Out-of-school time settings provide a unique opportunity for promoting social and emotional learning (SEL), as they tend to have greater flexibility in their goals and missions, and do not face the curricular demands that can undermine SEL efforts during the school day.

OST settings also tend to offer increased opportunities to develop the type of close, trusting relationships that enhance SEL. In addition, many of the goals of OST programs are also the goals of SEL programs, and at least one study indicates that OST leaders are more likely to say that SEL is central to their mission than education leaders.

This guide is designed to facilitate planning and discussion for effectively integrating SEL in to OST settings.

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Social and Emotional Learning in Out-of-School Settings

Use this guide with your staff
The more intentional OST programs are about addressing SEL skills, the easier it will be to align efforts and expectations across settings.

I. GOALS & PRIORITIES

Determine how OST program components and strategies can be adapted to fit the specific needs of your population and context. The more intentional OST programs are about addressing SEL skills, the easier it will be to align efforts and expectations across settings. To determine goals and priorities, answer the following questions with your team.

Needs and Goals

- What is the specific mission or goal of your OST organization or program? Do you have a specific content focus or set of activities and requirements you must accommodate when adopting SEL programs or strategies? Examples include physical activity, service learning, the arts, etc.
- Is there a specific focus or urgent need you hope to address by adopting or adapting SEL strategies? Examples include bullying prevention, character education, behavior management, etc.
- Are there specific skills or social-emotional or behavioral needs you are hoping to address? For example, empathy, growth mindset, conflict resolution, etc.

Time and Structure

Determine whether there are scheduling or timing constraints that will influence SEL programming.

- Is there dedicated time available during your program for SEL programming?
- Does the use of SEL programming or strategies need to be integrated with other program activities?

Leadership and Training

Decide which stakeholders should be involved in both selecting and implementing new SEL programming.

- What process will you use to discuss SEL priorities and review options for SEL programming?
- Who will be involved in each stage, and how will you ultimately decide which program to implement?
- Who will implement the program? What kind of training will this require?

Alignment and Adaptation

- If you are collaborating with a school or other organization, are they already using any SEL initiatives, strategies, or programs that might be extended to your program? Do they align with your program mission or goal? What steps will you take to align programming while also limiting redundancy?
- How can program components and strategies be differentiated for your specific population and context? Consider timing, structure, instructional methods, etc.

Key considerations:

- In order for schools and OST programs to work together to effectively promote SEL, it is important for OST practitioners to understand different approaches to SEL, to be clear about how they are supporting SEL skills, and to be proactive about connecting and coordinating with school partners.
- Use data to guide decision-making. This may include student and staff school climate data, disciplinary records, qualitative data from focus groups, or interviews with key stakeholders (program participants, OST coordinators, parents, schools/community centers, etc.).
II. ADAPTING SEL TO OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

It is important to consider the specific needs of each context and student population when selecting and adapting SEL programming for OST settings.

A. Determine what type of program best fits your needs. Consider the following three models and how OST organizations and their partners (schools, community centers, etc.) might use the information they’ve gleaned from their reflections about goals and priorities to inform decision-making.

Model 1: Partnerships organized around a common structure. Imagine an OST organization whose mission and structure mirror that of a traditional school-day program.

The OST program likely exists within a school building and/or shares students with a school-day program. In this program, students might be organized in classrooms and engaged in homework and other seated activities, or the program might have a stated mission that is aligned with the academic mission of a partner school (e.g., literacy). A leadership team might begin by considering the importance of consistency and the danger of redundancy.

With your team, reflect on how you will:

1. Focus on your prioritized SEL domain;

2. Tell which programs have implications for key academic domains (e.g., literacy); and

3. Ensure that OST-based activities are additive (not repetitive) and aligned in their afterschool setting.

Model 2: Partnerships organized around a mission. Imagine an OST organization whose mission and structure does not match that of a traditional school-day program.

Instead, this OST program is driven by a set of offerings that are nonacademic in nature. This program might exist within a school building, or it might be community-based. For example, an OST program whose mission is to provide children with opportunities to express their life experiences through poetry, a program built around specific sports, or a program that engages children in arts-based exploration.
With your team, reflect on how you will:

1. Determine which SEL programs appear to share similar goals and/or use similar pedagogical strategies to those already in place.

2. Decide if there are elements of different programs that might be used in tandem to best match the existing structure.

3. Narrow the program’s scope by zooming in on the specific components and content areas that are most relevant for your student population.

**Model 3: Partnerships organized around a specific challenge.**

Imagine an OST program whose desire to engage in SEL work is driven by a particular challenge that its staff/student body faces. For example, an OST program where staff struggle with stress management/emotional regulation or where students struggle with positive communication skills. In this instance, the starting point might be a consideration of the target population, including data collection around the strengths and struggles of students and staff in the program.

With your team, reflect on how you will:

1. Identify which programs are most saturated with activities related to the SEL skills and/or domains of interest.

2. Determine which programs focus on emotional regulation.

3. Determine which programs also target teachers.

4. Determine which programs focus on building positive communication skills.

**Key considerations:**

- Is there an existing program already in use at the school site? If so, how might it be adapted?
- OST programs should prioritize programmatic elements that match the desired content type (e.g., skill focus) and pedagogical strategy (e.g., instructional method).

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**Four common principles underlying high-quality OST and SEL programming include providing:**

- Safe and positive environments;

- Support for the development of high-quality relationships between adults and children;

- Developmentally appropriate, relevant, and engaging content; and

- Opportunities for direct skill building.
B. Use key considerations for adapting SEL programs for OST settings. Here are five considerations for organizations to grapple with in their plan for adapting SEL programming for OST settings:

1. Expansion is difficult when forcing standardization. While most SEL programs are packaged as standardized units, programs vary widely in their content, approach, and skill focus.

2. The benefits of consistency should be balanced with the need for programming to be additive. Consistency across contexts improves outcomes for children and youth, but simply repeating more of the same often leads to student disengagement.

3. SEL programs should authentically support the mission of the OST organization. Prior work in the fields of family and community engagement suggests that adaptations are most effective when they are fully integrated into the mission and practices of an organization.

4. In addition to the mission, the pedagogical approach of SEL and OST programs should be both aligned and additive. SEL programs, like OST programs, vary in their goals and pedagogical approaches.

5. Organizations should consider the specific SEL needs and learning styles of their students.

Engaging your school’s leadership team in leveraging SEL in OST settings will prove to benefit both school settings.

◊ Reflection:
• How can components be differentiated to meet the specific needs of your context and student population?
• Consider how to maintain consistency without being redundant.
• What SEL programs can be easily integrated with, but also add to, what an OST program already offers?