Using Data for Improvement

Using data to improve social and emotional learning is an essential tool in supporting youths' meaningful growth.

This section includes tools and templates to help staff gather and use data for improvement. This is different from formal, high-stakes outcome assessment or program evaluation. This section includes creating a data dashboard by using reflective activities to measure change over time, having youth assess and provide feedback to the adults that support them in learning social and emotional skills, several creative data collection strategies, an SEL SMART goals tracker, and a checklist to help select SEL outcome measurement tools.

Emoji Data Dashboard

Use the Emoji Reflection activity (under Creating the Learning Environment) to track changes over time by creating a data dashboard. At the individual level, the Emoji Reflection activity is a tool for personal growth. At the program-level, it is well-suited for youth-directed measurement and continuous improvement. There are no-tech and low-tech options for creating a data dashboard.

Why This Matters

- Youth are often the subject of evaluation, but don't get a voice in making meaning of the data. When youth are empowered to be at the center of measurement and meaning-making, programs give them voice and influence about how data is used.
- Tracking how youth perceive their SEL development gives program staff important insights into how staff actions influence youth outcomes.
- The Emoji Reflection activity is a powerful reflection tool AND easily provides program-level data with minimal administrative work.

Getting Started

- Pick whether you are going to use the No-Tech Dashboard or the Low-Tech Excel Dashboard. The No-Tech Dashboard is ideal for 10 or fewer youth. The Low-Tech Excel Dashboard is ideal for groups with more than 10 youth or for programs that want to compare data across groups, reflection prompts, or program cycles.
- Materials and time vary depending on group size and type of dashboard.

How To Do It

No-Tech Dashboard

1) Ideal for groups with 10 or fewer youth. If you have a group larger than 10, break them into smaller groups to track their Emoji responses.
2) Start tracking group responses after you have been using the Emoji reflection for at least 3 weeks.
3) Create a large poster or wall space for each group that can accommodate an enlarged version of the dashboard template. Be prepared to keep this poster for the duration of the project (or at least the weeks that you plan to use the Emoji reflection).
4) Invite youth to transfer their individual Emoji responses from the previous weeks to the group dashboard. Have youth draw in their Emoji or pre-draw Emoji and have youth color in their response.
5) Update the dashboard at least every other week. A dashboard is only useful if it is responsive and accurate.
6) Gather the group of youth and staff together every 3-4 weeks to discuss the data.

Low-Tech Excel Dashboard

1) Ideal for groups with more than 10 youth or for programs that want to compare data across groups, reflection prompts, or program cycles.
2) Download the Excel-based template (available online).
3) Watch the interactive tutorial (available online) for step-by-step instructions.

For each type of dashboard, display the poster graph or the Excel graph so that everyone can look at the group data, and make sure that everyone has their individual Emoji reflection available. Use the following conversation starters to discuss the dashboard:

- For each week, quickly identify as a group which Emoji got the most and fewest responses.
- Which weeks did your response match up with the most frequent response on the group graph?

Emoji Data Dashboard

- What stands out to you about the group graph?
- Do any of the weeks surprise you?
- What was happening in the project/program/group each week?
- Why do you think so many people chose X response for this particular week?
- What changes should we consider based on this information?
- How do we define "success" for this particular skill (or anchor statement)? Is there a "best" Emoji response? This is a good opportunity to introduce the idea that "success" might be about getting better at reflecting or building awareness, rather than answering in a specific way.

Take It Further

- Continue the conversation with your staff team. Reflect on staff actions, programmatic choices, and youth dynamics. Are there any youth that need additional support? Is there anything that staff should modify in order to better support youths' social and emotional growth, as they are reporting it? If you decide to make changes, note the specific change and date on your dashboard or in program notes. After a few weeks evaluate if those changes had the desired effect.
- Once you've finished the cycle of using Emoji Reflection, share the story of how youth used reflective measurement to track change over time and make programmatic improvements.

Staff Support Card

Have youth use this tool to assess and provide feedback to the adults that support them in learning social and emotional skills. It should be used at multiple points in time to track progress. This is intended as a low-stakes way to inform and strengthen staff practices, not a high-stakes evaluation.

Why This Matters

- Staff play an important role in enhancing the social and emotional learning of youth in their program. Feedback from youth can provide valuable information that staff can use to improve their practice.

