



A Curriculum for Educating the Heart and Mind

HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1

# *Creating a Compassionate Classroom*

## Overview

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At the high school level SEE Learning is about students learning how best to take care of themselves and each other. In order to accomplish this, SEE Learning helps students develop social, emotional, and ethical competencies. The goal of SEE Learning is to promote compassion: for oneself (self-compassion) and others. It is not enough to tell students to be compassionate to others and to themselves; rather students must have opportunities to reflect upon and experience compassion. The learning experiences in the curriculum allows students to gain the knowledge and tools to embody compassion. As students come to understand the value of these tools and methods, they embody them through their actions and behaviors.

Chapter 1, "Creating a Compassionate Classroom," introduces the foundational concepts of kindness and compassion. Although there may be subtle differences between these terms, for the purpose of SEE Learning, the important thing is to introduce these concepts and explore them with your students so that they eventually develop their own rich understanding of the concepts and how they look in practice. All the subsequent chapters of SEE Learning then build upon this foundation by exploring self-compassion in the personal domain with regard to the body, the mind, and emotions (Chapters 2 to 4); compassion for self and others (Chapters 5 and 6); and compassion and ethics in a systemic context (Chapter 7). This first chapter introduces the "what" of SEE Learning and the remaining chapters fill out the "how."

**Learning Experience 1, "Exploring Happiness and Well-being,"** enables students to explore interpersonal awareness and common humanity through the lens of happiness and well-being. Students are asked to identify how happiness can be cultivated through the development of ethics, the recognition of common humanity, and well-being.

**Learning Experience 2, "Exploring Common Humanity,"** encourages the exploration of the concept of common humanity through a series of activities. Students examine how all people share a desire to be happy, well, and to experience both kindness and compassion. Students are prompted to reflect on how everyone wants happiness and to avoid distress, worry, and suffering.

**Learning Experience 3, "Exploring Systems Thinking and Appreciating Interdependence,"** allows students to examine how interdependence affects their life. Through an exploration and personal application of the concept of interdependence, students identify the interdependence that exists within a single event, object, or accomplishment. Students are asked to reflect on how an awareness of interdependence can inform the daily decisions they make.

**Learning Experience 4, "Laying the Foundation for Class Agreements,"** enables students to view their classroom as an interdependent system. Primed with an understanding of common humanity, diversity, inclusivity, and interdependence, students will work together to explore shared ways of interacting and relating to one another that promote shared happiness and well-being. Students reflect on how they can interact with others and expect others to interact with them.

**Learning Experience 5, "Co-creating Class Agreements,"** engages students to apply the lenses of interdependence and systems thinking, common humanity, diversity, and inclusivity to shape suggestions into class agreements. Students are encouraged to reflect on the short-term and long-term implications of upholding these agreements on both themselves and others.

**Learning Experience 6, "Identifying Thinking Traps,"** engages students to explore the concept of Thinking Traps. Through their inquiry students will relate them to well-being and the class agreements. This concept will enable students to begin the process of looking internally to understand how they direct and guide their experiences.

**Learning Experience 7, "Building Compassion Through Reciprocity,"** asks students to explore scenarios and identify underlying motives for the actions each character took. Students are asked to decide whether they were acts of genuine compassion or apparent compassion/kindness. Through the use of mindful dialogue students will reflect on their own actions and motives and finally illustrate/write about a time when they gave or received compassion and kindness.

## The Components of a SEE Learning Experience

You will notice that each learning experience begins with a check-in, which over time changes and develops. The check-ins provide a way of transitioning into the SEE Learning experience and signaling a shift in the day. Check-ins also serve as a way to strengthen skills through repeated practice. You are encouraged to use the check-ins even when you do not have enough time to do a full learning experience. Some learning experiences involve discussions or presentations that give students a basic knowledge of a term or an idea. This is for the purpose of received knowledge.

The learning experiences also include insight activities, which are designed to deepen the received knowledge and develop critical insights, which in SEE Learning is called "a-ha" moments and signifies a deeper realization. Whenever possible, received knowledge is incorporated into the insight activities (rather than as a separate presentation) so that students can learn by doing.

