

The Aperture 8

A guide to the research-based
social and emotional competencies
from Aperture Education



Introduction

CASEL™ has defined five competence areas ([The CASEL 5](#)) that lead to social and emotional success for children and adults. Those competence areas are Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. The beliefs, attitudes, and resulting behaviors within each of these categories can influence and reflect the social and emotional competence of a child or adult. For example, if a student easily shows gratitude or empathy toward other students, but often turns homework in late, that student may have high Social Awareness but low Responsible Decision-Making skills. But one great thing about social and emotional skills is that they can be measured and taught. At Aperture Education, we have modeled our social and emotional competence framework off the CASEL framework and have added subcategories based upon the extensive research and experience of our team. Aperture Education measures social and emotional competence based upon eight different areas:

Self-Awareness is how we view ourselves and our emotions, and in turn, how we interact with the world around us.

Optimistic Thinking refers to having a sense of optimism and hope for the future, speaking positively about oneself and others, and belief in the ability to attain future goals.

Self-Management is our ability to regulate our emotions and behaviors and is a crucial steppingstone to developing relationships in school and work, in addition to developing adaptability when things don't go the way we want or expect them to.

Goal-Directed Behavior is the ability to plan our actions, complete tasks, and persist as we strive for the things we want to achieve.

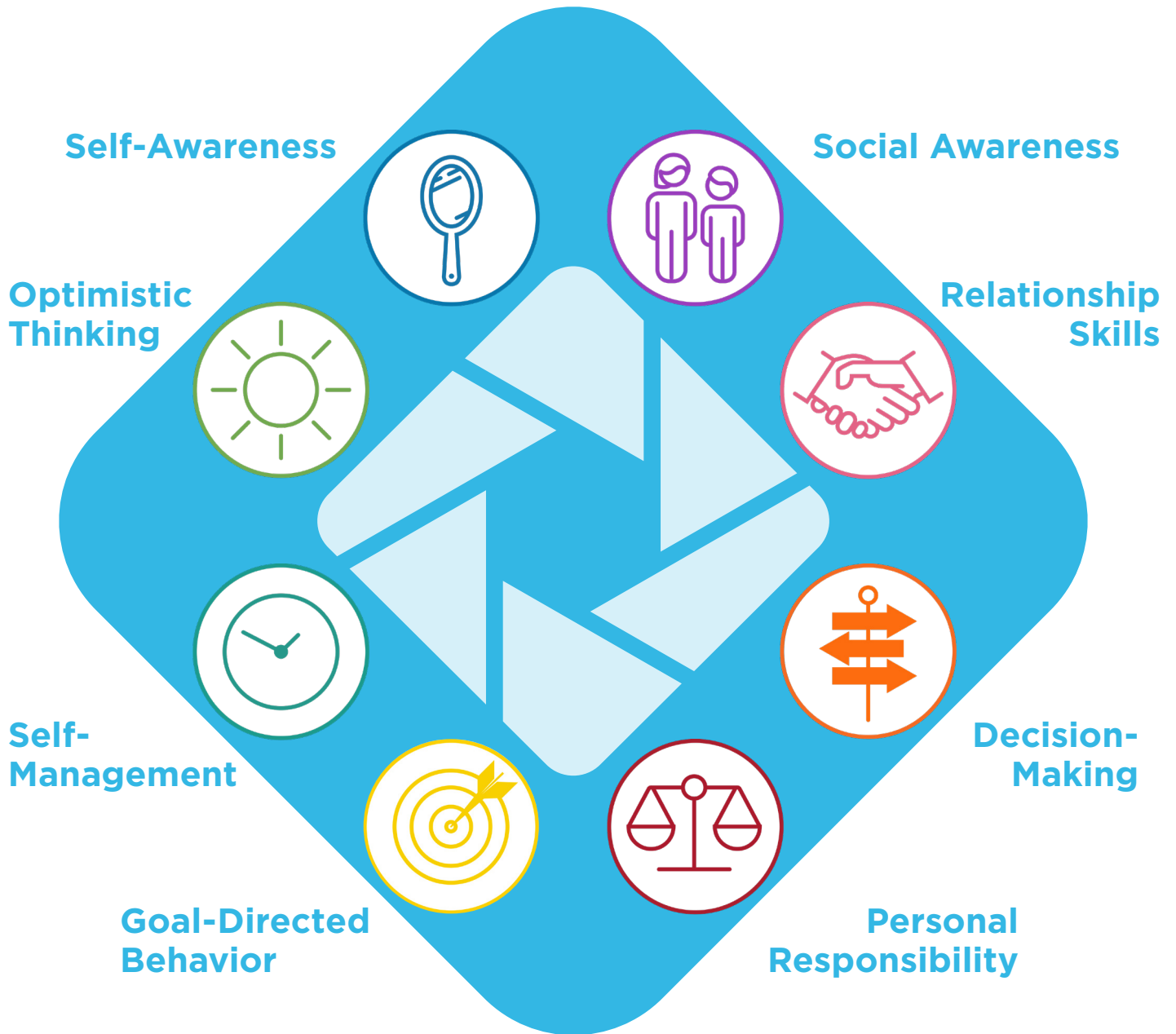
Social Awareness is an individual's capacity to interact with others in a way that shows respect for their ideas and behaviors and uses cooperation and tolerance in social situations.

