Developed in collaboration with

Relationship Skills

Competency

The educator will strengthen their abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships through clear communication, collaborative problem-solving, managing conflicts, and effectively navigating settings with diverse individuals and groups.

Key Method

The educator will develop and strengthen relationship skills and create a relationship-building action plan, including self-reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, and small action steps.

Method Components

What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):

"SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions." (CASEL, 2023)

CASEL's framework for SEL addresses five broad and interrelated areas of social and emotional competence:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- **Relationship skills**
- Responsible decision-making

In this micro-credential, you will explore aspects of **relationship skills**, reflect on how this competency is relevant to your work and personal life, and develop a plan for personal growth.

What are Relationship Skills?

Relationship skills are how we get along with others and form lasting friendships and connections. This includes communicating clearly, solving problems, managing conflicts and disagreements, and standing up for ourselves and others (CASEL, 2023).

For a more in-depth look at relationship skills and how they impact you personally and professionally, consider three ways you likely rely on this competency: communication, building relationships and teamwork, and conflict management.

Communication

Your communication skills include both the way you articulate thoughts and ideas and the way you actively listen to others. You exercise these skills when you consider how best to explain or describe something to another person so they will understand your meaning and when you focus as a listener to understand someone else's idea or perspective fully.

Communication skills are tested when discussing topics that carry emotion for you or those you are speaking with. For example, when we are upset with someone, our first impulse may be either to bottle up our anger and say nothing *or* to respond with an angry tone and use language that places blame on them. We use communication skills when we take time to cool down and think through our feelings, then speak in a way that is less likely to trigger a defensive reaction from the other person: with a thoughtful tone, blame-free language, and openness to hear their version of events.

Communication skills also come into play when there is not a conflict. For example, you use communication skills to show someone that you value them and want to hear more about them. You also use communication skills when an essential or challenging topic comes up in a group – while it would be easier to hang back and stay silent, you choose instead to be open, honest, and receptive to those with different views or new information.

Building Relationships and Teamwork

You exercise your skills in building relationships and teamwork when you find ways to connect and collaborate with others across differences, whether the difference is related to age, identity, cultural background, or life experience. You already may use these simple, daily actions that can strengthen relationships:

- Greet students and colleagues by name.
- Go out of your way to connect with someone you don't usually interact with.
- Share a story about yourself to allow others to get to know you within your comfort level and appropriate boundaries.
- Ask questions to know others within your comfort level and appropriate boundaries.
- Give and receive constructive feedback.
- Model fairness, respect, and appreciation for others.
- Acknowledge the efforts of others with encouragement and affirmation.

The Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework describes five ways people build strong relationships with others that support resilience and growth. They are:

- Express care (show another person that they matter to you).
- Challenge growth (push them to keep getting better).
- Provide support (help them complete tasks and achieve goals).
- Share power (treat them with respect and give them a say).
- Expand possibilities (connect them with people and places to broaden their world).

For a more in-depth look at these five essential elements of relationships, see Developmental Relationships/ *Help Young People Thrive.*

Your ability to connect with others and foster relationship-building among others contributes to a sense of trust, which is foundational to working as a team to achieve goals. Consider how the quality of relationships strengthens the capacity for teamwork among:

- Educators and students
- Among students
- Educators and families
- Among educators
- Friends and family members

When trusting relationships are present, people are:

- More open to trying something new.
- More committed to providing mutual support.
- More confident in sharing knowledge and expertise.
- More receptive to feedback for improvement.
- More willing to have authentic discussions and change views or practices in response to new information.

Conflict Management

Conflict is to be expected in any relationship, and our ability to manage conflicts and maintain positive relationships is another key skill set. Working through a conflict requires self-awareness and self-management to understand and productively communicate your own needs, social awareness to understand the needs of others, and relationship skills to ensure all those involved feel safe to express their perspective and feel heard and respected. Here are some skillful ways that educators can support their students or their school community to work through conflict:

- Create opportunities for group decision-making. Open dialogue engages students, parents, and staff in a democratic process in which compromise rather than competition is crucial to making decisions.
- Democratize the space. Alter the room's orientation by repositioning the front, moving all the desks, seats, or tables to the side, or having groups sit on the floor in a circle. Set guidelines for sharing so that everyone has a voice, especially those who have less positional authority (e.g., the group leader waits to speak until others have spoken).
- Use reflection and writing time to help everyone organize their thoughts and allow them to share through visual art without using language or via partner or small group discussion. Focus on ways for writers, thinkers, talkers, and visual artists to share their ideas.
- Normalize conflict around issues. When discussing problems, lean into complexity rather than seeking to simplify. Taking different sides of an issue—not to compete and win but to come to a collective decision—creates a democratic experience that demonstrates the process's messiness and complexity.

Educators also practice conflict management when they are involved in a personal conflict. For example, you may use this skill when you tell someone how their actions impacted you and communicate and maintain clear boundaries. You also use this skill when you recognize moments that you have caused harm to others, apologize, and take action to restore your relationship.

