Review of Research

The Importance of Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

Social-emotional skills are important to healthy child development. Skills such as empathy, emotion management, and social problem solving contribute to children's success in school and to their later success in the workplace (Huffman, Mehlinger, and Kerivan, 2000). No single reason explains why some children develop severe and persistent problems with aggression while other children do not. However, young children who show behavior problems, such as frequent aggression, have about a 50 percent chance of developing more serious problems in later childhood (see Campbell, 1995, for a review). Moreover, a lack of social-emotional skills interferes with children's development even when they do not show significant behavior problems (Weissberg and Greenberg, 1997). Finally, learning alternatives to aggression in solving social problems is a major task of development for all young children (see Pettit, 1997, for a review).

The need for social-emotional learning is widespread. It is not limited to children identified as "at risk." Similarly, social-emotional learning is not limited to the home setting. The school and the family are the two most important social-emotional learning environments for children (see Weissberg, Caplan, and Harwood, 1991, for a review). The skills that result from this learning can promote healthy or unhealthy development. Thus, it is critical that educators take advantage of the rich opportunities, inherent to any school setting, to teach positive social-emotional skills to all children.

Program Overview

Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum (Committee for Children, 1989, 2003; 1997, 2003) is designed to promote social competence and reduce social-emotional problems by teaching children skills in the core areas of empathy, emotion management (impulse control, emotion regulation, anger management), and social problem solving. It is a universal prevention program, which means that it is taught to every child in a classroom rather than to selected children. It has four levels: Preschool/Kindergarten, Grades 1–3, Grades 4–5, and Middle School.

Guiding Theory
The *Second Step* program emphasizes understanding and dealing with emotions, expressing emotions in socially acceptable ways, thinking about social situations in accurate and constructive ways, and learning prosocial behaviors through practice. The program assumes that feelings, thoughts, and

behaviors affect one another. These goals and assumptions are based on the cognitive-behavioral model (Kendall, 2000; Kendall, 1993), a broad psychological approach grounded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), social information processing (Crick and Dodge, 1994), and research on verbal self-regulation (for example, Luria, 1961). The *Second Step* units follow from the long-standing traditions in intervention research on empathy (Feshbach, 1975), social problem solving (Spivack and Shure, 1974), and anger management (Novaco, 1975).

Empathy, Emotion Management, and Social Problem Solving

Empathy, emotion management, and social problem solving are critical skill areas. Healthy social-emotional development requires the coordination and integration of feelings, cognitions, and behaviors (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma, 1995; Lemerise and Arsenio, 2000). Thus, empathy, emotion management, and social problem solving are not discrete skill areas; each contains emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements.

Empathy

The *Second Step* program is based on a broad definition of *empathy* that includes: (a) knowledge of the emotions of self and others; (b) perspective taking (for example, the recognition that individuals can view the same situation differently and the ability to generate plausible reasons for a particular feeling); (c) vicariously experiencing others' feelings; and (d) communication of feelings and viewpoints to others. These characteristics are also included in concepts such as emotional intelligence (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) and emotional competence (Saarni, 1997). Finally, responding prosocially to others' distress is included in the definition of *empathy* (Miller, Eisenberg, Fabes, and Shell, 1996). Examples of these defining features are listed in Table 1 (see page 16).

Empathy is related to social and academic competence. Children who accurately recognize and label emotions tend to be less aggressive, more accepted by peers, and have better general social skills (Arsenio, Cooperman, and Lover, 2000; Crick and Dodge, 1994; Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, and Holt, 1990; Izard, Fine, Schultz, Mostow, and Ackerman, 2001; Katsurada and Sugawara, 1998). Children who have high levels of emotional understanding at age five are more likely than other children to show academic gains at age nine. This is true even for children who had equally high verbal abilities at age five (Izard et al., 2001).

Young children who can label and comment about the emotions of others are better liked by their peers. Well-liked children have larger emotion vocabularies. As children develop during the preschool and kindergarten years, they become better at describing emotions they have experienced previously. This makes them better able to reflect on past emotional situations and to imagine how similar situations may occur in the future (Fabes, Eisenberg, Hanish, and Spinrad, 2001). This skill is useful for communicating with others and for predicting the consequences of actions.

Empathy can motivate people to respond to the distress of others in a caring way. Children are more likely to offer help and emotional support if they can take another's perspective (Carlo, Knight, Eisenberg, and Rotenberg, 1991; Crick, Casas, and Mosher, 1997; Iannotti, 1985; Litvack-Miller,

McDougall, and Romney, 1997; Miller et al., 1996). In contrast, children who show more frequent aggression are less likely to provide assistance to a peer in distress (Hughes, White, Sharpen, and Dunn, 2000).

Development. Perspective-taking skills emerge during the early childhood period. Many emotional-expression and emotion-identification skills are relatively well developed for many children by the end of the preschool years (Greenberg et al., 1995). Between preschool and kindergarten, children's emotion communication becomes increasingly sophisticated and less self-focused. For example, instead of simply using emotion words to communicate likes and dislikes, children begin to label a wider variety of emotions and explain the causes of emotions. Preschool-aged children are also able to recognize that strong feelings decrease over time (see Harris, 2000, for a review). Children begin to focus on the emotions of peers and to reflect on past emotional experiences (Fabes et al., 2001). By age five, most children recognize that thinking about something upsetting that happened in the past can prompt negative emotions (Lagattuta and Wellman, 2001).

In the elementary years, children's emotion knowledge and perspective-taking skills continue to improve. Between kindergarten and sixth grade, children develop an increased understanding of the typical causes of emotions, learn rules about expressing emotions appropriately, and become increasingly aware that individuals can experience more than one emotion at a time (Greenberg et al., 1995). Older research suggested that young children do not understand mixed emotions (Harter and Buddin, 1987). More recent evidence indicates that four-year-old children can recognize mixed feelings in others based on nonverbal cues (Kestenbaum and Gelman, 1995) and five- and six-year-old children demonstrate an understanding of mixed emotions when provided with concrete examples of situations that cause mixed emotions (Brown and Dunn, 1996; Kestenbaum and Gelman, 1995). Thus, early childhood appears to be an excellent time to help children develop this understanding, which may be a building block for emotion management.

Another feature of empathy that changes with development is how children show personal concern when responding to a person who is upset or hurt. Surprisingly, most four- to five-year-olds show about the same level of personal concern regardless of whether they have significant behavior problems. By age seven, children with early behavior problems show less personal concern than they did at age five. The opposite is true for children who did not show early problems (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, and Bridges, 2000). In other words, it is not true that children with behavior problems lack personal concern during early childhood. Rather, most young children with behavior problems do not show age-expected gains in personal concern. These findings suggest that early childhood is a pivotal time in the development of personal concern. Early childhood teachers who nurture early personal concern may help children at risk retain and further develop this potential asset.

Specific skills. All levels of the *Second Step* program focus on three components of empathy: identifying feelings in self and others, perspective taking, and responding emotionally to others. In response to research indicating the importance of emotion knowledge to the development of young children, the *Second Step* Preschool/Kindergarten program has a stronger focus on the first component. Using photo-lesson cards, children practice how to identify the nonverbal, verbal, and situational clues related to seven common emotions and their feelings words: *happy, sad, angry,*

surprised, scared, disgusted, and *worried.* The first six emotions are included because they are universally expressed by people from different countries and cultures (Ekman and Friesen, 1975). Since fears and worries are common among young children (Lyman and Hembree-Kigin, 1994), the feeling *worry* is also included in the empathy lessons. Using the *Second Step* program, children learn how to identify and distinguish among their own feelings, using internal (muscle tension, heartbeat, breathing) and situational clues.

Emotion Management

Social-emotionally competent children are able to deal better with strong emotions and express them in socially acceptable ways than children with skill deficits (Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad, 1998). Emotion management applies to positive emotions (for example, inhibiting the impulse to run gleefully around the room during rest time) as well as negative or distressing emotions (for example, inhibiting the impulse to hit when another child takes away a toy). Additional examples of the features of emotion management are listed in Table 1 (see page 16).

Effective emotion management is associated with decreased aggression (Underwood, Coie, and Herbsman, 1992) and increased social-emotional competence (see Eisenberg, Fabes, and Losoya, 1997, for a review). An important ingredient of emotion management is attentional persistence, or the ability to remain focused on a goal while resisting internal or external distractions (Belsky, Friedman, and Hsieh, 2001). A benchmark of attentional persistence is the ability to resist immediate rewards in order to reach difficult goals (see Metcalfe and Mischel, 1999, for a review). One way that researchers have measured this ability, called "delay of gratification," is to see how long preschool-aged children can wait alone in a room with a tasty marshmallow. They are promised a second marshmallow if they can resist eating the first one until the experimenter comes back into the room. Young children who could not wait long enough to get both marshmallows tended to get lower scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) when in high school and show social-emotional deficits in adolescence and adulthood. Further, delay of gratification appears particularly helpful to individuals who are highly sensitive to peer rejection (Ayduk et al., 2000; Sethi, Mischel, Aber, Shoda, and Rodriguez, 2000).

