

From the 2018 book

Social-Emotional Learning
(SEL) in the Home

Published by

Ribas Associates

ribasassociates.com

INTRODUCTION

If you are buying this book because

1. you think the authors want to (or are able to) tell you how to parent your child, or,
2. you think the authors believe they are better parents/guardians than you,

put it back on the shelf and save your money!

No one can really tell you how to better parent your child unless they have a comprehensive understanding of you, of how you parent, and of your child. We authors are not experts on parenting. We are experts on the development of social-emotional skills in young people.

Just to prove the point that I am not an exemplar parent, I will tell you about a conversation I had recently with my son, who is in college and had an emergency root canal. Later that day I called him to ask him how bad it was (I never had a root canal). His answer was, “Dad, nothing could be as bad as that time you made me skate through a two-hour hockey practice with double pneumonia when I was 11!”

In my own defense, I didn’t know he had double pneumonia until we took him to the doctor the next day. In hindsight, I guess I should have known something was up when he came home from school and slept until practice time and I all but carried him into the car for practice. The worst part of this is that I have more stories like this about my parenting mess ups!

I like to think that my kids are doing well in part *because of* my parenting. The reality is that they might be doing well *in spite of* my parenting!

—Bill Ribas

Authors’ Expertise

The area in which we do have expertise is in developing social and emotional (SEL) skills in young people, which they can use in school and life. Our knowledge has come from hundreds of hours working with teachers and children many hours studying the research, books, and articles on SEL. As you will learn in the book, our “intelligence” related to this topic

is due to study and practice. It is not due to our being smarter or better parents than any of our readers.

We authors are all parents, and this experience has been invaluable. We learned from our successes and our failures. Doing the research on social-emotional learning (SEL)--and specifically for this book-- allowed us to reflect on our own past parenting and to think about our present and future parenting with our own children.

What Is in This Book?

In writing this book, we planned to provide parents with a set of strategies that could easily be integrated into their parenting everyday. As mentioned above, we are not telling you how to parent. Rather, we are helping you meld your successful parenting practices with strategies that will help you to further develop your child's social-emotional learning.

In chapter 1 you will learn about the significant positive impacts on the lives of children, adolescents, and young adults when they have learned SEL skills. This research has motivated schools across the country to train teachers, administrators, and other school staff in the skills for developing social-emotional learning. With this book, parents can now be significant contributors to this important work. During a child's pre-school to high school experience, the school teaches 95% of the academic skills (reading, writing, math, science). As parents, we may provide some support for academics by helping with homework and reading to our children. However, with social-emotional skills, parents and guardians *can contribute 50% or more* to the skill development because every parenting activity is an opportunity to develop these skills. We have the opportunity to impact the development of SEL skills from birth through the rest of their lives.

We hope that while reading this book you will find new ways to positively affect your children's lives. The book provides strategies, tools, and examples to make this important work more effective and fulfilling.

Below is a brief summary of what you will learn in each chapter.

Chapter 1: What Is Social Emotional Learning?

After reading this chapter, parents and guardians will be able to:

1. Explain the five major areas of SEL skills
2. Explain the specific social and emotional skills related to each of the five areas
3. Explain the impact on children and adolescents in school, work, and life when social emotional skills are learned
4. Explain the stages children and adolescents follow from initial exposure to a skill to its mastery

Chapter 2: Beliefs About Intelligence and the Acquisition of Academic, Social, and Emotional Skills

After reading this chapter parents and guardians will be able to:

1. Explain how to help your children (of all ages) confront and overcome challenging tasks
2. Explain the role of genetics and learned skills as they relate to school, work, and life success
3. Explain the social-emotional skills possessed by successful people and how to help your children develop these skills

Chapter 3: Resolving Conflicts and Other Important Conversations with Your Child

At the conclusion of this chapter, parents and guardians will be able to

1. Plan ahead for important discussions with your child to insure you achieve the goals of the conversation
2. Use effective praise to maximize your child's acquisition of SEL skills
3. Use descriptive feedback to maximize your child's acquisition of SEL skills
4. Explain the difference between punishments and consequences and use consequences effectively
5. Take important conversations with your child through stages to maximize your child's acquisition of SEL skills
6. Facilitate the resolution of conflicts between your child and friends and between siblings by modeling skills they can use to resolve future conflicts

Chapter 4: Using Questions to Encourage Deep Conversations, Develop SEL, and Higher-Order Thinking Skills

After reading this chapter parents and guardians will be able to:

1. Explain how to have the five essential social-emotional conversations with your child as he or she grows to adulthood:
 - a. Who are you?
 - b. How do your actions reflect who you are?
 - c. How do you read social signals from others?
 - d. How to get along with friends and family?
 - e. How to make decisions that reflect your values?
2. Explain how to encourage children to engage in meaningful conversations about the important parts of their lives: themselves, their behavior, their relationships, their choices
3. Explain how to create a supportive “safe space” for meaningful conversations that support children’s social-emotional growth at all ages.
4. Explain how to establish trusting relationships that are at the core of all deep conversations
5. Explain how to support the development of higher order thinking and metacognition through conversations using books, movies, and activities to evoke and support those conversations