Supporting Rationale and Research

Social Emotional Learning

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Durlak, Joseph & Mahoney, Joseph & Boyle, Alaina. (2022). What We Know, and What We Need to Find Out About Universal, School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Children and Adolescents: A Review of Meta-Analyses and Directions for Future Research. Psychological Bulletin. 148. 765–782. 10.1037/bul0000383. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366301585_What_we_know_and_what_we_need_to_find_out_about_universal_school-based_social_and_emotional_learning_programs_for_children_and_adolescents_A_review_of_meta-analyses_and_directions_for_future_research

Jones, Stephanie M. and Kahn, Jennifer. (2017). The Evidence Base for How We Learn. Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. The Aspen Institute, National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. Available at: https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FINAL_CDS-Evidence-Base.pdf

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Relationship Skills

Anton, J., Van Ryzin, M.J. (2024). Reducing teacher stress and burnout and enhancing self-efficacy through technology-supported small-group instruction. Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy.

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McKay, M., Wood, J. C., & Brantley, J. (2019). The dialectical behavior therapy skills workbook: Practical DBT exercises for learning mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness, emotion regulation, and distress tolerance. New Harbinger Publications.https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=CjqvDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT9&dq=interpersonal+relationship+skills+dbt&ots=D1JOnNiStm&sig=MAYMQ3rNkA5irPbIp9wdOHysUXY

Resources

General SEL Resources

CASEL

- What is the CASEL Framework? | CASEL

Leadership Competencies | NEA

Relationship Skills

Community-Building Circles - Casel School Guide

The 'How' of Building Deeper Relationships with Students | Hoa Nguyen | Edutopia

To Be Happier at Work, Invest More in Your Relationships | Rob Cross | Harvard Business Review

Communication

What is Active Listening? | Arlin Cuncic | Verywell Mind

5-Minute Chats with Students | CASEL

10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation | Celeste Headlee | TEDx Talks

Getting Started with Constructivist Listening | National Equity Project

Can We Talk? Tips for Respectful Conversations in Schools, Workplaces, and Communities | ADL

Build don't break relationships with communication | Amy Scott | TEDx Talks

Collaboration

Develop Team Working Agreements | CASEL

How to Create a Vision Board

Active Listening

Relationship Skills Growth Plan

How to Write a SMART Goal

Setting SMART Goals as A Teacher

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3 and a proficient score for all components in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

(200-300 words)
Please answer the following contextual questions to help our assessors understand your instructional situation. Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

1. Describe your current educational role and environment.
2. How do you currently practice relationship skills in your teaching role? Provide specific examples.
3. Why did you choose this micro-credential? What do you hope to gain? Provide specific examples.

Passing: All questions are answered thoroughly. The responses provide enough information to explain why the applicant chose this micro-credential to address a specific need and explain current thoughts around communication, collaboration, and relationship-building.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following three artifacts to demonstrate your learning. *Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.*

Artifact 1: Reflecting on Your Relationship Skills

Please consider each statement in this chart and how easy or difficult it is for you. **You will not turn in this table.**

Relationship Skills		Very difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very easy
COMMUNICATION	I stay focused when listening to others and carefully consider their meaning.				
	I can articulate my ideas in ways that engage others.				
	I can have honest conversations about race and racism with young people, their families, and other community members.				
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TEAMWORK	I connect meaningfully with young people, their families, colleagues, and community members who are of a different race, culture, or socioeconomic background than I am.				
	I get to know the people around me.				
	I work well with others and contribute to a collegial atmosphere.				
	I make sure everyone has had an opportunity to share their ideas.				
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	When I am upset with someone, I talk to them about how I feel and listen to their perspective.				
	I openly admit my mistakes to myself and others and work to make things right.				
	I can work through my discomfort when dealing with conflict, listen to feelings from all parties, and help them understand different perspectives.				

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(**400-800 words**)
Reflect on your responses to the self-assessment statements in the Relationship skills section. Answer the following prompts below, which you will submit:

1. **Strengths and Interactions:** How do the areas you marked as "easy" or "very easy" enhance your interactions with students, peers, and/or others? Provide specific examples from your life where these strengths have contributed to creating a supportive, respectful, or innovative environment.
2. **Challenges and Growth Opportunities:** For areas marked as "difficult" or "very difficult," how could growth in these areas improve your relationship skills? What specific strategies or tools could help you develop in these areas? Provide specific examples.
3. **Surprises and Confirmations**: As you reflect on your responses, were there things that surprised you? Were there things that confirmed what you already know about yourself? Provide specific examples.

4. **Outcomes of Your Relationship Skills:**: Share a specific example from your life where strong relationship skills helped resolve a conflict or achieve a positive result. Share a different example from your life when a lack of strong relationship skills caused harm.
5. **Commitment to Growth:** Based on your reflections, what actions will you take to build on your strengths **and** address your challenges with relationship skills? Provide specific examples.

