Impact of Family on Social and Emotional Learning of Children

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INTRODUCTION

The Ways of Being model (Blyth, Olson & Walker, 2017) focuses on ways of feeling, ways of relating and ways of doing. For young people to experience social and emotional learning (SEL) they must experience ways of feeling, relating and doing as a collective set of tools that work together. The family is a young person's first context of socialization and a place where all three are happening. The family provides youth with opportunities to experience and practice across all three domains in a context that is most often experienced as safe, supportive, forgiving, and unconditionally loving. Children develop SEL through everyday family interactions (Dahl, 2015; Rheingold, 1982). However, the role of families in supporting SEL during the middle school years has received little attention from researchers. To have young people fully engaged and prepared to learn in and out of school, they need a strong foundation. As youth spend increasingly more time outside of the home, their SEL experiences are building on the foundation developed in the family – complementing and supporting the skills a young person brings to each new experience or contradicting what the young person has experienced at home. Either way, this requires youth to negotiate these similarities and differences and determine how best to incorporate that into their growing sense of self.

Youth workers must understand the unique foundation from which each young person is starting and recognize and support the development of SEL upon this foundation. The family is a training ground for exploring feelings and being in relationships. Families provide access to and awareness of social emotional skills and teach youth how to navigate experiences in different settings, including out-of-school programs. In this issue brief we focus on middle school aged youth, a time when young people are fully immersed in identity formation, emotional regulation, negotiating new peer and intimate relationships; simultaneously parents are critical in helping young people develop and hone these skills. We explore the ways that families support and promote SEL during middle school, and provide some examples of opportunities for family to intentionally support the development of SEL within their cultural and religious values and beliefs. We conclude with suggestions and strategies for adult staff who work with youth from diverse backgrounds.

HOW FAMILIES SUPPORT SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

An inherent assumption of good parenting is providing children with age-appropriate opportunities and support for learning how to be successful and contributing citizens outside the family. The process of acquiring these skills begins in early childhood, and continues through everyday interactions and conversations – feeling, relating, and doing – all embedded within the context of a family's culture and daily family life. Parents and other family members are often the primary socializing agent, teaching youth the social norms, values, and behaviours needed to participate as effective members of a society (Brim, 1966). The family and cultural values important to the family play an important role in helping children experience and interpret the world around them. Specifically, family helps young people:

> - Make sense of their own emotions, develop capacity for self-awareness, and learn to manage and regulate emotions; [feeling]
> - Develop, understand and navigate relationships with others, and strengthen social skills for maintaining these relationships; [relating] and
> - Strengthen the cognitive skills needed to approach tasks and achieve goals. [doing]

The habits and skills acquired while growing up at home are long lasting. If inconsequential habits become so much a part of what we do as adults, it is not hard to understand that the family plays a fundamental role in establishing the behavioural norms and social values of young people and how they act and react to people and situations outside the home. Despite the fact that the ways in which parents and families support SEL in youth is not often purposive or identified as supporting SEL, when cultural-based norms and values developed in the family are consistent with those expected outside the family, youth are prepared and ready to learn. However, for most youth

there will be mismatches. Understanding family values and how families promote youth SEL allows youth workers, teachers, and other caring adults supporting the young person to more effectively support their growth and learning.

PROMOTING SEL THROUGH FAMILY SOCIALIZATION

The family is the child's first social setting. Within the family and the family's cultural context, children quickly learn what is expected of them and learn what it means to be a member of a social group. Families influence children's thinking and behaviour by praising to show approval or correcting to show disapproval. In particular, praising efforts while emphasizing strategies, perseverance, and progress promote learning and progress (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016). And the ways in which families express praise, support, and share strategies, will look different across different families (Keller, 2016). Families intentionally create opportunities for their young people to promote their cultural values and rituals. Think about your own family rituals – what do you do without even thinking about it because that's just the way things were when you were growing up? Whether or not you remove your shoes when you enter a home, brush your teeth before – or after breakfast, or know how to catch and filet a fish, is likely a function of early family interactions. And you soon realize that shared family rituals are specific to a family's cultural and religious beliefs when you enter a friend's home and leave your shoes on! Families promote SEL through the implicit norms, routines and expectations within the family, as well as through the intentional learning experiences families create for their young people.

Ways Of Parenting

Intergenerational family socialization takes place implicitly and intentionally. Implicit family socialization is when families celebrate holidays, engage in community events, and volunteer to help others, in ways that are consistent with the cultural and religious beliefs. Families model the norms, attitudes, and behaviours that form the foundation for their children's values. Implicit socialization provides the foundation for how youth experience the world and understand what is expected of them (e.g., behaviour). Implicit family socialization is similar to creating everyday learning experiences that help young people develop skills and strategies for long term success (setting clear expectations, consistently enforced, bi-directional communication for understanding). Although children learn by observing and imitating others, implicit learning may be necessary but not sufficient for promoting SEL competencies. Intentional family socialization refers to learning experiences designed to explicitly teach children the knowledge and skills they need to become self-reliant and make appropriate choices independently. Intentional socialization is when family explicitly helps, through behaviours and communication, children understand why a behaviour is important and when the behaviour is appropriate. Intentional family socialization promotes the development of the social emotional competencies that youth need to navigate new experiences in different settings.

