

EQ @ Home or School—for Families

Dear Parent(s),

Welcome to EQ @ Home or School, an online or in-class series to help build meaningful relationships among students, teachers, and families, and to equip students with the social-emotional and academic skills they will need for school and life. This series is especially designed to support the additional stressors associated with COVID-19 times. For families trying to balance it all amidst the unpredictability of COVID conditions, we hope these lessons bring you and your child(ren) new insights, meaningful conversations, and some good times together.

What is “family”? And who are “parents”?

Families and parents come in all shapes and forms. For some, families have two parents and lots of kids. For others, it is a single parent or a grandparent or a guardian or another caring adult. We welcome all! However you and your child define “parent” and “family,” these lessons are for you.



What qualifications/experience do you need to use these lessons?

If you are reading this intro letter... you are a good candidate for using these lessons with your family members. Anyone who demonstrates curiosity, care, and good listening skills can learn to facilitate these lessons successfully. Everything you need for rich, interesting conversations is included in the “Parent Discussion Questions & Activities” handouts that come with each lesson. You are also welcome to watch the “EQ @ Home or School” videos and/or read the student handouts. Every student participating in EQ @ Home or School lessons has a “student access code” that lets them log in to all the student and parent support materials.

“There is no way to be a perfect mother [parent] and a million ways to be a good one.”

—Jill Churchill
Author

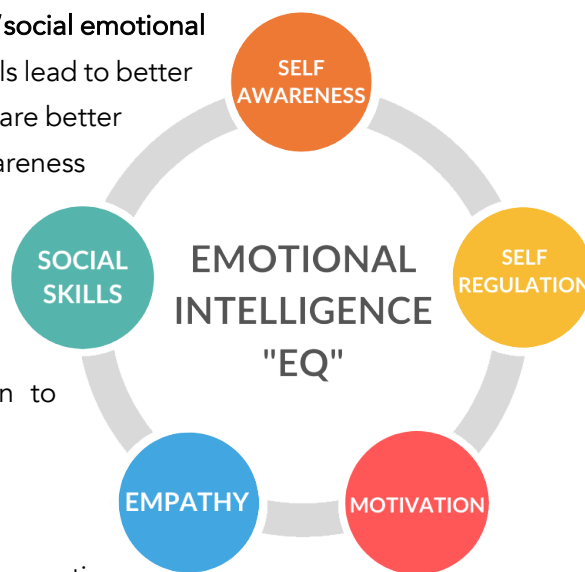
What is “EQ @ Home or School” all about?

Emotional intelligence (also known as “EQ”) is a critical, high-demand set of skills in today's world. Learning to manage our emotions, build and maintain healthy relationships, resolve conflicts, organize for success, and make responsible decisions are all EQ skills and essential for school, work, relationships, and life.

Emotional Intelligence (“EQ”)

—the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict

When applied in schools, EQ skill-building is also called “**social emotional learning**” (SEL). Study after study confirms that better EQ skills lead to better outcomes. Students who are able to manage their emotions are better able to focus in class and during a test. With emotional awareness and effective social skills, youth and adults can gain mastery over stressful situations and turn conflicts into opportunities to strengthen rather than damage relationships. Through EQ skill-building, students gain a greater sense of purpose in their schoolwork and begin to strategically work toward their long-term life goals.



How do we develop EQ skills?

We are not born with EQ skills; we develop them with practice over time. They are best taught through a relationship with a caring adult or adults who teach, model, help practice, and reinforce at "teachable" moments.

In class, students will dig deeper into the concepts for each EQ @ Home or School lesson. Every lesson comes equipped with a three-to-five minute video with R. Keeth Matheny (also known as “Coach Rudy”). Coach Rudy has been teaching SEL to high school students, college students, and adults for more than 20 years. His videos, plus the videos with Coach Oduwole, the student handouts, and the classroom discussions, give students lots of ways to learn, reflect on, and apply the EQ skills embedded in each lesson.

This “parent component” to the EQ @ Home or School lessons is an essential part of the EQ learning process for students. The goal of this program is to facilitate meaningful discussions, provide research-based emotional intelligence skill instruction, and give tips and strategies for applying these skills at school, at home, and ultimately in the workplace.

How can I help support my child(ren)’s EQ skill-building?

