

Building Foundations for Success: Social Awareness

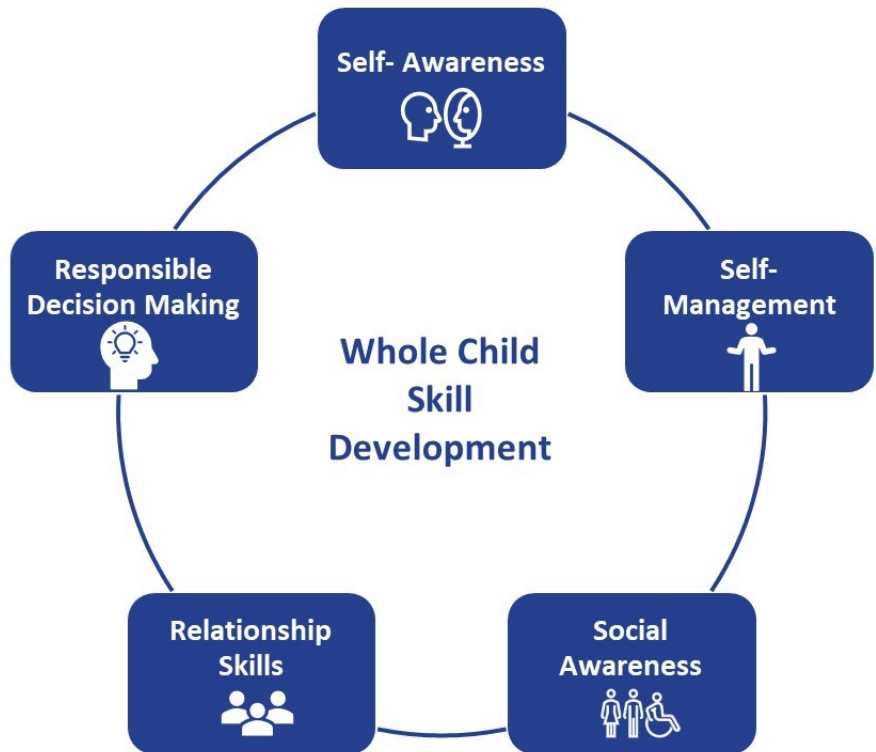
Whole Child Skill Development

Social Awareness:

Social awareness is the ability to empathize with others, express concern for others, and show gratitude. Social awareness includes the ability to identify how others are feeling, understand the experiences of others, and the factors that lead to those feelings and experiences.

Social awareness skills include the ability to:

- Understand other perspectives
- Feel and show empathy
- Appreciate diversity
- Respect others



Benefits of building social awareness skills:

- Students and adults who can understand others' emotions and experiences will be better able to tolerate and accept others, form positive relationships with others, and work more effectively with others.¹
- Building the social awareness skills in students can reduce bullying and aggression, and create a safer, more welcoming, more productive learning environments.²
- Building social awareness skills, such as empathy and respect, creates safer schools and communities where crime is less likely to occur.² Communities with a high degree of social awareness are more collaborative and better able to overcome challenges.³
- Students and adults who have the ability to recognize the interrelation of systems (systems thinking) are more capable of understanding how their behaviors effect others and are better able to act ethically, with consideration for others which leads to more stable employment throughout the life course.^{1,4}

Whole Child Skill Development : Developing whole child skills, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and the ability to make responsible decisions, are essential to student success inside and outside of the classroom. For more information, check out the OPI's [Whole Child Supports](#) website and the [Montana Whole Child Skill Development Competencies](#).

Classroom Strategies for Building Student Social Awareness:

Educators are very likely already implementing strategies that build social awareness skills in students. The strategies below are provided for consideration and were selected by a work-group of Montana educators and child development experts as strategies that are strength-based and correspond with the [Montana Whole Child Skill Development Competencies](#). We encourage all strategies to be selected based on ease of implementation into existing curriculum, school practices, and student and educator preference.

Grade K-2:

- Use literature to encourage active listening and engage students in discussion about the feelings and behaviors of the characters to foster empathy and understanding of others. Feature text by authors that authentically display characters of different cultures and backgrounds (i.e. [Indian Education for All sources](#)).
- Give each student a classroom job and have discussion around how those tasks are helpful for the group.

Grade 3-5:

- Ask students to journal about ways they can help others in their school, family, and community and why it is important. Engage students in a group discussion and reflection following individual journal activity.
- Invite guest speakers from the community to talk with students about their culture and traditions.

Grade 6-8:

- Engage students to identify people in the school and community that provide support for others; discuss how students and families may access those sources of support.
- Ask students to write alternate endings to a shared story through changing the behavior of one character.
- Engage students in identifying a need in the community and work with students to take action to address that need. Engage students in reflecting about the actions taken by the students upon completion.

Grade 9-12:

- Involve students in hosting a multi-cultural event for all members of the school and greater community to attend, emphasizing the cultural diversity of the local community.
- Engage students in identifying a need in the community and work with students to create a long-term service project to address the identified need. Engage students in reflecting about the student-led work throughout the project.

School-wide Strategies for Building Self-Awareness:

- Establish a school-wide kindness campaign that encourages students and staff to help others and show gratitude for acts of kindness and service to others.
- Implement [restorative circles](#) for students and school staff to foster active listening, empathy, and collaborative problem solving.

Strategies for Building Self-Awareness in School Staff:

- Provide professional development opportunities for school staff to learn about other cultures (i.e. [Indian Education for All learning opportunities](#)), especially the cultural beliefs around child rearing and family values.
- Provide opportunities for school staff to check-in with each other and with administrators to foster understanding, empathy, and social support for each school staff member.

Check out the [Montana Standards Association Framework](#) to learn more about Whole Child Skill Development Competencies and their alignment with other Montana academic standards.