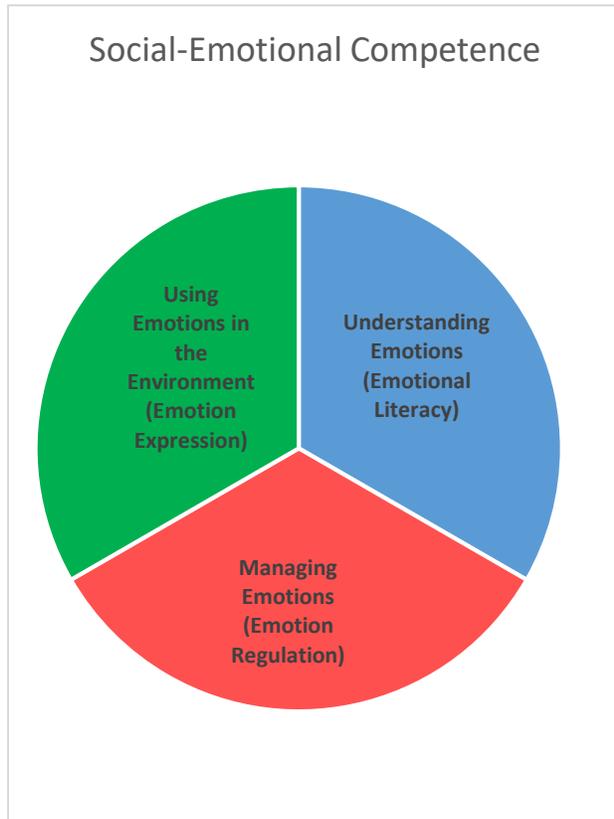


## Assessing the Social-Emotional Constructs: Overview

Social-emotional development includes the use of emotion, management of emotion, and understanding of emotion to navigate the social environment, including the learning environment, in which children exist. It is important for teachers to assess social-emotional competence because of the known relationship between early social-emotional factors and later outcomes, both academic and social (e.g., success in school, lower rates of antisocial behavior, Raver & Knitzer, 2002).



**Emotion Expression** refers to how children express their feelings through words, gestures and/or behaviors that help the observer, teacher or other adult understand the emotion or emotions the child is experiencing. Children progress from being aware (or not being aware) of others reactions to their emotion expressions to using emotion more purposefully in their social (learning) environment. For example, a child smiles when asking other children to play games or says "I'm sorry" when a friend is visibly angry.

**Emotional Literacy** is about understanding emotions in the environment (in oneself and others). Children begin with a limited ability to communicate their emotions accurately. Then children begin to identify emotions, can identify cause and effect of emotion, and ultimately interpret complex emotions. For example, while on the playground, Johnny walked over to Omar and told him, "I'm mad at you because you took my bike."

**Emotion Regulation** is the ability to control one's emotions. This involves children initiating, inhibiting or modulating their feelings. In the Emotion Regulation Strategies progression, children move from having few strategies for regulating emotions to being able to regulate emotions even in unusual events or events that evoke more intense emotions. For example, a child may sit on his hands in order to control himself while waiting for a toy while another child is playing.

In the pages that follow you will find suggestions for assessing each of these constructs, as well as specific examples of evidence teachers have collected to document each of the skills on these three social-emotional construct progressions, with rationales for placement on that skill of the progression.

## Setting the Stage for Assessing the Social-Emotional Constructs

When planning for assessment of social and emotional skills, it is helpful to reflect on the times children are likely to interact throughout the day. This could be during lunch time, free choice, small group activities. Creating activities and environments that promote children's interactions will give you multiple opportunities to observe their behaviors and skills for the social-emotional constructs. Below are suggested classroom activities and scenarios that facilitate the assessment of the three social-emotional constructs: **Emotion Expression**, **Emotional Literacy**, and **Emotion Regulation Strategies**. Please refer to the examples and annotated explanations that follow for the different skill levels on each progression.

- 1.) Create paired learning situations in which children must work together to achieve a goal, such as teams competing to solve word problems, create math patterns, etc. to observe for **Emotion Expression**.
  - Count children by ones and twos. Ask the "ones" to find a partner who is a "two." Watch how they approach their peers (do they ask with positive body language, such as smiling?)
  - During the activity, look for cooperation, turn-taking, and problem-solving (e.g., prosocial behaviors that promote relationship-building), especially when there are disagreements.
  - Talk to children after they are done with an activity to ask how they worked together (look for reflection). For example, if a child suggests taking turns with the activity, ask him why he suggested taking turns.
  