First off, SEL or emotional intelligence training is not effective when “done to someone.” It is much more effective and powerful “when done with someone.” Meaning, this is work that benefits *all* family members. Keeth’s grandmother, who lived to be 104 years old, used to always say “*ever ripening and never rotting.*” These are skills we never completely “master,” but rather are constantly growing and improving upon.

Questions that start with: **[Student-teach]** are great opportunities for students to share what they’ve already learned from the lesson.

We suggest you approach this work as a journey you are all on together. Like a hike through the woods, you will find your way through this new territory as a team. It is vitally important that your kid(s) are involved and even leading the discussion. Each lesson has questions that start with **[Student-teach]**. These are questions that students will have learned more about from the lesson and handout. If your child(ren) has already completed the lesson with their class, try to let them do most

of the talking and explaining for those questions. We often learn best by trying to explain new concepts to someone else.

As the parent(s), it is OK if you do not know all the answers to the discussion questions. You too will learn through this process. You can help your child(ren) by modeling personal growth and introspection. If we want our children to examine their behavior and improve, we too must model that ourselves. As adult caregivers, we can share our experiences, strategies, and values around these skills; however, they will be much better heard if we also are vulnerable enough to share when we have struggled, and where we can still improve.

Family Discussion Norms

- Speaker has full attention and support.
- Choose listening over lecturing.
- Be open-minded to the opinion of others.
- Look for the good in each other and your time together.

When/where/how should we have the “Parent Discussion Questions”?

The Parent Discussion Questions can be discussed over the dinner table and/or in a more official “family discussion time” when you all agree to set aside time for a family meeting. Setting up a traditional time like Saturday or Sunday afternoons can help build a routine that makes it easier to shut out other distractions.



Creating a safe discussion space is critical to this work. It is important that everyone is able to share and feels safe sharing. Adults need to work hard to avoid judgement and encourage contributions. The “Family Discussion Norms” will help create an environment for everyone to feel heard and validated. **Stay true to these norms—even when your patience is tested.** Like the picture to the right, approach the topic on an equal playing field. Think about this work as wading into the ocean. We want to make it extremely safe and enticing, then allow participants to progress slowly until we are all swimming comfortably in this work.

“There are no quick answers. Not with teenagers. You can’t protect them from all the dangers in today’s world or spare them the emotional turmoil of their adolescent years. But if you can create the kind of climate in your home where your kids feel free to express their feelings, there’s a good chance they’ll be more open to hearing your feelings. More willing to consider your adult perspective.”

As a parent, you may want to watch the EQ @ Home or School video and review the handouts before you discuss as a family, or you can do it together during the discussion. If your child(ren) has already done the video and homework with their class, let them explain to you what they have learned and take the lead on the discussion.

—Faber & Mazlish
*How to Talk So Teens Will Listen
& Listen So Teens Will Talk*

A big part of adolescent brain development is a search for meaning and acceptance. If they can find that at home, they will be much better prepared to navigate the choices and challenges outside of home.

These family discussions will be time well spent. Hopefully over time, you will each develop a greater understanding and empathy for each other and your different perspectives on life. The adolescent years may seem slow in the moment, but then they’re gone. Savor this time together.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE AUTHORS: **On-The-Job-Training in Parenting**

Both Julea Douglass and Keeth Matheny are parents of teenagers/young adults. Julea's kids are in middle and high school, and Keeth's kids are in high school and college. We understand and empathize with other parents trying to raise kids in a busy world.

As facilitators/speakers/authors, we can assure you we have *not* mastered all these skills. We too are happily a work-in-progress and are glad to have things to continue to work on and improve. We humbly share what we've learned from our personal parenting experiences ...

From Julea:

Plant seeds. *Throughout my kids' lives, I've tried to embed understandings that will come in handy later. A big one is the "d-word." At key decision points (like choosing Internet sites), I've asked my kids, "What's the d-word?"*

*They unenthusiastically respond, "**Discernment.**"*

"What's it mean?" I ask.

Again unenthusiastically, they respond, "Making smart decisions."

"And why is that important?"

"Because decisions matter ... and we'll be making decisions our whole lives" (or some variation of that).

The little decisions of today are practice for bigger decisions later. I try to use questions whenever I can so they have to come up with the answer—and the answer stays with them when I'm not.