Relationship Skills refers to an individual's consistent performance of socially acceptable actions that promote and maintain positive connections with others, including offering help and kindness toward others.

Decision-Making is the approach taken to problem-solving and includes learning from others and previous experience, using values to guide action, and accepting responsibility for decisions.

Personal Responsibility is the tendency to be careful and reliable, in addition to contributing to group efforts.

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These competency areas make it easier for educators to define and measure where students have strengths and where they have a need for instruction, or an opportunity to grow. It also provides a framework for specific social and emotional strategy development, so educators and students can work together to target a specific skill or set of skills to work on in a set time period. Keep reading to learn more about each competency and strategies that educators and families can use with students.



Self-Awareness

What is Self-Awareness?

A realistic understanding of our own strengths and weaknesses, together with a consistent desire for self-improvement is essential to success. Unfortunately, we are often more aware of our weaknesses and limitations than our strengths and possibilities. Failure and disappointment can cause us to think about what went wrong and why we did not meet our goals. However, when we are successful, we often just go on without taking the time to think about how we used our strengths to achieve our goal.

To help our children be successful, we can help them become more aware of their strengths and skills so that they can be better prepared to call upon them in the future. As Rachel Simmons, best-selling author and co-founder of Girls Leadership said, “Self-knowledge is the foundation of real success,” and that includes knowledge of our strengths.

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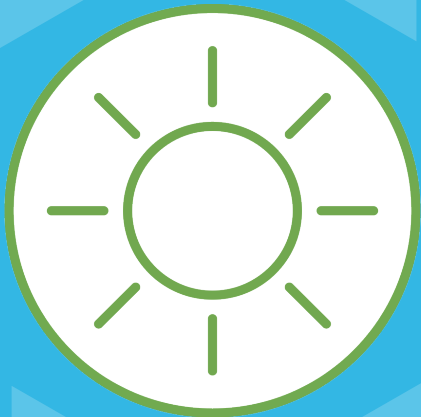
Strategy: My successes and strengths

The goal of this strategy is simple — to become more aware of what specific skills, talents and strengths help us achieve our goals so that we can deliberately use those skills in the future.

For elementary students - Have the child think of something that they really like to do and are good at. It could be sports, an artistic talent, or even playing video games. Then have them make a list of what specific skills they use to be successful. The more specific the better! Have them make a poster of the activity and the skills they use, then hang the poster to remind them of their strengths!

For middle school students - When faced with a challenge or a problem, have them identify their strengths (they could have already done this like the elementary students) and then discuss how they can use specific strengths to achieve their goal or solve the problem. The idea is to develop a strength-based plan on how they will meet their goal.

For high school students - They might need to collaborate or work with other individuals who have different skill sets to solve more complex problems and challenges. Help them think about what skills they bring to a team, what other skills the team will need, and who else has those skills and could be invited to be part of the team.



