



Activities for Building Character and Social-Emotional Learning

GRADES
6–8



**EASY-TO-USE LESSONS
INTEGRATE INTO DAILY
CURRICULUM**

Katia S. Petersen, Ph.D.



safe
& CARING
SCHOOLS®

Activities for Building Character and Social-Emotional Learning

GRADES
6–8

Katia S. Petersen, Ph.D.

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Activities for Building Character and Social-Emotional Learning Grades 6–8 was previously published as *Safe & Caring Schools Grades 6–8*.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Petersen, Katia.

Activities for building character and social-emotional learning. Grades 6–8 / Katia S. Petersen.
p. cm. —(Safe & caring schools)

Originally published under the title: Safe & caring schools. Grades 6–8, c2008.

Summary: “Hundreds of user-friendly lesson plans help teachers build attitudes of respect and caring, reduce problem behaviors, empower students to solve problems, and educate the whole child socially, emotionally, and academically. The lessons’ literature-based connections allow teachers to ‘build in’ rather than ‘add on’ social-emotional learning (SEL) as part of the daily curriculum. Each resource guide offers: Monthly themes focused on emotions, empathy, relationships, conflict resolution, bullying prevention, problem solving, decision making, teamwork, and self-esteem; Literature-based lessons with curriculum integrations for using the lessons as part of language arts, social studies, science, math, art, and music; Easy-to-implement lesson formats for all activities: Read, Discuss, Do, Relate; Built-in assessments; Reproducible activity handouts in the book and on CD-ROM. Field-tested in classrooms across the United States, these activities when fully implemented have resulted in improved school climate, greater parent engagement, increased academic achievement, and reduction in discipline referrals. The Activities for Building Character and Social-Emotional Learning resource guides are essential teaching tools for all preK–8 teachers”—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-1-57542-394-4

1. Classroom management—United States. 2. School environment—United States. 3. Learning, Psychology of. 4. Moral education (Middle school) 5. Affective education. 6. Middle school education—Activity programs. I. Petersen, Katia. Safe & caring schools. Grades 6–8. II. Title.

LB3013.P4336 2012
372.1102—dc23

2011053540

eBook ISBN: 978-1-57542-665-X

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Edited by Deborah Verdoorn Anderson and Meg Bratsch

Visual identity design by Tilka Design

Design by Tilka Design, and activity page design by J Campbell, ArtVille

Illustrations by Brie Spangler

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

Minneapolis, MN

(612) 338-2068

help4kids@freespirit.com

www.freespirit.com



Printed on recycled paper
including 30%
post-consumer waste

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the thousands of children in my life who give me inspiration and inner strength to do my part in creating a safe and caring world. It is my hope that these resources help connect children, parents, and educators so that they may achieve success wherever life takes them.

Acknowledgments

Safe & Caring Schools (SCS) has been tested where it matters most—in the classrooms. As such, my gratitude goes to all the teachers, specialists, and others who took time to incorporate the content of this guide into their lesson plans and then provide feedback about its efficacy. Efforts to create safe and caring schools are most effective when leadership is committed to applying the program at a schoolwide or district level to create systemic change. My thanks go to Dr. Wilfredo T. Laboy, superintendent of Lawrence Public Schools, and Dr. Mary Lou Bergeron, assistant superintendent of Lawrence Public Schools, for their foresight regarding the value of social and emotional learning in supporting students personally as well as academically. Dr. Bergeron has been particularly helpful in testing and proving this premise in schools.

Thanks to the staff at Free Spirit Publishing for their dedication to producing great products: To Publisher Judy Galbraith for her vision and belief in the power of the SCS program; John Kober, editor, for his ongoing support, guidance, patience and insight during the creation of the products, to Deb Anderson and Meg Bratsch, editors, for their extraordinary ability to produce resources that make a difference in the lives of students; and to the production team and all the others who pull the pieces together to make a book.

Thanks to J Campbell at ArtVille, Inc., for his professionalism, creativity, and ability to bring every page in this book to life. Also, thanks to my special educator friends, Kathy Kennedy Budge and Lynn Pauly, who listened, offered support, and used their ability to think outside the box to find the best way possible to connect with students.

This book series would not have been completed without the support of my wonderful family. My deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Steve Petersen, for the endless hours he worked by my side, for his ongoing encouragement, his incredible creativity, and for urging me to always reach for excellence. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to my daughter, Alexia, for her patience and support during this project and for reminding me daily about the true meaning of parenting. Warm thanks go to my parents for their unconditional love, for teaching me to believe in myself and encouraging me to follow my dreams.

