

Lifelong Skills

Managing challenging emotions and stress



What are life-long skills?

Life-long skills are skills for success! They include things such as understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving goals, feeling and showing empathy, creating meaningful relationships, and making responsible decisions. Parents and guardians play an important role in their child’s emotional awareness and development, which are both needed for success in society.

Children do not wake up and decide: *“Today is the day I will not scream at my little brother for taking my crayons away.”* As wonderful as that would be, parents and guardians know firsthand that it is a *process* of teaching a child *what* their emotions are, how they should *respond* when feeling them, and how to appropriately express them when interacting with others. Once a child can identify their emotions (like the ones within the energy zones below), a parent can help promote healthy behaviors and coping strategies which the child can lean on in times of need.

“Low” Energy Zone	“Good-To-Go” Energy Zone	“On the Edge” Energy Zone	“Extreme” Energy Zone
Sad Bored Tired Sick	Happy Focused Calm Proud	Worried Frustrated Silly Excited	Overjoyed/Elated Panicked Angry Terrified

**Adapted from Zones of Regulation, Think Social Publishing, Inc. **Adapted from the RULER program, Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

Life-long skills are the skills that serve as a foundation for children to better develop their understanding of emotions. As they learn how to effectively manage their emotions, especially during stressful times, this will enable them to successfully navigate life at school, at home, in their community and future workplace.

You are probably already instilling life-long skills in your children and don't even realize it! Here are some examples of how you may be promoting life-long skills:

- Do you ask about your child's feelings about different school subjects?
- Have you discussed with your child the importance of sharing while playing a sport?
- Have you helped your child identify when they should say sorry if they were playing too rough?
- Do you show compassion to your child when they are upset?
- As a family, have you ever played all together in a game or activity and took turns?

If you have done any of these things, you have participated in life-long skill development related to managing emotions! This is a huge part of your child's healthy development, and you play such an important role in it all!

How does physical activity help with emotion management?

Most resources for life-long skills are focused on activities like teaching children how to share, practice good manners, and treat others with respect. Did you know that physical activity is another successful strategy to help manage emotions? Yes, physical activity provides children with the opportunity to learn about themselves, navigate their world, and behave as a responsible and caring person. Physical activity provides an opportunity where children can challenge their emotions, release them, and learn to move forward. Finally, physical activity can serve as a *reinforcement* of how to manage stressful emotions! Offering your child physical activity doesn't just have to be exclusively sports, dance classes, or swim lessons. You can offer quick bursts of activity at home! Building life-long skills can be done together as a family unit! By moving together, thinking together, and being together, families can skill-build together!

Move Together!

Promoting family-led physical activity

Because family members rely on each other for emotional support, creating a positive climate where a child can safely express how they are feeling is very important. A safe and supportive environment means focusing on more than just your child's academic performance, their completion of a chore list, or making sure they are checking items off that you value as a parent or guardian. It means focusing on the whole child, their emotion, health, and well-being.

Families are in the unique position to not only help their child's healthy physical development, but also work on character building. Pairing physical activity as a strategy for emotion management allows you to cross off two things on your list, but more importantly schedule time for family bonding! But, physical activity doesn't have to be the only strategy you use for emotion management. As a parent or guardian, you decide what your child needs and when. Sometimes they need to be energized through physical activity, and other times they need an [energizing breathing exercise](#). You know your child best!

Pairing emotion management with physical activity

There are specific movements that provide opportunities to help children tune into their emotions, recognize their breath, and be present in the moment. Participating in these [InPACT at Home](#) activities may feel silly but are life-skills for a child to understand their feelings, thoughts, and process emotions all while being physically active. The goal of emotion management is to [build resilience](#) in your child.



Here are some examples of emotions paired with physical activities:

