

# SEL BENEFITS AND RESEARCH



## **PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION FOR BULLYING**

The Kimochis® Keys to Communication are innovative communication tools that form the foundation of the curriculum. These Keys teach children to manage emotions that can lead to unkind behavior and/or bullying. By learning to use the Keys, children can communicate in ways that build confidence, self-esteem and strong relationships while reducing hurtful interactions and bullying. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students understand the distinction between “bullying” and normal unkind interactions.

The Keys provide a collaborative and effective way to “bully-proof” your school.

## **DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE**

The use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs is one of the biggest temptations facing young people. Helping elementary-age students learn how to handle emotions and make smart, safe choices will prepare them for the peer pressure and temptations that lie ahead.

The Kimochis® lessons are a proactive tool for the prevention of “at risk” behaviors. Students who feel good about themselves are much less likely to turn to illegal substances for an emotional high. Kimochis® can help kids get in touch with reasons to feel good about themselves. The lessons teach strategies for handling upset emotions, which will help prevent students from using substances to numb or block challenging feelings as they get older.

## **BASED ON EVIDENCE**

Scientific, empirically based research studies and theories of child development and social-emotional learning were referred to while developing the Kimochis® lessons to ensure that concepts and approaches that have proven to have beneficial effects for children were included.

Theoretical models and conceptual paradigms included:

- Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 2000)
- Social-Information Processing Model (Crick & Dodge, 1994)
- Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Kendall, 2005)
- Research has shown that SEL programs that focus on developing five core Social-Emotional Competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making) provide positive outcomes for students (Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2003; Blum, 2005).

## **Research on the Effectiveness of SEL in the Elementary School Years**

- A meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs was completed by Durlak and others (2011). Results revealed improvements in social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, pro-social behavior and academic performance with a decrease in conduct problems and emotional distress.
- Extensive research indicates that mastery of social-emotional competence is associated with greater well-being and school performance, whereas the failure to achieve competence in these areas can lead to personal, social, and academic difficulties. (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008)
- Social and emotional learning has a positive effect on academic performance, including improved skills and grades in math, language arts, and social studies, and better problem-solving and planning skills, and subject mastery. (Durlak & Weissberg, 2005; Elias et al., 1997; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hawkins, 1999; Wilson et al., 2001; Zins & Elias, 2006; Zins et al., 2004)
- “Mental health is a critical component of children’s learning and general health. Fostering social and emotional health in children as a part of healthy child development must therefore be a national priority.” (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000, p. 3)

## Why the Kimochis® Educational Tools Are Different

The focus of the Kimochis® Educator’s Toolkit is to teach children to listen, speak and act with others in positive ways that lead to academic and life success. **The Kimochis® Keys to Communication** are a new, innovative communication approach that forms the foundation of the Kimochis® program.

The Kimochis® Keys to Communication teach children how to use their tone of voice, body language and appropriate words when they are in “emotional moments.” The Keys teach children to be respectful in their social interactions; take responsibility for their actions; be resilient and “bounce” back after social challenges; and consider their own emotional needs and those of others. By learning how to use the Keys, children can communicate in ways that support positive behavior and build confidence, self-esteem and strong relationships. Although the Kimochis® Keys to Communication seem simple, these powerful, positive strategies help children to problem-solve and make good choices when emotions are high.

The Kimochis® Feeling Lessons provide children, educators and parents a **common vocabulary** that allows everyone to “speak the same language” about feelings and emotions. When everyone understands and uses the same feeling vocabulary, social-emotional learning is consistent and happens more quickly for children. Adults can give prompts using the vocabulary to guide children to do and say the right thing in challenging emotional situations. (For example, “Use your talking voice and face when you ask to play.”) Peers can learn to cue each other using gentle prompts, which builds kindness and compassion.