Chose listening over lecturing. *After reading How to Talk so Your Kids Will Listen & How to Listen So Your Kids Will Talk and all my work with School-Connect, I've come to truly appreciate the effectiveness of listening. Especially now that my kids are teens, I see what a stress relief it is for them to just speak their minds. If it's about friends or a big test or feeling tired or anything else, just giving them time and space to talk without interruption and with my full attention often helps them find the answers/peace/strength they need.*

Have partners in parenting. *I am sad to say my husband passed away in May 2020 after a heroic six-year cancer battle. Through his illness and since, I'm so grateful for other parents and my kids' teachers and coaches who continue to guide and care about my kids. We have created an "extended family" of other adults who I trust. We often have other families over for dinner, do a lot of carpooling, and look out for each other's kids. I'm also grateful for a good counselor for each of my kids after their father passed away. If you or your kids are going through significant challenges or transitions, I highly recommend connecting with a good counselor to walk with you and/or your child(ren).*

Don't believe the hype—adolescents are not all bad. *When my kids were young, I often heard parents of older kids say, "Oh... just appreciate them now, because they'll turn on you when they're teenagers." Don't get me wrong—most teenagers definitely get more opinionated, strong-willed, and peer-dependent—but they also get more interesting (in my opinion), insightful, and witty. Most teens do not have total personality transformations, and if they do, there is likely something more going on there than just getting older (feelings of loneliness, inferiority, or anger). The teen years open up new opportunities for deeper conversations about life, politics, music, friendships, dating, or anything trending in the news. Teens are way more capable, observant, and sensitive than they may appear.*

Have fun together. *Learn to love whatever your kids like to do. Try to have one-on-one activities with each kid (favorite TV show, bike rides, ping pong, frozen yogurt runs, shopping). Make a purposeful effort to try to spend significant time every day with each family member doing something they like to do.*

From Keeth and his wife, Cory:

(Cory Matheny is an elementary school principal and has been heavily involved in SEL since 2012.)

Unconditional love. *Make sure your children know you love them unconditionally. While you may not always like their behavior, you love them always without condition. This foundation makes all of the other tips more impactful.*

Model what you teach. *As a parent your biggest asset and your biggest adversary is your own behavior. Children learn more from what you do than what you say. Make sure to model the SEL skills you want them to grow.*

The first law of love is to listen. *As Julea said, make time to really listen. It has been said, “If you don’t listen eagerly to the little things when they are little, they won’t share the big things when they are big.” We work hard to give our children our full and undivided attention when they want to talk. Even if the story is small or a retelling of their favorite show, we want them to know their voice is important and we care about what they care about.*

Verbalize your thinking. *We have found it is very helpful to verbalize your thinking with your children. Instead of just telling them your decisions, take the time to walk them through your process—the pros and cons, your values. This process helps them become better at understanding your “why” and helps them become better at their own decision-making skills.*

Model calm through conflict. *There is going to be conflict and that is not a bad thing. We can actually become a much stronger family through healthy conflict. It is critical that we model staying calm during conflict so they learn the skill. We can’t solve green light (advanced thought) problems with a red-light (emotionally hijacked) brain.*

Model apology. *We really believe in apologizing to our children when warranted. We want them to see apology as a sign of strength, not weakness and that generally relationships are more important than issues. A good apology is like relationship Super Glue, and that is something that will come in handy.*

Find and invest in common interests. *It is so helpful to have a fun hobby or activity that you enjoy with each of your children. This common ground activity that you both enjoy makes relationship deposits so you can have fewer relationship strains during the inevitable withdrawals that happen in parenting. These hobbies often evolve and change, but investing time and energy in finding them and cultivating them is effort well spent.*

Allow for imperfection. *Make sure to allow for both you and your children to not be perfect. We are not perfect, and expecting perfection from ourselves or from others is not sustainable or healthy. Give yourself and your children patience and grace. This is a time of learning and growing and it requires teachable moments.*

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR PARENTS

How to Talk So Teens Will Listen & Listen So Teens Will Talk (2006) by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish.
*(They also have a book for *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen ...* for parenting younger children.)*

Confident Parents, Confident Kids: Raising Emotional Intelligence in Ourselves and Our Kids—from Toddlers to Teenagers (2019) by Jennifer S. Miller, M.ED.

Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain (2015) by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D.

The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults by Frances E. Jensen, M.D., with Amy Ellis Nutt.