Optimistic Thinking

What is Optimistic Thinking?

Helen Keller once noted that, “Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.” The belief that things will turn out well is what motivates effort and encourages us to keep trying. After all, if we truly believed that our efforts are wasted and that things are going to end badly, why would we make the effort? We want our children to have an attitude of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking about themselves and their future.

We have all struggled with challenges at some point in our lives, and maintaining a sense of hopefulness and optimism is critical to persevere. The sacrifices that we make are inspired by the belief that they will make a positive difference for our families, our communities, and our country. Fortunately, optimistic thinking is a skill that can be taught. Below is a simple strategy to promote a child’s or teen’s sense of optimism.



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Strategy: Even if

The need for social distancing filled our children's lives with disappointment, and they are experiencing loss and frustration. "Even if" can help ease some of that disappointment. The essential idea of "Even if" is to encourage children to reframe the loss as an opportunity. Instead of focusing on the negative, we can help them see the positives in the situation. For instance, even if they can't have their friends over for their birthday party, they can still have a virtual birthday party. In fact, with a virtual party even friends and relatives who live far away who would not have been able to attend an in-person party can participate! Encourage children to think, "Even if I can't... I can still..." With enough practice, this can become a life-long skill to help children deal positively with disappointment.

For elementary students - it may help to focus on what fun things they can still do with their friends. In addition to virtual parties and sleepovers, they can also learn a new game to play with friends or family. For example, even if I can't go to my friend's house, we can still play Words with Friends together. Or, even if we can't go see a movie, I can still play my favorite board game with my family.

For middle school students - learning a new skill like cooking (even if I can't go to my favorite Mexican restaurant, I can still learn to make tacos at home) can be fun and rewarding.

For high school students - being able to contribute to the family and community can help them find meaning in their situation (even if I can't go to my part-time job, I can still help by raking my neighbor's leaves and mowing their lawn).



Self- Management

What is Self-Management?

Self-Management refers to an individual's success in controlling his or her emotions and behaviors to complete a task or succeed in a new or challenging situation. Both children and adults need to learn how to control their emotions so that they can get the job done. Often, when talking about managing emotions, we focus on how to calm down when we are angry, upset, or scared.

These are important skills, but we also need to be able to energize ourselves when we are tired, bored, or just don't feel like working hard. Sometimes we need to calm down and focus; other times we need to "psych ourselves up" to get the energy to tackle our schoolwork, our chores, or our jobs. Being able to psych ourselves up so that we can get to work is a life-long skill that helps us be successful.



Sometimes we need to calm down and focus; other times we need to psych ourselves up.





Strategy: Psych Yourself Up

The goal of this strategy is simple — to increase your energy level and motivation to do whatever needs to be done.

For elementary students - One key to psyching yourself up is to get up and get moving! Increased activity gets your heart pumping and can give you a boost of energy. For young children, have them spend five minutes pretending to be an active animal — jump like a kangaroo, stomp around like a dinosaur, or prance like a pony. Do this a few times throughout the day to keep them energized!

For middle school students - Music can heighten our mood and help us get fired up to take on a challenge. Have middle schoolers create a playlist of music that they find energizing or inspiring. For the baby boomer writing this strategy, I might include the Theme from Rocky or Eye of the Tiger, but I bet children could find something more meaningful to them! You might also want to create a playlist for calming down and relaxing when responsibilities are complete.

For high school students - Many professional athletes and entertainers have “pre-performance success rituals” that they go through to get ready for the big game or concert. They might listen to the same music, eat the same food, take deep breaths, or do something silly like basketball star LeBron James tossing chalk before each game. A good success ritual for high school students is to think about and picture in their minds their past successes - specific times when they performed well and achieved their goals. Remembering their past successes can give them the energy and the confidence to take on their current challenges.



Goal-Directed Behavior

What is Goal-Directed Behavior?

