



## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING: WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

We all know youth need time, education, and practice to succeed in school. But they also need time, education, and practice to develop social and emotional skills. These skills, which are also sometimes referred to as 'life skills,' include managing emotions, solving problems, making decisions, setting goals, communicating with others, developing empathy, and establishing and maintaining positive relationships.

The process of developing these skills is often referred to as "social-emotional learning" or SEL for short. Social-emotional learning goes hand in hand with academic instruction to provide a full and well-rounded learning experience for youth.

Fundamental to SEL is caring, supportive relationships with adults and peers. Within an environment where young people feel engaged, motivated, and a sense of belonging, they build these important skills that pave the way for their current and future success.

### Why is social-emotional learning important?

Research shows that social and emotional skills are essential to success in academics, community involvement, and ultimately, the workforce. Learning key SEL skills is linked to other positive outcomes, such as academic achievement and avoidance of risky behavior, even into adulthood.<sup>1</sup> As a result of these long-term outcomes, programs focused on SEL deliver a return of \$11 for every \$1 invested.<sup>2</sup>

### How do Wyman programs support SEL?

**Wyman is focused on making sure all young people have the right supports in place to foster SEL that are so fundamental to learning, work, and life.**

Each Wyman program carries out a unique set of activities to support youth in SEL. The Teen Outreach Program® (TOP®) uses a facilitated curriculum and community service projects, with lessons focused on skills like emotion management and problem solving. The Teen Connection Project® (TCP®) uses facilitated curriculum lessons focused specifically on creating positive social connections. Wyman Leaders is a multi-year program that provides youth with ongoing 1:1 support and peer group experiences, including a residential camp stay.

All Wyman programs are built upon the same foundation: the strong relationships that young people develop with caring, responsive, and knowledgeable adults - a critical driver of SEL. Through these relationships, and the engaging and empowering program environments, youth are supported to build social-emotional skills, develop a positive sense of self, and make connections to others and their world.

Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP) and Teen Connection Project (TCP) have received The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's (CASEL) highest designation for high-quality social-emotional learning programming.

TOP and TCP meet CASEL's **SElect** designation and are included in the CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs.

More information on our programs can be found at <https://wymancenter.org/programs>.



1. Taylor et al., 2017; Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015  
2. Belfield et al., 2015



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### Our Call to Action

As youth development professionals and educators, we are called to support young people's success – including their social-emotional health. It is critical that we expand the conversation around success to include social-emotional learning and the positive peer and adult relationships that facilitate these fundamental skills. Doing so not only supports achievement, but opens doors for innovative and potentially life-changing services to reach adolescents at a developmentally crucial period of life.

So, what does this look like?

- 1. Expanding and strengthening partnerships between schools and youth-serving non-profits, who specialize in supporting youth to build social-emotional skills.** SEL principles and practices embed seamlessly into core academic subjects, and center on skills that support student attention and learning. Creating strong partnerships between parents, schools, and youth serving organizations will add capacity to school systems, and relieve some stress from teachers, counselors, and social workers. The availability of services or programming in schools will also remove some of the barriers students face in accessing community resources.
- 2. Ensure that all adults who work with youth have the knowledge and skills to support SEL.** Social-emotional development can occur at anytime, and there are endless opportunities for adults to support youth SEL, whether it's a teacher in a math class, a coach on the soccer field, or a volunteer facilitating a community service project. SEL training for all adults working with youth ensures that young people will receive the consistent support they need to build social-emotional skills.
- 3. Investment at all levels – federal, state, and local – in programs for youth that support healthy social connections and meet pressing social-emotional needs.** This includes prioritization not only of delivery of effective programs for youth, but also training and capacity building for adults. This helps create systems that consistently elevate and reinforce healthy relationships and social-emotional skills.

When families, schools, and community partners work together to prioritize SEL, we can make sure all young people have rich opportunities to learn and practice important skills that help them collaborate, solve problems, and succeed in academics, careers, and life.