- 2.) When holding large and small group meetings, such as a morning or closing meeting, discuss how people will feel during different situations (**Emotional Literacy**). Group discussions are also a good opportunity for children to practice talking about a subject they know, to use new vocabulary words, or to talk about a story they have read (i.e., teachers can simultaneously observe for other constructs not in the social-emotional domain).
  - Ask students to think of things in school that make them feel two different emotions.
  - Ask children to imagine a situation where some children might feel different, such as taking a test and then having a pizza party after. Ask a child how they would feel and why. Suggest that another child would feel differently and ask why he feels that way.
  - Choose stories for group reading that have characters clearly experiencing emotions and ask the children to explain how the character feels throughout the story.
  - Tell students personal information about a story character (e.g., Fran loves dancing but hates loud music). Ask them to draw a picture of how Fran will feel when her mom makes her go to the holiday dance and ask about their pictures to listen for use of personal information to justify how Fran will feel.
  
- 3.) Create an environment where students are likely to display a variety of emotions that might need to be managed (**Emotion Regulation Strategies**) and follow up with questions about those feelings (**Emotional Literacy**).<sup>1</sup>
  - Make an announcement that the class will receive 5 extra minutes of recess, or announce that everyone will receive a present at the end of the day (e.g., stickers, fun pencils)
    - Which children remain in control or can quickly regain control over their excited emotions? (**Emotion Regulation Strategies—potentially Skills D or E**)
    - Which children need one or more reminders to stay in their chair and/or calm down? (**Emotion Regulation Strategies—Potentially Skills A-C**)
  - Follow up with children observed for Emotion Regulation Strategies and ask them questions related to their understanding of emotions (**Emotional Literacy**).
    - How did they feel when they heard there would be extra recess? Why did they feel that way?
    - How would a friend feel tomorrow if she got called in from recess to do an ambiguous task (e.g., help rearrange desks). Why would the friend feel that way?

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<sup>1</sup> Do not create an environment that would cause undue emotional stress. Most skills on the Emotion Regulation Strategies progression are about the management of emotions during *typical* events.

## Setting the Stage for Assessing the Social-Emotional Constructs

### Differentiating among the Social-Emotional Constructs

Teachers may observe skills from more than one of the social-emotional construct progressions during a single interaction. This may make it difficult to determine which child behaviors provide supporting evidence for which construct. Until each of the three social-emotional constructs are thoroughly understood and teachers are confident in how to place children on these progressions, it may be helpful to consider the kinds of events or situations best described by each construct:

- Emotion Regulation Strategies
  - Children need reminders about how to behave
  - You observe or expect a child to experience intense emotions given the event
  - You notice changes in a child's emotions and related behavior over the course of an event
- Emotion Expression
  - Children are asked to work together
  - Children may have to sacrifice or compromise in order to accomplish a task
- Emotional Literacy
  - Children are asked about or are discussing their own or other's feelings
  - Children are asked to take the perspective of another person—either someone they know, or a fictional or non-fictional character

## Emotion Expression Examples and Rationale



Expression of emotion is a means of communicating with others, including facilitating, maintaining, and concluding social interactions (Denham, 1998). The progression ranges from Skills A-G for the Emotion Expression Construct. Below you will find each skill on the progression, a corresponding example piece of evidence, and the rationale for assigning the evidence to a particular skill level. Many of the examples below are actual pieces of evidence teachers have documented for these progressions.<sup>2</sup>

### A. Acts, talks or reacts to an experience of stimulus without demonstrating awareness of the reactions of others around them.

#### Evidence

*On our way to lunch, Andrew accidentally stepped on Timmy's foot. Andrew apologized, but Timmy began to yell loudly, pushed the child who stepped on his foot and then sat on the ground refusing to move.*

#### Rationale

- Timmy shows no awareness that Andrew had apologized, and continued to yell and push.
- Andrew *does* show awareness that his actions had an impact on others (Skill B) and used a prosocial behavior to try to fix the situation (Skill D or Skill E, depending on whether we have seen Andrew express relationship-building types of behavior before).
- Timmy does not appear to be using an effective (if any) strategy to manage his emotion (**Emotion Regulation Strategies** construct). This scenario would also be a good opportunity for the teacher to observe if s/he has to intervene to help him deal with his emotions, which would provide evidence for the **Emotion Regulation Strategies** construct.

### B. Shows awareness that his or her own actions, words, and reactions to an experience or stimulus has an impact on others.

