One question is how early to begin. Some say the first few years of life are none too soon. The Harvard pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton proposes that many parents can benefit from being coached as emotional mentors to their infants and toddlers, as some home-visit programs do. A strong argument can be made for emphasizing social and emotional skills more systematically in preschool programs such as Head Start; as we saw in Chapter 12, children's readiness to learn depends to a large extent on acquiring some of these basic emotional skills. The preschool years are crucial ones for laying foundation skills, and there is some evidence that Head Start, when run well (an important caveat), can have beneficial long-term emotional and social effects on the lives of its graduates even into their early adult years—fewer drug problems and arrests, better marriages, greater earning power.[5]

Such interventions work best when they track the emotional timetable of development.[6] As the wail of newborns testifies, babies have intense feelings from the moment they are born. But the newborn's brain is far from fully mature; as we saw in Chapter 15, only as its nervous system reaches final development—a process that unfolds according to an innate biological clock over the entire course of childhood and into early adolescence—will the child's emotions ripen completely. The newborn's repertoire of feeling is primitive compared to the emotional range of a five-year-old, which, in turn, is lacking when measured against the fullness of feelings of a teenager. Indeed, adults all too readily fall into the trap of expecting children to have reached a maturity far beyond their years, forgetting that each emotion has its preprogrammed moment of appearance in a child's growth. A four-year-old's braggadocio, for example, might bring a parent's reprimand—and yet the self-consciousness that can breed humility typically does not emerge until age five or so.

The timetable for emotional growth is intertwined with allied lines of development, particularly for cognition, on the one hand, and brain and biological maturation, on the other. As we have seen, emotional capacities such as empathy and emotional self-regulation start to build virtually from infancy. The kindergarten year marks a peak ripening of the "social emotions"—feelings such as insecurity and humility, jealousy and envy, pride and confidence—all of which require the capacity for comparing oneself with others. The five-year-old, on entering the wider social world of school, enters too the world of social comparison. It is not just the external shift that elicits these

comparisons, but also the emergence of a cognitive skill: being able to compare oneself to others on particular qualities, whether popularity, attractiveness, or skateboarding talents. This is the age when, for example, having an older sister who gets straight A's can make the younger sister start to think of herself as "dumb" by comparison.

Dr. David Hamburg, a psychiatrist and president of the Carnegie Corporation, which has evaluated some pioneering emotional-education programs, sees the years of transition into grade school and then again into junior high or middle school as marking two crucial points in a child's adjustment.[7] From ages six to eleven, says Hamburg, "school is a crucible and a defining experience that will heavily influence children's adolescence and beyond. A child's sense of self-worth depends substantially on his or her ability to achieve in school. A child who fails in school sets in motion the self-defeating attitudes that can dim prospects for an entire lifespan." Among the essentials for profiting from school, Hamburg notes, are an ability "to postpone gratification, to be socially responsible in appropriate ways, to maintain control over their emotions, and to have an optimistic outlook"—in other words, emotional intelligence.[8]

Puberty—because it is a time of extraordinary change in the child's biology, thinking capacities, and brain functioning—is also a crucial time for emotional and social lessons. As for the teen years, Hamburg observes that "most adolescents are ten to fifteen years old when they are exposed to sexuality, alcohol and drugs, smoking," and other temptations.[9]

The transition to middle school or junior high marks an end to childhood, and is itself a formidable emotional challenge. All other problems aside, as they enter this new school arrangement virtually all students have a dip in self-confidence and a jump in self-consciousness; their very notions of themselves are rocky and in tumult. One of the greatest specific blows is in "social self-esteem"—students' confidence that they can make and keep friends. It is at this juncture, Hamburg points out, that it helps immensely to buttress boys' and girls' abilities to build close relationships and navigate crises in friendships, and to nurture their self-confidence.

Hamburg notes that as students are entering middle school, just on the cusp of adolescence, there is something different about those who have had emotional literacy classes: they find the new pressures of peer politics, the upping of academic demands, and the temptations to smoke and use drugs less troubling than do their peers. They have

mastered emotional abilities that, at least for the short term, inoculate them against the turmoil and pressures they are about to face.

TIMING IS ALL

As developmental psychologists and others map the growth of emotions, they are able to be more specific about just what lessons children should be learning at each point in the unfolding of emotional intelligence, what the lasting deficits are likely to be for those who fail to master the right competences at the appointed time, and what remedial experiences might make up for what was missed.

In the New Haven program, for example, children in the youngest grades get basic lessons in self-awareness, relationships, and decision-making. In first grade students sit in a circle and roll the "feelings cube," which has words such as *sad* or *excited* on each side. At their turn, they describe a time they had that feeling, an exercise that gives them more certainty in tying feelings to words and helps with empathy as they hear others having the same feelings as themselves.