Development. Much of the research on the development of emotion-management strategies has focused on the management of distressing emotions, especially anger. In a comprehensive summary of the research on emotion management, Brenner and Salovey (1997) note that children use some emotion-management strategies consistently throughout childhood, while the use of other strategies changes with age. For example, although young children often seek the assistance of adults to manage distressing feelings, they become less reliant on adult support with age. Another general management strategy is distraction, which is to think about or do something that takes one's mind off of the emotion. A common distraction strategy for both younger and older children is behavioral distraction (for example, managing sadness by coloring or playing basketball). Although children at all ages tend to use behavioral distraction with about equal frequency, older children more frequently use cognitive distraction (such as thinking about something pleasant) in response to distressing emotions than do younger children.

Another emotion-management strategy that children use is changing the situation that prompts the distressing emotion. For example, a child who is worried about the height of the tallest slide on the

playground decides to play on a lower slide instead. There are no age differences in children's use of this strategy. As children get older, however, they more frequently try to change their feelings rather than try to change the situation itself. For example, children change their feelings by using relaxation strategies (taking deep breaths to calm down) or reframing their thinking about the situation (instead of thinking about not knowing anyone on the first day of school, thinking of it as an opportunity to meet new friends).

Specific skills. Research suggests that teaching children strategies such as thinking calming thoughts, deep breathing, doing a calming activity, and reframing stressful situations by focusing on positives promotes effective management of feelings such as anger (Nelson and Finch, 2000) and impatience (Metcalfe and Mischel, 1999). It is critical that these strategies are used when children are able to use logical reasoning to manage emotions. When children are experiencing high levels of emotional distress, they have trouble using these emotion-management strategies (Metcalfe and Mischel, 1999). Thus, it is important for adults to intervene when children are able to think clearly and are not overwhelmed by emotion.

The *Second Step* program teaches children to identify and distinguish among their own emotions, both positive and distressing, using internal physical cues (such as feeling hot and tense when angry). Instead of focusing on emotional distress, children are taught to shift their attention toward management strategies such as cognitive distraction (saying "Calm down"), behavioral distraction (doing something calming), and relaxation techniques (deep breathing). Children are also taught behavioral-distraction strategies, such as playing with blocks when sad or silently counting to ten when feeling impatient or bored. In coaching children in the use of behavioral distraction, it is important to encourage them to engage in constructive behaviors. For example, children are often taught to "vent" their anger by punching a pillow or pounding clay. However, instead of reducing aggression, this type of strategy can lead to increased aggression in the long run (see Slaby, Roedell, Arezzo, and Hendrix, 1995, for a review).

Problem Solving

Children must make sense of and respond to countless pieces of social information each day. Thought processes (attention, thinking, memory, reasoning, and beliefs), emotion processes (empathy and emotion management), and behavioral skills (successfully entering a play group, interrupting politely) play critical roles in the way that children respond to the social world around them. The social information processing model (Crick and Dodge, 1994) describes processes that contribute to socially competent behavior. These processes involve accurately "reading" a social situation, identifying goals for social interactions (remaining friendly with other children), generating possible responses to the situation, selecting the response that best meets social goals, carrying out the selected solution, and evaluating the outcome of the solution. Examples from each step of social information processing are listed in Table 1 (see page 16).

Children who rely on aggressive solutions to problems use social information differently than other children (for reviews, see Crick and Dodge, 1994; Rubin, Bream, and Rose-Krasnor, 1991). They tend to be on the alert for threats in the environment and are more apt to assume that others behave toward them with hostility, a characteristic called the "hostile attributional bias." Their responses to social

situations tend to be guided by relationship-damaging social goals (such as getting their own way, being in control) rather than prosocial goals (such as fairness, making friends, having fun together). When generating problem-solving strategies, they offer more aggressive strategies, value aggressive strategies as effective, and fail to consider the potential negative effects of aggressive responses. Although this research was carried out with elementary-aged children, differences in problem-solving strategies are also present in early childhood (Youngstrom et al., 2000). When asked to generate potential solutions to common social problems, socially competent children are more likely to generate prosocial solutions (such as sharing), while children who show more frequent aggression are more likely to generate antisocial solutions.

Development. Most research on social problem solving is focused on describing differences between children who frequently rely on aggression and those who do not. However, little research has been done that describes how problem-solving skills develop over time. During the preschool years, young children begin to make predictions (Gopnik, Sobel, Schultz, and Glymour, 2001) and talk increasingly about the causes of events (Dunn and Brown, 1993). Young children can explain events as stemming from a variety of causes (such as psychological cause—"Jacob is crying because he is sad" or physical cause—"The glass is broken because it fell off the shelf") (Hickling and Wellman, 2001). However, they have a tendency to reason that events have a psychological cause (Dunn and Brown, 1993). Crick and Dodge (1994) hypothesize that growth in attention span, accuracy in reading social situations, understanding cause-and-effect relationships, and knowledge of rules for appropriate behavior contributes to increased problem-solving skills over the elementary years. They further suggest that the quantity and quality of problem-solving strategies improves with age. The results of a longitudinal study conducted with young children (Youngstrom et al., 2000) supports this position. Seven-year-olds report that they use more problem-solving strategies than do five-year-olds. They report a particular increase in prosocial strategies, such as offering to trade, and a decrease in antisocial strategies, such as hitting or grabbing.

Specific skills. Effective problem solving requires the coordination of empathy, emotion management, thinking skills, and specific behavioral skills such as joining in, resolving conflicts by trading or sharing, and apologizing. The Problem Solving unit can be viewed as an integration of skills taught in the program rather than as a separate skill area.

A strong focus of the *Second Step* program is on teaching children a problem-solving model, presented as a sequence of steps. More advanced levels of the program teach the following process with five main parts: (1) identify the problem; (2) brainstorm possible solutions; (3) evaluate each solution by asking four questions ("Is it safe?" "How might people feel about it?" "Is it fair?" "Will it work?"); (4) select, plan, and try the solution; and (5) evaluate whether the solution worked and switch to another solution if needed.

To match the needs and abilities of younger children, the Preschool/Kindergarten level of the program contains only three steps: (1) "How do I feel?"; (2) "What is the problem?"; and (3) "What can I do?" These steps are at the heart of the more sophisticated steps in the social information processing model described above. Using these steps, children are taught how to "read" and interpret internal cues, external social cues, and generate possible solutions to the problem. They learn to evaluate

solutions by predicting the consequences of the solution using "If—then" reasoning: "*If* Todd grabbed the ball back from Jill, *then* Jill might be angry." Finally, children are taught to use behavioral skill steps to carry out a selected solution.

Given research evidence that points to the role of social goals in motivating children's behavior, it has been argued that social-emotional learning programs that teach the "why" of social skills in addition to the "how" of social skills may be more effective than programs that teach only social skills (Erdley and Asher, 1996). The Preschool/Kindergarten level of the *Second Step* program highlights the prosocial goals of fairness and preserving friendship. For example, sharing and taking turns are presented as problem-solving strategies that promote fairness and having fun together. When evaluating solutions during problem solving, children are taught to anticipate the consequences of the solutions on people's feelings.

Developmentally appropriate problems and solutions are included in the lessons. For example, a challenging social situation for young children is knowing how to join in with the play of others. Research shows that the way children try to enter ongoing play is critical. Children who lack effective joining skills are more likely to be rejected by their peers. The joining-in steps taught in the program directly follow this research (Putallaz and Gottman, 1981; Ramsey and Lasquade, 1996). The program's steps for interrupting politely (wait for pauses in conversation before interrupting) also follow these findings.

Teaching Behavioral Skills

Empathy and knowledge of emotion-management and problem-solving strategies help children decide *what* to do. To be socially and emotionally competent, children must know *how* to carry out the strategies. The combination of modeling (teacher, puppet, and peer), practice, coaching, and positive reinforcement is an established best practice to teach socially competent behaviors to children (Elliot and Gresham, 1993; Ladd and Mize, 1983). In the *Second Step* Preschool/Kindergarten program, for example, these strategies are used in the Pretend and Practice activities. Teachers model the skill, children practice the skill, and teachers offer specific positive reinforcement ("You shared the clay with Adam, and now you are having lots of fun playing together") and coach children through difficult situations ("You're holding out that truck to Shawndra like you want to trade. Now you can ask, 'Shawndra, would you like to trade?'").

Transfer of Learning

Lessons in a student curriculum provide only part of the social-emotional learning equation in any classroom. Lessons must be used in combination with effective classroom-management practices (see Classroom Climate section of the Teacher's Guide). Further, children's newly acquired skills are maintained and further strengthened throughout the day when teachers (a) model social-emotional skills; (b) provide children with opportunities to practice skills in new, appropriate situations; (c) positively reinforce children's skill use; and (d) use incidental teaching or "teachable moments" as opportunities to provide coaching, constructive feedback, and positive reinforcement to children to support skill use during real-life situations (Consortium on School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Elliot and Gresham, 1993; Ladd and Mize, 1983).

