

HOW LEARNING HAPPENS

Family and Caregiver Conversation Tool

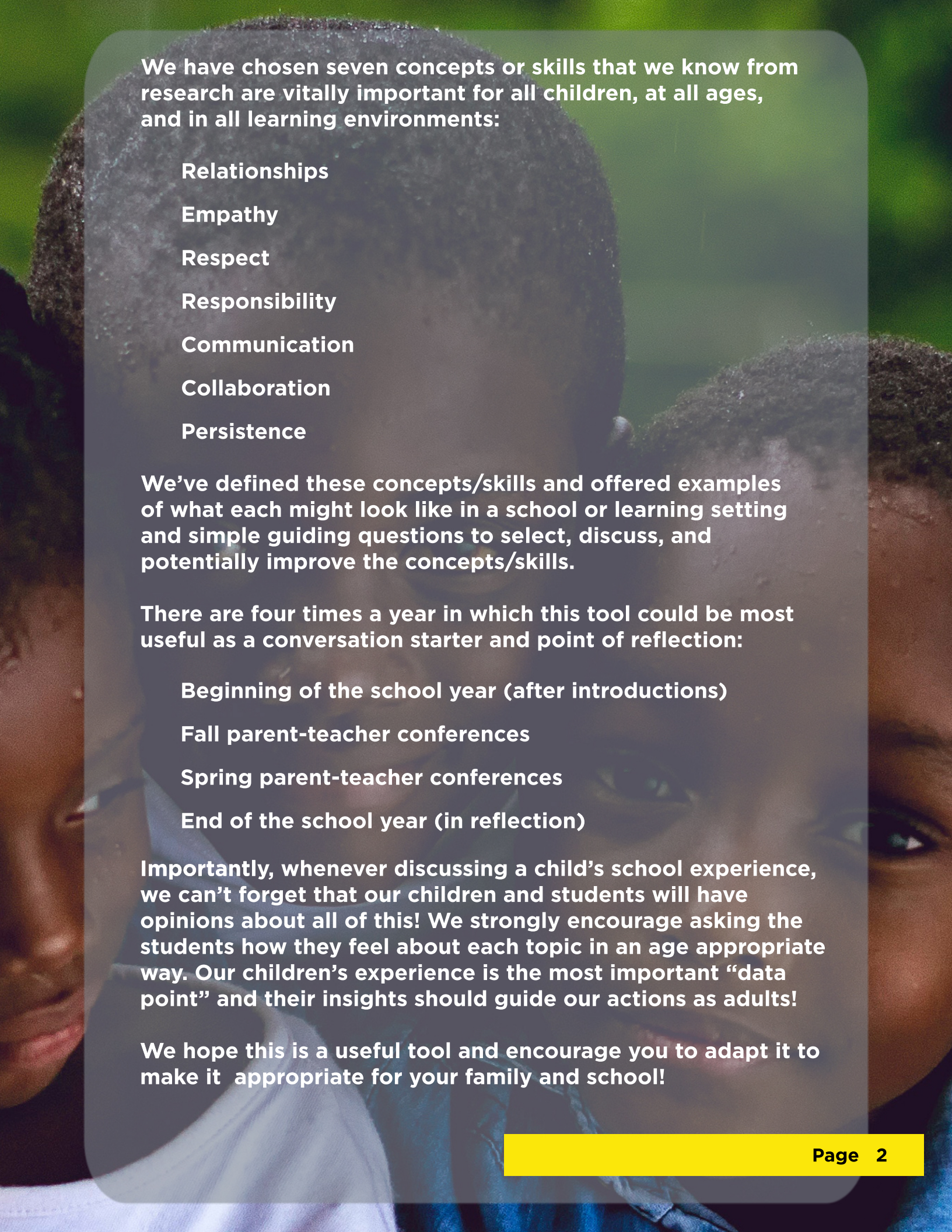




Dear Families and Caregivers:

Brain science now backs up what we, as parents and caregivers have always known: learning is social and emotional. This means that the most powerful learning happens when we pay attention to the academic, social, and emotional aspects of learning, not separately, but woven together, just like our brains do. But how do we begin to talk about and look for the ways this is **ALREADY** taking place in our children's schools and learning settings? And how do we identify how we can help schools be even more effective learning environments by taking new or additional steps to weave together academic, social, and emotional learning?

This tool is designed to help families and caregivers think about and discuss what their children's schools are already doing--and what they might do even better--to encourage some vital aspects of learning. It offers concrete ways to identify today, and envision for tomorrow, a learning environment that addresses all aspects of our children's development to encourage their growth into the people they were born to become.



We have chosen seven concepts or skills that we know from research are vitally important for all children, at all ages, and in all learning environments:

Relationships

Empathy

Respect

Responsibility

Communication

Collaboration

Persistence

We've defined these concepts/skills and offered examples of what each might look like in a school or learning setting and simple guiding questions to select, discuss, and potentially improve the concepts/skills.

There are four times a year in which this tool could be most useful as a conversation starter and point of reflection:

Beginning of the school year (after introductions)

Fall parent-teacher conferences

Spring parent-teacher conferences

End of the school year (in reflection)

Importantly, whenever discussing a child's school experience, we can't forget that our children and students will have opinions about all of this! We strongly encourage asking the students how they feel about each topic in an age appropriate way. Our children's experience is the most important "data point" and their insights should guide our actions as adults!

We hope this is a useful tool and encourage you to adapt it to make it appropriate for your family and school!

