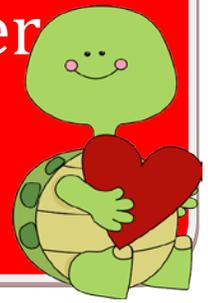


# Social-Emotional Learning Newsletter

## February 2014



**A NOTE FROM YOUR COACHES:** Let's keep our fingers crossed for no more snow this month! We know that with numerous snow days, the pacing guides have been difficult to keep up with. We encourage you to continue trying to fit in one or two lessons a week, depending on the length. As always, continue taking steps to generalize these skills throughout the school day. We also realize that the PSSA's are right around the corner and preparation will begin taking place this month. Remember that PATHS and Second Step lessons are often a nice break for students from the normal academic content. We urge you to try to continue lessons to keep students in a routine, and also allow for that much needed break during testing time. To support you in preparing for PSSA's, this edition of the newsletter has some tips and strategies to foster test preparation and social-emotional well being. We also included strategies to promote optimistic thinking and relationship skills. In addition, we are always looking for your input and ideas to add to our newsletters. Please don't hesitate to send an email with a useful strategy you use in your classroom!

### Promote Social-Emotional Learning During the PSSA's

The PSSA's can be a stressful time for both students and teachers, but SEL skills can be incorporated during this time to help alleviate some of that anxiety. It's important for students to recognize that they might experience different feelings during test preparation and testing time. Try some of these strategies to prepare your students for dealing with any uncomfortable feelings associated with testing.

- Encourage students to discuss the feelings they are experiencing while preparing for PSSA's. Review feelings normally associated with stressful situations, such as feeling frustrated, confused, and scared. Take time to brainstorm techniques for dealing with these feelings. Create a list and hang it in the room for students to see.
- Being a good problem solver is essential for doing well on any test. Use the Control Signal Poster, Problem Solving Steps and Action Plan Steps posters, when practicing sample PSSA test problems. Work through solutions by using similar steps so students can gain concrete experience for how to utilize these tools when they are taking the tests.
- Practice breathing techniques with students. Remind them that when they get stressed, taking deep breaths will help them calm down and think more clearly.
- Try exercises during the breaks between tests or after they are done for the day to help keep students' minds focused and calm.
- Read a funny story or tell jokes to get students laughing. Laughter is one of the best ways to release stress. This can also give students a chance to practice Self-Awareness and Relationship Skills as they share funny stories with one another.



**Exercising is a great way to relieve stress. Try teaching students some yoga techniques or simple movements to do in the classroom. Weather permitting, getting outside for fresh air will also help students relax.**

## Promoting Positive Relationships in Your Classroom

February is a great time to play up friendship, Valentine's Day, and to work on building Relationship Skills in your classroom. Remember relationship skills can be defined as a child's consistent performance of socially acceptable actions that promote and maintain positive connections with others. Here are some activities to try with your class:

**Compliment Hearts:** Complimenting is a simple way to encourage students to form positive relationships as well as foster self-esteem. For the month of February, challenge students to compliment one of their peers every day. Older grades can be challenged to compliment a different person everyday to give students a chance to give and receive a compliment from someone they might not normally interact with. Students can write compliments on construction paper hearts. Place blank hearts somewhere in the classroom for students to access and set aside specific times for them to use them. After students write a compliment they can give it directly to their classmate, place it in a mailbox, or they can be collected and shared at the end of the week. At the end of the month discuss with the class how giving and receiving compliments felt. This can be continued all year with a different theme each month; shamrocks, flowers, raindrops, etc.

**Peer Scavenger Hunt:** Sometimes students need a fresh start mid-way through the school year. Take time to reenergize relationships by having a peer scavenger hunt. Create a worksheet with a list of 10-15 statements, such as "lived in a different state" or "favorite flavor of ice cream is chocolate", etc. Provide a copy of the sheet to every student in the class. Instruct students to go on a "scavenger hunt" around the classroom to find a classmate that fits each statement. This is a fun way to get students up and moving as well as discover some different information about their peers!

### Encourage Optimistic Thinking in your Classroom

Promoting optimistic thinking during PSSA time can help get students in the right mind-set for testing. Optimistic Thinking is a student's attitude of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking regarding herself/himself and her/his life situations in the past, present and future.

Try these tips in your classroom:

**Positive Self-Phrases:** Talk to students about how we all have things that we are good at and things we aren't as good at—that's what makes us unique! Ask students to reflect on one academic and one behavioral trait they really like about themselves. On a small piece of paper have students write these traits and tape to their desk. When they are feeling defeated or unsure of themselves remind them to look at their positive self-phrases to help themselves think more positively about their strengths.

**Optimistic Advice Collage:** This can be a helpful activity to do prior to PSSA's. Discuss with students that sometimes when we feel stressed or overwhelmed we say phrases in our head to keep ourselves going and to think positively. Ask students to think about a phrase they've said to themselves or heard somebody else say, (such as "Keep trying!" "You can do it!" "Believe in yourself!") and write it on a sheet of paper. Allow students to be creative and use markers and other supplies to make their phrase decorative. After each student has created a phrase they can put them together on a large poster board to create an Optimistic Advice Collage. The collage can be displayed in the classroom for students to see daily! **BONUS!**

**Extend this activity to a home/school connection. Ask students to speak with family members about what phrases they say to themselves to think optimistically. Students and family members can create their portion of the collage at home and then bring back to school and share with classmates.**

**Getting to the Heart of Complimenting by Anne Paluszny is a great book to read to remind students of how to compliment and why it is important.**

