

4.5

BUILDING COPING AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SKILLS THROUGH PLAY



2 hours 30 minutes



Paper, markers and pens, Handout 5: Characteristics of Playful Experiences, Handout 9: About the P.O.W.E.R. Game Bank or a printed copy of the P.O.W.E.R. Game Bank for each participant, Classroom Wellbeing Portfolios



By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Describe the role of social and emotional skills in supporting children’s wellbeing
- Demonstrate leading activities that build social and emotional skills
- Develop a plan for integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) activities into the classroom.



Introduction



20 minutes



P.O.W.E.R. Game Bank



Standing in a circle

- ➔ Display the learning objectives for the session. Invite a participant to read them.
- ➔ Play “Pantomime” from the P.O.W.E.R. Game Bank (page 180).
- ➔ Begin by explaining the key learning. Say, for example:
 - *“This game teaches children how to communicate their feelings, by acting out feelings with actions.”*
- ➔ Invite participants to practise acting out different actions and feelings. Ask a volunteer to be the caller who will call out different actions or feelings, one at a time, for the rest of the participants to do (e.g., happy, clap, shake, sad).
- ➔ Ask another volunteer to be the caller and call out a combined action and feeling for the rest of the participants to act out (e.g., angry clapping or bored dancing).
- ➔ Play the game for three or five rounds. After every few turns, ask a new volunteer to be the caller. Encourage the callers to be creative with their feelings and actions.

- ➔ Invite participants to share their ideas for how to play the game in the following rounds.



Demonstrate the actions and feelings on video. All participants should then mimic what they see, leaving their cameras on.

- ➔ Wrap-up using the closing reflection questions on the activity guide:
 - **Reflect:** Which combinations of actions and feelings were the most fun to act out? Which were the most difficult?
 - **Connect:** When in your life is it difficult to express your feelings?
 - **Apply:** What can help you to share your feelings? How can you help others to share their feelings?
- ➔ End the reflection by connecting the exercise to their classrooms by asking:
 - *“How could an activity or game like this support your students’ wellbeing?”*
 - *“When and why might you choose to facilitate this activity in your classroom?”*
 - *“What skills could this build in your students? How do you see those skills being affected by conflict?”*



Background / Theoretical Explanation



20 minutes



Handout 5: Characteristics of Playful Experiences



Facilitator explanation

- ➔ Explain that children’s social and emotional skills can be affected by conflict and that playing games like Pantomime can help to rebuild these skills.
- ➔ Severe adversity – including displacement and direct attack, which many students will have experienced – can overwhelm the brain and interrupt the ability to process emotions in a healthy way.
- ➔ These interruptions in social and emotional processing can have significant effects, including on health and academic and economic outcomes, in the short, medium and long term.
- ➔ However, targeted skill-building activities, a safe and supportive learning environment and strong adult and peer relationships can improve these processes, which will enable children to cope better with adverse events and the emotions and responses that arise from them.

- ➔ Social emotional skills – such as emotion regulation, empathy and problem-solving skills – have been shown to have positive short- and long-term effects, such as reducing aggressive and antisocial behaviour, improving the ability to focus and academic outcomes, and creating healthier behaviour and outcomes. Although these skills benefit all children, including those not affected by crises, particular skills and competencies may strengthen the resilience of children affected by conflict and enable them to persevere, manage stress, and make and maintain strong, positive relationships.
- ➔ The most effective way to build and reinforce these skills is through:
 - Safe and secure environments and relationships
 - Explicit understanding of the skills that are being developed
 - Targeted skill practice (through activities like pantomime)
 - Reflection on the skills and applying them outside of the game/activity.
- ➔ Ask participants to reflect on the Pantomime game they just played – how did it meet the following criteria?
 - What did we do to ensure that the Pantomime was played in a safe and secure environment, with positive relationships?
 - How well did I, as the facilitator, communicate the skills that were being developed in the Pantomime?
 - What targeted skill practice did we do in the Pantomime?
 - How did we reflect on what we did/learned in the Pantomime?