#### Evidence

*During lunch, Jamal took a few goldfish from his friend without asking. His friend got upset and said, "No Jamal!" and Jamal quickly gave them back.*

#### Rationale

- Jamal responds to his friends' reaction by giving the goldfish back, demonstrating that he has an awareness that his actions impact others.
- His friend is using words and "upset" facial expressions to get his goldfish back, which could be Skill D or E (depending on whether we've seen this child engage in relationship-building).

<sup>2</sup> Evidence has been modified to protect teacher and child identity, and to provide clarity and readability.

## Emotion Expression Examples and Rationale



### C. Makes choices to express emotions in ways that get his/her needs met.

#### Evidence

*Lily was getting very upset because she did not get passed the kickball. Lily began to sob until a peer kicks the ball to her.*

#### Rationale

- Lily is crying to get the ball passed to her. She does not try to use positive language or emotion (e.g., “Hey guys, pass over here please!”), behaviors that indicate Skill D or E. She continues to cry until she gets her way or her “need” met.

### D. Begins to express emotions in ways that support building relationships.

#### Evidence

*Sam often refuses to share his coloring tools but recently when asked by his peer for his green crayon, he said, “you can have it when I’m done.”*

#### Rationale

- The teacher notes that it is unusual for Sam to engage in prosocial behavior (in this case, encouraging turn-taking with his peer), which is why he is considered “begins to” express emotions in relationship-building ways (Skill D) rather than “generally” expresses emotions in ways that support building relationships (Skill E).

### E. Generally expresses emotions in ways that support building relationships.

#### Evidence

*Ariel was working on a science experiment and another student knocked it over. Ariel told the student how she felt and to please not do it again.*

#### Rationale

- The student is at Skill E if the teacher determines that this is more of an established behavior rather than an emerging behavior.
- Ariel’s response to the student is considered to be “prosocial” and constructive.
- The primary difference between E and D is that Ariel, unlike Sam, frequently expresses emotions in ways that support building relationships.

## Emotion Expression Examples and Rationale



### F. Reflects about emotions and the consequences of actions with support from the teacher.

#### Evidence

*Jack doesn't want to be partners with another friend for the reading activity. He was reminded to think how he would feel if someone didn't want to be his partner. He then replied, "I'm sorry" to his partner and began to work with his designated partner.*

#### Rationale

- Jack reflected on the teacher's comment and altered his initial behavior to be more supportive and understanding of his partner's feelings. Note: Jack's reflection was a result of his teacher prompting (not independently as in Skill G).

### G. Independently reflects about emotions and the consequences of actions.

#### Evidence

*Abby's friend tripped over Abby's foot during tag. Abby said sorry, and reached down to help her friend to stand back up on her feet. I said, "Abby, that was nice of you to help Sally." Abby said, "I get sad when I fall on the ground so I didn't want her to be sad too."*

#### Rationale

- Abby independently chose to help her friend who she accidentally tripped. Without much prompting, Abby was able to explain to her teacher why she helped her friend.

## Emotional Literacy Examples and Rationale



Being emotionally literate (i.e., understanding emotions) helps children better understand their peers and their own behavior, which supports the development of both emotion expression and regulation. This construct progression may require more conferencing with the child to gauge his or her understanding of emotions.

The progression ranges from Skills A-I for the Emotional Literacy Construct. Below you will find each skill on the progression, a corresponding example piece of evidence, and the rationale for assigning the evidence to a particular skill level. Many of the examples below are actual pieces of evidence teachers have documented for these progressions.<sup>3</sup>

### A. Child expresses verbally or behaviorally a range of emotions.

#### Evidence

*When Molly's mom brought cupcakes for a student's birthday, Sally smiled. Before Molly's mom came, Sally had her head on the desk and was sad due to reading time being over for the day.*

#### Rationale

- Sally expressed a range of emotions for different events occurring throughout the day.
- A child at this skill does not show an awareness of his or her emotions (Skill B).

### B. Child shows an awareness of his or her verbal and/or behavioral expression of emotions.

#### Evidence

*Peter began to tear up and cover his eyes when there was a scary scene in the movie. When asked if he was okay, he said he couldn't watch it. When asked how he was feeling, he said "It's haunted."*

#### Rationale

- By covering his eyes, Peter shows an awareness of his scared emotion but cannot yet identify what he was feeling.

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<sup>3</sup> Evidence has been modified to protect teacher and child identity, and to provide clarity and readability.