Getting Started

- Materials: Copies of the Staff Support Card
- Time: 15 minutes to complete card, 30-60 minutes for staff discussion
- This tool can be used either in reference to an individual staff member or to a group of staff as a whole. Be sure to decide this before using the support card and communicate this to youth.
- Youth should complete the Staff Support Card 2-4 times a year (e.g., once a semester).
- Choose a specific period of time that youth should consider when completing the Staff Support Card (e.g., think back to the last week).
- Be sure to communicate the intent of the Staff Support Card and how the information will be used with the staff who are going to be the focus of youth feedback.

How To Use It

1) When you first introduce the Staff Support Card, explain that the purpose is for youth to provide feedback to staff so that staff can improve their work with youth.
2) Go through each statement with youth and make sure you have a common understanding of each statement. Ask youth for an example of what each statement would look like (e.g., What does it look like when staff show you respect?)
3) After responses from youth have been collected, convene your staff group to discuss the results. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:
    - What was most surprising to you about the responses?
    - What practical steps can staff take to improve?
    - What kind of professional development or training might help us improve?

    If collecting information over time:

    - How does the current feedback compare to previous feedback?
    - What changes have been made since the last Staff Support Card?

Take It Further

- After using the Staff Support Card several times, have a check-in conversation with youth. Discuss the results of the Staff Support Card and what the staff is working on. Let youth know that their input was considered and even incorporated.
- Turn it into an online survey.

Tool: Staff Support Card

Think about _____ (name or group of staff) in the last _____ (week, month)…

		USUALLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY
WAYS I AM	Staff respect me			
	Staff make sure everyone feels included			
	Staff encourage me to share my perspective			
	Give an example:			
WAYS OF FEELING	Staff help me when I feel frustrated or upset			
	Staff handle their own emotions well			
	Staff check-in with me about how I feel			
	Give an example:			
WAYS OF RELATING	Staff encourage us to work together			
	Staff help us resolve conflict			
	Staff give us a chance to play special roles			
	Give an example:			
WAYS OF DOING	Staff challenge me to try hard and do my best			
	I can ask staff for help			
	Staff will support me if I try and fail			
	Give an example:			

Sticky Note Survey

This is a simple activity that serves to combine reflection and measurement by asking participants to rate themselves on a particular skill at the beginning and end of a session.

Why This Matters

- Visual displays of data help groups identify trends.
- Feedback helps staff know whether they are on track.
- This activity is to be used at the beginning and end of direct SEL instruction to assess effectiveness.

Getting Started

- Materials: sticky notes (2 colors – pre and post); 4 response cards (8.5 x11 sheets) that say strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree; tape; and a few feet of wall space.
- Time: 5 minutes at the beginning and 5 minutes at the end of an activity
- Set up: somewhere in the room, tape the response cards on the wall, evenly spaced in a line over a few feet.

How To Do It

1) Choose a social and emotional skill that you are working on today, like conflict resolution or emotion management.
2) Write a goal statement about learning or practicing that skill, as it's unrealistic to expect that youth would change their overall feelings or behavior significantly in one session. It's much more realistic that they might learn some new strategies for resolving conflict with a teammate, for example.
3) Be sure your outcome statement can be answered with the response categories strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. For example, "I know strategies to control my temper," or "I have skills to resolve conflict with others." Above the response cards, place the outcome statement (write on board or tape to the wall).
4) As young people arrive, invite them to grab a sticky note and respond to the statement by placing their sticky note along the strongly agree to strongly disagree continuum for how they would rate themselves at the moment. They do not need to write their name on the sticky note. Once everyone has placed their sticky note, proceed with your activity.
5) At the end of the session, pass out another set of sticky notes (in a different color than the pre-question).
6) Tell participants that you are interested in both reflecting on what happened today, and measuring the effectiveness of today's activity.
7) Ask them to write down one idea that relates to the outcome statement. For example, depending on the focus of the activity, they might write down one strategy they learned to control their temper, or one thing they plan to work on to be a better teammate. Or, ask them to write down why their sticky note is in the same of different spot than earlier. Then have youth go place their post-sticky notes on the wall below the pre-sticky notes. Allow 5 minutes for this.
8) Now you have a dashboard—real time information that you can use. Take a look at the line:
    - What do you notice? Where was there a change from pre to post?
    - Why is this happening?
    - How could we use this information?

Take It Further

- Consider using the sticky note survey activity at different times throughout your program rather than at the beginning and end of a session.

Candy Survey

This is a simple, fun and tasty way to gather data from young people. Depending on the questions, this activity can be used to gauge participants' satisfaction, skill level or comprehension. This was originally developed by Kim Sabo Flores.

Why This Matters

- Reflection helps participants make sense of and reinforce what they are learning.
- Anonymous feedback helps staff know whether they are on track.