For example, the Preschool/Kindergarten level of the program contains sheets of small cardboard Hearts. Teachers give Hearts to individual children along with verbal reinforcement of children's skill use. The purpose of the Hearts is to provide children with a concrete symbol of caring in addition to the specific information provided by the teacher. For example, a teacher might recognize a child for helping another child who is new to the classroom by saying, "You have been very helpful to Malik by showing him where the art supplies are kept. Here's a Heart to put in the container for our class.") Other sections of the Teacher's Guide and each *Second Step* program lesson contain further information about the use of the Hearts, positive reinforcement, and other transfer-of-learning strategies.

Social-emotional learning opportunities present themselves countless times each day; it is important to use these teachable moments so that children can see how the *Second Step* program skills fit into their daily lives. Similarly, development is an ongoing process. As children grow and change, their social world changes too. They need to increase continually the range and sophistication of their skills. Thus, it is not surprising that social-emotional programs that are taught for multiple years are typically more successful than short-term efforts (Weissberg and Greenberg, 1997).

Program Evaluation

Pilot studies of the *Second Step* program (Preschool/Kindergarten, 1–3, 4–5, and Middle School) showed that students who received *Second Step* lessons achieved greater gains in knowledge of social-emotional skills than students in comparison groups did (Moore and Beland, 1992; Beland, 1988; Beland, 1989; Beland, 1990).

More recent studies demonstrate changes in children's behavior and attitudes as well as their knowledge. Preschool and kindergarten children from low-income urban families showed decreased levels of observed aggression and disruptiveness following program completion, and increased knowledge of social skills (McMahon, Washburn, Felix, Yakin, and Childrey, 2000). Third- through fifth-grade children in a rural community who received the *Second Step* program were rated by teachers as more socially competent and less antisocial relative to those children who did not receive the program, and they were observed to follow adult directions more frequently (Taub, 2002). Urban African-American students in fifth through eighth grade showed increased empathy and knowledge of social skills, with the change in empathy corresponding to lower levels of self-reported aggression (McMahon and Washburn, 2003). These findings are in line with others showing that middle school students who received the *Second Step* curriculum increased their knowledge of violence and violence prevention skills (Orpinas, Parcel, McAlister, and Frankowski, 1995) and were less likely to endorse antisocial and aggressive behaviors than those who did not (Van Schoiack-Edstrom, Frey, and Beland, 2002).

Larger, more rigorous experimental evaluations of the elementary *Second Step* program also showed effects on student behavior and attitudes. Grossman et al. (1997) found that observed physical aggression decreased from autumn to spring among second- and third-grade students who received

the program. In contrast, students who did not receive the program became increasingly aggressive. Six months later, students who received the program continued to show lower levels of aggression. Frey et al. (2005) showed that students who received the program for two years required less adult intervention in minor conflicts, were rated more socially competent, and were more likely to choose positive social goals than students who did not receive the program. Finally, an experimental evaluation examining the impact of *Faustlos,* a German translation of the *Second Step* program, showed that students who received lessons over three years experienced less anxiety, depression, and withdrawn behavior, as reported by parents, than students who did not receive the program (Schick and Cierpka, 2005).

In sum, these evaluations of the *Second Step* program show sustained improvements in students' actual behaviors as well as in their knowledge, attitudes, and motivation.

Summary

Young children have an enormous capacity for growth and change, which offers both great challenges and resources to early childhood educators. Teachers are responsible for preparing young children for the academic and social tasks required of formal schooling at a time when most children have short attention spans, are highly emotional, and are just learning how to be part of a group. The purpose of the *Second Step* program is to build children's social-emotional skills, not only with the goal of promoting a caring classroom community, but also to foster children's lifelong learning to become healthy, responsible, and productive members of society.

Table 1
Defining Features of Empathy, Emotion Management, and Social Information Processing

Characteristics	Examples
Empathy	
• Identifying emotions in self and others	
- Using nonverbal cues	Anger in others: Clenched teeth, furrowed brow, crossed arms.
	Worry in oneself: Fast heart beat, stomachache.
- Using cues from the situation	Sadness: Losing a treasured toy.
	Excitement: Waiting in line for outdoor play.
	Anger: Being called a hurtful name.
	Mixed feelings: The last day of school may prompt feelings of happiness and sadness.
• Perspective taking	Recognizing that Sara thinks playing farm is fun, but Trina thinks it's boring.
	Pretending to be a chef in the kitchen center.
• Experiencing others' feelings	Feeling sad when another child falls down and scrapes her knee.
	Feeling happy when another expresses delight at building a high block tower.
• Communicating feelings and thoughts	"I like to play with you."
	Saying during a *Second Step* discussion: "I felt happy when Jerome shared his special markers with me."
• Responding to others with care and concern	Asking a tearful child, "Are you sad?"
	Hugging a child who has lost his blanket.
	Apologizing and making amends.
	Offering comforting words to a person in distress: "You will feel better later."
Emotion Management	
• Dealing with strong emotions	Behavioral distraction: Tasha looks at a book to help her wait for snack time.
	Relaxation: Take deep breaths.
	Cognitive distraction: Slowly count to three.
	Cognitive reframing: Julio's teacher tells the class that their field trip is postponed until the next day and that they will have free play instead. Julio feels disappointed and then thinks, "My aunt is coming over tonight. Now I have time to draw her some pictures, and we will get to go on the trip tomorrow."
• Expressing emotions in acceptable ways	Telling the teacher, "I'm disappointed because I didn't get to be line leader."
	Using strong, nonblaming, polite statements to assert rights: "Cutting in line is against the rules."
	Ling smiles and says "Thank you" for a gift even though she thinks it's babyish.

Second Step   Preschool/Kindergarten

Table 1 *(continued)*

Characteristics	Examples
Social Information Processing	
• "Reading" a social situation	Using empathy skills to identify: How do I feel? "A little frustrated." What is the problem? "Allesandra and I both want to play the frog in our fairy story."
• Identifying goals	Affiliation: "I want to keep playing with Allesandra." Fairness Dominating others: "I want her to do what I say."
• Generating possible solutions	Jacob thinks about two possible solutions: (1) Take turns being the frog. (2) Say, "You're too ugly to be the frog."
• Evaluating solutions	If I say, "You're too ugly to be the frog," then Allesandra might get mad.
• Selecting a solution	Jacob selects the solution "take turns" because it is a fair solution that will help them keep having fun together.
• Carrying out the selected solution	Jacob says, "Let's take turns!"
• Evaluating the outcome of the solution	If Allesandra agrees, sharing is naturally reinforced. If Allesandra disagrees, Jacob may try a different solution.

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Review of Research

The Importance of Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

Social-emotional skills are important to healthy child development. Children with weak social-emotional skills are at risk for developing problems in school (Wentzel and Wigfield, 1998) and later in the workplace (Spencer and Spencer, 1993). In particular, aggressive children are especially at risk for developing more serious problems throughout childhood and adolescence (Campbell, 1995; Parker and Asher, 1987). Even for children who do not display behavior problems, a lack of social-emotional skills interferes with social-emotional development (Weissberg and Bell, 1997).

Research confirms that school and the family are the two most important social-emotional learning environments for children (Weissberg, Caplan, and Harwood, 1991). The skills that result from this learning can promote healthy or unhealthy development. Thus, it is critical that educators take advantage of the rich opportunities inherent in school settings to teach positive social-emotional skills.

Program Overview

The third edition of *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum* (Committee for Children, 2002) is designed to promote social competence and reduce children's social-emotional problems. The curriculum teaches students several skills central to healthy social-emotional development: (a) empathy (Halberstadt, Denham, and Dunsmore, 2001); (b) impulse control and problem solving (Crick and Dodge, 1994); and (c) anger management (Eisenberg, Fabes, and Losoya, 1997). *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum* is a universal prevention program. That is, it is taught to every student in the classroom rather than to selected children. It has four levels: Preschool/Kindergarten, Grades 1–3, Grades 4–5, and Middle School.

Guiding Theory
The *Second Step* program is designed to improve children's skills in three general areas. Each unit covers one of these areas. In the Empathy Training unit, children are taught the empathy skills needed to identify emotions and to recognize possible causes of the emotions that occur in their interactions with others. Then, in the Impulse Control and Problem-Solving unit, children are taught to respond to social interactions thoughtfully rather than impulsively. To do this, they learn problem-solving steps that promote a neutral rather than hostile orientation toward peers. Finally, in the Anger Management unit, they are taught how to manage their own anger constructively.