“Safe & Caring Schools provides educators with the roadmap and all the tools necessary to transform classrooms and schools into environments that are not only physically, socially, and emotionally safe, but that engage and nurture our children’s resilience, including their capacity and love for learning.”

**BONNIE BENARD,
SENIOR PROGRAM ASSOCIATE, WESTED,
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA**

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FOREWORD

Dr. Katia Petersen has long been a champion for children and has dedicated her career to educating children and adults about the importance of social and emotional development in our youth and ourselves. Her vision, as a practitioner, has been to include life-skills education in the school day. She wants teachers to connect with students in a meaningful way and students to understand the relevance of school and how best to use it as a resource for self-development and well-being. Safe & Caring Schools is the culmination of more than 25 years of experience working in schools to help educators and others enhance the well-being and emotional literacy skills in children from preschool through high school.

In Safe & Caring Schools, Dr. Petersen has created a comprehensive approach to provide a solid foundation for infusing social and emotional literacy skills—including recognition of emotions, building relationships, conflict resolution, problem solving, decision making, and collaboration—into all areas of the program. The activities and resources provided in this book have been field-tested in classrooms across the United States with children from diverse backgrounds. Over the past years, I was fortunate enough to have worked with Dr. Petersen implementing Safe & Caring Schools in the Lawrence Public Schools. During the implementation, we collected a variety of data relative to overall school climate issues. In schools where Safe & Caring Schools was being implemented consistently, the data showed the following:

- an improvement in school climate
- greater parent engagement
- increased academic achievement
- a reduction in referrals for disciplinary infractions

We have continued to use the themes and activities of Safe & Caring Schools as a foundation for the social and emotional development of our students.

As an educator and school psychologist, I understand how children's levels of social and emotional literacy skill development impact their ability to succeed in school. I have seen firsthand how the development of these skills improved the overall academic and social success of our students. As an administrator, I am also acutely aware of the concerns that schools and school districts have relative to time on learning and adding new programs to the school day, especially at a time when there is a heightened focus on academic achievement and a demand for increased instructional time. With this in mind, Safe & Caring Schools was created to be an integrated component of systemic change at the classroom, school, and district levels. It has evolved into an easy-to-use, classroom-based approach that can be infused into all academic content areas with minimal effort on the part of teachers. The skills in the program are universal and can be addressed and reinforced throughout the school day and across grade levels. By infusing social and emotional learning across the curriculum, Safe & Caring Schools provides teachers with the flexibility and creativity they need to ensure students gain the skills they require to become successful students and members of society.

Mary Lou Bergeron, Ph.D.

*Assistant Superintendent for
Operations and Support Services
Lawrence Public Schools
Lawrence, Massachusetts*

PREFACE

Imagine a world where all children have an opportunity to learn and thrive—a safe place where adults help children become resilient. Imagine the impact safe and caring school communities can make in our challenging world as they encourage peer support, getting along, making ethical choices, problem solving, accountability, and cooperation. With this vision, I have created the Safe & Caring Schools (SCS) program to facilitate a blended curriculum of academic and social and emotional learning.

As times have changed, so have the demands put upon educators to meet the needs of every child. But one thing has never changed—the need for all children to feel appreciated, secure, and accepted. Many educators I speak to are concerned, and at times frustrated, about the lack of time to get everything done, the stress of how best to deal with challenging students, and the ever-growing issues of bullying and violence. Research increasingly supports that to reach the whole child, social and emotional learning (SEL) needs to be an integral part of the regular classroom curriculum. But, how much more can schools take on, what kind of support do they need, and how do they deal with the balancing act of mandated standards compliance and reaching children emotionally? SCS is a turnkey, literature-based program that supplies the school staff with a full suite of integrated materials to do this work, not as an add-on, but as part of the daily routine. Years of classroom testing have made Safe & Caring Schools a program that is easy to implement and sustain.

I've spent the past 27 years working in schools with staff and students of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and talents. Using extensive feedback from thousands of educators, counselors, and parents, SCS addresses their needs by promoting social and emotional learning in the school, home, and community through the following:

- improving school climate and student behavior
- engaging and motivating students
- increasing academic achievement
- reducing stress
- increasing parent involvement
- enhancing staff teamwork

Time after time in testing this program, the schools that infused SEL into daily activities saw and felt a significant change in the behavior and language of their students. As attitudes and behaviors improved, so did academic performance. As teachers worked together making deliberate plans to embrace the SCS approach, they created systemic change in a natural way.