Getting Started

- Materials: Wrapped candy with multiple colors (i.e. Starbursts, fruit Life Savers, etc.) and containers (bowls, boxes, jars) for answers.
- Time: 10 minutes: 5 to vote, and 5 to tally.
- Set up: Write the questions in large print on a board or poster. Make a chart with what each color candy stands for (e.g., red candy for "a lot", pink for "somewhat", orange for "a little", and yellow for "not at all"). Make sure you have enough candy, especially for the more positive items as these tend to be selected more often.

How To Do It

1) Develop a set of statements or questions (limit to 5 questions). For example:
   - My group worked well together
   - I handled my emotions well
   - I felt respected
2) Develop a set of three or four responses categories and code to the candy colors. For example:
   - Strongly Agree (red), Agree (pink), Disagree (yellow), Strongly Disagree (orange)
   - Always, Sometimes, Rarely, Never
   - A lot, Somewhat, A little, Not at All
3) Place an empty container next to each posted question.
4) Ask youth to respond to each question by placing into the jar the candy response that best reflects their opinion. Note: let youth know that the candy will be shared. Youth might not cast certain color votes if they don't want to part with their favorite flavor!
5) Count the responses and share the reward!

Take It Further

- Don't want to use candy? You can use colored gemstones, marbles, or other small manipulatives. Some programs who often assess in this style make a wooden repository—see an idea in this video.
- After collecting this information, use the data to help reflect on questions like: Did I pace the learning so that participants were comfortable and able to gain new skills? What adaptations could be made to improve the program? Are participants learning as much as was planned?

Postcards Home

Use this as reflection activity that provides staff and families with important feedback. The activity also allows youth to process quietly, reflecting on their experiences and future goals.

Why This Matters

- Reflection helps participants make sense of what they are learning.
- Feedback helps staff know whether they are on track.
- This activity can be used to inform and engage families in how youth are learning and growing in out of school time activities.

Getting Started

- Materials: postcard template
- Time: 15 minutes to complete the card
- Set up: create the postcard structure that works best for your program. For example:

  Hi from [name of youth program]!

  Today I learned:

  1) _____

  2) _____

  What challenged me the most was:

  _____

  Next time I want to:

