

**Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** is the process through which children and young people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.<sup>1</sup> While everyone develops social and emotional competencies in their lives, SEL programming during childhood can help reduce future problem behaviors among children and adolescents<sup>2</sup>. SEL programming can also help children be better prepared to learn when in school by supporting children's approaches to learning—academic self-concept, goal setting, and perseverance.

## Why SEL is Important to Save the Children

SEL is important to us because it means that children, whatever context they are in, are ready to learn and have the social emotional knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to both reach their potential and adapt to any changes in their contexts. By prioritizing SEL in programming and specifically including it in the Education in Emergencies 2016-2018 strategy, it is part of the Save the Children's broader approach to risk reduction and resilience. In the broader model of resilience, SEL deals with the individual-level outcomes that our programs will try to target. . During this period the aim is to invest and test SEL programming and assessment tools, ensuring that our approaches result in positive outcomes for children.

## What does SEL mean for learning?

When children are given education opportunities that include social emotional learning strategies, they often demonstrate stronger preparedness for learning and achievement in school.<sup>3</sup> A crisis, like forced migration or community violence, can negatively impact a child or adolescent's psychosocial wellbeing and their ability to learn. Through strengthening protective factors, SEL programming can help children not only deal with the adverse effects of negative life events but also increase their concentration, improve behavioral conduct and contribute to more positive attitudes towards learning.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CASEL (2015). What is Social and Emotional Learning? Retrieved from <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/> on August 5th,

<sup>2</sup> Aber, J.L., J.I. Brown, and S. Jones. (2003). "Developmental trajectories toward violence in middle childhood: Course, demographic differences, and response to school-based intervention." *Developmental Psychology* 39(2): 324-348.

<sup>3</sup> Winthrop, R., & Kirk, J. (2008). Learning for a bright future: Schooling, armed conflict, and children's well-being. *Comparative Education Review*, 639-661.

<sup>4</sup> Hawkins J.D., J. Guo, K.G. Hill, S. Battin-Pearson, and R.D. Abbott. (2001). "Long term effects of the Seattle social development intervention on school bonding trajectories." *Applied Development Science* 5:225-236

Therefore it is critical to integrate SEL into learning, whether that be a formal or non-formal learning environment.