## Emotional Literacy Examples and Rationale



### C. Identifies emotions in self.

#### Evidence

*Matt said, "I'm so happy." I asked why, and he said, "Because I'm happy!"*

#### Rationale

- Matt indicates the emotion he was experiencing, but doesn't give a reason when asked. If he had provided an explanation (and could consistently provide explanations), he might be placed at Skill E because he is able to determine that an event can include one or more emotions (i.e., understands causes of emotions).

### D. Identifies emotions in others.

#### Evidence

*Per her mother's request, Traci and I are working on reading a book about a dog to help her overcome her fear of dogs. When I asked her how the little girl felt in the story, she said "happy." When I asked her why the girl was happy, she said she knew a scary dog. She couldn't tell me why the little girl in the story was happy (girl got a puppy for her birthday).*

#### Rationale

- Children at Skill D can identify what others are feeling, but may have difficulty identifying why without support. If the child can identify both the emotion and what caused the emotion, they should be placed at the next skill level (E).

### E. Indicates a response to an event can include one or more emotions, including conflicting emotions, within themselves or another person.

#### Evidence

*While doing a whole class debrief about students arguing with their partners, I asked the students how it makes their friends feel when they yell and won't share their books. Hallie responded, "It makes them feel sad and upset because no one likes to be yelled at."*

#### Rationale

- Hallie indicated the emotion that another person would experience when they yell and don't share, and explained that people don't like to be yelled at.
- Skill E is about understanding cause and effect of emotion. Children at this skill cannot only identify emotions in self and others, but can make the connection from the expressed emotion to what happened that led to the experience of that emotion.



**F. Indicates the same event can cause different people to experience different emotions.**

Evidence

*Jackson had to return the class hamster today and it was Nallie's turn to take the hamster home. Nallie, "I'm so happy it's my turn to take Bubbles home but Jackson is sad."*

Rationale

- In Skill F, Nallie is able to indicate that Jackson has a different emotion than her.
- In this skill, children cannot only identify causes of emotion, but can indicate that the same event can cause two people to feel differently than each other.

**G. Indicates knowledge of how the social context relates to his/her own and other's emotion experience.**

Evidence

*Today a member from our community brought a live pig into one of our kindergarten classrooms. Before entering the room with the pig, both Jason and Christian made similar comments along the lines of they were very excited to see the pig, but also nervous and scared as they had never seen a live pig up close before. Christian commented that the other kids weren't scared because they all live on farms.*

Rationale

- In Skill G, the boys are able to differentiate that they are both excited and nervous (Skill E) but Christian identified that other children were not scared because they were raised on farms (i.e., was using social information to determine how other children felt).
- In comparison to Skills D or F, Christian references the social context for why he or she feels a certain way.
- Unlike previous skills, the social context, which includes additional information unique to that particular environment, is used to understand emotions. In this example, Christian knows that the other kids in the class were raised on farms and uses that information to explain how other children felt. If they went to a different classroom where the children did not live on farms, he might not make that determination.

## Emotional Literacy Examples and Rationale



- H. Interprets the emotional experience of others using the social context (e.g., provides justification that includes social information and inferences about others' intentions).**

### Evidence

*In a class lesson about bullying, the students were presented a scenario where a fox was picking on a turtle for being a slow walker, but the fox doesn't know that the turtle is in a race to see who can go the slowest. I asked my class how the turtle feels. Pedro responded, "The turtle feels happy because he's actually winning the race. I got picked on one time during recess and I felt sad but the turtle is just happy he is winning."*

### Rationale

- For Skill H, Pedro puts aside his own experience of getting picked on and uses information about the race to determine how the turtle would feel in the mock scenario.

- I. Predicts the emotional experience of others using the social context (e.g., provides justification that includes social information and inferences about others' intention).**

### Evidence

*When I asked Donelle if he was excited for the field trip tomorrow, he said he was but knows that his mom will be sad when she is not with him. He justified his statement by saying, "In the car yesterday, Mommy said she missed me when I was at school."*

### Rationale

- Donelle predicts the emotions of his mom using social information from his conversation that he had with her yesterday in the car.
- Skill I differs from Skill H because the child predicts the emotional experience of others before the emotional experience actually occurred.

## Emotional Regulation Strategies Examples and Rationale



For the Emotion Regulation Strategies construct, we observe the *strategies* children use to regulate their emotions. It's important for teachers to create classroom expectations for behavior and provide children with ideas for controlling their emotions before observing for this construct. Teachers should also consider what is reasonably appropriate for children in their grade. For example, it's not unusual for one child to visibly experience intense emotions and another child to not show intense emotions. Neither of these children should be considered "unregulated" if there is evidence of regulation occurring.

