



A Review of SEL Virtual Tools and Interventions for PreK-12

Natalie Nordlund, Ed.S., & Rachel Losoff, Ph.D.

The Chicago School of Professional Psychology

Introduction

Due to many school psychologists delivering support, instruction, and services remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary that school psychologists know what virtual tools and interventions are available to use with students. Additionally, while social-emotional learning (SEL) has been previously found to have a positive impact in various ways, such as increasing students' readiness to learn (Laukkonen et al., 2020) and their motivation and self-confidence (Zins et al., 2004), and improving students' academic achievement (Corcoran et al., 2018) and overall well-being (Taylor et al., 2017), the additional challenges, stressors, influences, and social climate facing our students today call for an increased emphasis on teaching students:

- The importance of noticing and accepting how they're feeling (i.e., self-awareness)
- How to manage their emotions and deal with stress (i.e., self-management)
- The importance of empathizing with others and recognizing social injustice (i.e., social awareness)
- How to develop and maintain positive relationships virtually and seeking or offering support and help when needed (i.e., relationship skills)
- The strength of open-mindedness and how to identify solutions for personal and social problems (i.e., responsible decision-making)

Methods

Free or affordable virtual tools and interventions for SEL with students grades PreK-12 were identified via Web search, examined, and categorized into one of three categories, based on the five core SEL competencies' three broader categories of SEL competence (CASEL, 2017):

1. **Intrapersonal competence** (i.e., self-awareness and self-management)
2. **Interpersonal competence** (i.e., social awareness and relationship management)
3. **Cognitive competence** (i.e., responsible decision-making).

Certain SEL virtual intervention programs were further reviewed by identifying findings from research studies that have evaluated them.

Additional free virtual tools that can be used for SEL, as well as examples of how they can be applied, were also identified.

A virtual resource was developed based on findings for practitioner use.



Results

- A total of 30 free or affordable virtual tools and interventions for SEL were identified, examined, and categorized into the most appropriate SEL competency category.
- Additional information relevant for use (e.g., specific SEL skill/focus, grade levels most appropriate for use, languages available) was gathered. 30% (n = 9) of the virtual tools and interventions are available in one or more languages other than English.
- 11 additional free virtual tools that can be used for SEL were identified, and application examples were provided in the virtual resource.

Example of table in virtual resource:

Digital Intervention/Product	Social-Emotional Skills/Focus	Grade Levels	Device(s) Needed for Use	Cost	Language(s) Available
Self-Awareness & Self-Management					
MindYeti	Mindfulness	Grades K-8	Computer, tablet, or smartphone	Free meditations available	English, Spanish
Mindful Powers	Mindfulness and self-control	Grades K-5	Tablet or smartphone	Free app	English
Headpace	Mindfulness	Grades PK-12	Tablet or smartphone	Free app (Headpace Plus-extra cost)	English, French, German, Portuguese, Spanish
Calm	Mindfulness	Grades PK-12	Computer, tablet, or smartphone	Free app (Calm Premium-extra cost)	English, French, German, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish
Smiling Mind	Mindfulness	Grades 8-12	Computer, tablet, or smartphone	Free app and web-based version	English

[Click for link to virtual resource](#)

- Feel free to download, save, and share!

Structured intervention program recommendations:



EverFi Online SEL Programs

5 different programs focusing on targeted SE skills for grades 2-10



Be Internet Awesome

Curriculum with supplemental online games focusing on SEL for the virtual world for grades 3-6



Centervention Online SEL Games

5 different social skills training game-based programs for grades K-8

[Click for link to additional details and research findings on these programs](#)

Discussion

While there are a lot of virtual SEL tools or interventions to choose from, here are some things to consider when selecting:



While there are a lot of products out there, there were gaps identified when searching for published research studies evaluating these interventions, such as:

- Minimal published research on these specific tools/interventions
- More published research for virtual mental health interventions for or with adults/college students than children/adolescents
- A lot more products and research for virtual interventions to improve children/adolescents' academic skills

For outcome studies that have been identified, there is variance across studies/interventions in effectiveness. Therefore, a proposed dissertation research study involves conducting a meta-analysis of outcome studies evaluating SEL tools/interventions for students grades PreK-12.

- This study would involve an analysis of distinguishable components to further evaluate which components have been correlated with highest effect sizes, whether an aspect of the tool/intervention itself (e.g., game-based vs. not game-based) or the user (e.g., student's age).
- Publicly available SEL virtual tools/interventions would also be evaluated for their inclusion of identified effective components.
- Based on findings from the study, specific considerations and needs can be identified and discussed for the future use/application, evaluation research, and development of SEL virtual tools/interventions.

References

CASEL. (2017). *Core SEL Competencies*. <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>

Corcoran, R. P., Cheung, A. C. K., Kim, E., & Xie, C. (2018). Effective universal school-based social and emotional learning programs for improving academic achievement: A systematic review and meta-analysis of 50 years of research. *Educational Research Review*, 25, 56-72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.12.001>

Laukkonen, R. E., Leggett, J. M., Gallagher, R. M., Biddell, H. L., Mrazek, A. J., Slatger, H. A., & Mrazek, M. D. (2020). *Future of education and skills 2030: Curriculum analysis; The science of mindfulness-based interventions and learning: A review for educators*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Directorate For Education And Skills: Education Policy Committee). https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/The_Science_of_Mindfulness-Based_Interventions_and_Learning_A_Review_for_Educators.pdf

Taylor, R. D., Oberle, E., Durlak, J. A., & Weisberg, R. P. (2017). Promoting Positive Youth Development through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects. *Child Development*, 88(4), 1156-1171.

Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* (J. E. Zins, R. P. Weissberg, M. C. Wang, & H. J. Walberg (Eds.)). Teachers College Press.