  _____

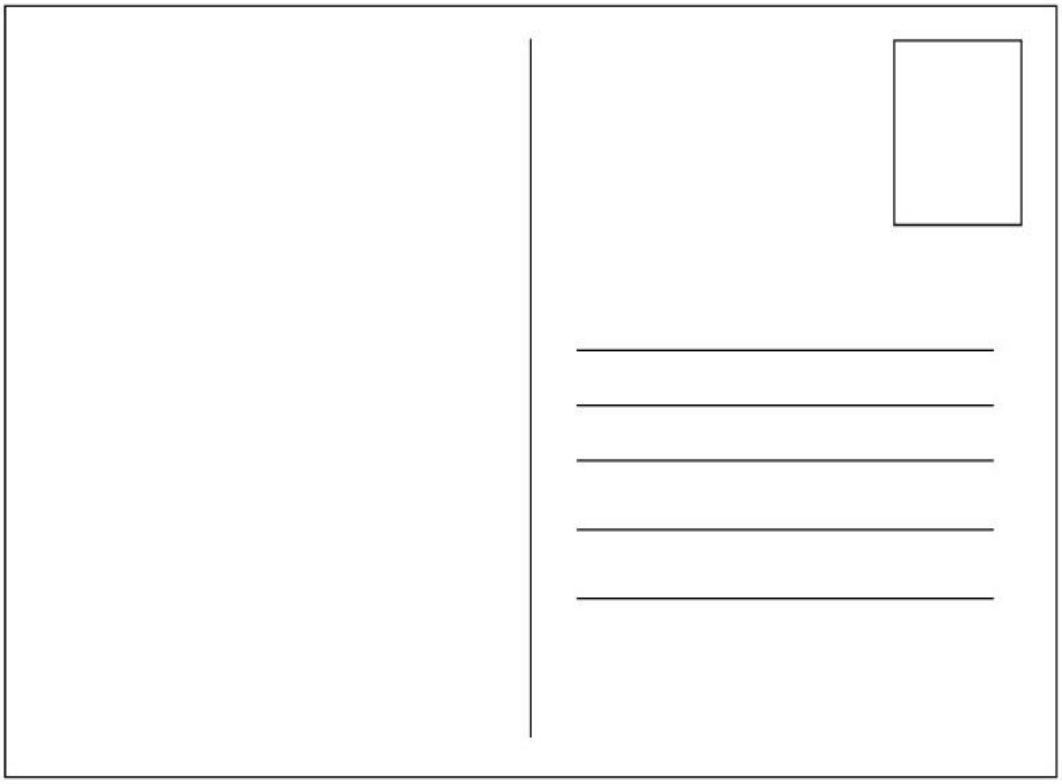
How To Do It

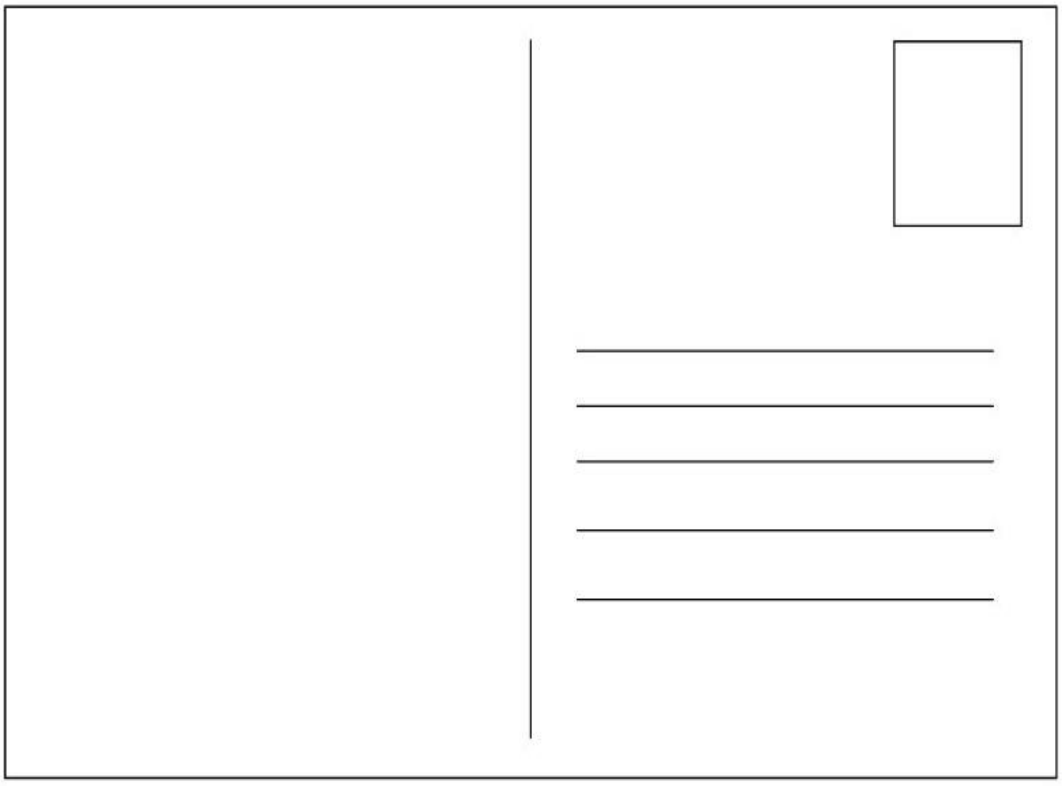
1) Pass postcard templates out
2) Ask youth to think about their experience in the program and reflect on what they would tell their parents or guardians about their experience. Be sure to tell youth if you intend to mail this to parents or guardians.

Take It Further

- After completing the postcards, have a check-in conversation with youth. Discuss the ideas that they shared. You could use this as an opportunity to talk about future goals or how the program could better support their learning.
- With permission, postcards could be sent to a variety of individuals. Send to youth to remind them of what they learned. Send them to a financial stakeholder to showcase what youth learn in the program. Keep postcards from the end of one program and share with new youth starting the program the following year

Template: Postcards Home





Bullseye

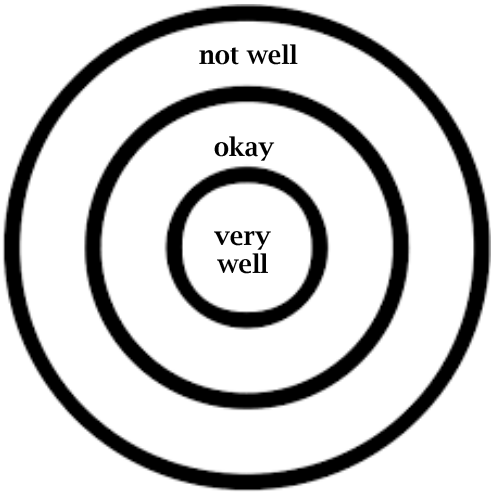
Use this strategy to see if you are hitting the mark in your youth program. A dartboard is one of the easiest and most versatile visuals.

