



25 May 2020

Now, more than ever, we need Social and Emotional Learning skills interventions

BY PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA ON 24 APRIL 2020

By Dr Gloria Marsay

Covid-19 has shown globally that there is a need for people to learn strategies to deal with adversity. Strategies to deal with anger, anxiety, fear, depression, loneliness, sadness, grief and loss.

Elke Van Hoof, professor of health psychology and primary care psychology at Vrije University in Brussels, wrote an article entitled *Lockdown is the world's biggest psychological experiment – and we will pay the price* published on [World Economic Forum](#). She suggests that timely action is required to mitigate the toxic effects of this lockdown and emphasises that action is better late than never.

Mental healthcare is often marginalised and under resourced. In many countries, mental healthcare is regarded as a luxury. However, far from being a luxury, mental healthcare is an important social responsibility. It is anticipated that soon policy makers and medical funding organisations will recognise the need for mental health services as a basic need rather than a luxury. More than two decades ago, [Daniel Goleman](#) author of *Emotional Intelligence* stated that *helping people better manage their upsetting feelings – is a form of disease prevention*.

According to Yogan [Pillay](#), mental health services in South Africa are under resourced. He states that the National Department of Health has acknowledged the need to have a more robust model for the provision of community-based mental health services. The [South African Human Rights Commission](#) found major shortcomings in mental health services, including insufficient funding and shortages of human resources to provide mental health services. Recently, [PsySSA](#) has prepared a Covid-19 resource pack for Psychology Practitioners. The opening comment reads:

It is our responsibility to understand the risks and ramifications of COVID-19, and to be the ones the community can depend on for information, help and support.

Liesel [Ebersöhn](#) 2020 explains Africa's heritage of flocking as a resilience response. She suggests that social support mitigates the effects of collective hardship. As a community, we need to mobilise collectively for social support that enable positive outcomes despite extreme difficulties.

We never know when adversity will present itself. Strategies to deal with adversity, the social and emotional skills, were once taught in families. However, the structure of the family, has changed world-wide and so it has become important that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills are taught in schools. A case can be made for the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning skills interventions for educators so that they will be aware of and make use of these skills to ameliorate the difficulties they face in the classroom and the educators will be able to impart and nurture these skills in learners.

[Elias et al \(2019\)](#) explain SEL skills as the process through which individuals learn and apply a set of social, emotional, behavioural and character skills required to succeed in schooling, the workplace, relationships, and citizenship

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#)) framework offers a positive youth development strategy to help young people develop five core competencies – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Research by esteemed scholars is showing that SEL skills not only result in improved academic performance, they also are necessary to assist young people through the transition from education to the workplace, and that SEL skills sustain people in the workplace and as responsible citizens. [Durlak, et al \(2011\)](#) present findings from a meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs. The study suggests that educators can implement SEL programmes that lead to successful outcomes for students. The study concludes that policy makers, educators, and the public can contribute to healthy development of young people by supporting the incorporation of evidence-based SEL programming into standard educational practice.

[Immordino-Yang, et.al. \(2019\)](#) explain how when children (and the adults that care for and teach them) are socially and physically well and self-regulated, they think better. Immordino-Yang et al believe in the importance of the biopsychosocial and developmental contexts of SEL intervention and assert that attending to the social and emotional experience in educational setting is not a luxury, but a societal responsibility. Furthermore, several scholars are promoting the thought that apart from the three R's which should be taught in schools (Reading wRiting, and aRithmetic) a fourth R should

be added – learning how to *Relate* to others ([Juvonen, et. al 2019](#); [Jones et al, 2019](#); [Nishina, et al 2019](#))

An International Research Network, formally recognised by the [World Education Research Association](#) focused on supporting all students, especially vulnerable and marginalised young people began in 2018. Whether due to low income, disability status, or being from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, there is an increasing number of vulnerable young people who need access to caring and encouraging education environments, so that they may learn the required skills to earn a sustainable livelihood and become successful adults and responsible citizens. South Africa participated as one of three countries from the Global South. The project has three phases. The first phase of the [project](#), already completed, was to understand the educators' perceptions of Social and Emotional learning skills in the learning environment. The ultimate aim of the project is to design and implement a contextualised effective model that educators can use in the learning environment to facilitate the development and implementation of Social and Emotional skills for both educators and learners.

This pandemic has made it clear that we need to address the biopsychosocial and developmental context in all interventions to assist society move forward in the aftermath of Covid-19. You may agree with the experts referred to in this article that we need to find ways to promote mental health and well-being at each level of care.

[Jonathan Jansen](#) spoke about the profound impact that (the essential) lockdown has had, and will have, on academic progress of our young people. It is my opinion that there is an urgent need for the implementation of interventions to equip both our educators and our learners with fundamental SEL skills. I wish to argue that schools are ideal sites for promoting important Social and Emotional Learning skills to sustain children through adolescence into responsible adulthood and that Educational Psychologists have a vital role to play in preparing young people for the future.

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Dr Gloria Marsay is both a registered Educational Psychologist working in private practice, and Research Fellow at the University of the Free State. She is a member of the International Research Network investigating SEL skills in the learning environment and is responsible for the South African component of this project.

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CoViD-19 emotions mental health psychology social and emotional learning

Psychological Society of South Africa



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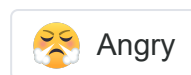
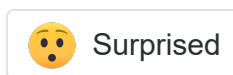
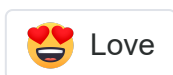
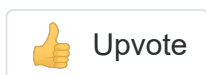
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