

# Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Early Childhood

Shelby Deglan and Anthea Leung



**Shelby Deglan** is an MLIS student at the University of British Columbia and works at Fraser Valley Regional Library. **Anthea Leung** is an auxiliary Youth Librarian at West Vancouver Memorial Library.

This list features freely accessible links to research and resources on social-emotional learning (SEL) in early childhood. The resources can help children's librarians and early childhood practitioners expand their knowledge and equip them with practical skills to promote SEL practices at libraries and/or other childcare settings.

## SEL and Dialogic Reading

This article argues that SEL and emergent literacy can be developed simultaneously through *dialogic reading*. When reading a book to a group of children, dialogic reading is when practitioners engage children by asking questions, talking, and listening.

For example, a practitioner might ask what a character's motivation is in a story, or how they might be feeling. With this approach, Doyle and Bramwell recommend small groups and repeated readings so that children can learn narrative structures, vocabulary, and more fully comprehend the story's social-emotional content.<sup>1</sup> Social-emotional skills include sharing, cooperation, getting along with others, and solving conflicts. Doyle and Bramwell<sup>2</sup> recommend selecting books with social-emotional content, such as narratives that solve conflicts between characters or include emotional vocabulary (i.e., grumpy, excited, frustrated, etc.).

Learning emotional vocabulary helps readers to describe their feelings and feelings of others. This article is aimed at teachers, but the research and implementation tips on conducting dialogic reading during storytime can be applied to librarians. The article urges practitioners to be intentional and strategic with book reading and asking questions that enrich children's understanding of social interactions and emotions.

## Promoting Emergent Literacy and Social-Emotional Learning through Dialogic Reading

<https://readitonceagain.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Promoting-early-literacy-and-social-emotional.pdf>

## SEL Life Skills

Mind in the Making (MITM) is a training program for practitioners and caregivers of young children. The program is based on seven Essential Life Skills that MITM recommends that young children develop:

- focus and self-control
- perspective taking
- communicating
- making connections

- critical thinking
- taking on challenges
- self-directed, engaged learning

All seven skills incorporate social, emotional, and cognitive learning. Aside from the actual training modules, this website has many quick resources for skill-building activities that answer common parenting questions. For example, when asking how to get a young child to play with others, MITM recommends talking about feelings, talking about others' perspectives, playing pretend, and asking questions about the feelings of characters in books and stories. These recommendations mainly build on perspective taking, related to empathy, and encourage children to understand others' motivations and point of view to reduce instances of conflict.

### Mind in the Making

<https://www.mindinthemaking.org/>

### Skill-Building Opportunities: Playing with Others

[https://assets.ctfassets.net/uztpv7pl0j6m/5UNPZQJe5YilGBKUrT2DD9/42ab684f3766c5b79256f469c4e158c9/MITM\\_Preschool\\_Socialization\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/uztpv7pl0j6m/5UNPZQJe5YilGBKUrT2DD9/42ab684f3766c5b79256f469c4e158c9/MITM_Preschool_Socialization_2019.pdf)

## SEL and Heart-Mind Well-Being

Heart-Mind Online is an online repository of evidence-based SEL resources that support children's positive development of social and emotional well-being. Heart-Mind Online introduces the concept of heart-mind well-being and identifies five heart-mind qualities:

- is secure and calm
- gets along with others
- is alert and engaged
- is compassionate and kind
- solves problems peacefully

The website features many resources on the heart-mind well-being theme as well as activity guides for parents and educators to help young children develop prosocial and emotional competencies.

The resources are based on and support the nurturing of the five heart-mind qualities. They can be searched by themes, such as conflict resolution, friendship, and resilience, as well as by developmental ages. For example, the website features an introductory guide to *Feelings First Aid*, filled with easy-to-follow and engaging activities that help children to overcome negative triggers and regulate their emotions in stressful

situations. Caregivers and practitioners can follow step-by-step instructions to identify the type(s) of emotions a child is experiencing and to incorporate the corresponding child-friendly meditation practices, such as *hot chocolate breathing* and *snack attack*.

### Heart-Mind Online Resources

<https://heartmindonline.org/resources>

### Resources: Feelings First Aid

<https://heartmindonline.org/resources/feelings-first-aid>

## Public Library Storytime Resource: SEL Kits

Newfoundland and Labrador Public Libraries (NLPL) have curated a collection of six social-emotional learning kits, aimed to assist families, caregivers, and early childhood educators with teaching SEL concepts to young children through storytelling and other literacy activities. The kits cover a wide range of SEL topics, such as practicing mindfulness, celebrating diversity, dealing with death and grief, etc. Each kit includes eight nicely illustrated picture books and an activity guide. For example, the *Anxiety and Worries Social-Emotional Learning Kit* features age-appropriate titles such as *Breathe* by Scott Magoon and *The I'M NOT SCARED Book* by Todd Parr and introduces two activity suggestions—*Worry Box* and *Breathing Exercises*—that connect well with the themes of the books. This resource guide would be useful to children's librarians who are interested in curating SEL-themed resource kits and/or delivering SEL storytimes for young children and families at their libraries.

### NLPL's Story Kits to Share with Kids: Social Emotional Learning Kits

<https://guides.nlpl.ca/c.php?g=713536&p=5085022>

### Social Emotional Learning Kits Printable List

[https://guides.nlpl.ca/ld.php?content\\_id=35022833](https://guides.nlpl.ca/ld.php?content_id=35022833)

## Empathy Day Early Years Toolkit

The Empathy Lab creates an Early Years Toolkit to assist public librarians with planning and delivering SEL-themed library programs to celebrate Empathy Day in the UK. The toolkit includes innovative and developmentally appropriate empathy-building activity guides to engage, entertain, and inspire young children. The activities are designed to help young children understand how themselves and others think, feel, and behave.

The Empathy Lab stresses the importance of utilizing stories to build empathy skills, so a large part of the toolkit is dedicated to book activity suggestions related to some of the recommended picture books, such as *Lulu Gets a Cat* by Anna McQuinn. Caregivers, librarians, and educators download

resources, such as the empathy-themed book list and emotion rhyme cards, to help children learn to recognize, understand, and respect other people's feelings and emotions.

#### Early Years Toolkit for Empathy Day

<https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/b2f3fbc2/files/uploaded/01%20Early%20Years%20Toolkit.pdf>

#### Read for Empathy Guide

[https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/b2f3fbc2/files/uploaded/Empathy%20Guide%20A4%20landscape\\_oK1oB43TVapUSdcg0pBk.pdf](https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/b2f3fbc2/files/uploaded/Empathy%20Guide%20A4%20landscape_oK1oB43TVapUSdcg0pBk.pdf)

## SEL Empathy Booklist

An updated 2020 booklist of preschool picture books that model empathy and compassion has been created by Brightly, a Penguin Random House Company. These books can help caregivers and practitioners approach children's emotions and empathy development in ways that are relevant to today's social and political climate.

For example, the first book on the list is *Come with Me* by Holly M. McGhee. It features a child who is anxious about the news on television and is cheered up by spreading kindness in the neighborhood with her parents. Other topics include loss, friendship conflict, perspective taking, bullying, kindness, being different, and peace.

#### Twelve Books that Model Empathy and Compassion for Young Readers

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books-that-model-empathy-compassion-young-readers/> &

## References

1. Brooke Graham Doyle and Wendie Bramwell, "Promoting Emergent Literacy and Social-Emotional Learning through Dialogic Reading," *International Reading Association* (2006), 554–64, <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.59.6.5>.
2. Doyle and Bramwell, "Promoting Emergent Literacy," 554–64.