Why This Matters

- Reflection helps participants make sense of what they are learning.
- Feedback helps staff know whether they are on track.

Getting Started

- Materials: dartboard or dartboard image; sticky dots
- Time: 10 minutes to explain, vote, and process
- Set up: Plan questions that asses SEL skills that youth are practicing. Create a dartboard and label each of the rings. For example, How well did your team make decisions together?



How To Do It

1) Create questions and categories for each question. If you are using an actual dartboard, use sticky notes to label each ring. See an example in this video.

2) Pass out sticky dots to youth. You can label the sticky dots if there are subgroups that you care about. For example, you could write the grade of each respondent on their dot.

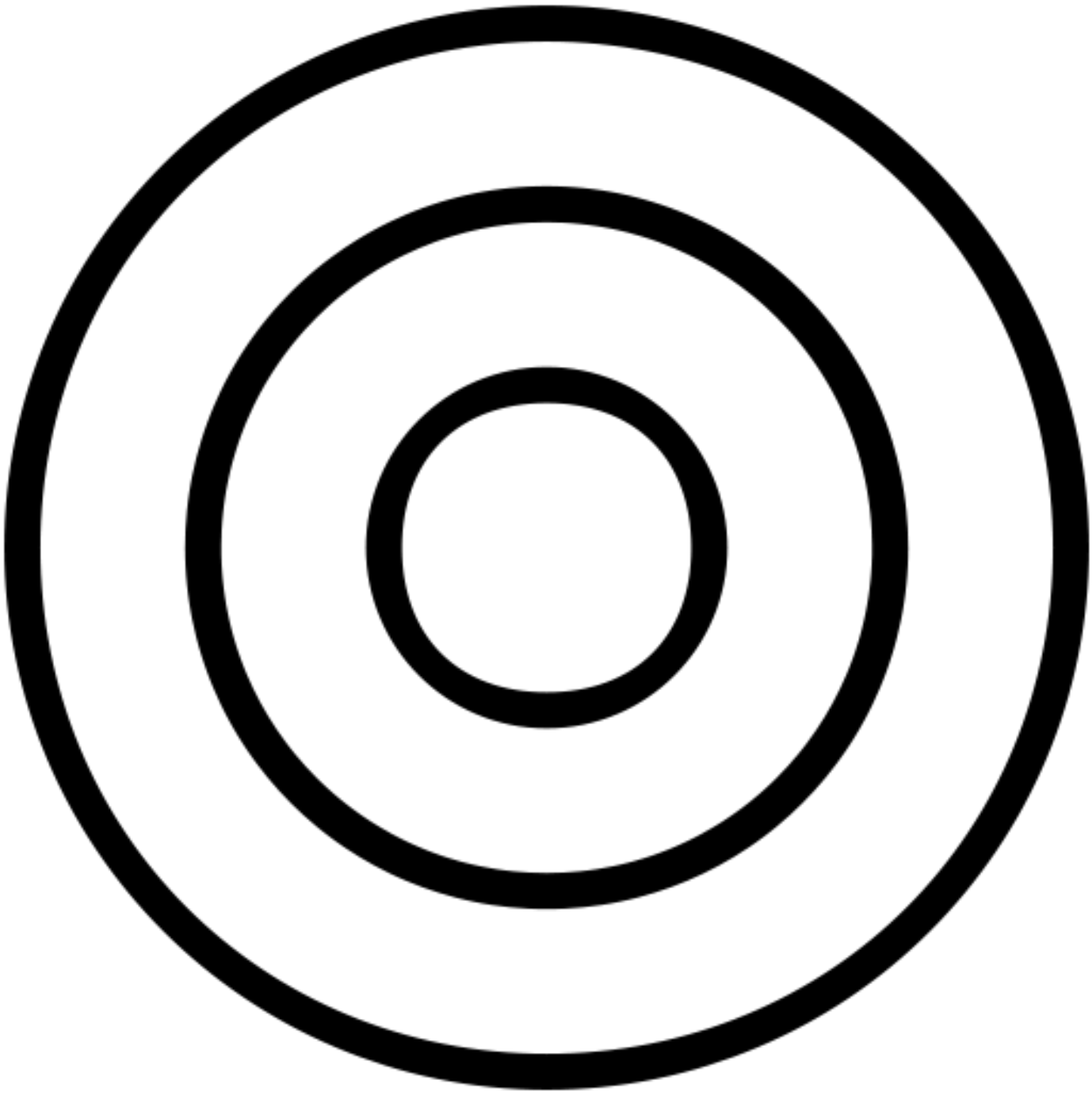
3) Ask youth to answer the question by placing their sticky dot on the response that best reflects their experience.

