



School Mental Health Community of Practice School Counselors

Micro-Skills Practice Aligned with Social Emotional Learning Standards

Micro-skills are moment-to-moment activities that K-12 building and district administrators, educators and classroom personnel, school psychologists, counselors, and social workers (among other school personnel) can use to promote mental health, behavioral health, and academic success among K-12 students. Micro-skills are designed to assist you in knowing how to respond and intervene directly with students in need (e.g., those who are experiencing MH/BH concerns). Micro-skills are strength-based and asset-driven in nature, and can be used by individuals without formal MH/BH training (e.g., micro-skills are NOT clinical strategies that must be delivered by formally trained MH/BH professionals). Identifying actionable strategies that all school personnel can take to support students spreads the onus of responsibility for addressing the MH/BH needs of students to the entire school staff, providing a broad (and needed) level of support for students.

SEL Standard: Self-Awareness is the ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions and thoughts, understand how emotions and thoughts relate to one's identity and culture, and recognize how they influence behavior. Self-awareness is the ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations with a sense of integrity, confidence, and optimism.

Self-Awareness Micro-Skill: Identify and acknowledge physical, behavioral, and emotional cues that indicate how your students are feeling

Expand Your Emotions & Feelings Vocabulary: It is important for both school personnel and students to be able to recognize a wide range of emotions. Common tools that are often used in classroom and school settings to help individuals identify emotions are emotions vocabulary posters and feelings charts. Common emotions include joy, anger, sadness, fear, surprise, trust, acceptance, passion, love, shame, guilt, disgust, pain, confusion, loneliness, and anticipation.

Examples of emotions vocabulary posters and feelings charts can be found at:

- *How Do You Feel Today?:* <https://www.rewardcharts4kids.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/feelings-chart2-1.jpg>
- *The Feelings Wheel:* <file:///C:/Users/Cricket1/Downloads/PPHK+Workbook+-+Feelings+Wheel2.pdf>
- *Vocabulary of Emotions/Feelings:* <https://tomdrummond.com/app/uploads/2019/11/Emotion-Feelings.pdf>
- *Feelings Lists/Body Sensations:* <https://www.hoffmaninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/Practices-FeelingsSensations.pdf>



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The following are micro-skills that school counselors can use to identify and acknowledge physical, behavioral, and emotional cues that indicate how students are feeling:

Label and acknowledge the cues you recognize in students

- School counselors often engage with students who may be experiencing a wide range of uncomfortable emotions. You may notice cues related to anxiety, depression, fear, embarrassment, guilt, shame, and anger.
- It is important to also recognize comfortable emotions students experience. 'Catch students being good' and explicitly acknowledge cues related to pride, joy, compassion, creativeness, confidence, and optimism.

Assist students in labeling their own emotions

- An important tool that school counselors can use when assisting students in labeling their own emotions is to state an observation and ask for clarification rather than assuming the reason for the cues you are noticing.
- "I notice your body seems tense. Can we talk about that?" rather than "You must be angry right now."
- "I notice that you are hanging your head and you don't seem comfortable making eye contact with me" rather than "I'm glad to see you are ashamed of your actions."

Assist students in labeling others' emotions

- School counselors can assist students in using the 'state an observation and ask for clarification' strategy in order to help them understand other students' emotions.
- "I noticed you (insert the cue that they noticed here) when you (insert the situation here) and I'm (insert their own emotion here) because (insert the reason here)."
- I noticed you got really quiet when Jan made that joke and I'm worried because I don't want you to be upset.



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Label and acknowledge your own emotions for students

- School counselors can serve as positive role models to students by acknowledging your own feelings in different situations and using the opportunity to explore how your students might be feeling in those same situations.
- "Wow! That fire drill alarm startled me. How did that sudden noise make you feel?"
- "We had a long break. I'm happy to get back to school and see everyone. How do you feel about coming back?"

Structure the school day to support positive emotions

- School counselors can help students know what is expected in the school setting.
- School counselors can set a positive tone and reinforce school expectations when you meet with students.
- Help students process their reactions to unexpected (or expected) changes in normal routines.
- When needed, give students the opportunity to use Mindful Minutes or Grounding Activities to re-center their emotions.

Teach students strategies to manage their emotions

- Help students recognize their automatic emotional response to adverse events using the ABC method.
 - A = Activating event that triggered the student
 - B = Belief that formed after event
 - C = Consequences of how belief makes student feel.
- Help students identify alternative reactions to the situation that can solve their problems and help them experience positive emotions.