



SME Guide

Spotlight on: Heather Williams

No two classrooms are alike, and Soar with Wings can be integrated into all classroom environments. When educators use the Soar with Wings resources, children are introduced to social and emotional learning (SEL) in a way that creates a community in which each child is valued and given the tools to become the best version of themselves. This can be accomplished no matter where or how your class is held.

In this professional learning video, you will be introduced to Heather Williams, who is a counselor and owner of Harmini Counseling, Coaching, and Consulting in Atlanta, Georgia. As a counselor, Heather uses social and emotional learning to support students' mental health in the aftermath of COVID-19.

A Closer Look...

Heather discusses three topics that she believes are important for Wings Leaders—and educators across the country—to be aware of as they help students adapt to life in a post-COVID world. Below are overviews of each subject as well as quick tips to help you begin incorporating her suggestions into your own learning communities.

1. Understand the importance of self-awareness

What is it? Heather describes self-awareness as quieting the noise around you and tuning into yourself in order to get to know yourself better.

Why does it matter? Self-awareness is directly related to emotional intelligence. The better you know yourself, the more you are able to correctly identify your emotions, understand your own reactions, recognize how you affect others, and make healthy decisions. Self-awareness is particularly important as students are re-adjusting to different social situations following the pandemic.

Tips for classroom incorporation:

- Ask frequent questions that guide students in identifying their current mood.
- Include time to journal during the school week, and provide students with prompts related to their emotions, thoughts, behaviors, preferences, and values.
- Include time for discussions that prompt students to reflect on their experiences and behaviors, helping them to understand their motivations and feelings.
- Model and lead students in affirmations to themselves and to their peers.



2. Consistently model positive behavior

What is it? When adults model positive behavior, they demonstrate desired behaviors and/or skills. Modeling behavior is based on the idea that students are always watching, so it is important for adults to consistently demonstrate the types of behavior that they want their students to display. Adults can model behavior explicitly, in which they explain the concept and then act it out, as well as nonexplicitly, in which students learn entirely by observing.

Why does it matter? Modeling can help students develop social skills and learn appropriate behavior. Children attentively watch the adults in their lives. As Heather says: “If a student sees you do it, odds are they will probably do it themselves.”

Tips for Classroom Incorporation:

- Remember that students are always watching. Do your best to consistently model positive behaviors—both verbally and nonverbally—and reflect regularly on your own actions.
- Integrate opportunities for role-play where you demonstrate decision-making, conflict resolution, and problem solving. Afterwards, discuss why the behavior is important and how/when it can be applied.
- Acknowledge when students apply and display positive behaviors.

3. Anxiety is common

What is it? Anxiety is a feeling of worry or unease about things that are about to happen or things we think could happen in the future. An unprecedented number of students in all grades continue to struggle with anxiety as a result of the pandemic.

Why is it important? Heather explains that people with anxiety tend to shut down or avoid interactions with others. When educators recognize that anxiety is common among their students, they have the opportunity to create an open, safe, and calm space in their classroom where students know it is okay to be themselves.

Tips for Classroom Incorporation:

- Create a supportive classroom environment. Speak openly about anxiety, reinforce that anxiety is normal, and encourage discussions about all kinds of emotions.
- Consider teaching mindfulness like deep breathing or other relaxation techniques to help students manage anxiety. They can be incorporated into the beginning or end of class or a specific activity.
- Schedule regular one-on-one check-ins with students to better understand their feelings and anxieties.
- Collaborate with parents and mental health professionals. Keep open lines of communication with caretakers about their child’s well-being, and work with school counselors for additional support.



In My Own Classroom

Reflect on the questions below as you consider how you can use social and emotional learning in your classroom to support students' mental health:

- Do you give your students varied opportunities to reflect on their mood and feelings? How could you do this more frequently?
- In what situations could I do a better job of modeling positive social interactions?
- At what points throughout the day could I integrate explicit modeling and roleplaying of positive behavior?
- Which students especially struggle with anxiety? What am I currently doing to support them?
- What else could I do to ensure I create a safe and welcoming environment where students are comfortable being themselves?

Additional Resources

Looking for even more ways to help you incorporate SEL concepts in your classroom? Check out the following resources for ideas that can be used in school and at home!

- Soar with Wings [Digital Lesson Bundles](#), especially *Focusing on Me and You*, *Read All About It!* and *Time to Create*.
- [Virtual Field Trip](#): Bringing SEL to Life: Skills for the Classroom and Beyond
- Soar with Wings [Family Activities](#), especially *In Your Shoes* and *Zen Zone*
- Soar with Wings [Professional Learning Videos](#), especially *Social and Emotional Skills for School and Life*
- Soar with Wings [Meet the Expert Videos](#), especially *Tips for Using Soar with Wings Content in the Classroom*