To be successful, productive, and happy, each of us needs to learn how to set and achieve goals. Achieving meaningful goals is what keeps us moving forward in our lives. Without goals, our lives can become a hodge-podge of random activities that fill the day, but not our hearts and minds. As American businessperson, Jim Rohn said, “Success is steady progress towards one’s personal goals.” Like all social and emotional skills, goal-directed behavior can be taught. The two strategies below can be used with students (and adults!) of all ages.



Success is steady progress towards one’s personal goals.





Strategy: SMART Goals

George Doran developed the SMART goals approach in 1981. Forty years later, the SMART goals approach is used everywhere. The acronym SMART identifies the key characteristics of a good goal:

Specific - good goals identify a clear, specific goal. Rather than a vague statement like “I will work harder in school,” a specific goal might be “I will complete my homework assignments.”

Measurable - We need to know when we have achieved our goal, so we need the goal to be measurable. Rather than, “I’ll exercise more,” it is better to state, “I will exercise for at least 30 minutes three times a week.” Then, we need to measure and track our progress.

Achievable - We need to be realistic and set goals that we can actually achieve. It is better to have a series of small achievable goals that builds your child’s confidence than one giant goal that increases the chances of failure and builds pessimism.

Relevant - Is the goal important to your child? If it is not relevant to them, they are less likely to achieve it.

Time-Limited - It is important to set a time frame for completing the goal. Set a realistic time frame for meeting your goal. Having a specific time frame makes it harder to procrastinate.

Helping children (or yourself) develop a habit of making SMART goals will help them be more successful. It is one of the most important skills we can teach and will benefit them and ourselves for decades to come.

Strategy: The Hemingway Effect

No matter how SMART our goals, we can still get tired, bored, or hit roadblocks that could keep us from reaching our goals. The famous author, Ernest Hemingway, developed a great and simple tool for helping us keep going until we achieve our goals. This technique has become known as The Hemingway Effect. Think of a student working on a term paper. Often children will continue to work on the paper until they are tired, bored, or run out of ideas (writer’s block). When they can’t go any farther, they stop. This can leave them frustrated and makes it hard to return and finish the paper. Ernest Hemingway’s great solution was to 1) stop writing while things are going well, and 2) write down the next step, or the next idea you want to discuss when you return. Students will feel better and when they return, they will already know the next step and can get right back to being productive. Always knowing the next step to take when we return helps us keep going until we achieve our goal.

These two strategies can help our students with their schoolwork, their chores and will become lifelong habits that will help them be successful, productive, and happy.



Social Awareness

What is Social-Awareness?

Before we can get along with each other or work together towards a common goal, we must get to know, understand, and respect each other. A key skill related to social awareness is empathy — the ability to understand and appreciate the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of another person. Rather than ignoring or rejecting someone we disagree with, empathy helps us understand the other person, even if we don't agree. That understanding is essential to not only avoiding conflict, but also working together to achieve a common goal. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "I don't like that person. I have to get to know him better." Let's see how we can help our children and ourselves grow our empathy.



Empathy helps us understand the other person, even if we don't agree.





Strategy: Grow your empathy

The foundation of empathy is the ability to recognize another person's emotions — to understand and appreciate what the other person is feeling. The goal of this strategy is simple - to help children develop their ability to show empathy.

For elementary students - A great way to develop this skill with young children is to read books together and discuss how the characters in the story are feeling. Ask children questions like:

- “How do you think the character is feeling?”
- “Why do you think they feel that way?”
- “Do you think you would feel that way too?”

You can also encourage them to write short stories about people they know, focusing on how they felt in each situation. Make sure they focus on positive emotions and not just negative ones.

For middle school students - Another key aspect of growing empathy is learning how to listen to others. “Active listening” refers to a set of skills to help us pay attention and understand

what someone else is saying. Active listening skills are especially important with difficult or hard conversations. With teenagers spending so much time communicating via social media, it can be hard for them to learn and practice active listening. According to neurologist and former teacher Judy Willis, active listening entails suspending judgement, focusing on the speaker, avoiding interruptions, and responding and reflecting after a wait time. Review these pointers with children and help them practice these important skills.

