

Background

Social-emotional learning (SEL) describes processes by which children develop skills to manage emotions, set goals, display empathy, sustain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.¹

Developing the skills to recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate emotions is one approach to building SEL competencies.²

The Role of Caregivers

- Caregivers act as both models and coaches in children's developing emotion regulation.^{3,4}
- Children can learn about emotions by observing how caregivers respond to their own emotional experiences and through direct interactions where caregivers help them notice, name, and respond to feelings.^{3,4}

Bibliotherapy:

- Shared storybook reading provides a context in which children can observe and learn emotion regulation strategies, applying what they see a character do to their own behaviour.⁵
- When children engage with characters facing similar emotional experiences, they can reflect on feelings at a distance, making difficult emotions easier to approach and discuss.^{6,7}
- Through shared storybook reading, caregivers can guide attention to emotional experiences, prompt reflection, and support children in considering new ways of understanding situations.⁵⁻⁷

Context and Application

Challenges in using storybooks to support children's SEL include:

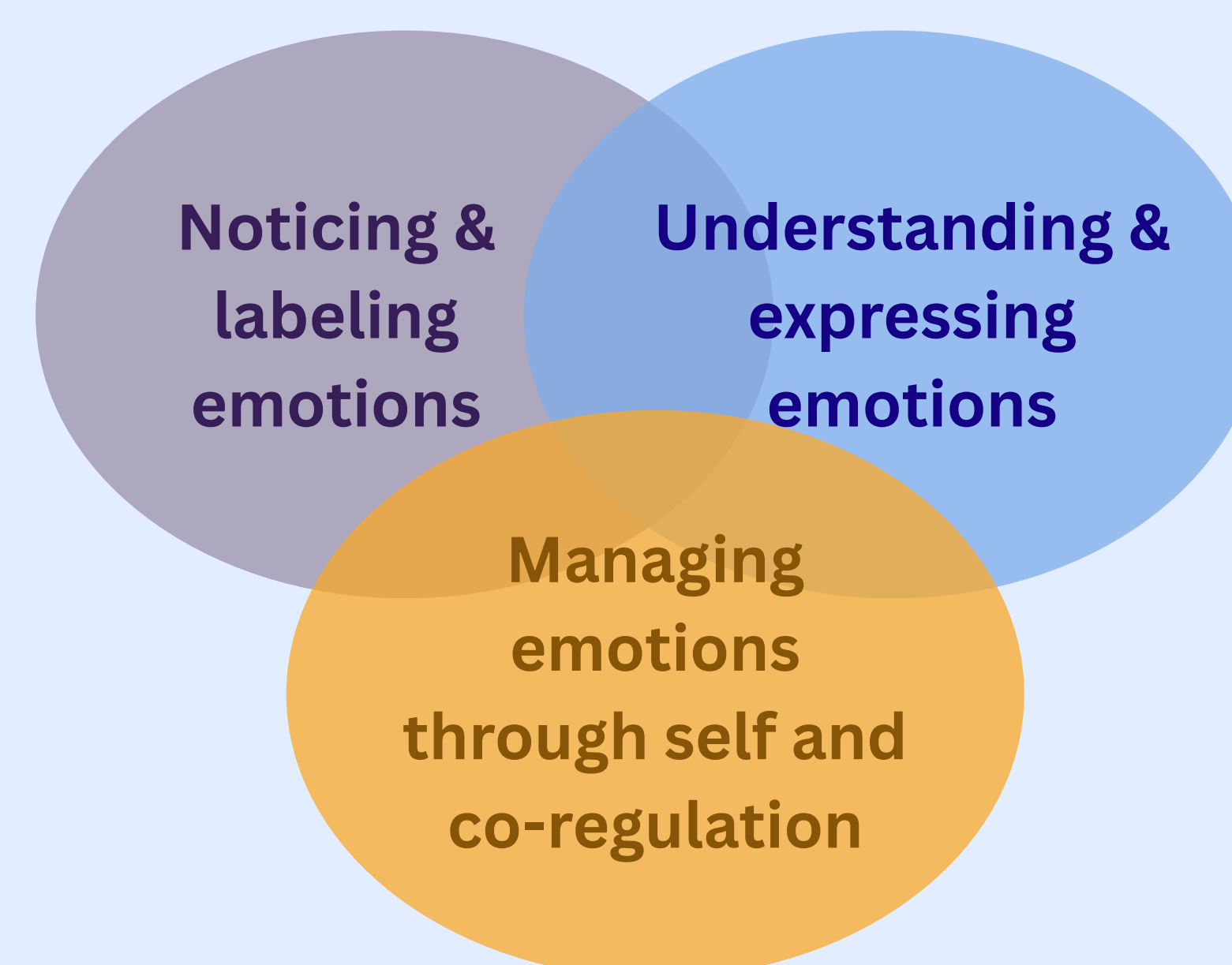
- Wide and diverse literature available.
- Variation in skills depicted across books.

To address this, storybooks were organized into three domains to help caregivers select appropriate books and guide conversations with their child.

The Organizing Framework

The RULER framework (Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, Regulate)² and the Process Model of Emotion Regulation (a model of how emotions are experienced and managed)⁸ were used to inform the organization and interpretation of storybook content.

Storybooks identified through a systematic search of the NoveList K-8 Plus database were reviewed and grouped into three domains reflecting the primary emotional competencies represented:



Within each domain, storybooks were selected to align with children's developing emotional competencies.⁹

The Process Model⁸ was used to examine how emotions are identified and regulated in storybooks, from initial noticing through active regulatory strategies.

Example Storybooks

Domain	Book	What it Depicts	Ages
Noticing & labeling emotions		<i>In My Heart: A Book of Feelings</i> by Witek (2014) explores how different emotions feel in the body and mind, supporting children in recognizing and naming what they are experiencing.	Ages ~3 to 8 (early emotion recognition and vocabulary building)
Understanding & expressing emotions		<i>My Feelings Make Me Stronger</i> by Cole (2024) follows a child learning to recognize, understand, and express a range of emotions through interactions with animal characters, each modeling strategies for managing difficult feelings.	Ages ~4 to 10 (understanding causes of emotions and learning to express and manage them)
Managing emotions through self and co-regulation		<i>I Am Okay to Feel</i> by Brown and Brown (2022) follows a child and his father navigating a thunderstorm together. The father supports emotion regulation through creating space for feelings, noticing and naming emotions as they arise, co-regulating through breathing and movement as emotions build, and reflection.	Ages ~4 to 10 (emotion management with caregiver support)

Implications/Future Directions

- Storybooks can serve as a low-intensity, accessible tool for supporting children's emotion regulation.
- The organizing framework addresses an evidence-informed approach to selecting storybooks.

Resource Guide Development:

- A resource guide is currently under development covering key concepts in children's emotional development, emotion regulation, and the caregiver role.
- This resource is intended to be used as a supportive tool for parents, caregivers, and educators and will include selected storybooks and guiding questions to support conversations with children.

References

