



PROJECT SO-WELL-AWARE

WHAT EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT STUDENTS' SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS

Booklet 3



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WHAT CAN YOU TAKE AWAY FROM THIS BOOKLET?

 **TAKE AWAY 1**
Why Intervention and Prevention Matter for the Promotion of Well-Being

 **TAKE AWAY 2**
Evidence-Based Daily Practices to Promote Well-Being

 **TAKE AWAY 3**
Reflecting on the Role of Teachers in Promoting Student Well-Being

FIRST OF ALL, DID YOU KNOW ...



... that emotional school well-being strongly decreases from primary to secondary school?



... that ratings of students and teachers regarding students' well-being at school only partially align?



... that teachers are better able to assess students' academic self-concept, followed by social inclusion?



... **BUT** that their perception of students' well-being at school strongly diverges from how the students themselves describe how they feel?



... that teachers' ratings of students' well-being are influenced by students' characteristics such as students' gender and special needs status?



... that it is not only essential to intervene when problems occur - but also to prevent future ones to sustainably improve students' overall school well-being?

1 WHY BOTH PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION MATTER

→ INTERVENTION PROGRAMS FOCUS ON REDUCING PRESENT PROBLEMS



PRESENT PROBLEMS

Intervention programs are designed to address existing problems, such as an individual student's low well-being or the occurrence of conflicts in the classroom. These programs are often tailored to specific problems or symptoms and aim to improve them. In a school, these can take place at the individual level (e.g., reduction of anxiety in individual students), at the classroom level (e.g., noise reduction in the classroom) or even at the school level (e.g., implementation of a mentoring program).



RESEARCH SUGGESTS...

Research suggests that certain intervention programs (for more information, see booklet 2 of the SO-WELL-AWARE package) can help individual students. However, social and emotional learning should be a regular part of education (see e.g. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning; CASEL). This is because making changes in everyday teaching practices helps all students feel better and has lasting benefits over time.

1 WHY BOTH PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION MATTER



PREVENTION PROGRAMS

FOCUSING ON REDUCING RISK FACTORS



RISK FACTORS

On the other hand, prevention programs aim to proactively increase the well-being of all students before problems even arise. These programs focus on promoting a positive and supportive learning environment and require ongoing evaluations, such as regular well-being assessments. In this way, potential challenges can be identified early and well-being can be safeguarded in the long term. Like intervention programs, these can take place at the individual level (e.g., self-compassion exercises in individual students), at the classroom level (e.g., team-building activities in the classroom) and at the school level (e.g., implementation of a whole-school resilience program).



PRACTICAL EXAMPLES



IMAGINE INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

There are several serious cases of bullying between classmates in your school. A comprehensive intervention program could include the introduction of an anti-bullying program. This program could include regular training for teachers and students on topics such as non-violent communication and methods that promote self-reflection and a perspective shift.



IMAGINE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

You have heard about bullying incidents from teachers in other classes. You would like to promote group cohesion in your class in order to proactively counteract conflicts and bullying. Classroom check-ins could serve as a preventative strategy, creating a safe-space for students to name and share their feelings and experiences on a weekly basis anonymously or in a group discussion.



PROMOTING STUDENTS' WELL-BEING IN THE CONTEXT OF USING THE PIQ: WHAT EVERY TEACHER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Promoting the social-emotional and motivational development of students is a general task of schools. For prevention of low well-being/ill-wellbeing as well as intervention, it is crucial to evaluate the effects from different perspectives (e.g. students' self-perception, teacher perception, parent perception) with an appropriate instrument.

The Perception of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ; see <https://piqinfo.ch/>; Venetz et al., 2015) measures emotional well-being in school, social participation as well as students' academic self-concept. These three school-related aspects of well-being are highly important for students' overall well-being as e.g. also for their academic development.

HOW WILL THE PIQ TELL ME IF AN INTERVENTION IS NEEDED?