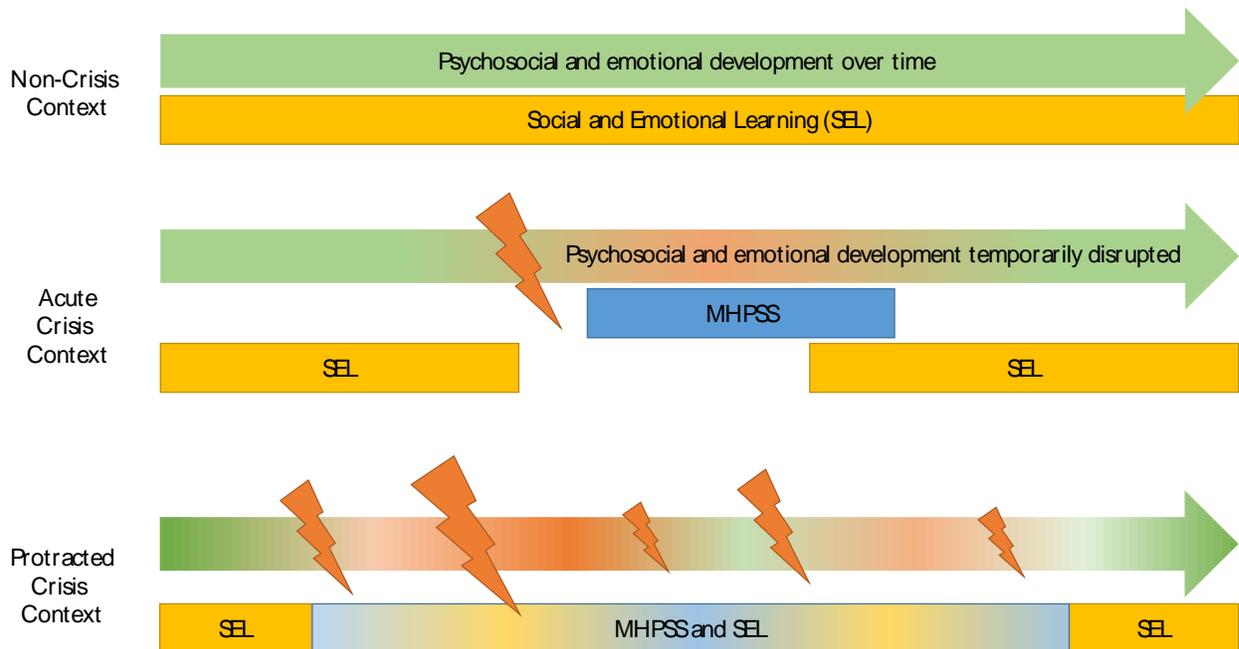
### **When is SEL appropriate?**

SEL and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) are complementary approaches and there is considerable overlap when they should be implemented. SEL programming can be used across the full spectrum, including in a humanitarian emergency, where MHPSS may also be used. MHPSS is primarily used in acute humanitarian emergencies and is a targeted intervention approach. It is designed to reach those most in need of urgent psychosocial support (reducing the negative impact of crisis situations) as a result of experiencing severe adversity or chronic trauma.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, SEL is a universal intervention approach that builds individuals' social and emotional knowledge, attitudes and skills in varied contexts, and can be used in any stage, whether that is emergency, early recovery or development.

In a **non-crisis context**, SEL can be incorporated throughout the programming cycle to address child and youth development over time (see figure below). In the context of an **acute crisis**, the underlying continuity of SEL program may be disrupted by a crisis. In this situation, dedicated MHPSS may be the most appropriate immediately after the crisis, with a gradual shift to regular SEL programming over time. The gradual shift between MHPSS and SEL could happen after all children and adolescents have received the basic screening and mental health services they need. The timing for this gradual shift will differ in every context and decisions about the shift will need to be made after considering the aftermath of the acute crisis. In the context of a **protracted context**, the underlying continuity of SEL programming may be interrupted on several occasions. In this situation we recommend having a joint MHPSS and SEL programming components that uses the principles of universal and targeted interventions to determine what services are needed in different communities.

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<sup>5</sup> IASC Guidelines, (2007).



### How do we incorporate SEL into EiE programming?

There are three main entry points for SEL programming.

1. **Education sector:** SEL can be incorporated into the curriculum of formal school (classroom) programs or non-formal learning settings (like community centers, integrated Child Centered Spaces/Child Friendly spaces, or Temporary Learning Spaces).
2. **Relevant MHPSS programming** (like HEART or SC Denmark's Resilience program): SEL can be layered into this program as a universal programming approach, with targeted MHPSS interventions for children who need specific psychosocial support.
3. **Disaster Risk Reduction:** SC's Comprehensive School Safety framework requires programming around "resilience education". SEL curricula/content (as in Learning and Well-being in Emergencies programming) could be incorporated as a component of this resilience education, especially when dealing with individual level resilience.

**Learning and Well-being in Emergencies (Resource Kit)** is one programmatic approach that can be used to address SEL in children. It combines the school/classroom learning setting and home/community environment to provide support and opportunities to practice SEL which has been found to increase positive student

outcomes and improve the duration of the effects.<sup>6</sup> Linked to SEL and resilience, DRR and emergency messaging are also incorporated into the program. Learning and Well-being in Emergencies has the following components:

- **Teacher training:** Besides training on literacy content and pedagogy, teachers receive instruction on the different components of SEL, how to build SEL competencies in children, and how to prioritize self-care. Teachers receive ~40 to 50 hours of professional development training (and on-going support) in 8 core sessions (+2 additional ones) that are rolled out based on the context. Ideally, all sessions should be done and the SEL focused sessions at the start are mandatory but there is some flexibility in the timing of rolling out the sessions.
- **Community action:** Complementing the school/classroom learning environment, there is a strong community component. Through 21 one hour sessions, facilitators work with community members (caregivers, young people, etc.) to raise awareness about their own self-care and child SEL and overall well-being. Some of these awareness sessions also focus on literacy and numeracy practices that families can use to support their children's learning. Complementing this, there are number of community-based activity options that can be selected and these range from community book banks, reading festivals, reading clubs and reading buddies.
- **Assessment:** A set of tools to measure SEL competencies, a child's approaches to learning, literacy development, and classroom/home environment can be used to either measure program impact or as a monitoring component.