Chapter 5: The Brain and Learning

After reading this chapter, parents and guardians will be able to:

1. explain the basics of brain anatomy and how the brain functions
2. explain the processes of memory creation and learning and how they are connected
3. explain how the brain functions in relation to learning social and emotional skills
4. distinguish between common neuro myths and research-backed findings about the brain
5. use knowledge of learning and memory processes to optimize experiences in the reader’s parenting practices

As you read this book, it is important that you take time to acknowledge the good work you already do as a parent. In fact, as you read Chapter 1, you will see that you are already developing many of these

skills in your children. You may not have used the same name for the skill or have thought that the interactions were “teaching” them. However, we are confident you will recognize how parenting actions you took, and the modelling you provided, did, in fact, positively impact your child’s social-emotional skills level.

Our hope is that this book will help you take the next step in this important process.

Using *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)* in the Home in Your Book Study Group

Like our children, we all have different learning styles. Our learning style is the way in which we are most successful at learning new information and skills. For some of us, just reading this book and working with our child is the way we can best assist with the development of SEL skills. For others, meeting weekly or monthly in a book discussion group is effective. We wrote this book so parents can work individually with their child or participate in a parent book group.

For those who prefer working in a book group we have written the book so it can be easily used by groups with no training. Each chapter has discussion questions the group can use as they progress through the book. Some book groups may wish to discuss each chapter separately. Others may wish to study it in other ways (e.g., skill by skill). To assist parents with this, we have developed two book-group protocols that will make it easy for groups of two, three, four, or more (we recommend groups not exceed eight members) to learn together. We don’t mean to imply these are the only two ways this book can be used in a group. Parent book groups should feel free to use the book in any way that best meet their needs. On the following pages, we offer these two protocols as a way to easily approach the book if your group believes it best meets their needs.

Option 1: Chapter-by-Chapter Format

Book study groups are a way for parents/guardians to work with one another to better parent their child(ren). When running a book group it is important to have a well-established structure for the group to be productive for all. The following guidelines for a chapter-by-chapter book study group is intended to assist parents with having productive book study groups.

1. **Groups should have between two to eight members.** When the group exceeds eight it reduces the opportunities for each member to speak.
2. **Groups can meet weekly, every two weeks, or every three weeks.** If meeting weekly, it is important that reading “assignments” are short enough so everyone can complete the reading. When book groups meet less frequently than every three weeks, too much information from the previous meeting is forgotten and it can be difficult to pick up the discussion where you left off.
3. **Groups can be established in many configurations.** For example, they can be made up of the parents/guardians of children of a similar age or they can be made up of parents/guardians of children of multiple ages.
4. **Group Leaders:** It is important to have some form of leadership to keep the discussion on track. Any of the following have been used successfully.
 - a. **Groups with a permanent leader and assistant leader.** The leader keeps the discussion moving and insures equitable sharing. The assistant keeps notes of key points and keeps track of the time. The leader and the assistant remain the same through all the meetings.
 - b. **Groups with permanent co-leaders.** In situations in which there are co-leaders the leaders can alternate sessions. When one is the leader and the other is the assistant leader. The co-leaders remain the same through all the meetings.
 - c. **Alternating leaders and assistant leaders.** The roles of leader and assistant leader can alternate each session or every couple of sessions. In some cases there may be parents who are un-

comfortable acting as a leader or co-leader. In those situations the leadership should only be alternated among those who are willing to take a leadership role. Since it is important to get as many people involved in book groups as possible, we don't want anyone to be deterred from participating if he or she is reticent to take a leadership role.

5. **At the first meeting, establish norms for productive discussion and have the group commit to following these norms.** At the outset of each session, ask everyone to do a quick skim of the norms as a good reminder. This may not be necessary if the group meets every week. In this case, reviewing the norms at the first two sessions, and then as needed, may be sufficient. Below is a sample of norms that can be used. However, each group should feel free to modify these suggested norms to best meet the group's needs.
 - a. I did my reading prior to the group meeting.
 - b. I understand that good parenting can come in many forms. I did not try to impose my parenting belief and practices on others.
 - c. I shared my ideas and offered suggestions *when suggestions were requested* while insuring others had equal time to share.
 - d. I spoke clearly and slowly.
 - e. I answered others' questions but did not monopolize the discussion.
 - f. I remained on topic and helped the group stay focused.
 - g. I encouraged others to participate and respected their contributions.
 - h. When I disagreed, I did so without hurting others' feelings.
 - i. I summarized or repeated my ideas when necessary.
 - j. I gave reasons for my opinions.
 - k. I listened courteously and effectively.
 - l. I tried to understand the suggestions of others when those suggestions were not consistent with my own ideas and beliefs.
6. **The reading should be broken into defined sections that can be discussed at a single meeting.** Books typically need to be broken up into chapters or sections. Our book has five chapters that are concise and defined. Some study groups do one chapter at a meet-

ing. Some will take two or three meetings to discuss a chapter. Some groups will divide the chapters among the groups and have each chapter group report on the chapter during a meeting.

