



A CASE FOR BIBLICAL SEL

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Biblical social-emotional learning (SEL) promotes student flourishing. God made humans as holistic beings. Jesus commands us to love God with our hearts, minds, and souls (Mt. 22:37). David wanted to be self-aware of any wickedness that was within him (Ps. 139:23-24). Paul says that we are to be transformed by the renewal of our *mind* (Rom. 12:2). As Christian educators, we must teach the **whole** child. Students' physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development all play an indivisible role in their academic success.

Let's prick your curiosity and interest by exploring a truly Christian approach to this crucial topic — SEL. First, we will briefly examine data indicating the need to address your students' mental health. Next, we will explore the case for biblical SEL. Lastly, we will examine how Christian educators are likely already practicing SEL in their schools.

In recent years, research has indicated that mental health in the United States has been in decline. As of 2022, The National Institute for Mental Health estimates that north of one in five adults live with mental illness (*Mental Illness*, n.d.). Young adults, in particular, appear to be experiencing higher levels of behavioral, emotional, or mental disorders (*Mental Illness*). Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports findings that suggest one in seven 10 to 19-year-olds experience a mental disorder of some kind (World Health Organization: WHO, 2024). This trend continues to be affirmed directly by educators (Prothero, 2023). The data is evident all around us, and Christian educators — armed with a robust approach to biblical SEL — can step in to promote God's good design for students.

Christian schools are not immune to the effects of sin and brokenness in the world. Scripture paints a clear picture that God desires to bring healing to these areas of our experience (Is. 26:3). The misunderstanding of SEL has been one of the largest deterrents to understanding and implementing biblical SEL in Christian schools. Two examples of a biblical approach to SEL show it is not only compatible but integral to the spiritual formation process of students in Christian schools.

- 1. Self-awareness is no invention of modernity.** In fact, it is deeply embedded in the truth of God's word (Groves & Coley, 2024). We see throughout Scripture that true self-awareness places the focus on God and His view of us rather than our own. Consider Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV). The Psalmist writes, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." The Apostle Paul's words tell us, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God

prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10, ESV) Far from an egocentric approach, biblical self-awareness places God’s view of us as the standard. As students adopt and practice biblical self-awareness, educators can expect to see an increase in patience, confidence, kindness, and more in their classrooms.

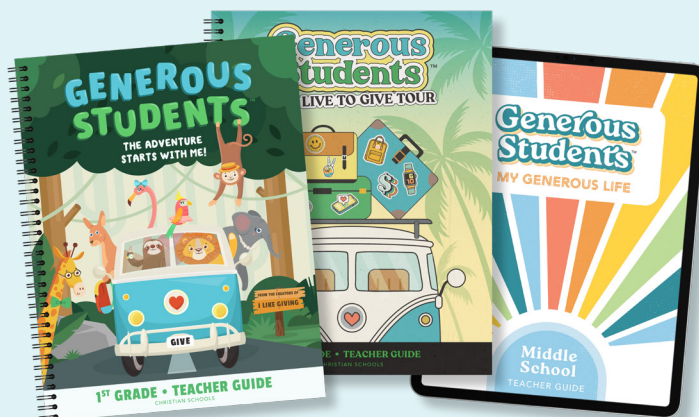
2. Self-management is another impactful domain of SEL. Imagine students who consider the interests of others above their own. Or, what if our students responded with self-regulation and forgiveness when wronged? Once again, God’s Word provides the foundation. Ephesians 4:26 (ESV) charges us to “be angry and do not sin.” Emotions like anger are not intrinsically sinful. Instead, Scripture teaches us that being angry can be an opportunity to either sanctify our desires to Christ or gratify the desires of the flesh — leaning into the former is biblical self-management. Paul states in Romans 12:20-21 (ESV), “...if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.” Biblical SEL equips students with the tools they need to work through conflict in a way that honors God and each other.

Christian educators teach and practice aspects of biblical SEL daily. We show care, compassion, and correction. We display love, joy, peace, and so many other Christ-like characteristics. We are quick to put an arm around a struggling student and pray. We eagerly rejoice with our students when they hit long-awaited milestones. As Christian educators develop a growing toolbox of biblical SEL tools, we are likely to see thousands of students engaging with a sinful, broken world in a way that helps them to grow with Christ and with one another.

We are holistic beings, and our students are too. Christian educators are facing unique challenges while dealing with mental health in our classrooms, but we can turn to the Creator’s design. We must press into and practice the way of our loving Father, who desires salvation, relationship, wholeness, restoration, and hope for all of His creation. Reach out and explore a biblical approach to SEL. Discover the robust design that God has given us (and our students!) to engage our social and emotional experiences in a way that honors Him and honors others.

Looking for a trusted biblically-immersed SEL partner?

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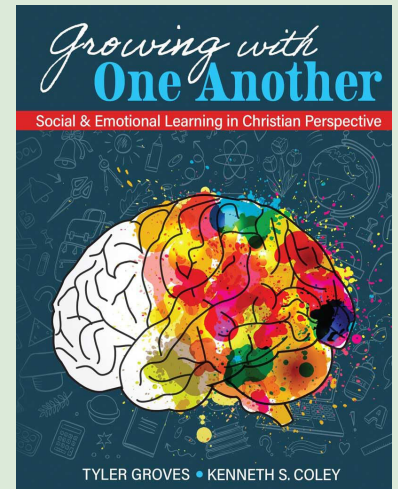


Check out Dr. Tyler Groves' book,
Growing With One Another.

available at 

Growing with One Another is a thoughtful and practical engagement of SEL through a robust Christian philosophy of education. This work is packed with practical social science and education research that is grounded in a Christian worldview. Whether you are a teacher in training or a 30-year veteran, this book will give you the tools you need to engage and utilize SEL in your classroom each and every day!

Click here to view! 



Groves, T., & Coley, K. (2024). *Growing with One Another: Social and Emotional Learning in Christian Perspective*. Kendall Hunt.

Mental illness. (n.d.). National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>

Prothero, A. (2023, May 30). What it's like teaching through a youth mental health crisis. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-its-like-teaching-through-a-youth-mental-health-crisis/2023/05#:~:text=Teachers%20say%20they%20need%20more,academic%20and%20social%2Demotional%20learning>.

World Health Organization: WHO. (2024, October 10). *Mental health of adolescents*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>