Learning experiences include reflective practices. These are for moving from critical insight into

embodied understanding. They enable students to make personal connections to what they are exploring.

In some cases there is not a sharp distinction between insight activities and reflective practices. Reflective practice can lead to insights. Also, an insight activity can be repeated and deepened to encourage further reflection and internalization. Both insight and activities are sometimes marked with an asterisk. This symbol indicates that you are encouraged to do that particular activity more than once if you feel it would be helpful. Some lessons end with a debrief. This is an opportunity for students to reflect on the learning experience as a whole and share their thoughts, feelings, and questions.

## Time and Pacing

Each learning experience is designed to be a minimum of 45 minutes. It is recommended that you take longer than this if time allows and if your students are capable of it, spending more time on the activities and reflective practices especially. If you have less than 45 minutes, you can choose to only do one of the activities or a part of the activity, and finish the learning experience in the following session. However, remember that check-ins and insight activities are important to include regardless of time.

SEE Learning High School Curriculum has also been adapted to fit within an advisory program model. Typically advisory sessions are around 25 minutes. Therefore the learning experiences have either been divided or shortened to fit within this timeframe.

SEE Learning is also offered through a Curriculum Integration Model. This model enables educators to connect their curriculum (content, instructional practices, and assessment) to SEE Learning competencies and practices. Educators may select to use a grounding practice before an assessment to help regulate their students' nervous systems. Educators can also use a self-compassion prompt or reflective activity to prepare students for when an exam is returned back to them for review. Many educators are actively integrating SEE Learning enduring capabilities into their content. Whether through literature, history, science, etc educators are weaving concepts of compassion, resilience, interdependence, etc into what, how, and why they educate students.

## Student Personal Practice

Your students will be learning personal practices that they can use, and each student will connect with a different set of practices. SEE Learning scales up into practices gradually, recognizing that if not approached skillfully, some practices may actually make students feel worse, rather than better. Chapter 1 sets the stage for personal practice by establishing a safe and caring environment.

Chapter 2 then provides practices that calm and regulate the nervous system. Chapter 3 then introduces practices involving the cultivation of attention (and what are commonly called “mindfulness” practices). Chapter 4 then engages then students with practices involving identifying emotions and emotional regulation. Chapter 5 then introduces practices that foster awareness of identity, appreciating diversity, and recognizing common humanity. Chapter 6 then engages students in practices related to self-compassion, forgiveness, and compassion for others. Chapter 7 then provides practices that enable students to become systems thinkers and to cultivate the capacity for ethical and compassionate discernment. The curriculum concludes with a hands-on service learning experience called The SEE Learning Compassion In Action Project. It is advised that you follow this sequence as best as you are able, as that way your students will be well prepared for each additional type of practice and will be able to return to the simpler forms of practice in case they become upset or dysregulated. Students will journal throughout the curriculum and the Compassion in Action Project to capture personal reflections through drawings, notes, or written work.

## Teacher Personal Practice

It is highly recommended that you begin some of the practices in Chapters 2 and 3 before you start teaching them to your students if you do not already have familiarity with them. Even a slight bit of personal practice (such as a few minutes each day) will make your teaching more effective when you reach those sections. Starting early will allow you to get in as much practice as you are able before working on the practices with your students.

## Further Reading and Resources

If you have not yet completed reading the SEE Learning Framework, contained within the SEE Learning Companion, you are encouraged to read that up to and through the Personal Domain. Also recommended is Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge’s short book *The Triple Focus*, and Linda Lantieri and Daniel Goleman’s book *Building Emotional Intelligence: Practices to Cultivate Inner Resilience in Children*.

## Chapter 1: Creating a Compassionate Classroom

Learning Experience 1: Exploring Happiness and Well-being

Learning Experience 2: Exploring Common Humanity

Learning Experience 3: Exploring Interdependence and Systems Thinking

Learning Experience 4: Laying the Foundation for Class Agreements

Learning Experience 5: Co-creating Class Agreements

Learning Experience 6: Identifying Thinking Traps

Learning Experience 7: Building Compassion Through Reciprocity