



SEE Learning

Social, Emotional, and
Ethical Learning

A Curriculum for Educating the Heart and Mind

Overview

High School Curriculum

Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics

Emory University

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OVERVIEW: SEE Learning at the High School Level

The purpose of SEE Learning is to help students explore and investigate for themselves how they can best take care of themselves and each other, specifically with regard to their emotional and social health. There is a body of research that shows that this kind of learning increases student well-being and helps them make sound decisions that bring benefit to themselves and others (see recommended resources). All of SEE Learning can be seen as rooted in compassion: both compassion for oneself (self-compassion) and compassion for others. Rather than didactically instructing students to “be kind” or “be compassionate,” however, the approach of SEE Learning is to facilitate personal insights among students and to provide them with a set of skills and tools. As students apply SEE learning to their own experiences, they will come to understand the value of these skills and tools to living a happy life. With this embodied understanding, they will begin to use their new tools as needed, not only within the lesson or designated practice time. At that point, they become their own and each others’ teachers.

The SEE Learning Curriculum is available for students from the elementary age through high school. While it is beneficial to bring SEE Learning to young students, it is by no means the only opportunity we have to teach students these very important mindsets and skills. High schoolers who have already experienced the curriculum (or something similar), as well as those who are not familiar with it, will benefit from SEE Learning- as long as their developmental needs are taken into consideration. The social lives of high schoolers are complex, as they juggle the demands of school, work, friendships, family relationships, and romantic relationships. As students approach adulthood, they experience a greater sense of responsibility towards themselves and others. This responsibility can increase anxiety and stress- but can also motivate students to grapple with bigger questions about their own identity, purpose, and possibilities for the future. It is in this context that SEE Learning offers a crucial opportunity for high school students to develop their self-awareness and self-regulation skills, practice compassion for themselves and others, and develop an ethical framework to guide their actions.

Role of the Educator

Educators can support high school students by taking on more of a facilitator role during SEE Learning delivery. The learning experiences are meant to invite self-reflection, stimulate ethical discernment, and provoke critical questioning of the subject matter. Educators need not feel as if students must immediately connect or agree with the material and practices. Educators who work with high school students should encourage students to question the material presented, nudging them towards reflection and their own ‘ah-ha’ moments that will lead to embodied understanding of the material. The real-world application of SEE Learning becomes even more urgent at the high school level, as students prepare to enter adulthood. The educator’s role in all of this is not to insist upon right answers or correct perspectives (nor to have all the “right” answers themselves!), but to facilitate and nurture the learning process, making room for multiple perspectives and diverse experiences.

SEE Learning High School Curriculum

The curriculum begins with Chapter 1, “Creating a Compassionate Classroom,” which introduces the foundational concepts of kindness and compassion. Although definitions are provided, the important thing is to introduce these concepts and explore them with your students so that they eventually develop their own rich understanding of compassion and what it looks like in practice. This holds true for all the material presented in SEE Learning. Subsequent chapters of SEE Learning then build upon this foundation by exploring self-compassion in the personal domain with regard to the body, the mind, and emotions (chapters 2 to 5); compassion and related values in relation to others (chapters 6 to 8); and compassion in the broader context of communities, systems, and the world (chapters 9 and 10).

Components of the Learning Experience

In the high school curriculum for SEE Learning, each chapter includes learning experiences, which may have the following components:

- Check-in’s: These are short warm-up activities designed to bring the class together, inviting students to check-in with themselves and with you, and preparing them for learning and exploration.
- Presentations and Discussions: Presentations and discussions focus on specific content that is relevant for the topic or skill to be explored. Note that this that the discussions are open-ended and exploratory, rather than didactic.
- Insight Activities: These activities are designed to be engaging in order to spark personal critical insights and new perspectives on the topic being explored.
- Reflective Practices: Reflective practices are designed to help students deepen and internalize their experiences and insights through repeated application. These are generally more personal, and more contemplative in nature than insight activities.
- Debriefs: Debriefs are prompts that allow for sharing, questions, and reflection by students at the end of a session. These are not presented as stand-alone activities, but accompany a presentation, discussion, insight activity, or reflective practice.

The Learning Experiences are designed so that you have flexibility to facilitate a session that is appropriate for your students, given the time you have. If you have sufficient time, it is beneficial to follow the order presented above (when built into the learning experience). Begin with a check-in to settle your students and prepare them for what is to come, move into a presentation and discussion, follow it by an insight activity, engage in a reflective practice, and then conclude with a debrief. This is a comprehensive session that has the potential to engage students at all three levels of understanding (received knowledge, critical insight, and embodied understanding).

In many cases, however, you may not have sufficient time to facilitate all those components. In that case, choose the parts that suit your needs. For example you may choose to do a discussion only, or an insight or reflective practice only. Note, however, that the check-in's and debriefs are designed to book-end each experience. Therefore, make sure to begin each session with a check-in and end with a debrief, no matter how brief the session. You will want to cover at least one activity from each learning experience before moving to the next learning experiences; and you will want to cover a few learning experiences from each chapter before moving on to the subsequent chapters.