My hope is that the content and philosophy of this Safe & Caring Schools resource guide will inspire and help you to enhance your role as a significant adult in your students' lives. I have created a tool that helps you use your wisdom, energy, and desire to reach every child on a personal and emotional level. Every day is a new adventure and an opportunity to create a better world for our children. As you work with SCS materials, I welcome your feedback, success stories, and suggestions for improvements. You can write to me in care of:

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Katia S. Petersen, Ph.D.

Skills for School. Skills for Life.

The mission of the Safe & Caring Schools (SCS) program is to create sustainable, positive systemic change by infusing social and emotional learning (SEL) and character education into daily academic instruction from preschool through grade 8. This takes place in partnership with educators, counselors, administrators, parents, and community members to improve academic achievement and school climate.

“When you educate the whole child, you can count on academic growth as well, even if that’s not the primary intent.” These words from “The Whole Child,” a 2007 report from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, reinforce the value of social and emotional learning. SEL is no longer seen as an option to be taught separately from academics; rather, it can be taught and implemented in schools in a number of ways.

SCS supports the idea that reaching the hearts of children is equally as important as reaching their minds. As one teacher who uses SCS explains, “I have learned that if I want my students to succeed academically, I need to teach them how to listen, follow directions, communicate effectively, resolve problems, and make good choices.”

Teaching kids life skills needs to become part of the daily routine. Learning to get along with others, accepting responsibility for one’s own actions, and making better choices takes practice and needs the guidance and ongoing support from the adults in kids’ lives. Consistency and repetition, as well as modeling desirable behaviors, will increase students’ ability to internalize and use new skills in real-life situations.

Research Foundation

For several years now, there has been a growing body of scientifically based research supporting the idea that enhanced social and emotional behaviors can have a strong impact on kids’ success in school and, ultimately, in life (*Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?* Edited by Joseph E. Zins, Roger P. Weissberg, Margaret C. Wang, and Herbert J. Walberg. Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2004). The research substantiates that effective strategies for educational reform involve (1) a central focus on school climate change and (2) infusing SEL into regular academic lesson plans. Giving children a balance of intellectual and emotional instruction leads to more complete psychological development and helps them become better learners.

This idea is supported with hard data. For example, The Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health and the William T. Grant Foundation funded an analysis of 207 studies of social and emotional learning programs involving 288,000 elementary and secondary students from a cross section of urban, suburban, and rural schools. The results of the analysis are summarized in a 2008 report, “The Benefits of School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs” from CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning). In evaluating academic outcomes, the study found that in schools where SEL is integrated into the regular programming, students scored 11 percentile points higher on standardized tests compared to students in schools not using an SEL program. Even though incorporating SEL activities required time in the school day, it did not negatively affect students’ academic performance; rather, time spent on SEL improved academic performance. This project, conducted by Joseph A. Durlak of Loyola University in Chicago and Roger P. Weissberg at the University of Illinois at Chicago, was the first meta-analysis of research on the impact of SEL programs on students. Their full report is titled *The Effects of Social and Emotional Learning on the Behavior and Academic Performance of School Children*.

SCS incorporates a holistic approach in working with children, combining several research-based strategies into one program in order to nurture the whole child and promote student well-being. SCS defines student well-being as “the development of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that maximize students’ functioning in environments where they live and work—school, home, and community” (Romano, J. L. *Journal of Educational Research*, 90, 1996). SCS provides you with a comprehensive set of core materials to enhance student well-being in a manner that is easily infused into your daily routine.

SCS materials incorporate a strengths-based approach that fosters resiliency in children to enable them to thrive and become successful in school and in life. Recent research shows that focusing on strengths is one of the key elements in supporting our youth, and schools play a critical role in the development of the strengths or assets in students.

As Bonnie Benard writes in *Resiliency: What We Have Learned* (San Francisco: West Ed, 2004):

A framework, research support, and a rationale for resilience-based prevention and education include the following assumptions:

- Resilience is a capacity all youth have for healthy development and successful learning.
 - Certain personal strengths are associated with healthy development and successful learning.
 - Certain characteristics of families, schools, and communities are associated with the development of personal strengths and, in turn, healthy development and successful learning.
 - Changing the life trajectories of children and youth from risk to resilience starts with changing the beliefs of the adults in their families, schools, and communities.
-

SCS uses a complete and comprehensive plan that makes sense and works.