These *Second Step* units are based on cognitive-behavioral methods (Kendall, 1993; Kendall, 2000). This is an approach that has grown out of Bandura's social learning theory (1986) and models of social information processing (Crick and Dodge, 1994). Research now offers considerable evidence that thoughts affect people's social interactions. For example, if a girl thinks that her peers dislike children who taunt others, she may hesitate to taunt. But if she thinks that taunting will make her peers see her as superior, she may look for opportunities to taunt others. Researchers have demonstrated that there are many ways in which feelings, thoughts, and behaviors affect each other. At the same time, they have also shown that the relationships between thought and behaviors can be put to practical use. This line of research began with Luria's (1961) demonstration that people can use self-talk to control their behaviors. These lines of research provide the theoretical foundation of the *Second Step* lessons.

Empathy Training, Impulse Control and Problem Solving, and Anger Management

Empathy, impulse control and problem solving, and anger management are critical social-emotional skill areas. Cognitive-behavioral research shows us that these skills are not simple—they are multi-faceted. Each involves feelings and thoughts as well as behaviors. In addition, the skills interact with each other in complex ways (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma, 1995; Lemerise and Arsenio, 2000). The emotional reactions children have in social interactions—and the cognitive and behavioral habits they have developed—all affect children's abilities to empathize, control their impulses, solve interpersonal problems, and manage their anger. Ultimately, these interacting patterns of emotion, thought, and behavior affect the success of children's social and emotional development. Therefore, the *Second Step* lessons address emotional responses, patterns of thought, and behavioral skills, as well as ways in which they affect each other. The *Second Step* lessons have been derived from long-standing traditions in intervention research on empathy (Feshbach and Roe, 1968; Feshbach and Feshbach, 1969; Feshbach, 1975), problem solving (Spivack and Shure, 1974), and anger management (Novaco, 1975).

Empathy

Empathy skills are the focus of the first *Second Step* unit. They provide a foundation on which the problem-solving and anger-management skills are built in the second and third units. Empathy skills are central aspects of emotional intelligence (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) and emotional competence (Saarni, 1997). The *Second Step* unit on empathy is developed from a broad definition of *empathy*. It includes: (a) knowledge of the emotions of self and others; (b) taking into consideration others' perspectives; (c) giving others the benefit of the doubt; (d) responding emotionally to others; and (e) giving positive responses to the distress of others (Miller, Eisenberg, Fabes, and Shell, 1996).

It is important for children to have good empathy skills. Empathy is related to children's social competence and their academic success. There is evidence that empathy contributes to one's ability to learn. In one case, researchers (Izard, Fine, Schultz, Mostow, and Ackerman, 2001) found that, even when they had equal verbal abilities, children who had high levels of emotional understanding at age five were more likely than other children to show academic gains by the time they were nine years

old. In another case, children with behavior problems were studied for two years. Those who showed more concern for others at the outset went on to show greater improvements in their social behaviors over the two-year period of the study (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, and Bridges, 2000).

Empathy is also related to interpersonal skills in other ways. For example, at the time that they are entering grade school, children who are better at labeling and describing emotions (empathy skills) are also better accepted by their peers (Fabes et al., 1994; c.f., Crick and Dodge, 1994). Empathy can also motivate people to respond to the distress of others in a caring way. Children are more likely to offer help and emotional support if they can take another's perspective (Carlo, Knight, Eisenberg, and Rotenberg, 1991; Litvack-Miller, McDougall, and Romney, 1997).

Development. From extensive research on empathy in young children, we have clear information about what children's empathy skills are typically like by the time they enter grade school. Most children are developing their abilities to take the perspectives of other people. Children are already fairly skilled at expressing emotions, and many are getting good at identifying emotions in themselves and others (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma, 1995). Their communication about emotions is beginning to become more sophisticated and less self-focused. For example, instead of simply using emotion words to communicate likes and dislikes, children begin to label a wider variety of emotions, such as cheerfulness and sadness, and to explain the causes of emotions (Fabes, Eisenberg, Hanish, and Spinrad, 2001). They also begin to focus on the emotions of their peers and to reflect on past emotional experiences. As children enter school, they are beginning to develop an understanding of the causes of emotions. For example, most children recognize that current emotions can be caused by memories of past events (Lagattuta and Wellman, 2001).

The focus of most research about empathy has been on preschool children. Therefore, the development of empathy in elementary school children is understood mostly in broad rather than specific terms. Between kindergarten and sixth grade, children develop an increased understanding of the typical causes of emotions and learn rules about how to express emotions appropriately (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma, 1995). They become aware that individuals can experience more than one emotion at a time (Brown and Dunn, 1996), and their ability to understand and communicate about mixed emotions becomes progressively more sophisticated during the elementary school years. By age 10 or 11, most children can generate and describe examples of when they have experienced two contrasting emotions (such as happiness and sadness) at the same time (Brown and Dunn, 1996).

Another feature of empathy that changes with development is the manner in which children show personal concern when responding to a person who is upset or hurt. Surprisingly, most four- to five-year-olds show about the same level of personal concern regardless of whether they have significant behavior problems. By age seven, children with early behavior problems show less personal concern than they did at age five, although other children show more personal concern (Hastings et al., 2000). In other words, it is not true that young children with behavior problems lack personal concern. Most young children with behavior problems do show personal concern for others. They differ from other children in that their expression of personal concern does not develop and increase in ways that are typical for most children.

It may be the case that teachers who nurture early personal concern in their students may be particularly helpful to children who are at risk. Perhaps they can help at-risk children retain and further develop empathy when they otherwise would not, and perhaps they can help at-risk children make up ground that they have begun to lose.

Specific skills. The *Second Step* program focuses on three components of empathy: identifying emotions in self and others, perspective taking, and responding empathically. Research indicates that knowledge of emotion is critical to the healthy development of young children. Therefore, *Second Step* has a strong focus on labeling one's own emotions and accurately identifying the emotions of others. The *Second Step* lessons teach children to identify nonverbal (especially facial expressions), verbal, and situational cues related to six common emotions and their "feelings words": *happy, sad, angry, surprised, afraid,* and *disgusted*. These were chosen because they describe the six emotions that are universally expressed by people from different countries and cultures (Ekman and Friesen, 1975).

Researchers have demonstrated the usefulness of the story format for teaching children about emotions. When Brown and Dunn (1996) told stories about children who felt two emotions at the same time (for example, a child feeling happy and sad on the last day of school), first-graders were able to use the stories to express their knowledge about mixed emotions. In contrast, they were not able to express an understanding of mixed emotions in response to open-ended questions that had no reference to a story as a context for the questions. Each of the *Second Step* lessons is based on a story that demonstrates an important peer-relations skill. This story format makes it easier for children to discuss feelings and gives them concrete ways to understand complex social-skills concepts.

Impulse Control and Problem Solving

Children must make sense of and respond to countless social interactions each day. Each response that a child makes to such interactions has three parts. These parts are emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. The curriculum addresses each of these parts of children's social responses. Emotions are the focus of Unit I. In Unit II, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are addressed. First, children are introduced to emotion-management skills. Second, children learn constructive ways of thinking about social interactions by learning specific problem-solving steps. Third, children practice behavioral responses to situations that commonly cause impulse-control problems. In Unit III, children continue with in-depth practice and special applications of the skills they have learned in the previous units.

In Unit II: Impulse Control and Problem Solving, children are taught that when they are having a problem with peers, it is useful to first calm down, and then apply a set of problem-solving steps. The sequence of problem-solving steps is based on what we know about effective patterns of thinking in social situations. Aggressive children have different patterns of thinking than other children do when they interact with their peers (Crick and Dodge, 1994; Rubin, Bream, and Rose-Krasnor, 1991), and are especially vigilant for threats in the environment. One significant problem is that aggressive children are more apt to interpret others' behaviors toward them as being hostile (Dodge and Frame, 1982). Their negative interpretations are important because when children believe that peers are treating them hostilely, they are more likely to choose aggression in response.

Children's aggressive behaviors are also related to their social goals (Erdley and Asher, 1996). When children respond aggressively in social situations, they tend to have aggression-promoting social goals, such as looking strong. They are especially unlikely to have friendship-promoting social goals, such as getting along. When they generate problem-solving strategies, aggressive children offer fewer positive or prosocial strategies (often only one) and offer more aggressive strategies than other children do (Richard and Dodge, 1982). Compared to other children, when aggressive children evaluate possible solutions to social problems, they are more certain that aggressive strategies will work, they judge aggressive strategies as less likely to cause harm, and they have lower expectations that prosocial strategies will work (Crick and Ladd, 1990). These patterns of thinking may be central contributors to children's aggressive behavior habits.