“Low” Energy Zone	“Good-To-Go” Energy Zone	“On the Edge” Energy Zone	“Extreme” Energy Zone
Emotion- Sad Activity- Self-Hug (Mindfulness Play card 1-2)	Emotion-Happy Activity-Disco Party (Buddy Play card 9-10)	Emotion- Worried Activity- Polar Bear Stretch (Flexibility Play card 17-18)	Emotion- Overjoyed/Elated- Activity- Tornado Squat (Strength Play card 25-26)
Emotion-Bored Activity-Texture Trek (Mindfulness Play card 3-4)	Emotion- Focused Activity- Bubblegum Flow (Flexibility Play card 11-12)	Emotion-Frustrated Activity- Split Squat (Cardio Play cards 19-20)	Emotion- Panicked Activity- Butt Kickers (Strength Play cards 27-28)
Emotion-Tired Activity- Clap Jack (Cardio Play card 5-6)	Emotion- Calm Activity- Hacky Sack (Cardio Play card 13-14)	Emotion- Silly Activity-Mario Jumps (Strength Play cards 21-22)	Emotion- Angry Activity- Body Scan (Mindfulness Play card 29-30)
Emotion-Sick Activity-Child’s Pose (Flexibility Play card 7-8)	Emotion- Proud Activity- Seat Belt Crunch (Strength Play card 15-16)	Emotion- Excited Activity-Finder’s Keeper (Buddy Play card 23-24)	Emotion- Terrified Activity- Punching Bag (Cardio Play cards 31-32)

**Adapted from Zones of Regulation, Think Social Publishing, Inc. **Please see supplemental sources on why these specific exercises are paired with an emotion.

Think Together!

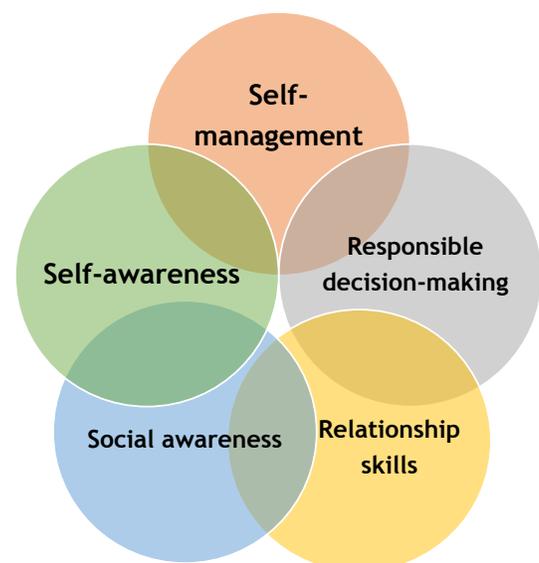
What does life-long skill-building look like at home?

An important life-long skill is the ability to engage in active communication. Addressing feelings can be a challenge for children of all ages, especially when they don't know how to identify, process, and express these emotions. Physical activity can be used as an opportunity to "prime" communication by moving and enjoying a quick burst of energy together. Think of physical activity as the primer that you put on your walls before you start to paint! Playing games and moving with your children is wonderful for taking part in quality time but is also a chance to build character competencies.

The energy zones help identify emotions that are being felt in the moment. The emotions you see in the energy zone chart may be an emotion your child is feeling now. One physical activity break can help your child feel more energized in the moment. The exciting part is that your child doesn't have to wait a day, a week, or a month to feel better! Exercise can be an immediate mood booster! The play card exercises are meant to support your child *while* they are feeling a negative emotion. When these activities are repeated over time however, they can serve to build strength in coping strategies for all emotions. **Emotions are the foundation and physical activities are skills for either overcoming challenging emotions like anger or reinforcing positive emotions like happiness!**

"Knowing and understanding these energy zones will help your child recognize and positively deal with their emotions. As an educator and parent, I use these every day to have a quiet moment with myself and internally focus on how I am feeling. Moreover, I have my children and students do the same. This teaches children labels for emotions and gives them practice expressing what they are feeling and why!" -Heather Lewis (Parent and Kindergarten teacher at Discovery Elementary in Williamston Community Schools)

When thinking together, it is important to address that there are also bigger topics that emotions feed into. There are five common areas in which we can develop these skills: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. As you do these activities together, and explore emotions, you are building your child's self-awareness and self-management. These are life-skills that will help your child be able to recognize, name, and best respond to any emotion they feel. Talk about life-skills! The next page describes some additional strategies that parents and guardians can use to build these important life skills:



Lifelong skill	Definition
Self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing personal and social identities • Identifying one’s emotions • Connecting feelings, values, and thoughts together
Self-management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing what stress management strategies look like, talking calmly when angry, or thinking before you speak • Setting goals for the week, month, and year • Being a leader and self-starter to get tasks done
Responsible decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being curious and open-minded to others’ opinions and thoughts • Talking about solutions for personal and social problems • Assess the consequences of one’s actions whether good or bad • Reflect on one’s role to promote personal, family, and community well-being
Relationship skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating clearly what you mean • Developing positive relationships with people who support you • Practicing teamwork and problem-solving with peers, family, and community members • Seeking or offering support and help when needed
Social awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking others’ perspectives and feelings into consideration • Recognizing strengths in others • Demonstrating empathy and compassion • Understanding what gratitude is and how to express it to others

**Adapted from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2021)

Be Together!