4) Summarize the responses with youth. Have youth think about how their responses differed from others in the group.

Take It Further

- After doing the dartboard responses, have a check-in with youth. Discuss what could be done to make the experience more on target.
- Let youth run this activity. Youth can generate questions, pass out the dots, and analyze the data. You can begin to build evaluation skills in youth!

Template: Bullseye



Instagram Posts

Are you trying to find creative ways to use social media in your program? Try this strategy to build upon youth's technology habits.

Why This Matters

- Technology can be a bridge to youth as well as a creative outlet. Use technology to evaluate the learning happening in your program.
- This activity can be modified to be tech based or non-tech based.
- Reflection allows youth to think about and apply their learning.

Getting Started

- Materials: smartphone or construction paper, flip chart paper, and markers. Print out visual of phone for no-tech version.
- Time: 20 minutes to create. More time may be needed if drawing the visual
- Set up: Gather supplies based on tech or no- tech version. Review the organization's social media/photo release policy

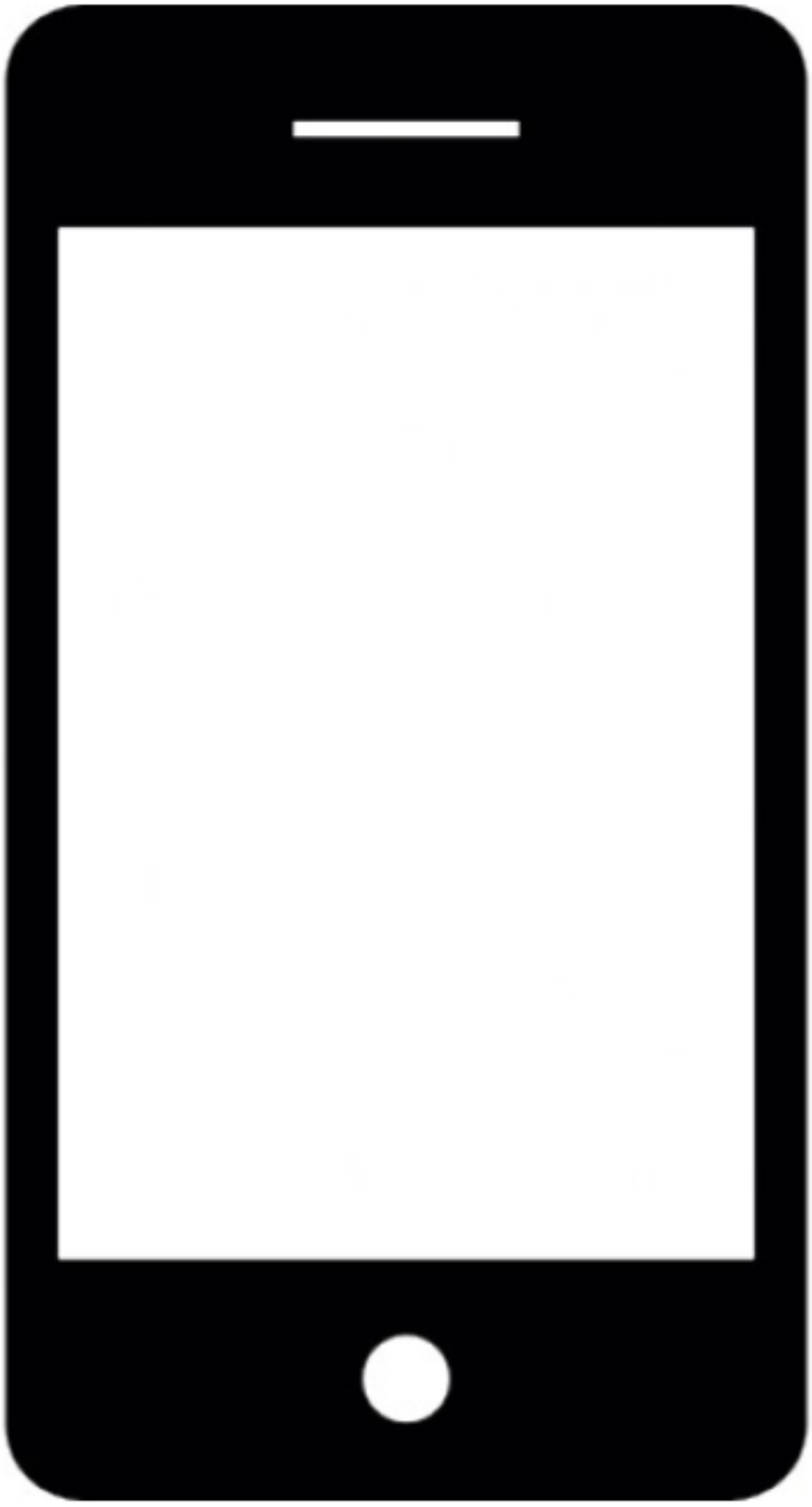
How To Do It

1) Ask youth to create an Instagram story of your program lesson. First take or draw a picture. Then write a caption. What were the highlights? What did they learn? Add #hashtags to the post.
2) Allow youth to use their phones or they can also create a poster mimicking an Instagram post. Use the image below to have youth design on paper. Youth can work individually or in groups.
3) Have youth or each youth group share their post with the group.
4) Reflect as a large group. What were common across the posts? What was different?

Take It Further

- Create a hashtag for your program and have youth share the image.

Template: Instagram Posts



Candid Camera

Use this activity for young people to observe and reflect on how they work together as a group.

Why This Matters

- Observation and reflection help participants make sense of how they are doing as a group (e.g., cooperation, teamwork, conflict resolution).

Getting Started

- Materials: space to show video, computer
- Time: 30-45 minutes
- Set up: Create a video of the group in advance. Prepare discussion questions to probe how well the group demonstrated the SEL skills that you were working on such as teamwork, listening, and managing conflict.

How To Do It

1) Show the video clip. Ask youth to think about certain probing questions. You could write those questions on the board or create handouts for note taking. Ask youth to be objective and try to view the clip as an outsider.
2) Process as a large group. Ask youth to first use their observation skills to state what they saw with their eyes, not their reason for the behavior. (This is a great time to talk about the difference between being objective and subjective.)
3) Ask youth to move into being subjective. What were the reasons they did or did not demonstrate the skill goal?