- It complements and enhances the well-being of children by promoting self-awareness, self-respect, integrity, and compassion to help them become productive citizens of any community.
- It encourages students to take risks and become active learners, regardless of their abilities, language barriers, or cultural differences.
- It leads students to make connections with the world around them by creating opportunities to practice the skills they need to face daily challenges.
- It allows students to reach for their full potential of becoming positive leaders by promoting social and emotional education as part of academic learning.

SCS activities support standards and comply with best practices for SEL infusion at school while providing opportunities for you, the teacher, to use your creativity. When aligned with the key competencies of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the SCS activities clearly address those key SEL competencies: 1) Awareness of self and others, 2) Positive attitudes and values, 3) Responsible decision making, 4) Social interaction skills.

These SCS materials have been tested with teachers and students of all abilities and backgrounds in public, private, city, and suburban schools. The program has been successful due to the commitment of staff, ongoing support from leadership, and awareness that all student needs—emotional, social, and intellectual—must be met. The schools that had the most success with the program developed strong relationships with their students by infusing SCS principles into the culture of the school, rather than just using occasional add-on SEL or character education units. At these schools, teachers brought the activities to life by modeling desirable behaviors and creating an environment where all students felt safe, accepted, recognized, and celebrated for their individuality every day.

A Schoolwide Commitment

To improve classroom and school climate, the SCS materials can be used by an individual teacher or by an entire school or district. Either approach will work, but a systemic change can be realized only when an entire school makes a commitment to become a safe and caring place. By choosing the schoolwide approach, a school has the benefit of teamwork and support from all staff, plus parents and community members. Through the common language of clear expectations, consistency of messages, modeling of desirable behavior, and the use of vocabulary that will help everyone communicate more effectively, you will be able to create positive systemic change in your school.

To implement a schoolwide SCS program:

- Include social and emotional learning in your mission statement.
- Establish clear expectations for positive behavior.
- Be consistent with expectations and consequences.
- Establish a yearlong plan to reinforce parent involvement.
- Create a support system for all students, staff, and parents.
- Coordinate communication among all staff, including teachers, specialists, administrators, counselors, support staff, substitute teachers, and aides.
- Plan opportunities to recognize and celebrate successes.

Although classroom teachers are the primary implementers of the SCS lessons, administrators, counselors, social workers, health teachers, and other staff can be actively involved in the effort to infuse SEL into all areas of the school. Creating a schoolwide program takes thought and planning, but it's well worth the effort.

What Can Be Done About Bullying? Beyond Policy and Procedures

An essential goal of the SCS program is to create clear schoolwide and classroom expectations about bullying

and its consequences. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of adults to create an environment where students feel protected once they report bullying as they witness or experience it. If adults are not consistent with this protection, students will quickly learn to either take matters into their own hands or remain silent.

- Establish a coordinated plan where staff, parents, and students work together to respond to bullying in a proactive and timely manner. Help parents understand the seriousness of this issue and give them the tools to help their children along the way.
- Provide ongoing training and support for all adults to teach them how to respond when they witness or hear about bullying behavior, and how to provide timely follow-up.
- Administer a survey to students to help you assess bullying behavior in your school and to find out if your students know where bullying takes place and how and where they can go for help.
- Set clear guidelines for coaching and supporting students who have been bullied as well as students who bully others if you wish to create systemic change.

Create a safe environment where students are encouraged to become positive bystanders. By creating a climate that encourages students to become positive bystanders and report bullying, you'll be sending a message to students that bullying is taken seriously in your school. Middle school students often report that while they don't like witnessing bullying behavior, they don't know how to help without getting themselves in trouble. Students also share that they choose not to get involved out of fear they will be bullied, excluded, or isolated by the kids who bully. Along with your support, give students clear strategies while always keeping their personal safety in mind.

- Ask for help from an adult you know and trust.
- Reach out to the student who is being bullied.
- Ask the bully to stop only if you feel safe and are not alone.
- Refuse to join the bully; don't laugh or encourage the situation.
- Do not look the other way when someone is in trouble.
- Break the silence about bullying with help from your friends and adults.