

**BEYOND** the **BELL**

at American Institutes for Research ■

# How Afterschool Programs Can Support Employability Through Social and Emotional Learning

DECEMBER 2015



A Planning Tool



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American Institutes for Research (AIR) developed this tool to accompany our Research to Action brief *Ready for Work? How Afterschool Programs Can Support Employability Through Social and Emotional Learning*. The brief and this tool aim to provide afterschool program staff with information about how they can foster the building of employability skills in their programs.



# Introduction

For educators and employers, understanding the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that ultimately contribute to success in school, work, and life is a priority. Although young people need many skills to be successful in the workplace, one aspect of employability has gained attention in recent years—the need for workers to have strong social and emotional skills. Afterschool programs have a role to play in supporting the development of these skills for *all* youth.

## Social and Emotional Learning

The process through which children, youth, and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (2015). *What is social and emotional learning?* Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/>

# How to Use This Tool

This tool is based on the [Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education's](#) (OCTAE's) Employability Skills Framework. Table 1 provides a description of four employability skills from the framework that can be developed through social and emotional learning.

**Table 1. Employability Skills**

Skill Category	Specific Employability Skills	
Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Thinks critically</li> <li>■ Thinks creatively</li> <li>■ Makes sound decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Solves problems</li> <li>■ Reasons</li> <li>■ Plans and organizes</li> </ul>
Interpersonal Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Understands teamwork and works with others</li> <li>■ Responds to customer needs</li> <li>■ Exercises leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Negotiates to resolve conflicts</li> <li>■ Respects individual differences</li> </ul>
Personal Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Demonstrates responsibility and self-discipline</li> <li>■ Adapts and shows flexibility</li> <li>■ Works independently</li> <li>■ Demonstrates a willingness to learn</li> <li>■ Demonstrates integrity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Demonstrates professionalism</li> <li>■ Takes initiative</li> <li>■ Displays positive attitude/sense of self-worth</li> <li>■ Takes responsibility for professional growth</li> </ul>
Communication Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Communicates verbally</li> <li>■ Listens actively</li> <li>■ Comprehends written material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Conveys information in writing</li> <li>■ Observes carefully</li> </ul>

This tool has two parts. Part 1 will help you identify your priority areas for employability skills building based on youth and employer input. Part 2 will help you plan next steps based on that input. Refer back to our accompanying brief for more information on the research behind these action steps. Feel free to adapt the tool to your own needs, and, above all, be creative and think broadly about how you can support the development of employability skills in youth through social and emotional learning.

# PART 1:

## Identifying Interests

### Step 1: Listen to Youth

**Talk** to youth about their interests and career goals. **Share** the diverse skills that people need in order to get and keep jobs. **Understand** what youth want to learn.

*This is an opportunity to better understand what jobs and careers youth are interested in, which jobs may fit their skills and interests (e.g., a youth who loves to talk and interact with people may be interested in learning more about the human resources field), and where they may have opportunities to build their employability skills through social and emotional learning. With older youth, you might organize a brainstorming session or a discussion group in which you ask them the following guiding questions. With younger youth, you might need to get answers to these questions through individual conversations and observations. Use the space below to record what you learn.*

#### General

What jobs are you most interested in learning more about? What do you see yourself doing when you finish school? What kind of jobs can you imagine yourself in? Why?

#### Critical Thinking

What kinds of information do you need when making a decision? What factors do you consider or think about when making a decision? Can you tell me about a time when you had to think creatively to solve a problem? How can critical thinking skills (e.g., being able to make decisions, plan, and think creatively) help you in a job?

### Interpersonal Skills

How do you feel about talking to or meeting new people? What do you like and not like about working in groups? Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not? How can interpersonal skills (e.g., respecting individual differences, being able to work in a team, taking on leadership) help you in a job?

### Personal Qualities

What do you think it means to have integrity? Would you rather have more or less responsibility in a job and why? When you are working, what does it mean to be professional? How can personal qualities (e.g., taking on initiative, being independent, being flexible and professional) help you in a job?