➔ Collectively, reflect on why it may be important for activities that build social and emotional skills to have the five characteristics of play-based learning: **meaningful**, **joyful**, **actively engaging**, **iterative** and **socially interactive**, see Handout 5: Characteristics of Playful Experiences. First, provide a refresher on what these five characteristics mean:

- **Meaningful:** Connected to something they are already familiar with
- **Joyful:** Finding an experience joyful, exciting and motivating
- **Actively engaging:** Immersive activities that engage their attention, interests and developmental needs.
- **Iterative:** Trying to solve a problem or meet a challenge through repeated attempts or by figuring out different ways to approach the same game or problem
- **Socially interactive:** Encourages interaction and co-learning with peers and adults

For example:

- Activities that are meaningful build new learning from children's prior experiences and build on their existing knowledge, enabling them to learn more.
- When activities are joyful, students are more likely to be engaged and motivated to learn. They are likely to address challenges and learn new skills when they're motivated by peer interactions, and especially when they enjoy the activity and want to improve at what they're learning.





- Developing any skills, including social and emotional skills, requires students to be actively engaged in the process of learning, i.e., immersed in the activity from which they will learn, making choices, guiding the process and practising the skills they're learning.
- Iterative games and activities allow the learner to try, fail and try again. This enables them to think critically and find new ways to achieve the results they want.
- Developing social and emotional skills requires games and activities to be socially interactive, so that students can practise the skills in real life situations with their peers. Games that are social also enable students to learn from one another.

➔ Invite participants to think of games they already know/play with their students – SEL games or otherwise. Ask for examples from the group and then invite them to brainstorm how to make the games more playful by using the five characteristics of play.

- How can the games be made more meaningful, joyful, socially interactive, iterative and actively engaging?



Key Points

-  Two factors that support children's resilience (or wellbeing) are positive relationships and social and emotional skills. Teachers can strengthen these factors as they work with students in their classroom.
-  Through modelling behaviour, skill-building activities and supportive environments and relationships, teachers and classrooms can support the development of healthy coping mechanisms.
-  Social emotional learning can also help to rebuild healthy brain functioning that supports academic success.
-  Play-based approaches to learning are not only more fun and engaging for students, they're also effective and provide an opportunity to develop a wider set of skills.



Practice: Playing P.O.W.E.R. Games



1 hour 40 minutes



P.O.W.E.R. Game Bank



Groups of 2–3, whole group

➔ Now, it's the participants' turn to lead the games.

➔ In groups of two or three, invite participants to select a game from the P.O.W.E.R. Game Bank or one of their own play based SEL strategies to present to the whole group. Allow them a few minutes to prepare. Ask each group to share why they selected that game and what benefit they think it will bring to their students. Suggest that they consider how they would give the children agency, or ownership, over how they play the game. For example, can children choose the topic or theme for the activity?



Invite participants to lead a game from the P.O.W.E.R. Game Bank and adapt it for the virtual setting. Alternatively, provide a list of relevant online games or invite participants to share/teach a game they already play virtually with their students. For examples and inspiration, see this article from Edutopia: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/13-virtual-games-play-your-elementary-classroom>.

➔ Bring the groups together and invite each group in turn to lead the others in the game they prepared.

➔ After each game, ask the other participants to share feedback:

- What would you replicate when teaching this game to your students?
- Could facilitation of the game be improved?
- How does the game, and facilitation technique, build children's agency?
- How were the four criteria implemented (safe environment, explicit understanding, targeted skill practice and reflection)?
- What adaptations could you make in different situations, e.g., online, hybrid, when students are especially scared or after a recent extreme event?



Conclusion



10 minutes



Classroom Wellbeing Portfolios, markers and pens



Whole group review, individual drawing/writing

- ➔ Recap what you've learned (ask questions of the group or invite one or two participants to provide a recap).
 - It's important to build social emotional skills during/after conflict because the development of these skills is affected by adversity, which can have an impact on many other life outcomes.
 - The four social emotional skill-building criteria: safe environment, explicit understanding, targeted practice and reflection.

- ➔ Invite participants to take five minutes to add notes in their Classroom Wellbeing Portfolio.
 - How will they integrate social and emotional skill-building into their classroom?
 - For example: They could allow students to choose a P.O.W.E.R. activity when they return to class after their lunch break.