Turn in your responses to these 5 prompts. You may turn this in via the following formats:

*Photo of your handwritten response (must be legible)
*Voice recording
*Digital document

Artifact 2: Explore an Area of Personal Growth

Choose **one** of the following three areas that you wish to focus on. In your submission, please state WHICH OPTION you have chosen.

OPTION 1: Expressing Care and Building Trust Through Community Agreements

Identify a group with whom you work on a regular basis. Follow the directions on this document: Developing Community Agreements.

(500-800 words)
Respond to the following questions about your *process* with this group:

- How did you frame your discussion?
- How did you engage people in the process?
- What were your agreements?
- How did this change the relationships within the group?

OPTION 2: Providing Support Through Active Listening

Use this protocol to practice active listening with someone to whom you wish to provide support. Then, reflect on the following questions.

(500-800 words) **Submit your responses to the following:**

- Describe the setting in which you completed this activity (place, time of day, etc.). To provide context, please include a brief description of the situation that required active listening.
- What verbal communication strategies did you use, and why?
- What non-verbal communication strategies did you use, and why?
- How did you encourage sharing?
- Were you able to be present and listen with an open mind? What were the challenges to this?
- How was your support received? How do you know?

OPTION 3: Collaboration and Communication

Create a collaborative vision board with at least one person and reflect on the experience. Your vision board can be created with any digital medium that is collaborative. This can be submitted via a PDF, slide deck, Google doc (with permissions set to allow us to view), Canva link, or a Microsoft product. Your vision board should:

- Clarify and record what you want to accomplish together.
- Include a time frame for your vision (1 month, 1 year, 5 years ...).
- Include images and words that represent your vision and your emotional connection to it.
- Be kept somewhere visible to all of the people who share this vision.

(500-800 words)

1. How did you determine your shared vision? Were there compromises that were needed? Explain.
2. How did you each contribute to the vision board?
3. Where will you keep your vision board? Why have you chosen this place?
4. How will you use your shared vision board to achieve your goals?
5. How did this activity strengthen your relationship(s)?

Submit BOTH your vision board and your response to the 5 questions in a single document.

Artifact 3: Relationship Skills Growth Plan

(200-400 words)
Write in a journal or use a digital format to create a relationship skills growth plan to improve **your** relationship skills. In your writing, please:

1. Include one goal, written in a SMART goal format (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). Address each SMART element as you create your goal. See RESOURCES. Be sure to write a goal that addresses your relationship skills.
2. Describe any anticipated challenges to reaching your goal. How will you address those challenges?
3. Describe any supportive people you can rely on or routines and structures you can implement to help you achieve your goal.
4. List at least three specific steps you will take to get started.
5. Explain how you will track your progress. Start with the beginning status of your goal, then describe how you will track your progress as the plan is implemented. This may include a specific tracking tool, data that you keep, or journal entries that monitor your progress. What will you do if you discover something isn't working as planned?

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	**Basic**	**Developing**
Artifact 1: Reflecting on Your Relationship Skills	All questions are fully answered with complete explanations and specific examples. Introspection is evident. Responses are clear and well-organized, and the submission is legible and understandable.	All prompts are answered, but examples or introspection are missing. Writing may lack clarity.	Not all prompts are answered, and responses lack detail or introspection. Writing may be illegible.
Artifact 2: Explore an Area of Personal Growth	All parts of the chosen option are completed with thoughtful and authentic responses. Directions are fully followed.	Most of the activity is completed, but responses may lack depth or authenticity. Some directions may not be followed.	Activity is incomplete, with missing details or directions not followed.
Artifact 3: Relationship Skills Growth Plan	The plan includes a clear SMART goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Each of these elements is explained. The goal focuses on improvement for the **educator's** relationship skills.	The plan includes most required elements but may lack detail, clarity, or introspection.	The plan is incomplete, missing key elements, or lacks detail and introspection.

	Anticipated challenges are identified with thoughtful strategies to address them. At least three specific, actionable steps are provided with a clear timeline for tracking progress, and strategies for adjustments, as needed. The plan reflects introspection, intentionality, and alignment with responsible relationship-building principles.		

Part 3 Reflection

(200-400 words)
Write a personal reflection about your work on this micro-credential. A strong reflection describes:

- your personal experiences working toward understanding and application of the concepts in this micro-credential,
- specific moments that supported your learning,
- examples of how you will apply your learning to your unique context.

For tips on writing a good reflection, review the following resource:
How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?

Include your responses to the following questions in your submission:

1. How did implementing your growth plan strengthen both your personal and professional relationship skills?
2. What are your next steps in strengthening your personal and professional relationship skills?
3. What will you do differently, or what is working well for you?

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

Passing: Reflection proves that this activity has positively impacted your thinking about relationships. Specific examples are cited directly from personal **or** work-related experiences to support claims. Also included are specific, actionable steps that demonstrate how new learning will be integrated into future practices.