Development. Most research on social problem solving is focused on describing the differences between aggressive and nonaggressive children. Differences in the thinking of aggressive children are clearly established for children in the upper-elementary grades, and these differences may begin to develop at younger ages (Katsurada and Sugawara, 1998). However, little research has been done that describes how these kinds of problem-solving skills develop over time, and little is known about the nature of these thinking skills in the primary grades. Crick and Dodge (1994) hypothesize that children's social problem-solving skills depend on their cognitive abilities (for example, attention span, accuracy in reading social situations, understanding cause-and-effect relationships, and knowledge of rules for appropriate behavior). It may be, then, that some of children's social problem-solving skills can develop only after certain cognitive abilities develop. Crick and Dodge further suggest that children's problem-solving strategies probably improve progressively in both quantity and quality as they get older. The results of a longitudinal study conducted with young children (Youngstrom et al., 2000) support this position. As children progress between the ages of five and seven, they report using more problem-solving strategies, especially prosocial strategies.

Specific skills. In this unit, children are taught and given the opportunity to practice strategies they can use to calm down when they are feeling strong emotions. After becoming familiar with the calming-down strategies, children learn a set of problem-solving steps. These consist of five steps that children can use to think through problems: (1) identify the problem; (2) brainstorm possible solutions; (3) evaluate each solution; (4) select, plan, and try the solution; and (5) evaluate whether the solution worked and switch to another solution if needed.

These steps lead children through constructive prosocial thought processes that are consistent with the social information-processing model described by Crick and Dodge (1994). First, children must become aware of social cues. This is the focus of the unit on empathy, and the empathy skills continue to be used and strengthened in the second unit. Children are taught that when they have problems with their peers, they should use empathy skills to examine the social cues in the situation. Second, children must "read" the social situation. To help children with this skill, the *Second Step* lessons direct children to ask "What is the problem?" in order to encourage them to think through the situation thoroughly. They are taught to withhold judgment until they are certain that they have enough information about a situation. The lessons also emphasize neutral, nonblaming explanations for how social situations occur. Third, children are encouraged to select prosocial goals for social interactions. This perspective is taught indirectly in the *Second Step* lessons during children's

evaluations of possible solutions. By teaching children to evaluate possible solutions against four specific standards ("Is it safe?"; "Is it fair?"; "How might people feel about it?"; and "Will it work?"), children are taught to use these prosocial standards as goals in their interactions. The problem-solving steps themselves explicitly direct children through the remaining thought process skills from Crick and Dodge's model—generating possible responses to the situation, selecting a response that meets prosocial goals, and evaluating the outcomes of the solutions after trying them.

Children are given repeated practice in carrying out these steps so that they begin to make this problem-solving sequence into a strong and consistent habit. In this unit, several social situations are presented to children to give them practice in using emotion-management skills and problem-solving steps. The situations used are circumstances that require impulse control and that are commonly problematic for children. These differ by grade level and may include interrupting politely, making conversation, apologizing, keeping a promise, and dealing with peer pressure. Children use these situations to practice applying the problem-solving steps, generate their own solutions, and practice the behaviors that they generate. This also gives children the opportunity to learn useful ways to respond to situations that are otherwise problematic. Overall, the Impulse Control and Problem Solving unit addresses the emotions, thoughts, and behavioral skills that contribute to prosocial behavior.

Anger Management

A child who is good at emotion management is one who can deal with strong emotions and express them in socially acceptable ways (Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad, 1998). Emotion-management skills are used for both positive emotions (for example, inhibiting the impulse to run gleefully around the room during rest time) and negative or distressing emotions (for example, inhibiting the impulse to hit another child who takes a toy away). Effective emotion management is related to both decreased levels of aggression (Underwood, Coie, and Herbsman, 1992) and increased levels of social-emotional competence (Eisenberg, Fabes, and Losoya, 1997). Much of the research on emotion management has focused specifically on anger, and Unit III of the *Second Step* curriculum also focuses specifically on managing anger. It is especially important for children to learn how to deal with anger. Some types of angry responses can increase the likelihood of a child being victimized by peers, and children's angry reactions can decrease the degree to which other children accept them. These in turn have broad implications for children's overall social-emotional development. In addition, when a person is very angry, general cognitive functioning is impaired, which interferes with reasoning and memory for what occurs during the anger episode.

Development. There are a variety of strategies that children can use to manage their anger and other strong emotions. One of these is *behavioral distraction*. This is when children distract themselves from a frustrating situation by switching to a new activity, as in the case of the child who decides to color a picture instead of arguing over which television program to watch. In their summary, Brenner and Salovey (1997) note that children use some emotion-management strategies at about the same rate throughout childhood. In contrast, their use of other strategies increases as they get older. Both younger and older children use behavioral distraction with about equal frequency. On the other hand, *cognitive distraction* (for example, thinking about something pleasant) is used by older children more frequently than by younger children in response to distressing emotions. Older children also distract themselves from the distress, but they do it by deliberately thinking about something pleasant or nondistressing.

Another emotion-management strategy that children use is to change the situation that prompts the distressing emotion. For example, a child who is worried about an upcoming spelling test studies more to reduce the worry. There are no established age differences in which children use this strategy. As children get older, however, they shift in the manner in which they apply this strategy. That is, they more frequently try to change their feelings rather than try to change the situation itself. For example, to change their feelings, children may use relaxation strategies (such as taking deep breaths to calm down) or reframe their thinking about the situation (for example, instead of thinking about not knowing anyone on the first day of school, they think of it as an opportunity to meet new friends). In both of these developmental shifts, children increase their use of strategies that involve controlling their thoughts as they get older.

Specific skills. Research suggests that children can be taught to manage feelings such as anger effectively (Nelson and Finch, 2000). This is done by teaching children to use strategies such as thinking calming thoughts, breathing deeply, doing a calming activity, and reframing stressful situations to focus on positives. It is important to intervene early in children's conflicts so that the children can use these strategies to calm down before they are overwhelmed by emotion. Once the anger becomes overwhelming, strong physiological reactions keep children from being able to reason well, and they have trouble using anger-management strategies (Metcalfe and Mischel, 1999). It then takes several minutes for physiology to return to normal. Therefore, once a child is upset, he or she may require several minutes of time before being able to calm down.

The *Second Step* program teaches students to identify and distinguish among their own emotions, both positive (for example, happy) and distressing (for example, angry), by using internal physical cues (for example, feeling hot and tense when angry). Children are taught to notice the signs that they are becoming angry, and they are taught to use those signs as cues that it is time to use the anger-management strategies that they have learned. They are taught several specific strategies to use for calming down, such as taking deep breaths and thinking calming thoughts, to manage the emotion. After they have calmed down, they can think clearly enough to use the problem-solving steps that they learn in *Second Step* lessons.

Teaching Behavioral Skills

Empathy and knowledge of emotion-management and problem-solving strategies help children decide *what* to do. To be socially and emotionally competent, children must know *how* to carry out the strategies. The combination of modeling (teacher, puppet, and peer), practice, coaching, and positive reinforcement is an established best practice to teach socially competent behaviors to children (Elliot and Gresham, 1993; Ladd and Mize, 1983). In the *Second Step* Preschool/Kindergarten curriulum, for example, these strategies are used in the Pretend and Practice activities. The teacher models the skill, students practice the skill, and teachers offer specific positive reinforcement: "You shared the clay with Adam, and now you are having lots of fun playing together." Teachers also coach students through difficult situations: "You're holding out that truck to Shawndra as if you want to trade. Shawndra, would you like to trade?"

Transfer of Learning

Lessons in a student curriculum provide only part of the social-emotional learning equation in any classroom. Lessons must be used in combination with effective classroom-management practices (see the Classroom Climate section of the Teacher's Guide). Further, newly acquired student skills can be maintained and further strengthened throughout the day when teachers (a) model social-emotional skills; (b) provide students with opportunities to practice skills in new, appropriate situations; (c) positively reinforce students' skill use; and (d) use incidental teaching or "teachable moments" as opportunities to provide coaching, constructive feedback, and positive reinforcement to students to support skills used during real-life situations (Consortium on School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Elliot and Gresham, 1993; Ladd and Mize, 1983). Other sections of the Teacher's Guide and each *Second Step* lesson contain suggestions and strategies that teachers can use to promote transfer of learning.

Social-emotional learning opportunities present themselves countless times each day. It is important to use these teachable moments so that children can experience *Second Step* skills working in their daily lives. In addition, as children and their social worlds grow and change, they need to increase the range and sophistication of their skills. For this reason, social-emotional programs that are taught for multiple years are typically more successful than short-term efforts (Weissberg and Bell, 1997).

Program Evaluation

Pilot studies of the *Second Step* program (Preschool/Kindergarten, 1–3, 4–5, and Middle School) showed that students who received *Second Step* lessons achieved greater gains in knowledge of social-emotional skills than students in comparison groups did (Moore and Beland, 1992; Beland, 1988; Beland, 1989; Beland, 1990).