- I. Each question of the PIQ has four possible answers: 1 = "Not at all true", 2 = "Somewhat not true", 3 = "Somewhat true", 4 = "Certainly true".
- II. If you add up the scores for all four questions related to a specific area, such as emotional well-being at school, social participation, or students' academic self-confidence, and the total is less than eight, it's important to pay special attention to the student. For example, a low score in the area of social participation, suggests that the students' social participation might be low, and an intervention should be considered. By reacting early, targeted interventions can be implemented to help the student feel better and thrive in a classroom.
- III. If PIQ scores decrease at different times, it shows that they may need support or intervention.

HOW CAN YOU GET ACTIVE TO PROMOTE WELL-BEING IN CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS?

Following CASEL (2013; 2015; <https://casel.org/>), five key skills should be taught in classrooms, schools, families, and communities: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Responsible Decision-Making, Relationship-Skills and Social Awareness. These skills should be taken into account in the preventive promotion of students' well-being and effective intervention when problems are already present.



Figure 1. CASEL framework

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' SELF-AWARENESS?

Self-awareness means understanding your own feelings, thoughts, and values, and how they affect your behaviour. This can be different at school compared to home. It also involves knowing your own strengths and weaknesses.

Sometimes, students might not be used to naming the thoughts and feelings they have in a specific situation or even in general.

- Create a safe space where students feel comfortable talking openly and honestly about themselves and others
- Listen to students and ask about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences at school. Try to understand their viewpoints.
- Help students learn the right words to express their feelings.
- Recognize and value each students' unique background, including differences in origin, gender, language, culture, and ability
- Support students in identifying and understanding their emotions
- Raise awareness about well-being and challenges
- Give helpful feedback that focuses on each student's individual growth and strengths. Avoid comparing students to each other; instead, appreciate their personal progress.



PAUSE AND REFLECT

1. Has anyone ever made you feel that your feelings are really valid? How did that feel?
2. How do you think your reaction to concerns of your students will impact their emotional state and their willingness to share future concerns?

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' SELF-AWARENESS?

		Response 1	Outcome 1
Imagine	One of your students is upset about getting a bad grade in another subject.	You shouldn't get so upset. It's just one of a few assignments. Just try to work harder.	The student might feel not heard and possibly even more frustrated. His feelings are not recognised, which can lead to him avoiding talking about the next problem.
		Response 2	Outcome 2
		I can see that you're sad and disappointed about your grade. It's understandable that you feel this way.	The student feels seen and supported. It might be possible, that next time, he is more willing to talk about his challenges.



PAUSE AND REFLECT

1. In the given scenario, what are the differences you noticed between both responses?
2. How might your response to a student's emotional distress affect: The relationships with your students; The student's emotional state; The student's willingness to share future concerns/seek help; The student's long-term well-being.

HOW TO: LISTEN TO AND VALIDATE STUDENTS' EMOTIONS

Emotions such as frustration, anxiety or sadness often arise when coping with challenges as they occur in students' everyday lives. Suppressing these emotions can lead to increased levels of anger, anxiety, depression, and aggression. Instead of expressing indifference, annoyance or anger (e.g., "It could be worse"), it would be worth considering a valuable communication technique: Emotional Validation.

Emotional validation, as applied in Response 2, is the identification of a non-judgmental acceptance of one's own feelings and the feelings of others. This method can help your students feel heard, acknowledges their feelings and conveys that the corresponding reactions are understandable and not irritating. While students' suppression of emotions can lead to impaired self-regulation persistence, validating feedback supports emotion regulation.

"BUT I WANT TO SOLVE MY STUDENTS' PROBLEMS?"

Often, we already do a lot of things right and use individual aspects of validation, but then move on to problem-solving by saying something validating but immediately telling the student what they should have done or what they should do next. However, active listening gives you the opportunity to fully understand the situation. Once you have recognized how the student is feeling, to raise self-awareness, you can help them create a space where they feel safe to think about their feelings.

HOW TO: LISTEN TO AND VALIDATE STUDENTS' EMOTIONS



PAUSE AND REFLECT

Think about whether there are moments when you offer a solution quickly, such as after a dispute between students. Instead, how could you validate the students' emotions for longer before moving on to finding a solution?