## **What are some best practices in SEL programming?**

### **Do no Harm**

Similar to MHPSS, SEL programming with children who have experienced severe stress has the potential to cause harm since it deals with sensitive issues (IASC MHPSS Guidelines, 2007). In order to minimize the risk of harm, it is critical:

- To use all available information to designing contextually-relevant programs
- To coordinate with other internal and external partners to provide necessary child support
- To develop an understanding of local stakeholder power relations that can affect child well being
- To use participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches for formative and summative learning

One structured way to think about harm reduction is through the "challenge by choice" approach. During training and in the implementation of the curriculum, participants should be encouraged to participate, but not forced. Because SEL activities can bring up

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<sup>6</sup> Elbertson, N.A., Brackett, M.A., Weissberg, P.A (2009). *School-based social emotional learning (SEL) programming: Current perspectives*. Second International Handbook of Educational Change, A. Hargreaves et al. (eds.), Springer International Handbooks of Education

stressful memories or emotions, it is important that participants are given the choice to sit-out for a certain activity or modify the activity so that they can participate.

### **Plan for integrated programming**

A person's development does not take place in isolation, but rather it occurs through the various relationships that individuals have in the different settings around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). SEL programming needs to include the classroom and school environment, as well as the home and community environment. When SEL is integrated into teaching and learning processes and the classroom and school environment, this can provide vital non-clinical daily psychosocial support for children in crisis-affected contexts. More serious MHPSS or more specialized cases can be identified through SEL work in the classroom and then appropriate referrals can be made. Both MHPSS and SEL should also engage caregivers, family and community support to be effective

One structured way in which you can think about integrated programming in an emergency is by incorporating SEL into the conflict-sensitive education framework (Dean, 2014). SEL programs will not be effective unless appropriate protection mechanisms are in place to ensure a safe learning environment. The larger education systems should be inclusive, equitable, and provide quality and safe access to education. At the school and classroom level, it is also important to promote a positive and caring atmosphere through improved teacher-student interactions and conducive teaching instruction and methodology.

### **Cultural and contextual understanding and adaptation**

Children's development and, therefore, their social emotional competencies are entwined with culture (Rogoff, 2013). What this means is making sure our interventions and materials are context specific and relevant so that we are addressing different competencies in a culturally sensitive way. Incorporating SEL into programs requires a thoughtful adaptation process that allows communities to offer feedback on which competencies make sense in their settings, and how. Although not a complete list, here are a few examples from past experiences implementing SEL programs in different cultures:

- SEL activities involving body movements and dancing may be deemed inappropriate by some parents, especially if their children are in mixed-gender groups
- Some self-care/stress management activities involve asking participants to close their eyes which is not always appropriate or comfortable.
- Cultural norms and beliefs can affect how people socially interact and what is socially acceptable, as well as how individuals express their emotions and whether individuals ask non-family members for help.

- When discussing stress management, people in different cultures will react to and manage stress differently. For example, some may rely on their faith and prayer or their take a more spiritual approach.
- Language ability can impact social emotional screening and assessment. For example, children who are not being taught in their LOI and who are do not have high levels of LOI proficiency may show delays in social emotional development (Chang et al., 2007; Tabors, 2008). We need to ensure that children with different language abilities are not been unfairly judged.

### **Additional Considerations to Ensure we Capture SEL Learning**

Because SC's SEL programming is in the early stages, it is important we invest and test. This means finding effective ways for Save the Children country offices to capture learning from SEL programming so as to better understand how culture impacts our SEL work and the impact of our SEL work on children. Our field experiences thus far have revealed some common practices that are worth considering as you incorporate SEL into your programming.

- **Adaptation:** Where possible, we recommend that country teams adapt all program and assessment materials with the help of local children, parents, and/or community members. This can take the form of a two-day workshop where stakeholders provide their perspective on the most appropriate ways in which to conduct different activities.
- **Translation:** In past assessments of SEL program we have seen that the local dialect can make a big difference in how children respond to assessors. This is also true for the actual program material. Where possible, hire a local staff member or translator to help translate all material into the local language, using local jargon and slang.
- **Knowledge management:** As we grow our SEL programming in SC, it is important that we ensure that we keep track of what we are learning in different contexts so that we can better adapt program materials and assessments in the future. We recommend that there is an assigned focal point as part of the project/SEL programming to be responsible for documentation of learning from the program.