal strengths, followed by "All About Me" activity, then provide a short break before the next SEL lesson. Explicit: Explicitly label and model strengths and preferences to support self-awareness (e.g. "I'm good at _____. This is a strength.").

Self-Management

Activity	SAFE Adaptations
Teach coping strategies visually (breathing exercises, calm-down steps)	Sequenced: Teach coping strategies in structured sequences (e.g. recognizing emotions, selecting a coping strategy, practicing the strategy → reflecting). Active: Students actively practice different coping strategies with hands-on activities (e.g. guided breathing with visuals, role-play activities, peer modeling). Focused: Explicitly practice and teach coping strategies. Incorporate breaks between instruction to practice self-management strategies. Explicit: The educator explicitly names and models self-management skills (e.g., "When I feel upset, I can take deep breaths").

Social Awareness

Activity	SAFE Adaptations
Social narratives for perspective-taking and understanding social cues	Sequenced: Social narratives are introduced in a structured progression (e.g., identifying characters, identifying emotions, interpreting social cues, predicting appropriate responses). Provide guided discussion and repeated practice. Active: Rehearse situations with peer modeling and within everyday interactions. Focused: Dedicate instructional time to identifying emotions, perspectives, and social cues. Explicit: Explicitly label emotions, social cues, and perspectives within the story (e.g., "She feels sad," "He is looking away, which means ____"). Use visual support and modeling.

Relationship Skills

Activity	SAFE Adaptations
Scripted practice for greetings, asking for help, sharing, or turn-taking	Sequenced: Social interaction skills are taught in a structured sequence (e.g., modeling the script, practicing with visual supports, practicing with peers, fading scripts), with repeated opportunities to build independence over time. Active: Students actively participate in role play, peer practice, and movement-based interactions using scripts, visuals, or AAC. Focused: Explicitly teach and practice social skills (e.g. how to greet, turn-taking, and asking for help). Explicit: Explicitly teach and model appropriate social language and behaviors (e.g., "I can say 'Can you help me?'"). Provide sentence frames/scripts and feedback during practice.

Responsible Decision-Making

Activity	SAFE Adaptations
Problem-solving flowcharts	Sequenced: Decision-making skills are taught in a structured sequence (e.g., identifying the problem, considering choices, predicting outcomes, selecting a solution), with modeling and guided practice. Active: Students actively engage by manipulating flowchart visuals, selecting choices, role-playing problem scenarios, and practicing decision-making using real or simulated situations. Focused: Dedicate instruction to teach responsible decision-making skills with structured practice and breaks. Explicit: Teach and label each step of the decision-making process (e.g., "First, I stop and think," "Next, I choose a safe solution") using visual supports.

Resources

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