

Widen the Lens this SEL Day

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The importance of this year's International SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) Day theme, "Building Bonds, Reimagining Communities," cannot be underestimated. As Americans confront the devastating consequences of racial injustice and the COVID-19 pandemic, we must acknowledge that a brighter future depends on all of us bonding together, and reimagining a future for our communities that is different from the past. A brighter future also requires a continued focus on teaching all community members – not just students in classrooms – about the foundational importance of social and emotional skills, including:

- **How to build and maintain healthy relationships**
- **How to listen respectfully to those with differing opinions**
- **How to work on putting ourselves in another person's shoes, and thereby, practicing empathy**
- **How to take initiative and participate in conversations and activities in our communities that are focused on finding solutions to difficult problems**

For many of us, our conversations and teachings around social and emotional learning have been with students and colleagues in school settings. As we focus on the theme of "Building Bonds, Reimagining Communities," I would suggest that we widen our focus, and recognize that social and emotional skill-building starts at birth and should continue across an entire lifespan. When we think about the SEL continuum in this way, we can look for opportunities to elevate its importance in every aspect of our lives.

At the Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC), we focus on supporting the social and emotional development of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and the adults who care for them. Decades of research confirm that these earliest years of life are when the foundational skills for SEL are established, and that it is within the context of nurturing, supportive relationships with caregivers that children learn these skills. The recognition that adults – parents, grandparents, foster parents, early care and education providers, etc. – must themselves have well-developed SEL skills in order to model, teach, and support SEL skill development in young children, highlights the fact that everyone is on an SEL journey.

Reflecting on this year's SEL Day theme, I hope that as SEL leaders, we can widen our lens and see opportunities for ourselves to model, teach, and elevate the importance of SEL in our daily lives. When our own children, extended family, neighbors, and community members see us modeling empathy, respectful listening, generosity and authentic caregiving, we are demonstrating SEL in action. As we think about how each of us can play our parts in supporting those community members most devastated by racial injustice and the COVID-19 pandemic, and finding solutions for a future reimagined, let's strive to ensure our own SEL skills are at the center of all our efforts.