

Insights is published by ESS as a service for educational professionals. Each issue highlights an important research article and provides practical applications of the findings for the classroom and the school environment.

Choose Love

With the approach of Valentine's Day, as students plan to exchange heart-shaped cards and candies with friends and family, teachers can seize the opportunity to convey a much greater lesson about love. School personnel can help students to learn about, and live by, the "Choose Love Formula".

The Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement™ was founded by Scarlett Lewis, an educator and the mother of 6-year-old Jesse, one of 20 students who were lost in the Sandy Hook school shooting. As a way to cope with unspeakable violence and loss, Ms. Lewis set the goal of ensuring that all students have access to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programming in their schools. With a team of educators and mental health professionals, Ms. Lewis conceived and developed a pre-K through 12th grade SEL curriculum that educators can download for free and implement in their school districts. SEL instruction teaches students to understand and manage emotions, to set and achieve positive goals, to feel and demonstrate empathy for others, to develop positive relationship skills, and to make responsible decisions.

The Choose Love Movement incorporates evidence-based strategies derived from research on SEL, neuroscience, positive psychology, mindfulness, character education, and emotional intelligence. It is a proactive and preventative approach that focuses on building a positive school climate, rather than focusing on negative issues and events. One major message of the program is a classic concept derived from cognitive-behavioral psychology: while "we can't always choose what happens to us, we can always choose how we respond". The program uses easily understood images and acronyms to teach the findings of neuroscience, for example how "Lizard Brain" triggers emotional, fight or flight responses, but how other parts of the brain can be activated to regulate emotion and to choose loving, pro-social behaviors.

The curriculum is designed to teach students that Courage + Gratitude + Forgiveness + Compassion in Action = the Choose Love Formula, and that in any circumstance they have the choice to respond with love rather than with anger or aggression.

The cultivation of these character values can foster optimism, resilience, and personal responsibility, and SEL studies have shown that students exposed to this instruction have better academic performance, improved attitudes and social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, and less emotional distress.

ESS has incorporated many aspects of The Choose Love Movement into the daily psychoeducational groups that are offered to ESS students. The Choose Love website emphasizes, however, that the program can be used effectively by individual teachers with little preparation or extra materials, as well as on a school-wide basis. Teachers can:

- Download and review the Choose Love materials (see website below).
- Display the Formula, the traits, the brain model on classroom bulletin boards.
- Read and discuss a quote each day that focuses on one of the four traits (Educator Guide on website includes Quote Lists).
- Use the 4 calendars (link below) to identify behaviors that can be practiced to foster the development of each character trait.
- Incorporate Choose Love messaging into academic lessons: Reading and English teachers can ask students to observe the 4 traits in story characters; art teachers can ask students to draw what Courage looks like; music teachers can ask students to identify songs that exemplify each trait; history teachers can ask students to notice and identify these traits in historical figures, etc.

RESOURCES:

<https://www.jesselewischooselove.org> (entire curriculum is free and can be accessed at this site)

<https://www.jesselewischooselove.org/choose-love-calendar/>

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