### Communication Skills

What is your preferred way to communicate? Do you enjoy talking? Singing? Writing? What makes an active listener? How can communication skills (e.g., being able to observe, listen, and communicate in various ways) help you in a job?

## Step 2: Listen to Employers

More than ever, companies want to prepare the next generation of the workforce. Include them in your programming! Talk to employers and recruiters about your program’s goals for helping prepare youth for the workforce, and find out what skills they expect employees to have. You may want to share OCTAE’s [Employability Skills Framework](#) or skills areas to help guide your conversation.



Use information collected from youth to focus on the employers that are a good match for youth interests.

*Make a list of possible employers in your community to contact. Think about a range of employers (e.g., the tech industry, manufacturing, sales, small business, social services, and the public sector). If your community is small or does not have many potential employers, consider the closest city or use your personal and professional networks to identify additional employers to contact. Set up individual interviews or host a meeting in which you bring employers together and ask them about the skills they want to see in their employees. Record those skills in Table 2.*

**Table 2. Skills That Employers Want to See**

Type of Employer	Desired Skills				
	Critical Thinking	Interpersonal Skills	Personal Qualities	Communication Skills	Other
Human Resources department at local company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assesses problems quickly and identifies solutions</li> <li>Thinks on his/her feet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friendly</li> <li>Respectful of diverse staff</li> <li>Works well with wide range of staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional work ethic</li> <li>Positive disposition at work</li> <li>Always ready to help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to communicate online, via phone, and in person</li> <li>Listens to employees’ needs and is responsive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Punctual</li> <li>Can-do attitude</li> </ul>

### Step 3: Compare Notes

Once you have gathered information from employers and youth, it is time to review what you learned and make some decisions.

*For this step, you may want to bring together a group of youth, key community partners or employers, staff, school partners, and family members. Look at the list of skills that youth in your program want to develop (Step 1) and compare them to the skills that employers are interested in (Step 2). Answer the guiding questions.*

**Where is there overlap?**

**How are the two lists different?**

**What areas do you want to focus on?**

## PART 2: Action Planning

Once you have completed Part 1 of this tool and identified your overarching priorities based on youth and employer input, it is time to start planning program strategies to address these priorities.

*First, using the information you gathered in Part 1, review the skills in the first column of Tables 3–6. Identify which skills in each table are the biggest priorities for your program and check them off.*

*Next, review the skills you checked off in the first column as priorities. What specific activities are you going to use to support the development of these skills? We have provided some examples of social and emotional learning practices and activities for inspiration. Remember, your program activities can support the development of more than one skill. Record your ideas in the space below each table.*

**Table 3. Critical Thinking**

Critical Thinking		
Skills	SEL Practices to Support Skills	Program Ideas
<input type="checkbox"/> Thinks critically <input type="checkbox"/> Thinks creatively <input type="checkbox"/> Makes sound decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Solves problems <input type="checkbox"/> Reasons <input type="checkbox"/> Plans and organizes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Challenge youth to come up with solutions to problems they encounter in the program. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunities to practice making authentic decisions. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engage youth in planning the program and its activities. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Encourage youth to problem-solve together when they have a conflict rather than solve it for them. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Use hands-on, inquiry-based approaches to learning so that youth can be creative and think critically about a topic or issue.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Role-play—provide a scenario to act out that requires youth to decide between two different and difficult choices. Discuss the decision-making process with them. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provide a challenge (e.g., how to decrease the amount of trash at the school), and have youth identify possible solutions. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engage youth in the scientific method—ask them to develop and test a hypothesis, reflect on their results, and then change and retest their methods. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Start your activity with a planning session. Suggest different planning strategies that youth can use to determine what they want to learn and how they are going to learn it. Provide guiding questions and ideas for inquiry-based learning approaches.

