



10 MOVEMENT STRATEGIES TO BOOST SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

Practical ideas to support SEL, regulation, engagement, and collaboration throughout the school day

Evidence Snapshot:

Research supports that movement enhances focus, mood, and classroom behavior while improving SEL components such as self-regulation, empathy, and decision-making (Bai et al., 2021; Cahill et al., 2020; Laverdure et al., 2017). Integrating purposeful movement helps students connect their body, brain, and emotion to support lifelong participation. Movement is not a “break” from learning – it’s a bridge to learning.

START WITH A MOVEMENT WARM-UP

Use 2–3 minutes of light exercises (e.g., stretches, animal walks, jumping jacks) at the beginning of class or therapy sessions to prepare students’ minds and bodies for learning.

INTEGRATE “BRAIN BREAKS”

Short bursts of movement (1–3 minutes) between academic activities help reset attention and improve focus. Try activities like standing marches, wall push-ups, or a short dance routine.

EMBED MOVEMENT INTO ACADEMICS

Incorporate movement into instruction to make learning active and memorable (e.g., spelling words with arm motions, skip-counting while hopping, or acting out story scenes).

PAIR MOVEMENT WITH EMOTION CHECK-INS

Use color-coded zones, emotion thermometers, or yoga poses that match feelings to link physical awareness with emotional vocabulary (e.g., “strong like a tree,” “calm like a cloud”).

ENCOURAGE MINDFUL MOVEMENT

Combine slow, intentional breathing with stretches or yoga poses to help students build self-awareness and calm. Reinforce that movement can be both energizing and regulating.

USE CLASS JOBS TO ENCOURAGE ACTIVITY

Routines promote purposeful movement and responsibility while supporting SEL through independence and confidence (e.g., passing materials, leading transitions, or organizing supplies).

CREATE A "MOVEMENT MENU"

Provide students with a choice board or visual schedule of short movement options (e.g., chair push-ups, stretching, breathing break). Choice fosters autonomy and self-management.

BUILD MOVEMENT INTO TRANSITIONS

Turn hallway walks, line-ups, or desk clean-ups into structured opportunities for movement—skip, tiptoe, or balance while walking to the next activity.

PROMOTE GROUP MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Encourage teamwork through cooperative games, relay races, or problem-solving activities that require coordination and communication, reinforcing social awareness and relationships.

ADVOCATE AND COLLABORATE

Partner with teachers, counselors, and administrators to embed movement into schoolwide SEL practices. Share evidence-based benefits, co-create routines, and model activities during meetings.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? SCAN THE QR CODE FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