Focusing on emotion management and physical activity together

Being together is important, especially when it comes to the social and emotional health of your child. Parents and guardians who prioritize time together increase the emotional bond they have with their children. Social cohesion is defined as “*forming a united whole through the strength of relationships,*” which is exactly what a family unit is. Social cohesion is also a key health indicator and acts as a buffer between poor health outcomes for not just your child, but you! Moving together as a family, thinking together about life-long skill building topics, and simply being together is a recipe for success for all family members. Try incorporating one of the powerful practices on the next page into your routine!

- Set aside time once a week to go for a 20-minute walk. This not only promotes movement, but also teaches your children the importance of unplugging.
- [Try incorporating breathing exercises](#)
- Make a 5-minute mindfulness goal for you and your family members to conduct a body scan or journal.
- Use the InPACT at Home play cards once a week to all try a new physical activity
- Talk about what [teamwork](#) looks like in your family and show it through buddy activities.
- Emphasize physical activity as a healthy coping mechanism for managing emotions. When feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or even before trying to problem solve, model physical activity by turning on a quick 5-10-minute fitness video.
- In the hustle and bustle of life, make movement a priority! Every minute counts and means that much more if you can incorporate it regularly instead of a one-off task.

Physical activity is a strategy that can help children stay or move into the “Good-To-Go” energy zone! Over time, when practiced regularly, your child will learn to identify and use strategies, such as the listed movements when feeling specific emotions. Emotions are not a check box or one size fits all. There are many ebbs and flows of when, how, and why children feel the way they do. You as a parent or guardian have your own recipe for success for your child. Teaching life-skills for managing emotions will require additional supports. To learn more, please consult your school social worker or physician.

Additional resources for parents:

- <https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-parent-resources>
- <https://casel.org/systemic-implementation/sel-with-families-caregivers/>
- <https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/sel-at-home-parent-resources-activities>

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Heather Lewis holds an MA in Psychology in Education from Teachers College, Columbia University, as well as an MA in Child Development from Michigan State University. She is the K-12 Social Emotional and Mindfulness Coordinator for Williamston Community Schools and teaches Kindergarten at Discovery Elementary in Williamston, Michigan. She specializes in Social-Emotional Learning, Mindfulness, and Student- Athlete Mental Health.



InPACT at Home Powerful Practice Calendar

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week 1					
Self-Regulation	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Practice what different emotions look like in the mirror with your child.	PLAYCARD PRACTICE: Flamingos (Playcards 33-34)	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Put a weekly family chart of values on the fridge. Pick a value each week to talk about with your children.	PLAYCARD PRACTICE: London Bridges (Playcards 35-36)	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Apologize to your child when you are wrong.
Week 2					
Self-management	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Have a list of activities on the fridge that your child can turn to when feeling stressed. Practice <u>morning gratitude</u> with your child.	PLAYCARD PRACTICE: Monster Walks (Playcards 37-38)	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Call out stress management strategies you see in pictures, books, or in real life. For example: deep breathing, journaling, or meditation.	PLAYCARD PRACTICE: Good Morning (Playcards 39-40)	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Talk about self-discipline, patience and what it should and shouldn't look like.
Week 3					
Responsible Decision-Making	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Find one time a day to ask about your child's day.	PLAYCARD PRACTICE: Inch Worm (Playcards 41-42)	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Ask your child how they would solve an issue and write down a game plan together.	PLAYCARD PRACTICE: Hershey Kiss Push-up (Playcards 43-44)	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Set family guidelines for consequences and communicate what each means.
Week 4					
Relationship Skills/Social awareness	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Volunteer as a family and have your child pick what kind of service they want to be a part of. Talk about <u>everything</u> and anything!	PLAYCARD PRACTICE: High Five Planks (Playcards 45-46)	POWERFUL PRACTICE: Communicate " <u>I-messages</u> " with your child and model responding over reacting.	PLAYCARD PRACTICE: Fast Feet (Playcards 47-48)	POWERFUL PRACTICE: When offering support, ask what kind of support your child is wanting. "Do you want me to listen or problem solve with you?"

