

SDUHSD middle and high school counselors are committed to working in partnership with parents/guardians in supporting student social and emotional well-being. Recognizing that middle school is a time of significant change, middle school counselors will be using this bi-monthly newsletter as a forum to share information about essential topics using a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework that focuses on five key areas: relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-management, self-awareness, and social awareness. Social and emotional well-being sets the groundwork for a safe and positive learning environment and enhances a student's ability to lead a well-balanced life.

Empathy in the Digital Age

Our middle school students have grown up in a day and age where instant communication is a way of life. In many ways, this can be a positive thing - they can get questions answered quickly, keep in touch with family or friends who may live far away and allow instant communication with parents/guardians. One of major downsides of this however, is that it is very difficult to interpret intention and emotion from on-line messages. The immediacy of instant communication doesn't allow time for reflection before hitting that "send" button. For an age group that is working on developing empathy, this is even more difficult. There are many ways that we as adults can help. We need to work to allow face to face contact and connection for students. This helps them see other non-verbal aspects of language, such as body language and the intent of the speaker. Help young people use the '24 hour rule' before they respond to a text or post that upsets them. This will give them time to cool down and see if what is written could be looked at in another way - the first step in developing empathy. If they are still upset, discuss the best way to address the issue-usually not on-line. Encourage them not to contribute to negative, derogatory group chats. Have them imagine how the person those chats are about might feel. Sometimes, all it takes is that one person to stand up for someone else and many others follow their lead. While the cyber world can be bit scary, kindness and empathy can make the digital highway a bit easier to navigate.

T.H.I.N.K
Before you
POST
anything
on line.

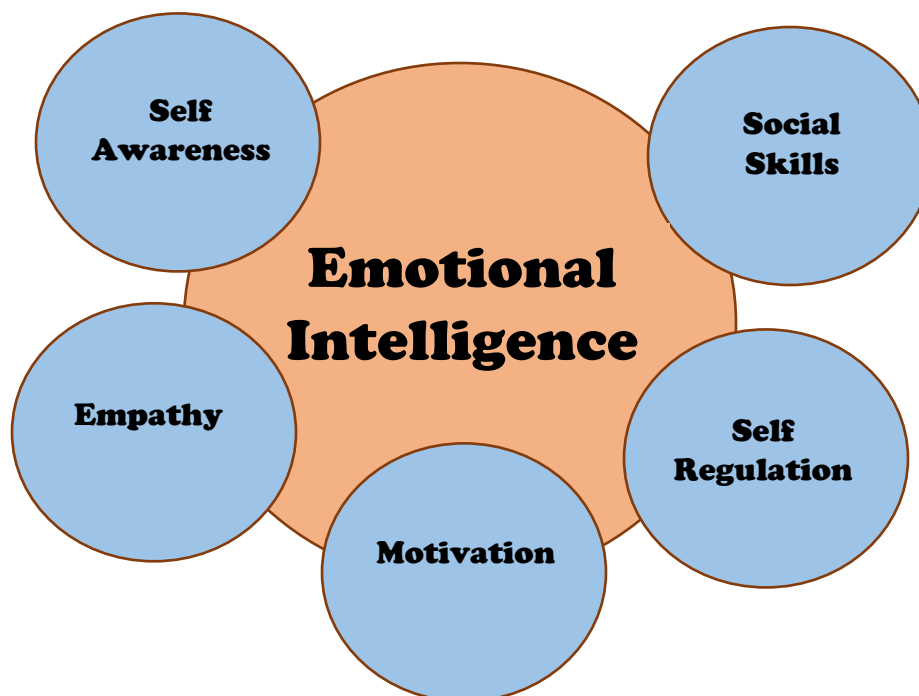
T: Is it True?

H: Is it Helpful?

I: Is it Inspiring?

N: Is it Necessary?

K: Is it Kind?



Building Empathy in your teen

Developing empathy in your teen is important! Empathy teaches them to reflect, observe and think about their own behavior. We want to help them notice, name their feelings and communicate them to others.



How to Help Develop Empathy

Model Kindness: As parents/guardians, you are the first and strongest models of kindness and empathy.

Teach children to listen with their ears, eyes and heart.
What is the other person saying? Feeling?
Communicating non-verbally?

Use teachable moments to ask students things like:
“How do you think ‘Person X’ felt when they saw those negative comments about them on Instagram?”

Recognize and praise those times when your student shows empathy toward another person.

Point out those times when your student was not displaying empathy. Discuss how they could have been more kind or understood someone else better.

Digital Citizenship

Social media access and use is at the forefront of parent concern in the middle school years and we want to provide up-to-date resources and guidance for parents as it relates to their teens privacy and safety. SDUHSD middle schools reference and utilize digital citizenship lesson plans from Common Sense Media. [Common Sense Media](#) is a site we also recommend to assist parents in learning about the latest apps and websites, along with tips of how to talk with their teen about how to responsibly use social media.

Diegueño Middle School Counseling News

Spring is quickly approaching and the weather will be changing. Limiting screen time can allow for more fun outdoor activities. Encourage healthy habits; walking, biking, and physical activity as a family. Communicating with your student is essential, try playing board games, cards, or charades. Plan a once a week family dinner. Remember, your student will mimic your healthy choices and habits.

Tips for discussing empathy with your middle school student:

- Share a time that you experienced empathy from a friend and how comforting that was for you.
- Talk with your student about a time in their life when they have experienced empathy either for or from a friend or family member.
- Challenge your student and yourself to display one act of kindness every day.

If you missed one of the SDUHSD Parent Forums on *Drug Trends and Social Media Awareness* by John Moffatt here is a link to the [Technology Contract](#) he mentioned.

Young kids learn how to use technology by watching their parents, so model healthy habits early by balancing media time with real time. Counselors are available to help with any type of assistance that you may need, so feel free to contact us.

♥, Laura Martin and Rebecca Vincent