The unique and compelling **Kimochis® characters** (Bug, Cloud, Huggtopus, Cat, Lovey Dove, Bella Rose, and Clover) and **29 plush Kimochis® feeling pillows** help children learn how to recognize and manage emotions; learn effective self-regulation skills; express caring, concern, patience, and tolerance for others; establish and maintain positive relationships; and make responsible social decisions. Each character has a specific personality that teaches children social-emotional skills. For example, Cloud is the mood regulating Kimochis® who helps children learn to predict, plan, and practice using a tone of voice, face and words that will maintain a positive connection when upset. Each character has a pouch where the plush feelings can be tucked to show what the character is feeling at the moment. Lessons built

around the characters and feelings are fun, interactive, and engaging to preschool and elementary children.

The goals of the Kimochis® program illustrate the important social–emotional outcomes for children.

They are:

1. **Self-Awareness:** Know what we are feeling; have a realistic assessment of our own abilities; have a well-grounded sense of self-confidence
  - To recognize feelings of happiness, anger, sadness, pride, courage, frustration, crankiness, silliness, curiosity, hopefulness and courage in self
  - To understand how you are coming across
  - To know what you can say and do when feeling upset that can make a problem bigger or smaller
  - To know when you need to ask for peer or adult help
  
2. **Social Awareness:** Understand what others are feeling; be able to take their perspective; appreciate and interact positively with diverse groups
  - To become aware of words and actions that can create negative feelings
  - To recognize when others are feeling mad, frustrated, cranky and other upset feelings and not take their words personally
  - To respect others' personal and space boundaries
  - To practice patience and honor other's differences and short comings
  
3. **Self-Management:** Handle our emotions so they facilitate rather than interfere; be conscientious and delay gratification to pursue goals; persevere in the face of setbacks
  - To use a talking tone of voice and face (positive nonverbal communication)
  - To use positive self-talk to handle negative feelings
  - To cool down when experiencing upset feelings (like mad or cranky) and keep a positive connection with others

- To be resilient when experiencing upset feelings
- To stay focused and not get distracted by others
- To express and experience happy, excited, silly, and curious feelings without making unsafe choices

4. **Relationship Skills:** Handle emotions in relationships effectively; establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resist inappropriate social pressure; negotiate solutions to conflict, and seek help when needed

- To choose words that are helpful, not hurtful
- To seek to be inclusive and get oneself included
- To do the right thing when others do the wrong thing
- To apologize and forgive
- To assume the best in social interactions
- To recognize when others feel frustrated, mad, sad or left out and offer support
- To act in kind, compassionate ways when others are sad, frustrated, left out, mad
- To be assertive to stand up for self and others
- To re-do hurtful moments and recover after making mistakes
- To listen and connect with another's pride in a positive way

5. **Responsible Decision-Making:** Make decisions based on an accurate consideration of all relevant factors and the likely consequences of alternative courses of action, respect others, and take responsibility for one's decisions

- To be kind and let others try again
- To respect others' feelings of fear, sadness, etc.
- To make sure silliness is fun for everyone
- To know when and how to get adult help
- [The WellBeing Classroom: Embedding Wellbeing, Creating Community](#)
- [Kimochis® – A Case Study Looking at Social Emotional Gains in the Early Years](#)

- [Outcomes of Culturally Diverse Kindergarten Students Using Kimochis Curriculum](#)
- [Kimochis implementation on Olive Crest Academy](#)
- [Effects of Kimochis on Individual Students](#)
- Global Journal of Human-Social Sciences: Linguistics & Education, [Social-Emotional Learning: Modifications to a Social Skills Training Program for Adolescents with Moderate to Severe Communication Disorders](#) (page 53–63)

## **Theoretical Background and Conceptual Framework: Summary of SEL Research Supporting the Kimochis® Educator’s Tool Kit**

The Kimochis® Educator’s Tool Kit is a universal, school-based, social and emotional learning program designed to give children the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively. These skills have been identified by leading researchers in the field of social and emotional learning as necessary for school success, academic achievement, positive social relationships and the development of emotional competence.

The Kimochis® curriculum incorporates innovative, fun and exciting lessons and activities that were developed to teach children how to manage challenging social situations with skill, character and confidence. This overview summarizes the research that supports the design and lesson components of the Kimochis® program.