Take It Further

- In the future, assign youth the role of observer during activities (or for a portion of the activity.) Youth can practice taking notes and giving feedback to the larger group.
- Set up scenarios that allow youth to challenge the skills that you are practicing. Create a challenging task that requires strong group skills.

SMART SEL Goal Tracker

Use this tool to help youth set, track and reach goals related to SEL competencies.

Why This Matters

- Goal setting skills empower young people to strive for self-improvement and have control over their own lives.
- By setting and reaching goals, youth gain confidence and are able to identify, adopt, and maintain healthy behaviors that will help them be successful in the future.
- It's pretty common for us to have students set academic goals. But how about SEL goals?

Getting Started

- Materials: Worksheet
- Time: 20 minutes
- Set up: Print sheets and allow time for youth to complete

How To Use It

1) Choose an SEL competency to work on (e.g., self-control, teamwork, empathy, grit).
2) Once young people are aware of the social and emotional competency they'd like to develop, encourage them to set an achievable SMART goal. SMART goals are specific, realistic, worthwhile, and have some way that it can be measured in a given time period. They should also be developmentally appropriate.

   For example, a kindergartner might set a goal of asking a peer to play at least once a week, a middle school student might carry out 25 intentional acts of kindness during the Great Kindness Challenge, and sophomore might set a goal of checking in weekly with a friend who is having a hard time.
3) After the goals are set, encourage students to monitor their progress. Again, this goal setting and monitoring can be done privately. Use the SEL Goal Tracker tool to reflect and make notes. Notice not only how youth are progressing to their goals, but also how they are reflecting on their progress.

Take It Further

- Those who are having difficulty meeting their goals can be given extra one-on-one support.
- Meet one-on-one with youth to talk about the goals they selected. Follow up on their progress halfway through the program, and celebrate at the end of the program.

Tool: SMART SEL Goal Tracker

MY SMART SEL GOAL:	
☐ Specific: What exactly do you want to accomplish?	
☐ Measurable: How will you know you've reached your goal?	
☐ Action: What steps will you take to reach your goal?	
☐ Relevant: Why is this a worthwhile goal?	
☐ Timely: What's your deadline?	

MY PROGRESS	NOTES

SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate formal social and emotional learning assessment tools. The checklist will help you evaluate practical, logistical, and technical considerations for each tool that you are considering.

Why This Matters

- The best assessment tool for your program is the one that aligns with your goals and is practical to use.
- The checklist is designed to raise awareness of considerations that may be important in your decision-making process.