It is important to note that emotional validation is different from tolerating a specific behavior. Only the feeling that is or was present is validated (e.g. the feeling before an argument --> "I can see how that has upset you"; "I can see that you didn't feel respected").

As always: Appreciate the progress! As with many other skills, the more you practice emotional validation, the easier it will be for you to use it when you need it most.

Additionally: In challenging situations, remember that validation starts with yourself. As we are often very critical of ourselves, take special care to recognize and validate your own feelings as you would with others.

How can the PIQ help you to increase student's self-awareness?

Use the PIQ from multiple raters, including the students' self-ratings, your ratings, and the caregivers' ratings. Then share the results and discuss how the differences might have occurred.

SELF-MANAGEMENT REFERS TO THE ABILITY TO MANAGE ONE'S EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS, AND BEHAVIOURS ACCORDING TO ONE'S GOAL.



IMAGINE

A student is consistently overwhelmed by deadlines and homework assignments and consequently forgets to complete their homework on time.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' SELF-MANAGEMENT?

- Teach ways to manage school-related stress, like planning and organizing tasks better. One possibility would be to introduce students to methods such as the following:
 - Mapping out what is due to the following days, weeks and months. Based on this overview, a checklist can be created. Note, that this should be made based on students' preferences (e.g., usage of online tools or calendars);
 - As not all assignments are equal, prioritizing tasks based on deadlines;
 - Identification of smaller and bigger tasks might help to estimate, how much time is needed to complete each task.
- Be transparent with deadlines for homework and assignments, so that students can better organize their time.
- Provide helpful feedback by suggesting better ways to act. For example, after clearly addressing unacceptable behavior, teachers should offer students alternative actions through meaningful tasks that help them improve.



PAUSE AND REFLECT

Do you currently teach students to manage school-related stress? If yes, how effective are these methods in your classroom?

HOW CAN THE PIQ HELP YOU TO INCREASE A STUDENT'S SELF-AWARENESS?

Students could take the student-self version of the PIQ multiple times to evaluate whether a specific goal (e.g. increasing academic self-concept) was achieved.



RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING MEANS THINKING CAREFULLY ABOUT YOUR ACTIONS AND CONSIDERING WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG.



IMAGINE

A student notices that a classmate is being bullied by a group of peers. The student is now faced with a decision: should he confront the bullies directly or report the incident to a teacher?

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING?

- Set up clear rules for making decisions, like using personal schedules.
- Share how you make decisions with students and involve them when you can.
- Give regular feedback to help students improve their decision-making skills.
- Practice: Teach students how to make decisions based on case studies by having them discuss different options with their classmates and reflect on the outcomes of each choice.





WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING?

LET'S PRACTICE: DISCUSS THE BULLYING CASE STUDY WITH YOUR STUDENTS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING STEPS.

		Reflection Questions for Students
Step 1	Divide the class into groups. Every group should gather information about the incident.	What is happening and who is involved?
Step 2	Consider different ways to address this situation. Each group should list pros and cons of possible solutions.	How does the bullied student feel about the situation? How does the student feel, who has to make a decision?
Step 3	Regroup the class. Each student should share the proposed solutions of their original group.	
Step 4	Ask students to reflect on their learnings.	How might you handle a similar situation based on what you learned from this session?

HOW CAN THE PIQ HELP YOU TO INCREASE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING?

Use the questions as a guide to evaluate your decisions. Think about how your choices might affect your well-being, your self-confidence at school, and your relationships with others. Consider how your decisions might also impact your classmates in these areas.



LET'S PRACTICE: NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

For example, practice role-playing in using nonviolent communication statements. Through this strategy, students learn to express themselves honestly while listening to their and others' needs. One way to help students express their thoughts without blaming others might be to introduce them to "I" statements.

"I" feel _____[emotion] when _____ [context].

Example:

I feel sad when you start to work on a different task without informing me.

instead of

You always start doing something without informing me.

HOW CAN THE PIQ HELP YOU TO INCREASE A STUDENT'S RELATIONSHIP SKILLS?