More recent studies demonstrate changes in children's behavior and attitudes as well as their knowledge. Preschool and kindergarten children from low-income urban families showed decreased levels of observed aggression and disruptiveness following program completion, and increased knowledge of social skills (McMahon, Washburn, Felix, Yakin, and Childrey, 2000). Third- through fifth-grade children in a rural community who received the *Second Step* program were rated by teachers as more socially competent and less antisocial relative to those children who did not receive the program, and they were observed to follow adult directions more frequently (Taub, 2002). Urban African-American students in fifth through eighth grade showed increased empathy and knowledge of social skills, with the change in empathy corresponding to lower levels of self-reported aggression (McMahon and Washburn, 2003). These findings are in line with others showing that middle school students who received the *Second Step* curriculum increased their knowledge of violence and violence prevention skills (Orpinas, Parcel, McAlister, and Frankowski, 1995) and were less likely to endorse antisocial and aggressive behaviors than those who did not (Van Schoiack-Edstrom, Frey, and Beland, 2002).

Larger, more rigorous experimental evaluations of the elementary *Second Step* program also showed effects on student behavior and attitudes. Grossman et al. (1997) found that observed physical aggression decreased from autumn to spring among second- and third-grade students who received the program. In contrast, students who did not receive the program became increasingly aggressive. Six months later, students who received the program continued to show lower levels of aggression. Frey et al. (2005) showed that students who received the program for two years required less adult intervention in minor conflicts, were rated more socially competent, and were more likely to choose positive social goals than students who did not receive the program. Finally, an experimental evaluation examining the impact of *Faustlos,* a German translation of the *Second Step* program, showed that students who received lessons over three years experienced less anxiety, depression, and withdrawn behavior, as reported by parents, than students who did not receive the program (Schick and Cierpka, 2005).

In sum, these evaluations of the *Second Step* program show sustained improvements in students' actual behaviors as well as in their knowledge, attitudes, and motivation.

Summary

Researchers have studied extensively the ways that socially skilled children think and respond in their social interactions. The *Second Step* program is designed to help children learn to use those ways of thinking and responding in their everyday interactions with peers. The *Second Step* program focuses on social skills that research suggests may be pivotal in helping children succeed socially and avoid aggression toward their peers. The program is presented in three units, each of which builds on the next. It is designed to address each of the three parts of children's social responses: emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. This begins in Unit I with building a foundation of empathy skills—a focus on emotions. In Unit II, emotion management is introduced in the calming-down strategies. Unit II continues with a strong focus on teaching children constructive patterns of thought through the use of the problem-solving steps. Children then practice behavioral skills to use in difficult social situations. Unit III promotes children's mastery of the calming-down strategies and problem-solving steps, and gives children practice at effective behaviors to use in several additional challenging social situations.

Note that the thinking skills taught in Units II and III draw heavily on the empathy skills that children develop during Unit I study. In these later units, for example, children are taught to use empathy skills to attend to important cues in social situations and to predict the social outcomes of their behavioral choices. The Impulse Control and Problem Solving unit also prepares children for the unit on Anger Management. Most children must first learn the emotion-management strategies and problem-solving steps, and then practice them repeatedly before they will begin to be skilled at using them. It is only after repeated practice that children are able to succeed in applying emotion-management and problem-solving skills to situations that are especially challenging, such as those in the Anger Management unit.

Several levels of learning are required for children to master social skills. Children must first learn to understand the concepts. Then they must learn to apply the concepts and generalize them to new situations. Then they must practice them enough that the behavior and skills become habitual and, eventually, automatic. It is only when the behaviors and strategies are well established and familiar that children are likely to use them well when they are angry or otherwise under stress. For these reasons, it is important that children get as much physical and active practice using these skills as possible, repeatedly acting out the skills until they transfer to real life.

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Review of Research

The Importance of Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

Social-emotional skills are important to healthy child development. Children with weak social-emotional skills are at risk for developing problems in school (Wentzel and Wigfield, 1998) and later in the workplace (Spencer and Spencer, 1993). In particular, aggressive children are especially at risk for developing more serious problems throughout childhood and adolescence (Campbell, 1995; Parker and Asher, 1987). Even for children who do not display behavior problems, a lack of social-emotional skills interferes with social-emotional development (Weissberg and Bell, 1997).

Research confirms that school and the family are the two most important social-emotional learning environments for children (Weissberg, Caplan, and Harwood, 1991). The skills that result from this learning can promote healthy or unhealthy development. Thus, it is critical that educators take advantage of the rich opportunities inherent in school settings to teach positive social-emotional skills.

Program Overview

The third edition of *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum* (Committee for Children, 2002) is designed to promote social competence and reduce children's social-emotional problems. The curriculum teaches students several skills central to healthy social-emotional development: (a) empathy (Halberstadt, Denham, and Dunsmore, 2001); (b) impulse control and problem solving (Crick and Dodge, 1994); and (c) anger management (Eisenberg, Fabes, and Losoya, 1997). *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum* is a universal prevention program. That is, it is taught to every student in the classroom rather than to selected children. It has four levels: Preschool/Kindergarten, Grades 1–3, Grades 4–5, and Middle School.

Guiding Theory

The *Second Step* program is designed to improve children's skills in three general areas. Each unit covers one of these areas. In the Empathy Training unit, children are taught the empathy skills needed to identify emotions and to recognize possible causes of the emotions that occur in their interactions with others. Then, in the Impulse Control and Problem-Solving unit, children are taught to respond to social interactions thoughtfully rather than impulsively. To do this, they learn problem-solving steps that promote a neutral rather than hostile orientation toward peers. Finally, in the Anger Management unit, they are taught how to manage their own anger constructively.

These *Second Step* units are based on cognitive-behavioral methods (Kendall, 1993; Kendall, 2000). This is an approach that has grown out of Bandura's social learning theory (1986) and models of social information processing (Crick and Dodge, 1994). Research now offers considerable evidence that thoughts affect people's social interactions. For example, if a girl thinks that her peers dislike children who taunt others, she may hesitate to taunt. But if she thinks that taunting will make her peers see her as superior, she may look for opportunities to taunt others. Researchers have demonstrated that there are many ways in which feelings, thoughts, and behaviors affect each other. At the same time, they have also shown that the relationships between thought and behaviors can be put to practical use. This line of research began with Luria's (1961) demonstration that people can use self-talk to control their behaviors. These lines of research provide the theoretical foundation of the *Second Step* lessons.

Empathy Training, Impulse Control and Problem Solving, and Anger Management

Empathy, impulse control and problem solving, and anger management are critical social-emotional skill areas. Cognitive-behavioral research shows us that these skills are not simple—they are multi-faceted. Each involves feelings and thoughts as well as behaviors. In addition, the skills interact with each other in complex ways (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma, 1995; Lemerise and Arsenio, 2000). The emotional reactions children have in social interactions—and the cognitive and behavioral habits they have developed—all affect children's abilities to empathize, control their impulses, solve interpersonal problems, and manage their anger. Ultimately, these interacting patterns of emotion, thought, and behavior affect the success of children's social and emotional development. Therefore, the *Second Step* lessons address emotional responses, patterns of thought, and behavioral skills, as well as ways in which they affect each other. The *Second Step* lessons have been derived from long-standing traditions in intervention research on empathy (Feshbach and Roe, 1968; Feshbach and Feshbach, 1969; Feshbach, 1975), problem solving (Spivack and Shure, 1974), and anger management (Novaco, 1975).

Empathy

Empathy skills are the focus of the first *Second Step* unit. They provide a foundation on which the problem-solving and anger-management skills are built in the second and third units. Empathy skills are central aspects of emotional intelligence (Mayer and Salovey, 1997) and emotional competence (Saarni, 1997). The *Second Step* unit on empathy is developed from a broad definition of *empathy*. It includes: (a) knowledge of the emotions of self and others; (b) taking into consideration others' perspectives; (c) giving others the benefit of the doubt; (d) responding emotionally to others; and (e) giving positive responses to the distress of others (Miller, Eisenberg, Fabes, and Shell, 1996).

It is important for children to have good empathy skills. Empathy is related to children's social competence and their academic success. There is evidence that empathy contributes to one's ability to learn. In one case, researchers (Izard, Fine, Schultz, Mostow, and Ackerman, 2001) found that, even when they had equal verbal abilities, children who had high levels of emotional understanding at age five were more likely than other children to show academic gains by the time they were nine years

old. In another case, children with behavior problems were studied for two years. Those who showed more concern for others at the outset went on to show greater improvements in their social behaviors over the two-year period of the study (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, and Bridges, 2000).

Empathy is also related to interpersonal skills in other ways. For example, at the time that they are entering grade school, children who are better at labeling and describing emotions (empathy skills) are also better accepted by their peers (Fabes et al., 1994; c.f., Crick and Dodge, 1994). Empathy can also motivate people to respond to the distress of others in a caring way. Children are more likely to offer help and emotional support if they can take another's perspective (Carlo, Knight, Eisenberg, and Rotenberg, 1991; Litvack-Miller, McDougall, and Romney, 1997).