### Action Steps/Activity Ideas to Support Skills Development

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**Table 4. Interpersonal Skills**

Interpersonal Skills		
Skills	SEL Practices to Support Skills	Program Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understands teamwork and works with others</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Responds to customer needs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Exercises leadership</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Negotiates to resolve conflicts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Respects individual differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Talk to youth in your program about individual differences.</li> <li>✓ Jointly create group norms and guidelines with your youth participants.</li> <li>✓ Offer opportunities to lead activities.</li> <li>✓ Provide opportunities for youth to work in teams and to solve problems collaboratively when they arise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop a compact with youth that outlines shared agreements and norms. Ask all youth and staff to sign the compact, and post it centrally within your program.</li> <li>■ Rotate leadership or have youth lead a project or activity. For example, in a sports program, youth might lead the warm-ups, or more experienced youth can mentor their peers. In an arts program, a participant can demonstrate a new technique to the class.</li> <li>■ Hold a discussion group to share ideas about a topic, and facilitate a conversation about diversity and respecting different opinions.</li> </ul>

**Action Steps/Activity Ideas to Support Skills Development**

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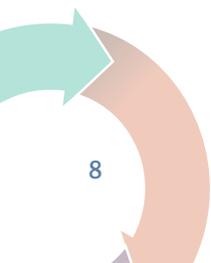


**Table 5. Personal Qualities**

Personal Qualities		
Skills	SEL Practices to Support Skills	Program Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates responsibility and self-discipline</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adapts and shows flexibility</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Works independently</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates a willingness to learn</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates integrity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates professionalism</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Takes initiative</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Displays positive attitude/sense of self-worth</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Takes responsibility for professional growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Talk to youth about importance of personal qualities.</li> <li>✓ Provide opportunities for youth to work independently or take initiative for their own work and projects.</li> <li>✓ Help youth develop their own plans for improvement.</li> <li>✓ Help youth understand how to adapt and be flexible under challenging circumstances.</li> <li>✓ Provide opportunities for youth to practice being professional.</li> <li>✓ Encourage positive attitudes and eagerness to learn.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide opportunities for youth to present their work to their peers or families. Encourage them to dress in a manner that fits their chosen field and prepare a formal presentation.</li> <li>■ Build independent work into your program. For example, ask youth to identify a topic for a project. Give them time to research the topic and choices in how they want to present it (e.g., write a report, make a poster, design a model).</li> <li>■ Explicitly practice some of the personal qualities skills. For example, have youth practice showing a positive attitude and willingness to adapt by presenting them with a frustrating scenario and having them role-play these skills.</li> </ul>

**Action Steps/Activity Ideas to Support Skills Development**

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**Table 6. Communication Skills**

Communication Skills		
Skills	SEL Practices to Support Skills	Program Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Communicates verbally</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Listens actively</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Comprehends written material</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conveys information in writing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Observes carefully</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide opportunities for youth to practice listening to one another and to you.</li> <li>✓ Practice different types of communication to build skills in different kinds of speaking (e.g., presenting to a group, one-on-one conversations, phone, in person) and writing (e.g., persuasive essay, creative writing, e-mail, letter).</li> <li>✓ Build reading into your program, regardless of your content, and ask youth to report on what they read.</li> <li>✓ Provide opportunities for youth to observe each other or the world around them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provide opportunities to practice conveying information in multiple ways. For example, youth could pick a simple topic (e.g., how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich) and then present information on that topic in multiple ways, such as writing it down, presenting it to the group, and drawing a picture about it.</li> <li>■ Build reading and writing into all aspects of your program, even if your program is not focused on literacy. For example, in a sports program, you can read about famous athletes or have youth write a story on why they like to play the sport.</li> <li>■ Youth can develop an observation or listening checklist and then take turns presenting information and listening for specific details.</li> </ul>

**Action Steps/Activity Ideas to Support Skills Development**

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at American Institutes for Research ■

10 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 600  
Chicago, IL 60606-5500  
312.288.7600

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