STEP 1. Families and caregivers review the below concepts and skills.

Relationships: students, educators, and families in the learning community all work to create and maintain positive, open, and collaborative relationships with each other.

Empathy: learning community members can “walk in the shoes” of others and understand their feelings and perspectives.


Respect: learning community members pay attention to the feelings, opinions and wishes of others, care for their learning environment, and know their own feelings and opinions matter.

Responsibility: members contribute to their learning community in helpful ways and build the skills to manage their own emotions and actions, and make positive choices.

Communication: learning community members have multiple ways of engaging with each other and practice listening, stating their needs, and problem solving through discussion.

Collaboration: community members work together to learn, improve, and achieve goals.

Persistence: learning community members build skills and use strategies to make progress and achieve goals in the face of challenges.



STEP 2. Collaboratively select two concepts/skills to consider, and to discuss with your child.

Here are some questions to help you select:

A. Is your school or classroom especially strong in building any of these concepts/skills?

B. Are there concepts/skills that you'd like to talk more about?

C. Are there concepts/skills you feel may need particular attention in your school or learning community?

STEP 3. For each concept/skill, discuss the following questions:

A . How does the concept/skill look in your classroom or school? See specific examples for each concept/skill on pages 6-12.

B . Are there opportunities you can see for improvement in this concept or skill?

What could learning with and through RELATIONSHIPS look like . . . ?

- ☐ My child works in collaborative groups on school projects.
- ☐ Teachers seem to know, understand, and care about my child.
- ☐ My child has at least one caring adult they feel they can go to if they have a problem.
- ☐ Everyone in the classroom worked on creating community agreements.
- ☐ My child's school creates friendships and mentorships between the grade levels through buddy or mentor programs.
- ☐ My child's school offers chances for teachers to regularly collaborate.
- ☐ Teachers have daily structures for building a sense of community and caring in the classroom such as morning or class meetings or closing circles.
- ☐ My child works in collaborative groups on school projects.
- ☐ Families and caregivers are welcomed into the school and classroom to volunteer their time, knowledge and care, such as serving as readers at storytime, contributing to career day, or chaperoning class field trips.

What could learning with and through EMPATHY look like . . . ?

- ☐ Feelings, including how to manage them, are discussed in the classroom.
- ☐ Teachers seek to understand the feelings and thoughts of students.
- ☐ Teachers seem to understand and work to meet my child's unique learning needs.
- ☐ Teachers and families have the chance to learn about child developmental milestones through out-of-school-time educational programming.
- ☐ My child learns about different cultures, languages and places and is encouraged to respect and appreciate diversity.
- ☐ Teachers and school staff create opportunities to learn about families and their specific values and cultures through open houses, family nights or world holiday celebrations.

What could learning with and through RESPECT look like . . . ?

- ☐ My child is learning self-respect and that their feelings and opinions are important.
- ☐ My child is learning that “respect” might look different in different cultures or families.
- ☐ My child is learning to care for and consider others.
- ☐ My child is learning to treat their environment with care.
- ☐ When my child causes harm at school to another person or property, s/he receives support from a caring adult to repair the harm caused.
- ☐ Teachers model respect with other adults and children in the school by working together collaboratively.
- ☐ Families, teachers and school staff model respect for one another by communicating constructively and in positive ways that strengthen relationships.

What could learning with and through RESPONSIBILITY look like . . . ?

- My child is offered choices involving their learning.
- My child is supported in building skills like listening, cooperation, and assertive communication to follow through on and manage their choices.
- Children are encouraged to think about decisions and consider the causes and effects of choices.
- Students are guided to specific options for healing relationships when they have made choices that have caused harm to others.
- Teachers and school staff uphold core values that include a sense of responsibility to the school community shared and articulated by school leadership.
- Teachers reach out to families to create positive, caring connections as a demonstration of their responsibility to each student.

What could learning with and through **COMMUNICATION** look like . . . ?

- ☐ My child learns and practices ways to be a better listener.
- ☐ My child has the chance to learn how to assert their feelings and needs.
- ☐ The classroom and school teach, practice, and utilize problem-solving strategies with children, among staff, and in communication with families.
- ☐ Teachers have multiple ways to keep families informed about their children's learning through take-home folders, websites or newsletters.
- ☐ Families are informed about how best to communicate with teachers and other school staff.
- ☐ Families have multiple channels through which they can communicate with the school through email, website, phone calls, or scheduled visits.

What could learning with and through **COLLABORATION** look like . . .?

- ☐ My child participates in collaborative academic projects with peers.
- ☐ My child learns about how to play different roles on a team or group.
- ☐ Teachers and school staff model collaboration by coordinating the curriculum within and between grade levels.
- ☐ Families/caregivers have opportunities to become involved in their child's learning at school and at home through homework that involves their participation or through participation in school events like assemblies, performances and project-based learning opportunities (science fairs, art shows, and history simulations).

What could learning with and through **PERSISTENCE** look like . . . ?

- ☐ My child is offered choices involving their learning.
- ☐ Students have the chance to set their own learning goals, with an emphasis on working hard, using different strategies and not giving up easily (rather than an emphasis on being “correct”).
- ☐ Students are given multiple chances and methods of revising work if the first draft is not up to standard.
- ☐ Teachers accept mistakes as essential to the learning process.
- ☐ Teachers communicate specific roles and offer guidance for families on how they can support homework with their child over the course of the school year.
- ☐ Families and teachers show and express confidence in each child that they can learn what they need to with time and hard work.