Getting Started

- Evaluate your readiness to make use of a formal assessment tool. Read the *Assessing Social & Emotional Skills in Out-of-School Time Settings: Considerations for Practitioners* issue brief for more information.
- Use the checklist to determine your priorities (cost, time, usefulness, reporting, etc.) in selecting a tool. Not all checklist items will carry equal weight for every program.

How To Use It

1) Review the items on the checklist as you evaluate formal social and emotional learning measurement tools.
2) Take time to investigate answers to questions that are most important to your program.
3) Request sample surveys, measurement instruments, and reports of tools that you are seriously considering.
4) Make a decision based on your program priorities and measurement needs.

Take It Further

- Ask 2-3 additional staff to review the checklist in order to evaluate the measurement tools you are seriously considering. Discuss your findings and make a collaborative decision.
- Ask youth leaders to review potential evaluation tools. Include youth in the decision about which tool to use.
- Ask for input from funders and other stakeholders who are invested in your program's SEL outcomes.

Tool: SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

Use this checklist to evaluate and compare formal SEL assessment tools.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
☐ **Do the items measured by this tool align with our program goals?**	The closer the alignment between what the tool measures and your program goals, the more helpful the data will be to youth and practitioners.
☐ **Will the tool provide helpful feedback to youth and actionable data for practitioners?**	Receiving helpful feedback is an important part of developing social and emotional skills. Actionable data will help practitioners make better decisions about program design and youth interactions. Reports that only provide data in spreadsheets or complicated tables will be more difficult to use.
☐ **Does the tool align with our program's definition of success in SEL?**	There is not a universal standard of success in SEL. What counts as SEL success will vary based on the values and goals of each program. Alignment between the tool's standard of success and your program standard is important.
☐ **How accessible is the actual tool that youth or practitioners are required to complete?**	The visual design of the tool and the formatting of measurement items matters. If the tool is burdensome or confusing to complete, the quality of responses will be affected.

The bottom line: Will this tool help you improve outcomes for youth?

Only consider tools that will help your program become more effective.

Notes:

Tool: SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
☐ **How much does the tool cost? (per youth/per year)**	Pricing is not standard across tools. Calculate the per youth/per year cost for each youth in order to compare differing price structures.
☐ **What are the training requirements for practitioners and associated costs?**	Training requirements vary widely and can add considerable time and money to the cost of using a tool.
☐ **How is the tool administered? How many items or questions are included?**	Some tools must be completed on a computer, others on paper. Paper-based tools increase the amount of data entry time required. The number of items on a tool will significantly impact the time and energy it takes to implement a tool.
☐ **How quickly will you get access to the data?**	Some reports can be generated immediately. Others will take weeks or even months to create. If you intend to use data for program improvement, getting quick access to data reports may be an important consideration.

The bottom line: Do you have the capacity (money + time) to meaningfully use this assessment tool?

The best measurement tool is the one that you can actually use.

Notes:

Tool: SEL Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS	WHY THIS MATTERS
☐ **What is the reliability score of the tool?**	Look for a tool with high reliability and administrative requirements that you can reasonably manage. Tools that have high reliability will provide more consistent results. You can find this information in a technical report or directly from the publisher.
☐ **What is the validity score of the tool?**	Validity scores indicate how accurately the tool measures the outcomes or skills it claims to measure. For example, if a tool claims to assess problem-solving skills, but only includes questions related to emotion management, this would be a red flag. You can find this information in the technical report or directly from the publisher.
☐ **Do you agree with the underlying theories that inform the assessment items?**	Consider how the tool's authors define social emotional skills. How the authors understand effective communication or healthy relationships will influence how the tool is designed and scored.

The bottom line: How valid is the tool for your context?

While a tool may have high technical scores, the data and feedback you receive will have limited usefulness if it doesn't align with your goals, values, or population. For example, if the tool you are considering was developed with a sample population that was primarily middle school youth in rural areas, it will not have high validity for your urban high school program.

Notes:

Adapted from:
Blyth, D., & Flaten, K. (2016). Assessing social and emotional skills in out-of-school time settings: considerations for practitioners. Retrieved from University of Minnesota, Extension Center for Youth Development website: http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth/research/sel/docs/issue-brief-assessing-sel-in-out-of-school-time-settings.pdf
Soland, J., Hamilton, L.S., & Stecher, B.M. Measuring 21st century competencies: guidance for educators. (2013). Asia Society and Rand Corporation. Retrieved from https://asiasociety.org/files/gcen-measuring21cskills.pdf