Development. From extensive research on empathy in young children, we have clear information about what children's empathy skills are typically like by the time they enter grade school. Most children are developing their abilities to take the perspectives of other people. Children are already fairly skilled at expressing emotions, and many are getting good at identifying emotions in themselves and others (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma, 1995). Their communication about emotions is beginning to become more sophisticated and less self-focused. For example, instead of simply using emotion words to communicate likes and dislikes, children begin to label a wider variety of emotions, such as cheerfulness and sadness, and to explain the causes of emotions (Fabes, Eisenberg, Hanish, and Spinrad, 2001). They also begin to focus on the emotions of their peers and to reflect on past emotional experiences. As children enter school, they are beginning to develop an understanding of the causes of emotions. For example, most children recognize that current emotions can be caused by memories of past events (Lagattuta and Wellman, 2001).

The focus of most research about empathy has been on preschool children. Therefore, the development of empathy in elementary school children is understood mostly in broad rather than specific terms. Between kindergarten and sixth grade, children develop an increased understanding of the typical causes of emotions and learn rules about how to express emotions appropriately (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, and Quamma, 1995). They become aware that individuals can experience more than one emotion at a time (Brown and Dunn, 1996), and their ability to understand and communicate about mixed emotions becomes progressively more sophisticated during the elementary school years. By age 10 or 11, most children can generate and describe examples of when they have experienced two contrasting emotions (such as happiness and sadness) at the same time (Brown and Dunn, 1996).

Another feature of empathy that changes with development is the manner in which children show personal concern when responding to a person who is upset or hurt. Surprisingly, most four- to five-year-olds show about the same level of personal concern regardless of whether they have significant behavior problems. By age seven, children with early behavior problems show less personal concern than they did at age five, although other children show more personal concern (Hastings et al., 2000). In other words, it is not true that young children with behavior problems lack personal concern. Most young children with behavior problems do show personal concern for others. They differ from other children in that their expression of personal concern does not develop and increase in ways that are typical for most children.

It may be the case that teachers who nurture early personal concern in their students may be particularly helpful to children who are at risk. Perhaps they can help at-risk children retain and further develop empathy when they otherwise would not, and perhaps they can help at-risk children make up ground that they have begun to lose.

Specific skills. The *Second Step* program focuses on three components of empathy: identifying emotions in self and others, perspective taking, and responding empathically. Research indicates that knowledge of emotion is critical to the healthy development of young children. Therefore, *Second Step* has a strong focus on labeling one's own emotions and accurately identifying the emotions of others. The *Second Step* lessons teach children to identify nonverbal (especially facial expressions), verbal, and situational cues related to six common emotions and their "feelings words": *happy, sad, angry, surprised, afraid,* and *disgusted.* These were chosen because they describe the six emotions that are universally expressed by people from different countries and cultures (Ekman and Friesen, 1975).

Researchers have demonstrated the usefulness of the story format for teaching children about emotions. When Brown and Dunn (1996) told stories about children who felt two emotions at the same time (for example, a child feeling happy and sad on the last day of school), first-graders were able to use the stories to express their knowledge about mixed emotions. In contrast, they were not able to express an understanding of mixed emotions in response to open-ended questions that had no reference to a story as a context for the questions. Each of the *Second Step* lessons is based on a story that demonstrates an important peer-relations skill. This story format makes it easier for children to discuss feelings and gives them concrete ways to understand complex social-skills concepts.

Impulse Control and Problem Solving

Children must make sense of and respond to countless social interactions each day. Each response that a child makes to such interactions has three parts. These parts are emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. The curriculum addresses each of these parts of children's social responses. Emotions are the focus of Unit I. In Unit II, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are addressed. First, children are introduced to emotion-management skills. Second, children learn constructive ways of thinking about social interactions by learning specific problem-solving steps. Third, children practice behavioral responses to situations that commonly cause impulse-control problems. In Unit III, children continue with in-depth practice and special applications of the skills they have learned in the previous units.

In Unit II: Impulse Control and Problem Solving, children are taught that when they are having a problem with peers, it is useful to first calm down, and then apply a set of problem-solving steps. The sequence of problem-solving steps is based on what we know about effective patterns of thinking in social situations. Aggressive children have different patterns of thinking than other children do when they interact with their peers (Crick and Dodge, 1994; Rubin, Bream, and Rose-Krasnor, 1991), and are especially vigilant for threats in the environment. One significant problem is that aggressive children are more apt to interpret others' behaviors toward them as being hostile (Dodge and Frame, 1982). Their negative interpretations are important because when children believe that peers are treating them hostilely, they are more likely to choose aggression in response.

Children's aggressive behaviors are also related to their social goals (Erdley and Asher, 1996). When children respond aggressively in social situations, they tend to have aggression-promoting social goals, such as looking strong. They are especially unlikely to have friendship-promoting social goals, such as getting along. When they generate problem-solving strategies, aggressive children offer fewer positive or prosocial strategies (often only one) and offer more aggressive strategies than other children do (Richard and Dodge, 1982). Compared to other children, when aggressive children evaluate possible solutions to social problems, they are more certain that aggressive strategies will work, they judge aggressive strategies as less likely to cause harm, and they have lower expectations that prosocial strategies will work (Crick and Ladd, 1990). These patterns of thinking may be central contributors to children's aggressive behavior habits.

Development. Most research on social problem solving is focused on describing the differences between aggressive and nonaggressive children. Differences in the thinking of aggressive children are clearly established for children in the upper-elementary grades, and these differences may begin to develop at younger ages (Katsurada and Sugawara, 1998). However, little research has been done that describes how these kinds of problem-solving skills develop over time, and little is known about the nature of these thinking skills in the primary grades. Crick and Dodge (1994) hypothesize that children's social problem-solving skills depend on their cognitive abilities (for example, attention span, accuracy in reading social situations, understanding cause-and-effect relationships, and knowledge of rules for appropriate behavior). It may be, then, that some of children's social problem-solving skills can develop only after certain cognitive abilities develop. Crick and Dodge further suggest that children's problem-solving strategies probably improve progressively in both quantity and quality as they get older. The results of a longitudinal study conducted with young children (Youngstrom et al., 2000) support this position. As children progress between the ages of five and seven, they report using more problem-solving strategies, especially prosocial strategies.

Specific skills. In this unit, children are taught and given the opportunity to practice strategies they can use to calm down when they are feeling strong emotions. After becoming familiar with the calming-down strategies, children learn a set of problem-solving steps. These consist of five steps that children can use to think through problems: (1) identify the problem; (2) brainstorm possible solutions; (3) evaluate each solution; (4) select, plan, and try the solution; and (5) evaluate whether the solution worked and switch to another solution if needed.

These steps lead children through constructive prosocial thought processes that are consistent with the social information-processing model described by Crick and Dodge (1994). First, children must become aware of social cues. This is the focus of the unit on empathy, and the empathy skills continue to be used and strengthened in the second unit. Children are taught that when they have problems with their peers, they should use empathy skills to examine the social cues in the situation. Second, children must "read" the social situation. To help children with this skill, the *Second Step* lessons direct children to ask "What is the problem?" in order to encourage them to think through the situation thoroughly. They are taught to withhold judgment until they are certain that they have enough information about a situation. The lessons also emphasize neutral, nonblaming explanations for how social situations occur. Third, children are encouraged to select prosocial goals for social interactions. This perspective is taught indirectly in the *Second Step* lessons during children's

evaluations of possible solutions. By teaching children to evaluate possible solutions against four specific standards ("Is it safe?"; "Is it fair?"; "How might people feel about it?"; and "Will it work?"), children are taught to use these prosocial standards as goals in their interactions. The problem-solving steps themselves explicitly direct children through the remaining thought process skills from Crick and Dodge's model—generating possible responses to the situation, selecting a response that meets prosocial goals, and evaluating the outcomes of the solutions after trying them.

Children are given repeated practice in carrying out these steps so that they begin to make this problem-solving sequence into a strong and consistent habit. In this unit, several social situations are presented to children to give them practice in using emotion-management skills and problem-solving steps. The situations used are circumstances that require impulse control and that are commonly problematic for children. These differ by grade level and may include interrupting politely, making conversation, apologizing, keeping a promise, and dealing with peer pressure. Children use these situations to practice applying the problem-solving steps, generate their own solutions, and practice the behaviors that they generate. This also gives children the opportunity to learn useful ways to respond to situations that are otherwise problematic. Overall, the Impulse Control and Problem Solving unit addresses the emotions, thoughts, and behavioral skills that contribute to prosocial behavior.

Anger Management

A child who is good at emotion management is one who can deal with strong emotions and express them in socially acceptable ways (Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad, 1998). Emotion-management skills are used for both positive emotions (for example, inhibiting the impulse to run gleefully around the room during rest time) and negative or distressing emotions (for example, inhibiting the impulse to hit another child who takes a toy away). Effective emotion management is related to both decreased levels of aggression (Underwood, Coie, and Herbsman, 1992) and increased levels of social-emotional competence (Eisenberg, Fabes, and Losoya, 1997). Much of the research on emotion management has focused specifically on anger, and Unit III of the *Second Step* curriculum also focuses specifically on managing anger. It is especially important for children to learn how to deal with anger. Some types of angry responses can increase the likelihood of a child being victimized by peers, and children's angry reactions can decrease the degree to which other children accept them. These in turn have broad implications for children's overall social-emotional development. In addition, when a person is very angry, general cognitive functioning is impaired, which interferes with reasoning and memory for what occurs during the anger episode.

