Information sheet:

Building social and emotional competencies

Ko te piko o te mahuru, tērā te tupu o te rakau.
By teaching the right values, the child will grow healthy in mind, body and spirit.

To build a safe and caring environment, explicitly enhance students' social and emotional competencies through the classroom programme. Do so in a way that both supports and is supported by the wider actions of the school.

Benefits to the students and the school will include:

- **attitudes**: a stronger sense of community at school (for staff and students) or perceptions that the school learning environment is caring and supportive
- **behaviour**: increases in students' social skills, desired behaviour, or ability to resolve conflicts along with decreases in behaviours such as aggression
- **performance**: enhanced academic achievement.

Connecting to the New Zealand Curriculum

Through the *New Zealand Curriculum*, explore concepts and values such as equity, diversity, discrimination, and conflict. Focus on future-focused issues such as citizenship.

The Health and Physical Education and Social Science learning areas both have an explicit focus on concepts such as discrimination, conflict, and equity.

These learning areas offer teaching resources such as the Curriculum in Action series – which includes ideas about how Health and Physical Education learning activities can be used to build a sense of community at school – and the Building Conceptual Understandings in the Social Sciences series.

Self-awareness

To promote behaviours such as caring, helping, empathy, and social problem-solving, young people first need to be aware of their own emotions and reactions.

This type of self-awareness is a foundation for understanding others' emotions and developing empathy. In turn this understanding is needed to help students to develop an awareness of how to respond to the dynamics within bullying.

Language and social skills

Self-awareness is not enough – young people also need to be provided with the language, social and assertiveness skills, and sense of self-efficacy to address situations and support their peers. These skills are not spontaneously developed and students might need to be provided with scripts about what to say and do.

The SAFE teaching approach

Effective approaches and programmes to building social and emotional competencies weave SAFE practices together.

- **S**equenced – use a set of activities to develop social and emotional skills in a step-by-step fashion.
- **A**ctive – use forms of learning, such as role-plays and behavioural rehearsal that provide students with opportunities to practise social and emotional skills.
- **F**ocus – put attention on social and emotional learning, with at least eight sessions devoted to social and emotional skill development.
- **E**xplicitly – set out to target particular social and emotional skills for development, with skills identified in lessons' learning objectives.

In the *New Zealand Curriculum*, the Health and Physical Education learning area provides a space to explicitly use SAFE practices to focus on building particular skills and competencies through the strands "Relationships with Other People" and "Personal Health and Physical Development".

The related key learning area is Mental Health.

These strands include a focus on big picture concepts such as discrimination, conflict, and wellbeing.

Particular classroom strategies

Particular classroom strategies that can assist students to build healthy relationships include using:

- visual resources such as DVDs to prompt discussion about healthy relationships and co-construct strategies to address social conflict
- strategies such as role plays in ways that enable students to develop as well as practise strategies for managing conflict situations
- cooperative learning strategies in ways that support students to relate well to each other.

Other tips for developing social and emotional competencies

Focus on cultivating experiences of caring, community, and belonging in schools.

Offer students opportunities to strengthen their social and emotional competencies in real-life settings.

Provide students with wider opportunities to show leadership and citizenship capabilities as they contribute to class, school, and community activities or community-building initiatives.

Offer a range of opportunities for young people to democratically participate in school life. For example, being members of student councils or health and wellbeing teams, organising school events, and taking part in developing school policies and rules or classroom decisions.

This information is summarised from Wellbeing@school: Building a safe and caring school climate that deters bullying .

Produced by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) in 2012, this series of research briefs summarises what is known in New Zealand and internationally about how to promote a safe and caring school environment.

Read the full research briefs on building social competencies at:

Wellbeing@School: W@S-Building-social-competency-research-brief (PDF, 235KB)

Publications referred to in this information sheet include:

Casel. (2008a). *Social and emotional learning (SEL) and student benefits: Implications for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students core elements*. Washington DC: National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, Education Development Center.

Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., & Schellinger, K. (2011). *The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta analysis of school based universal interventions*. Child Development, 82(1), 405–432.

Farrington, D., & Ttofi, M. (2009). *Effectiveness of programs to reduce school bullying*. Campbell Systematic Reviews 6. Oslo: The Campbell Collaboration.

Pepler, D., Craig, W., & O'Connoll, P. (2010). *Peer processes in bullying*. In S. Jimerson, S. Swearer, & D. Espelage (Eds.), *Handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective* (pp. 469–479). New York: Routledge.