### **Early Childhood Years**

- Effective interventions that build social, emotional and behavioral skills at a young age can have a positive effect on how children are able to problem-solve and interact with their peers later in life (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2007).
- A convincing body of evidence has been accumulated to indicate that unless children achieve minimal social competence by about the age of 6 years, they have a high probability of being at risk for social-emotional

difficulties as adults (Ladd, 2000; Parker & Asher, 1987).

- Strong evidence links social-emotional health in the early childhood years (birth to 6) to:
  - Subsequent school success and health in preteen/teen years
  - Long term health and wellbeing in adulthood
  - Promotion of resilience
  - Prevention of later mental health problems (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009)
- Research suggests that a child's long-term social and emotional adaptation, academic and cognitive development, and citizenship are enhanced by frequent opportunities to strengthen social competence during early childhood (Hartup & Moore, 1990; Ladd & Profilet, 1996; McClellan & Kinsey, 1999).
- Research underscores the fact that promoting young children's social-emotional competencies significantly enhances school readiness and success (Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Freedman, 2003).

## Elementary Years

Results from three large-scale reviews of research on the impact of social and emotional learning by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in 2008 found that SEL programs yielded positive benefits including:

- 23% improvement in social and emotional skills
- 9% improvement in attitudes about self, others and school
- 9% improvement in school and classroom behavior
- 10% decrease in emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression
- 11% increase in achievement test scores (Payton, et al. 2008)
- Extensive developmental research indicates that effective mastery of social-emotional competence is associated with greater well-being and better school performance, whereas the failure to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic difficulties (Eisenberg, 2006; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).
- Social and emotional learning has a positive effect on academic

performance, including improved skills and grades in math, language arts, and social studies, and better problem-solving and planning skills, and subject mastery (Durlak & Weissberg, 2005; Elias et al., 1997; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hawkins, 1999; Wilson et al., 2001; Zins & Elias, 2006; Zins et al., 2004).

- “Mental health is a critical component of children’s learning and general health. Fostering social and emotional health in children as a part of healthy child development must therefore be a national priority.” (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000, p. 3).
- A meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs was completed by Durlak and others (2011). Results revealed improvements in social-emotional skills, attitudes about self and others, pro-social behavior and academic performance with a decrease in conduct problems and emotional distress.

## **Research Findings Related to the Development of the Kimochis® Curriculum**

The Kimochis® curriculum is based on sound theories of child development and social-emotional learning. Scientific, empirically based research studies were referred to while developing the Kimochis® lessons to ensure that concepts and approaches that have proven to have beneficial effects on the development of social-emotional skills in children were included. A number of theoretical models and conceptual paradigms were studied, including, theories of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Bar-On, 2000), Social-Information Processing Model (Crick & Dodge, 1994), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1989) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Kendall, 2005).

In addition, research completed by leading experts in the field of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was reviewed. Maurice Elias, a renowned SEL researcher, and his colleagues define SEL as “the process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively” (1997). The goals of an SEL program are to foster the development of five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Collaborative for

Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2003). These five core competencies provide children a foundation for better adjustment and academic achievement as shown by more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades (Greenberg et al., 2003). As children master these competencies, they can connect with their own beliefs and values, develop concern for others, make good decisions, and take responsibility for their choices and behaviors. Accordingly, Kimochis® lessons were developed around these five core competencies. The Kimochis® lessons and objectives for Early Childhood and Elementary Age students are outlined on pages 7 and 8.

## Research Findings Related to the Five Core Competencies and the Kimochis® Lessons Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to recognize and name your own emotions. Self-awareness also involves the ability to understand your values and needs, as well as your strengths and limitations. This awareness of self is crucial to early school success. When a child has an awareness of his/her own emotions, s/he can learn to regulate or modulate them, an essential factor that influences getting along with peers and coping in a school environment. Research by Marsh and colleagues (Marsh, Craven and Debus, 1998; Marsh, Ellis and Craven, 2002) has shown that four-year olds have an understanding of their psychological selves and of their feelings and intentions. As self-understanding develops, it guides moral development and also sets the stage for self-control and self-regulation. Young children who can identify emotions in themselves are more likely to have success when they transition into kindergarten (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1992). As a child's self-awareness develops, they can label their own emotions and identify the emotions of others. As Daniel Goleman states in his influential book, *Emotional Intelligence*, "Self-awareness, recognizing a feeling as it happens, is the keystone of emotional intelligence. The ability to monitor feelings from moment to moment is also crucial to psychological insight and self-understanding. People with greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives (Goleman, 1995, p. 43)."