7. **All members of the group should complete the reading prior to the next meeting.** Discuss the importance of doing the reading so the group will run well. Not reading impacts everyone (not just the person who didn't read).
8. **The type of analysis and some focus questions should be agreed upon prior to completing the reading.** This book contains focus questions at the end of each chapter. The group may use these questions or create their own. The focus questions should be reviewed prior to the reading of each section. The questions then become the focus of discussion at the next session.
9. **The most interesting pieces to discuss tend to be those that enable parents/guardians to immediately apply the concepts in the reading to their children.** This book has been written by four parents. Each chapter is filled with strategies that are immediately applicable and easy to implement.
10. **Action Step** (optional): Once the group has mastered the content in a particular reading, it is time to add a practical experience. Each person should identify one or more strategies in the reading with which to experiment at home. We say "experiment" because the strategy might succeed—or it might fail. As scientists know, however, you often learn more from failures than you do from successes. After experimenting with the strategy, the member should prepare a reflection with answers to the following questions:
 - a. Why did I choose this strategy?
 - b. What worked? Why did it work?
 - c. What did not work? Why didn't it work?
 - d. If I try this strategy again, what will I do differently?

The reflection is shared and discussed at the next group meeting. If a group chooses to use this optional step, only members who volunteer should be selected to share. It should be made clear to all that no one is required to share. Some people wish to learn just by listening. They should have the option to do so without the pressure of needing to share.

Option 2: A Timed Protocol for Larger Groups

The timed protocol provides structure and allots a specific amount of time summarizing, sharing, and discussing. The protocol guarantees that all group members have an opportunity to share their thoughts about what they've read and how they can connect it to their parenting. If your group is large, the following process provides a structure.

The protocol asks parents to select and share passages of the book that resonate and “jump out at them.” This structure gives every participant a chance to connect their own experiences with the book.

The protocol provides everyone an equal voice and time. The timing helps organize the sharing and prevents one issue or one person from sidetracking or taking over the discussion.

A time-keeper assures that the talking time (“air time”) for each person is protected and guaranteed.

Finally, the protocol helps the group reach their desired destination—sharing and discussing social and emotional experiences and practices in childhood and adolescence.

Please note that the timing is for an hour. These times can be adjusted to the allotted time, the size of the group, and other needs of the group.

Preparation Before the First Meeting

1. Decide on whether to discuss the whole book in one evening or to meet more frequently to discuss one chapter at a time.
2. Ask the participants to read the book (or chapter) with an eye for passages that “speak to them” because they connect with their own parental concerns or with concerns for their children. Ask the group members to mark one or two passages per chapter and to write their reaction on a post-it or note card. A sample is in the box below with the quote and the connection to their concerns.
3. Then ask the participants to add a question to each selected passage. The question is intended to invite others into the conversation.

Sample Post-it or Note Card

The Passage (*it can simply be circled in the book and not copied*):

Clinical psychologist Daniel Goleman, Ph.D., the author of numerous books and articles on emotion intelligence estimates that IQ only accounts for between 10 percent and 20 percent of a person's success in school and career.

My reaction or connection:

I was amazed by the fact that so little of a person's success is tied to the intelligence they are born with. It is almost **scary how much impact parents and teachers can have on children's success.**

Question:

What is an example of something you have done with your child to help him or her develop one of the SEL skills?

Timing the Meeting

The protocol below is like a meeting agenda and helps you plan the meeting and the results that you anticipate. You can share the protocol with participants before the first meeting.

The times in parentheses below can be changed to fit the time available. In the **Sample Book Club Protocol** below, the time is enough to discuss one chapter.

Step 1. Provides an overview of the chapter. The chapter objectives and the questions at the end of the chapter can provide a guide for the facilitator. You could ask for volunteers for the facilitation of each chapter.

Step 2. Provides time for discussion in small groups, so everyone has an opportunity to share their selected passages and concerns. Each person has 4–5 minutes and the facilitator (or timekeeper) keeps track of the time and makes sure everyone has adequate time to speak.

Step 3. Provides time for whole-group sharing. A member from each group summarizes the major question(s) for 2 minutes, fol-

lowed by questions and comments from the group for about 3 minutes.

Step 4. Can vary. If members have tried some of the suggestions in the book, they can share their experiences. Or, to connect the meeting to the group's shared concerns, the facilitator may pose a question to the entire group.

Step 5. For planning the next meeting and next steps of the group or book club. Parents may decide to focus on one small area to share with the group at the next meeting.

Sample Book Club Protocol/Agenda (45–50 minutes)

1. **(5 minutes)** The facilitator summarizes the essence of the chapter.
2. **(20–25 minutes)** The facilitator asks the parents and guardians to share their selected passages in small groups of 4 or 5, allotting each person 4 or 5 minutes.
3. **(10–15 minutes)** Each group is asked to select a spokesperson who discusses the group's comments and passages for 5 minutes. Other groups can ask questions.
4. **(15 minutes)** The last part is variable. The facilitator may be aware of a current concern of the group, or may present an activity, article, video, or question to engage the entire group.
5. **(5 minutes)** At the end of each session, participants might consider a really small topic or practice that they can research or try in their parenting, which they can share at the next meeting.