For high school students - One of the most important benefits of a well-developed empathy is that it can help us overcome biases, stereotypes, and prejudices. By enabling us to appreciate the experiences and feelings of others, empathy can help us better understand others and ourselves. Encourage high schoolers to read books or watch movies that present the life experiences of people different from themselves. Use active listening skills to talk to adolescents about their reactions and thoughts.



Relationship Skills

What are Relationship Skills?

Relationship Skills are the ability to interact positively and productively with other people. Whether it is making and keeping a friend, being part of a team, or working on an important project with others, relationship skills are essential to our success, productivity, and happiness. Like all social and emotional skills, relationship skills take practice to develop. Here are some suggestions to help children build these critical skills.



Relationship skills are essential to our success, productivity, and happiness.





Strategy: Who is great at this?

The goal of this strategy is simple — to help children recognize and build important relationship skills.

For elementary students - The first step is to help children name and recognize important relationship skills. Take a sheet of paper and make two columns. On the left side list key relationship skills such as “says something nice about someone,” “is polite,” or “offers to help others.” On the right side, have students write the name of someone who’s great at this and give an example of how that person showed that skill. Start with a small list of easy skills for children to identify and then add more as they get better at recognizing relationship skills in others.

For middle school students - Relationship skills can be particularly hard because they involve other people. Teenagers often struggle with relationship skills as part of growing up. Issues like being loyal to friends, keeping their trust, and being accepted while still being true to oneself and doing the right thing are very hard lessons to learn. Fortunately, there are many great movies

that deal with these themes such as “Riding with My Sister,” “The Breakfast Club,” “Stand By Me,” and even “Toy Story”. Watch these films with middle schoolers and then talk about the relationship skill challenges portrayed in the film and who was great at solving those challenges and how.

For high school students - The ability to get along with all kinds of people is important in the workplace and in the community. Help high schoolers learn to form positive relationships with a variety of individuals. Have teens pick someone that they do not yet know well but would like to get to know better. The person could be a classmate, a neighbor, or even a family member like a cousin. Encourage them to strike up a conversation with that person and explore three things: 1) their interests, 2) their goals, and 3) someone they admire. Have them share with you what they discovered - likely they will have more in common with the person than they thought! Help high schoolers become someone who is great at getting along with others.



Decision-Making

What is Decision-Making?

Consider this quote from John C. Maxwell, “Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you.” If you agree with Maxwell that we are defined, at least in part, by the choices we make, then helping our children learn to make good choices is very important. The social and emotional skill called Decision-Making is about how we solve problems and make choices that are based on our values, how we accept responsibility for our decisions and their consequences, and how we learn from experience.



**Life is a matter of choices,
and every choice you make
makes you.**





Strategy: Pause Power

Elementary Students - Pause Power is a decision-making strategy that has two parts. It begins with identifying what is really important to us and the principles that we want to live our life by. Help children identify what is most important to them. It might be “telling the truth,” or “being a good friend.” You can help them identify what’s important, but make sure it’s what is important to them, not you. Second, help children develop a habit of pausing when they are faced with an important decision and thinking about what’s most important to them and then using those principles to guide their decision. This will help them avoid making impulsive decisions or being overly influenced by peer pressure. If a child’s decision reflects what is important to them, they will feel better about that decision. So, when you see children struggling with a decision, remind them to use their Pause Power. With practice it will become a habit that will help them make decisions based on their values and their true selves.

Strategy: Examining Close Calls

Middle and High School Students - Phew, that was a close call! How many times have we experienced a close call in our life? What’s

interesting is how we respond to close calls. As Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe point out in their book, “Managing the Unexpected,” we tend to think of a close call as a positive outcome or success. Barely passing the test shows that we studied enough; being the last person selected for a team shows that we are a good enough athlete. At a minimum we chalk it up to luck and move on. What we don’t do often enough is examine the close call as a failure nearly avoided to see what we can learn from it. As children become teenagers, they will find themselves in more risk-filled situations such as driving a car, staying out later, or going on unchaperoned trips with friends. They are likely to have close calls such as a car accident that was barely avoided. We need to encourage adolescents to not just learn from their mistakes, but to learn from their Close Calls. Help them think through what could have happened, what led to that situation and what they can do differently in the future to avoid that situation. A Close Call is a gift, but only if we examine and learn from it. So, encourage your adolescent to examine a close call as a kind of failure they can learn from, not as a success that they should feel good about. Like all social and emotional skills this practice can serve them well throughout their life.