SEE Learning Delivery Options

Delivering SEE Learning at the high school level poses some unique challenges and opportunities. At the elementary level, it's common for students to be with one group of classmates and one main teacher during the entire school year. Elementary educators generally have an appreciation for “whole-child” educational practices and may receive support for integrating social-emotional learning into their daily routine. At the high school level, there is more pressure for academic success and educators often have less time during their class periods to integrate SEL. Despite these challenges, educators who understand the value of SEE Learning are finding ways to integrate it into the high school schedule. Here are some options for you to consider:

- Advisory: Use SEE Learning as the curriculum during student advisory time. If advisory happens daily for a short amount of time- 15 minutes or so- you won't be able to teach a complete learning experience; however, many of the activities are 15 minutes long and check-ins are even shorter, so you can deliver through the curriculum activity-by-activity. The advantage to this option is it provides 'bite-sized' pieces of information that can be more digestible to students.
- Counseling sessions: Use SEE Learning as a group counseling curriculum for select small groups of students. The learning experiences are designed to help students develop the most critical social emotional skills they need for happiness and success.
- Health, Life Skills, Ethics, or Religion classes: Use the curriculum throughout the year in a general health, life skills, ethics or religion class. The SEE Learning experiences provide students with an opportunity to develop their skills in compassion, self-regulation and ethical discernment- ultimately increasing their well-being and happiness as well as the happiness of others.
- Peer Leadership: You might like to facilitate some of the activities with your peer leaders, then have your peer leaders facilitate the same activities with their classmates or younger students.
- Integrate into your regular class: Some educators are integrating the learning experiences and activities into their regular class period, usually on a weekly basis. Don't

worry if you can't get through the entire curriculum at this pace. Doing some of the learning experiences will provide some benefit. As your colleagues and administrator see positive outcomes from the program, they may want to make SEE Learning a more regular part of your school.

Practices to Support SEE Learning

Setting Up a Peace (or Chill Out) Corner

You may wish to set up a "peace corner" or "chill out corner" students can use when they need some private time to engage in personal practice to navigate their emotions. After you explain what the purpose of this corner is, you can invite your students to name it themselves. This will also serve as a good place to post, student work, and posters or other materials that are supportive of SEE Learning. Some classrooms have pillows, pictures, a poster of the resiliency zone (explained in Chapter 2), snow globes and hourglasses, music, books, art supplies, and other such resources. Explain to your class that the chill out corner is a place where they can show kindness and compassion to themselves and practice some of the things they are learning in SEE Learning. Encourage them to populate it with objects that are appropriate for this purpose. Over time, just going to the chill out corner may prove helpful for your students when they need to settle themselves or return to a place of well-being in their bodies, as they come to associate the chill out corner with safety and well-being.

Student Personal Practice

Student personal practice is an important part of SEE Learning, Personal practices are introduced gradually and sequentially, starting with practices that ground and relax the body and autonomic nervous system. It is highly recommended that you follow the order in which the practices are introduced. This minimizes the risk for adverse experiences among your students, such as a student feeling more anxious or stressed from doing a practice, rather than more calm and focused.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for personal practice by establishing a safe and caring environment and introducing basic body practices for calming the nervous system. Chapter 2 explores these body practices in greater depth and detail. Chapter 3 introduces practices of focused attention and what are commonly called "mindfulness" practices. Chapter 4 then introduces practices involving emotions and how to navigate them. By following this sequence, your students will be well prepared for each additional type of practice and will be able to return to the simpler forms of practice when necessary.

Teacher Personal Practice

You may have heard the expression "you teach who you are." In the context of SEE Learning, this means that your students will learn from your example, perhaps even more so than from what you explicitly teach. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you personally explore the practices, even briefly, before you start teaching them to your students. Even a slight bit of personal practice (such as a few minutes each day) will make your teaching more effective when you reach those sections. You can reap great benefit from trying out some of these

practices for the week before school starts, or for the week before you begin teaching these lessons. Starting early will allow you to get in as much practice as you are able before working on the practices with your students. Also remember that you are on a journey alongside your students, and it is absolutely *not* necessary to master specific practices before trying them with your students. It will be very meaningful, however, if you genuinely seek to embody the qualities of compassion, patience, humility, and courage- qualities that SEE Learning encourages in students. In walking the walk with your students, you might find that every step on the learning journey provides opportunities for insights into the challenges and rewards of developing a personal practice. You may even find (as some educators have reported) that you learn a lot about the practices from your students themselves.

Sample Language for Introducing SEE Learning to Your Students

Since this is the first chapter of the curriculum, you may wish to introduce what you will be doing over the school year. Here are a few sample talking points for your convenience.

- *This year we will be spending some time each week doing SEE Learning: Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning. SEE Learning uses science, activities, discussions and reflections to explore our world of thoughts, emotions, our relationships with each other, the decisions we make, and the impact those decisions have on ourselves, others, and the world.*
- *We'll be learning about how to deal with strong emotions and stress, how to take care of ourselves and gain a better understanding of our bodies and minds, and how to get along better with other people or deal with things when we have trouble getting along with others.*
- *In the beginning, we'll be exploring the concept of compassion and how we can make this classroom a safe, happy and compassionate environment where we all feel respected, valued, and capable of learning and growing together.*
- *SEE Learning is not a subject where we learn right or wrong answers from a book. Instead, it presents material and activities that we will explore and test together, like a group of scientists. What we're investigating is the nature of our own emotions and attitudes, our sense of who we are, our relationships, and our society. It's a journey of discovery and an exploration of our world and ourselves, so we will approach everything with an open and critical mind.*
- *I am not an expert in this area and I'm actually excited to learn and explore this material alongside you. We're taking the time for SEE Learning because I believe it provides an incredibly important framework for living well.*

Further Reading and Resources

Please read the SEE Learning Framework, contained within the *SEE Learning Companion*.

Also recommended

The Triple Focus, by Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge (short book that provides a rationale for SEE Learning)

Building Emotional Intelligence: Practices to Cultivate Inner Resilience in Children, by Linda Lantieri and Daniel Goleman.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning's meta-analysis on the effectiveness of SEL programs: <https://casel.org/2017-meta-analysis/>