The Kimochis® lessons teach children to identify the nonverbal components (tone of voice, facial expressions, body language) of feelings. Children practice naming situations or experiences that often cause a specific feeling or feelings. Children learn to understand that feelings are messy and that we might have several feelings that occur at the same time! Lessons focus on building emotional literacy, the ability to identify, understand, and respond to emotions in oneself and others in a healthy manner (Joseph, 2003). When

children know a wide range of emotion words (beyond *happy, mad, sad*), it is easier for them to understand their emotional experiences and to communicate with others about their feelings. Children are introduced to the concept of how to redo a social mistake, the first step of which requires an awareness of actually making a mistake. They practice how to *own up* and *come clean* as ways to make amends for mistakes. Children also learn that they need to be aware of how they are *coming across* to others in their nonverbal and verbal communication. Activities focus on heightening awareness of these concepts. Educators are encouraged to guide and prompt children to pay attention to their communication and emotions in social interactions throughout the school day.

## Self-Management

Self-management is the ability to regulate emotions and behaviors so that goals are achieved. It also involves persevering with difficult tasks and in complex social interactions. Self-management is a complicated, developmental process for young children (Kopp and Wyr, 1994). It requires children to remember and generalize what they have been taught by caregivers, to initiate changes in their behavior, and to constantly monitor their behavior in varying situations. These foundational self-management skills are emerging during the preschool years as the brain develops (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Development in self-management can be seen in the difference between the impulsivity of a toddler and the deliberate behavior of a four-year-old entering kindergarten in the fall. The relevancy of self-management skills to school success is obvious. When children can control impulses and cope with strong feelings in emotionally charged situations, they will be more successful in school (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). In fact, some studies that have shown that certain aspects of self-regulation predict children's reading and math achievement in the early primary grades (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1993; Howse, 2003). Additionally, the ability to effectively manage emotions contributes to less aggression and fewer problems with substance abuse (Brady, et al., 1998; Vitaro, 1998). Children with poor regulation skills are likely to have conflict-based relationships with their teachers and peers, which can lead to school problems and possible school dropout (Bandera, 2003). When educators are asked to identify areas of critical importance with regard to school success, they often name competence in cooperation and self-control as highly significant (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003). There is some evidence that emotion regulation is a better predictor of school readiness than IQ (Blair & Razza, 2007). Children can learn strategies to manage their emotions and cope with stressful situations. Research suggests that teaching children strategies such as

thinking calming thoughts, deep breathing, doing a calming activity and reframing stressful situations by focusing on positive promotes effective management of feelings such as anger (Nelson and Finch, 2000) and impatience (Metcalf and Mischel, 1999; Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad, 1998).

The Kimochis® curriculum emphasizes the importance of teaching children to handle positive (happiness, pride) and negative (mad, frustrated, disappointed) emotions in ways that are productive and socially appropriate.

The focus is on helping both educators and children understand that feelings fuel behavior (*Feeling-Behavior Link*). Lessons teach strategies such as taking *Cool Down* breaths, repeating positive self-talk strategies, and reframing upsetting situations in a more positive light. Children learn to regulate their tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, actions and word choice. Lessons help children to recognize how difficult it is to use emotion-management strategies when feelings are high. So, children are given opportunities to practice these strategies “out of the moment” when they can rely on logical reasoning and adult prompting to manage emotions (Metcalf and Mischel, 1999). Role-plays, puppet enactments and games give children practice in predictable social situations. Educators are provided ideas on how to prompt children to use their emotional regulation strategies when needed in social settings.