Development. There are a variety of strategies that children can use to manage their anger and other strong emotions. One of these is *behavioral distraction*. This is when children distract themselves from a frustrating situation by switching to a new activity, as in the case of the child who decides to color a picture instead of arguing over which television program to watch. In their summary, Brenner and Salovey (1997) note that children use some emotion-management strategies at about the same rate throughout childhood. In contrast, their use of other strategies increases as they get older. Both younger and older children use behavioral distraction with about equal frequency. On the other hand, *cognitive distraction* (for example, thinking about something pleasant) is used by older children more frequently than by younger children in response to distressing emotions. Older children also distract themselves from the distress, but they do it by deliberately thinking about something pleasant or nondistressing.

Another emotion-management strategy that children use is to change the situation that prompts the distressing emotion. For example, a child who is worried about an upcoming spelling test studies more to reduce the worry. There are no established age differences in which children use this strategy. As children get older, however, they shift in the manner in which they apply this strategy. That is, they more frequently try to change their feelings rather than try to change the situation itself. For example, to change their feelings, children may use relaxation strategies (such as taking deep breaths to calm down) or reframe their thinking about the situation (for example, instead of thinking about not knowing anyone on the first day of school, they think of it as an opportunity to meet new friends). In both of these developmental shifts, children increase their use of strategies that involve controlling their thoughts as they get older.

Specific skills. Research suggests that children can be taught to manage feelings such as anger effectively (Nelson and Finch, 2000). This is done by teaching children to use strategies such as thinking calming thoughts, breathing deeply, doing a calming activity, and reframing stressful situations to focus on positives. It is important to intervene early in children's conflicts so that the children can use these strategies to calm down before they are overwhelmed by emotion. Once the anger becomes overwhelming, strong physiological reactions keep children from being able to reason well, and they have trouble using anger-management strategies (Metcalfe and Mischel, 1999). It then takes several minutes for physiology to return to normal. Therefore, once a child is upset, he or she may require several minutes of time before being able to calm down.

The *Second Step* program teaches students to identify and distinguish among their own emotions, both positive (for example, happy) and distressing (for example, angry), by using internal physical cues (for example, feeling hot and tense when angry). Children are taught to notice the signs that they are becoming angry, and they are taught to use those signs as cues that it is time to use the anger-management strategies that they have learned. They are taught several specific strategies to use for calming down, such as taking deep breaths and thinking calming thoughts, to manage the emotion. After they have calmed down, they can think clearly enough to use the problem-solving steps that they learn in *Second Step* lessons.

Teaching Behavioral Skills

Empathy and knowledge of emotion-management and problem-solving strategies help children decide *what* to do. To be socially and emotionally competent, children must know *how* to carry out the strategies. The combination of modeling (teacher, puppet, and peer), practice, coaching, and positive reinforcement is an established best practice to teach socially competent behaviors to children (Elliot and Gresham, 1993; Ladd and Mize, 1983). In the *Second Step* Preschool/Kindergarten curriulum, for example, these strategies are used in the Pretend and Practice activities. The teacher models the skill, students practice the skill, and teachers offer specific positive reinforcement: "You shared the clay with Adam, and now you are having lots of fun playing together." Teachers also coach students through difficult situations: "You're holding out that truck to Shawndra as if you want to trade. Shawndra, would you like to trade?"

Transfer of Learning

Lessons in a student curriculum provide only part of the social-emotional learning equation in any classroom. Lessons must be used in combination with effective classroom-management practices (see the Classroom Climate section of the Teacher's Guide). Further, newly acquired student skills can be maintained and further strengthened throughout the day when teachers (a) model social-emotional skills; (b) provide students with opportunities to practice skills in new, appropriate situations; (c) positively reinforce students' skill use; and (d) use incidental teaching or "teachable moments" as opportunities to provide coaching, constructive feedback, and positive reinforcement to students to support skills used during real-life situations (Consortium on School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Elliot and Gresham, 1993; Ladd and Mize, 1983). Other sections of the Teacher's Guide and each *Second Step* lesson contain suggestions and strategies that teachers can use to promote transfer of learning.

Social-emotional learning opportunities present themselves countless times each day. It is important to use these teachable moments so that children can experience *Second Step* skills working in their daily lives. In addition, as children and their social worlds grow and change, they need to increase the range and sophistication of their skills. For this reason, social-emotional programs that are taught for multiple years are typically more successful than short-term efforts (Weissberg and Bell, 1997).

Program Evaluation

Pilot studies of the *Second Step* program (Preschool/Kindergarten, 1–3, 4–5, and Middle School) showed that students who received *Second Step* lessons achieved greater gains in knowledge of social-emotional skills than students in comparison groups did (Moore and Beland, 1992; Beland, 1988; Beland, 1989; Beland, 1990).

More recent studies demonstrate changes in children's behavior and attitudes as well as their knowledge. Preschool and kindergarten children from low-income urban families showed decreased levels of observed aggression and disruptiveness following program completion, and increased knowledge of social skills (McMahon, Washburn, Felix, Yakin, and Childrey, 2000). Third- through fifth-grade children in a rural community who received the *Second Step* program were rated by teachers as more socially competent and less antisocial relative to those children who did not receive the program, and they were observed to follow adult directions more frequently (Taub, 2002). Urban African-American students in fifth through eighth grade showed increased empathy and knowledge of social skills, with the change in empathy corresponding to lower levels of self-reported aggression (McMahon and Washburn, 2003). These findings are in line with others showing that middle school students who received the *Second Step* curriculum increased their knowledge of violence and violence prevention skills (Orpinas, Parcel, McAlister, and Frankowski, 1995) and were less likely to endorse antisocial and aggressive behaviors than those who did not (Van Schoiack-Edstrom, Frey, and Beland, 2002).

Larger, more rigorous experimental evaluations of the elementary *Second Step* program also showed effects on student behavior and attitudes. Grossman et al. (1997) found that observed physical aggression decreased from autumn to spring among second- and third-grade students who received the program. In contrast, students who did not receive the program became increasingly aggressive. Six months later, students who received the program continued to show lower levels of aggression. Frey et al. (2005) showed that students who received the program for two years required less adult intervention in minor conflicts, were rated more socially competent, and were more likely to choose positive social goals than students who did not receive the program. Finally, an experimental evaluation examining the impact of *Faustlos,* a German translation of the *Second Step* program, showed that students who received lessons over three years experienced less anxiety, depression, and withdrawn behavior, as reported by parents, than students who did not receive the program (Schick and Cierpka, 2005).

In sum, these evaluations of the *Second Step* program show sustained improvements in students' actual behaviors as well as in their knowledge, attitudes, and motivation.

Summary

Researchers have studied extensively the ways that socially skilled children think and respond in their social interactions. The *Second Step* program is designed to help children learn to use those ways of thinking and responding in their everyday interactions with peers. The *Second Step* program focuses on social skills that research suggests may be pivotal in helping children succeed socially and avoid aggression toward their peers. The program is presented in three units, each of which builds on the next. It is designed to address each of the three parts of children's social responses: emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. This begins in Unit I with building a foundation of empathy skills—a focus on emotions. In Unit II, emotion management is introduced in the calming-down strategies. Unit II continues with a strong focus on teaching children constructive patterns of thought through the use of the problem-solving steps. Children then practice behavioral skills to use in difficult social situations. Unit III promotes children's mastery of the calming-down strategies and problem-solving steps, and gives children practice at effective behaviors to use in several additional challenging social situations.

Note that the thinking skills taught in Units II and III draw heavily on the empathy skills that children develop during Unit I study. In these later units, for example, children are taught to use empathy skills to attend to important cues in social situations and to predict the social outcomes of their behavioral choices. The Impulse Control and Problem Solving unit also prepares children for the unit on Anger Management. Most children must first learn the emotion-management strategies and problem-solving steps, and then practice them repeatedly before they will begin to be skilled at using them. It is only after repeated practice that children are able to succeed in applying emotion-management and problem-solving skills to situations that are especially challenging, such as those in the Anger Management unit.

Several levels of learning are required for children to master social skills. Children must first learn to understand the concepts. Then they must learn to apply the concepts and generalize them to new situations. Then they must practice them enough that the behavior and skills become habitual and, eventually, automatic. It is only when the behaviors and strategies are well established and familiar that children are likely to use them well when they are angry or otherwise under stress. For these reasons, it is important that children get as much physical and active practice using these skills as possible, repeatedly acting out the skills until they transfer to real life.

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