Personal Responsibility

What is Personal Responsibility?

Nearly 30 years ago, the United States Department of Labor released a landmark study, “The Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills” report that defined the skills necessary for successful employment. One of the twelve Foundational Skills they identified was Responsibility. To be successful in life as well as the workplace, our children need a strong sense of Personal Responsibility, which we define as, “an individual’s tendency to be careful and reliable in their actions.” We all want our children to achieve great things and as Winston Churchill said, “The price of greatness is responsibility.” Here are some suggestions to help your child build this critical skill set.



The price of greatness is responsibility.





Strategy: Encourage Before You Correct

Elementary Students - Educators and parents are busy people. With all of our responsibilities, it is tempting to just go ahead and correct children's schoolwork or chores rather than taking the time to encourage them to persevere, try again, and find the right answer on their own or with minimal guidance from us. But think of the long-term consequences of this correct first approach. Likely all of us has known a co-worker who did shoddy work and relied on others (like us!) to review and correct their work. These individuals may lack Personal Responsibility and take advantage of others. That certainly isn't who we want our children to become. So rather than correcting their work, encourage children to keep trying. Be positive and supportive. If your child becomes frustrated, give them some gentle guidance, but don't solve the problem for them. Encourage before you correct. They will feel proud and more confident if they learn how to solve it themselves.

Strategy: What am I good at?

Middle School Students - A key aspect of Personal Responsibility is perseverance - continuing to work hard and try one's best until we complete a task or solve a problem. We can encourage perseverance in our children by helping them identify what strategies or techniques have helped them persevere and be successful in the past and can be applied to the current situation. One way to help them do this is to identify some important responsibility that they are good at. It might be doing chores without reminders or participating in an extra-

curricular activity at school. Then have the student write down at least three strategies (for example, keeping an up-to-date calendar, or setting reminders on your smart phone that help them succeed in this area.) Discuss the strategies, keep a list of them, and the next time the child is struggling to complete a project or task, review the list and see what proven strategies you can apply to the current challenge.

Strategy: Encourage reporting mistakes

High School Students - Researchers Martin Landau and Donald Chisholm tell the story of a seaman on a US Navy aircraft carrier who lost a tool somewhere on the flight deck. Knowing that the tool could cause a serious accident if a jet sucked it into its engine on takeoff or landing, the seaman immediately reported his mistake. All take-offs were cancelled, and all landings were diverted until the tool was found. Not only was the seaman not reprimanded for losing his tool, but he was commended for his action because his honesty may have saved lives.

Teenagers make mistakes. As parents we should encourage our children to report their mistakes to us so that we can help them learn from their experiences. Even if we need to discipline them for their mistake, we should always thank them for being honest and telling us, and we should discuss with them how they could have handled the situation better. Mistakes are a great learning opportunity for our children if we encourage them to share their mistake with us, we respond with patience and understanding, and we help them learn from the experience.



The Aperture 8 strategies in this guide were developed by Ann McKay Bryson and are part of the Aperture system.

To learn more about Aperture Education, the Aperture 8, and our research-based SEL assessment, the DESSA, visit our website at www.ApertureEd.com.



Aperture Education empowers over 3,000 schools and out-of-school time programs across North America to measure, strengthen, and support social and emotional competence in K-12 youth and educators. This system enables education leaders to make strategic, data-based decisions about SEL within their organizations. The Aperture system includes the DESSA suite of strength-based assessments, CASEL-informed intervention strategies, and robust reporting, all in one easy-to-use digital platform. Aperture has supported over one million students in their social and emotional growth and continues to develop innovative solutions to bring the whole child into focus. To learn more, visit www.ApertureEd.com.