Table 1: Strategies for Parents to Move be yond Implicit Socialization to Intentional Family Socialization

IMPLICIT FAMILY SOCIALIZATION	INTENTIONAL FAMILY SOCIALIZATION	SEL SKILL PROMOTION
Using a credit card	Review your credit card statement with youth so they know why it is important to pay the full balance every month, and only charge what you can afford.	Responsibility, Decision-making, Self-Discipline
Having a glass of wine with dinner	Explicitly tell your child you expect them to wait until age 21 to drink, and that when they drink, it should be in moderation.	Self-control, Self-discipline, Boundary setting
Going for a run every morning before work	Explain to your child that you value your health and exercise and making it a priority every morning helps you feel better throughout the day.	Goal-setting, Persistence, Self-discipline
Carpooling	Point out that carpooling is a choice that comes with responsibilities and benefits: shared expenses and responsibilities, and opportunities for flexibility.	Responsibility, Problem solving, Teamwork
Visiting grandparents instead of hanging out with friends	Explain that family roles and responsibilities change: Remind them about the way's grandparents cared for them when they were younger.	Empathy, Emotion management
Serving a selection of vegetarian options at a holiday celebration	Explain that it is good to check with guests to see if they are not able to eat certain foods due to health or religious restrictions.	Promotes the appreciation of diversity, perspective-taking, and an understanding of social norms and behaviour

WHAT DOES SEL SUPPORT LOOK LIKE IN FAMILIES?

Family life is filled with learning opportunities. Young people need opportunities to make choices, choosing one option from among the many options available to them, and reflecting on the outcome of their choices. The family is an ideal place for this learning to happen; learning within the context of the family's cultural values. When families provide an environment that promotes early SEL, youth learn that there is a connection between their emotions, behaviours and their well-being. Impulse control, persistence, and empathy are three critical aspects of SEL that are acquired during childhood and are important contributors to youth well-being (Drever et al., 2015). Below are three specific examples for parents and families.

Impulse Control

Impulse control refers to an individual's ability to resist an initial desire to act in response to a thought or feeling. Although impulsivity is a component of temperament, families can help children become aware of and manage these emotions. When Dad shouts at his child for hitting a sibling, the child knows he/she did something wrong. But when Dad also acknowledges the child's feeling of frustration (I understand that you felt angry when your sister coloured on the homework you worked so hard on), explains why this behaviour is unacceptable (but you could have seriously hurt her and it is not okay to hit someone when you are angry), and offers an acceptable alternative for managing the anger (the next time you feel like that, hit a pillow, walk away until you feel better, or ask me for help), the child learns that strong emotions are okay and there are acceptable ways to manage these emotions.

Grit or Persistence

Grit or persistence refers to the ability to stick with a challenge to overcome obstacles to achieve goals. Whether learning to ride a bicycle, to play the piano, or to do long division, families can provide the motivation and encouragement for their children to "stick with it". Children learn that grit and persistence not only lead to skill mastery, but to feelings of self-confidence about their ability to set and achieve goals on their own. In contrast, when parents frequently solve their children's problems for them and shield them from the consequences of their actions, children may feel underprepared or insecure about their ability to do well on their own (Givertz & Segrin, 2014).

Empathy

Empathy refers to an awareness of what another person is experiencing and the feelings associated with that experience. When mom comforts a crying child, the child learns what it feels like for someone else to care about him/her; when dad praises a child for comforting a sibling who is crying, or for making friends with the new child at school who is being teased for dressing differently, the child learns to care about the situation and the feelings of others. In addition to promoting SEL, families support children in identity development (ways I am), a wellformed sense of self that can serve as a guide for navigating the demands of more complex social roles (Berzonsky, 2011). Identity encompasses the development of cognitive capacity (e.g., playfulness and readiness) and behavioural ability (e.g., intentional action, use of resources; Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014) as well as cultural awareness (McLean & Syed, 2015) When a child is deciding who to invite to a party or whether to try out for the soccer team, parents can help the young person consider the pros and cons of each choice and understand what their decision means for their developing sense of self.

CONCLUSION

For practitioners and educators who work with youth, it is important to recognize that the foundation for social emotional learning is established at home, and thus is grounded in each family's culture. In the ways of being model, family culture is part of "ways I am." This includes the attitudes, beliefs, and values youth have about themselves, their family, and the world around them. How families choose to socialize their young people, implicitly and intentionally, is related to their cultural and religious beliefs and values. This intersection of family and society present a challenge and opportunity to young people and the adults who support them (McLean & Syed, 2015). Supporting the family as a context for SEL requires starting by seeking to understand the values and beliefs each family brings to their ways of being.

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