

Feel Your Best Self

<https://feelyourbestself.collaboration.uconn.edu>

Introducing Feel Your Best Self

Well-being is essential to a healthy life, but there are many parts to well-being. Well-being includes dimensions such as physical, financial, environmental, and emotional. The focus of the **Feel Your Best Self** toolkit is about emotional well-being, meaning how positively you feel generally and about life overall.¹

Feel Your Best Self offers strategies to help strengthen the day-to-day experience of positive emotions or feelings – also known as positive affect. A higher ratio of positive to negative affect – 3:1, for example - can help you be more effective at managing thoughts and behaviors - like lowering stress, feeling more enthusiastic or energetic, or coping effectively with disruptions to routines. How you feel in everyday moments contributes to overall emotional well-being, therefore it is important to regularly practice simple strategies that can directly modify how you feel in the moment. Doing just a little on a regular basis can make it easier to experience lifts in emotion, feelings, or moods: meaning feeling your best self.

When children learn strategies to help them feel their best self, the strategies that they find most useful can assist them throughout their lives.² That is why we created **Feel Your Best Self** -- a toolkit designed for children ages 3 through 12 to learn strategies to promote emotional well-being. Feel Your Best Self is fun and engaging, incorporating puppetry to as a behavior- modeling and instructional tool for social-emotional learning.^{2,3} Using puppets has been shown to add benefits such as:

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increased student participation³
improved rates of peer-to-peer collaboration and communication³
reduced student concerns related to making mistakes or providing incorrect answers³
increased student attention and engagement³
added layers of fun to the learning experience^{3,4}

Use of children at their developmental level and helps create a more relaxed learning environment to enable learning. Children may identify and empathize with puppets in ways that they may not with the people in their lives. For children with special needs, puppets can be used to model social stories and coping strategies, engage with students with communication differences (e.g., non-verbal), and to connect with students who can be more difficult for teachers to reach.^{3,5}

¹ Park et al., 2022

² Iovino, E. A., Koslouski, J. B., & Chafouleas, S. M. (2021). Teaching Simple Strategies to Foster Emotional Well-Being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.772260>

³ Kröger, T., & Nupponen, A. M. (2019). Puppet as a pedagogical tool: A literature review. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 11(4), 393-401. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1212334.pdf>

⁴ Malhotra, B. (2019). Art therapy with puppet making to promote emotional empathy for an adolescent with autism. *Art Therapy*, 36(4), 183-191. <https://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07421656.2019.1645500>

⁵ Davis, V. (Host), & McCallum, K. (Narr.). (2017). Social emotional learning for special needs with puppets (No. 53) [Audio podcast episode]. In *10 minute teacher*. Cool Cat Teacher. <https://coolcatteacher.com/social-emotional-learning-special-needs-puppets-spedchat/>