The progression ranges from A-E. Below you will find each skill on the progression, 1-2 corresponding example pieces of evidence, and the rationale for assigning the evidence to a particular skill level. Many of the examples below are actual pieces of evidence teachers have documented for these progressions.<sup>4</sup>

### **A. When offered strategies for regulating the expression of emotions, begins to use the strategies offered with continual support.**

#### Evidence

*Jose is doing an activity and uses the strategy to put his head down for a couple minutes because he feels overwhelmed. But after a few minutes he doesn't want to get back to the activity and begins to yell for help instead. I had to go over to him to remind him to put his head down when he feels overwhelmed and then I will know to give him more support.*

#### Rationale

- Jose begins to use the strategy of putting his head down but does so inconsistently and has to be reminded by his teacher to use that strategy rather than disruptive behaviors.

### **B. When offered strategies for regulating the expression of emotions, consistently uses the strategies offered with minimal support.**

#### Evidence

*When Han was not listening to a request at the drinking fountain, Ian immediately came to tell me instead of "using his words" to meet his needs (he looked upset). I reminded him of a strategy that he could use and he then used his words to tell Han his turn was over and it was his turn.*

#### Rationale

- Ian had to be reminded of the appropriate strategy but once reminded, he adjusted his behavior "with minimal support."
- Unlike Skill A, Ian adjusts his behavior more quickly but notably, he does not try his strategy first.

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<sup>4</sup> Evidence has been modified to protect teacher and child identity, and to provide clarity and readability.



**C. Sometimes uses learned strategies independently to regulate expression of emotions during routine activities.**

Evidence

*Jordan was getting very upset when he did not know the word in his book and threw the book on the ground. The teacher talked to Jordan about putting his head on the table for a second and then raising 2 hands to show he needed help. Jordan put his head on the table and raised 2 hands during reading time three times this week.*

*Ethan has been using the “ask a friend” strategy during write-the-room activity to help find some of the words – no problems there. During math, though, he had a meltdown even after he “asked a friend” because he still couldn’t figure out the problem. We talked about other ways he could solve the problems, such as working backward from the answer or coming to me for help.*

Rationale

- In the first example, Jordan *sometimes* uses his strategies for emotional regulation.
- Jordan does not require much or any support as in Skill A or B. Rather, he knows to use his strategy but does so only sometimes.
- In the second example, the teacher notes that Ethan has a strategy that works in some settings (reading activity) but not others (math) and still needs help finding other strategies for dealing with his emotions.

**D. Consistently uses learned strategies independently to regulate the expression of emotions during routine activities.**

Evidence

*Paige lost her chance for Friday’s cooking activity when her name went up on the board for talking during reading. She looked pretty bummed for a few minutes, but kept it together and continued reading quietly. When we transitioned to lunch about 10 minutes later she was back to her usual self.*

Rationale

- Paige felt some kind of negative emotion (e.g., disappointment, sadness) but was able to move past it shortly after, suggesting she was able to regulate the emotions she was feeling. The teacher could have conferenced with her to confirm she had used an Emotion Regulation Strategy (e.g., distraction, restructuring the event in her mind) but it was not necessary.
- Children observed at Skill D should be engaging in typical, routine kinds of experiences. If the emotion is regulated during unusual or unusually complex, intense situations, that child would be observed to be at the next skill (Skill E). If a child is generally regulated, but an unusual event occurs in which he or she needs support, he can still be at Skill D, but not Skill E.



- E. **Independently** uses learned strategies for regulating emotions during complex contextual transitions (e.g., exposed to multiple stimuli simultaneously), to accomplish a **different or new** type of task, because of interruptions, or because of changes in the daily routine.

### Evidence

*We tried a new game today for sight words (Around the World). Dylan missed his word and had to sit instead of advancing to the next word, but he did not appear too upset. He quickly sat down and said "Aw man! I knew that word! I will get it next time." He did not allow himself to get upset and "brushed it off" as we talk about a lot in our room.*

### Rationale

- Dylan did not need any adult intervention to regulate his emotions and was able to handle his disappointment in a positive way. This differs from Skill D because it's a new type of game and he is still able to regulate his emotions.
- The teacher can determine what is an unusual, challenging, or complex event, especially if it differs among children.
- Skill E, in contrast to Skill D, requires use of Emotion Regulation Strategies during more emotionally demanding situations.