Talk with your students regularly about the class results from the PIQ subscale on 'social inclusion.' Check if any students feel left out or socially excluded. Remember to use students' own ratings, as you might not always notice how they feel about their social inclusion.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS INCLUDE BEING A GOOD LISTENER, COMMUNICATING WELL, AND WORKING TOGETHER WITH OTHERS,



IMAGINE

Two students are working on a project together, but a conflict arises between them as they want to focus on different approaches. The disagreement is affecting their ability to work effectively.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' RELATIONSHIP SKILLS?

- Teach and practice active listening, and make sure to listen carefully to your students yourself.
- Encourage tolerance and respect and show these behaviors in how you interact with students (e.g., help students listen to and understand each other's different opinions).
- Support and develop good communication skills.
- Build a sense of community by organizing group projects and involving families and communities in activities.



SOCIAL AWARENESS MEANS BEING ABLE TO UNDERSTAND OTHER PEOPLE'S VIEWPOINTS AND FEEL EMPATHY FOR THEM.



IMAGINE

During a group work, a student notices that one of their classmates is not participating and seems a little bit sad. The student is unsure how to approach the situation.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' SOCIAL AWARENESS?

- Help students learn to recognize their classmates' feelings by paying attention to both what they say and how they act.
- Encourage students to imagine themselves in other people's situations.
- Improve understanding of inclusion and acceptance of diversity by highlighting and appreciating the different backgrounds and qualities within the class.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' SOCIAL AWARENESS?

HOW TO: PERSPECTIVE-TAKING IN CLASSROOMS

One possible exercise for practicing changing perspectives and thus creating an awareness of the emotions and behavior of others comes from drama in education. By changing perspectives and recognizing motivation and needs, students can learn how important it is to consider all perspectives and take into account the complexity of situations.

- ➔ **Selection of a case study:** The teacher presents a case study that deals with a difficult situation (e.g. bullying incident resulting in aggressive behavior), in which several perspectives are involved, which are presented in turn. It is important that each perspective involved (e.g. teachers, students, school environment) contributes its part to the course of the situation.
- ➔ **Preparation:** Chairs are set up, each representing a perspective. The class is divided into two groups.
- ➔ **Task:** Each group is given the task of arranging the perspectives (and therefore the chairs) in order of blame for the situation.
- ➔ **Round 1:** Now each member of the group that is not currently setting up the order can take the vote for each perspective to defend this perspective or explain why it was acted in this way. Student in the class speaks up for student A: 'I behaved like that because I didn't feel that student B took me seriously. I had the feeling that my opinion didn't count'. After the first round, a common order is agreed upon.



Round 2: Now each student in the class can stand behind each chair to explain what this perspective would have needed in order not to act as it did in the case study. Student in the class speaks up for student A: 'I would have needed more encouragement from my classmates.'

HOW THE PIQ CAN HELP YOU TO INCREASE STUDENT'S SOCIAL AWARENESS?

Talk with your students regularly about the class results from the PIQ subscales. Discuss how low emotional well-being at school, low academic self-confidence, and low social inclusion among peers can affect students.



III. REFLECTING ON THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN PROMOTING STUDENT WELL-BEING

Promoting the well-being of students is a central task in the teaching profession that goes far beyond the mere transfer of knowledge. As mentioned, often a lot is already done right ("right" in the sense of promoting wellbeing), and it was not the aim of this booklet to dismiss teachers' already existing abilities. Rather, the aim was to emphasize once again the complexity of well-being and the many opportunities that exist to promote it sustainably. It is important to consider methods of intervention, but also of prevention, as it is crucial not only to recognize signs of e.g., stress in students at an early stage or to maintain good relationships through communication techniques, but also to respond with appropriate interventions (e.g., emotional validation, prioritization of tasks) when stress is already present. The following concluding reflection questions are intended to encourage reflection on your role as a teacher in relation to the well-being of students.



- How do your daily actions and decisions contribute to creating an environment that addresses students' needs both proactively and reactively?
- How do you evaluate your own practices and what methods do you use to grow and learn continuously?
- What strategies are you using so far to address the needs of your students both proactively and reactively? Can you think of any strategies that you could implement in your teaching?

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