By fourth and fifth grade, as peer relationships take on an immense importance in their lives, they get lessons that help their friendships work better: empathy, impulse control, and anger management. The Life Skills class on reading emotions from facial expressions that the Troup school fifth graders were trying, for example, is essentially about empathizing. For impulse control, there is a "stoplight" poster displayed prominently, with six steps:

Red light	1. Stop, calm down, and think before you act.
Yellow light	2. Say the problem and how you feel.
	3. Set a positive goal.
	4. Think of lots of solutions.
	5. Think ahead to the consequences.
Green Light	6. Go ahead and try the best plan.

The stoplight notion is regularly invoked when a child, for example, is about to strike out in anger, or withdraw into a huff at some slight, or burst into tears at being teased, and offers a concrete set of steps

for dealing with these loaded moments in a more measured way. Beyond the management of feelings, it points a way to more effective action. And, as a habitual way of handling the unruly emotional impulse—to think before acting from feelings—it can evolve into a basic strategy for dealing with the risks of adolescence and beyond.

In sixth grade the lessons relate more directly to the temptations and pressures for sex, drugs, or drinking that begin to enter children's lives. By ninth grade, as teenagers are confronted with more ambiguous social realities, the ability to take multiple perspectives—your own as well as those of others involved—is emphasized. "If a kid is mad because he saw his girlfriend talking with another guy," says one of the New Haven teachers, "he'd be encouraged to consider what might be going on from their point of view, too, rather than just plunge into a confrontation."

EMOTIONAL LITERACY AS PREVENTION

Some of the most effective programs in emotional literacy were developed as a response to a specific problem, notably violence. One of the fastest-growing of these prevention-inspired emotional literacy courses is the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, in several hundred New York City public schools and schools across the country. The conflict-resolution course focuses on how to settle schoolyard arguments that can escalate into incidents like the hallway shooting of Ian Moore and Tyrone Sinkler by their classmate at Jefferson High School.

Linda Lantieri, the founder of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program and director of the Manhattan-based national center for the approach, sees it as having a mission far beyond just preventing fights. She says, "The program shows students that they have many choices for dealing with conflict besides passivity or aggression. We show them the futility of violence while replacing it with concrete skills. Kids learn to stand up for their rights without resorting to violence. These are lifelong skills, not just for those most prone to violence."[10]

In one exercise, students think of a single realistic step, no matter how small, that might have helped settle some conflict they have had. In another students enact a scene in which a big sister trying to do her homework gets fed up with her younger sister's loud rap tape. In

frustration the older sister turns off the tape despite the younger one's protests. The class brainstorms ways they might work out the problem that would satisfy both sisters.

One key to the success of the conflict-resolution program is extending it beyond the classroom to the playground and cafeteria, where tempers are more likely to explode. To that end, some students are trained as mediators, a role that can begin in the latter years of elementary school. When tension erupts, students can seek out a mediator to help them settle it. The schoolyard mediators learn to handle fights, taunts and threats, interracial incidents, and the other potentially incendiary incidents of school life.

The mediators learn to phrase their statements in ways that make both parties feel the mediator is impartial. Their tactics include sitting down with those involved and getting them to listen to the other person without interruptions or insults. They have each party calm down and state their position, then have each paraphrase what's been said so it's clear they've really heard. Then they all try to think of solutions that both sides can live with; the settlements are often in the form of a signed agreement.

Beyond the mediation of a given dispute, the program teaches students to think differently about disagreements in the first place. As Angel Perez, trained as a mediator while in grade school, put it, the program "changed my way of thinking. I used to think, hey, if somebody picks on me, if somebody does something to me, the only thing was to fight, do something to get back at them. Since I had this program, I've had a more positive way of thinking. If something's done negative to me, I don't try to do the negative thing back—I try to solve the problem." And he has found himself spreading the approach in his community.

While the focus of Resolving Conflict Creatively is on preventing violence, Lantieri sees it as having a wider mission. Her view is that the skills needed to head off violence cannot be separated from the full spectrum of emotional competence—that, for example, knowing what you are feeling or how to handle impulse or grief is as important for violence prevention as is managing anger. Much of the training has to do with emotional basics such as recognizing an expanded range of feelings and being able to put names to them, and empathizing. When she describes the evaluation results of her program's effects, Lantieri points with as much pride to the increase in "caring among the kids" as to the drops in fights, put-downs, and

name-calling.

A similar convergence on emotional literacy occurred with a consortium of psychologists trying to find ways to help youngsters on a trajectory toward a life marked by crime and violence. Dozens of studies of such boys—as we saw in Chapter 15—yielded a clear sense of the path most take, starting from impulsiveness and a quickness to anger in their earliest school years, through becoming social rejects by the end of grade school, to bonding with a circle of others like themselves and beginning crime sprees in the middle-school years. By early adulthood, a large portion of these boys have acquired police records and a readiness for violence.

When it came to designing interventions that might help such boys get off this road to violence and crime, the result was, once again, an emotional-literacy program.[11] One of these, developed by Carol Kusche along with Mark Greenberg at the University of Washington, is the PATHS curriculum (PATHS is the acronym for Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies). While those at risk for a trajectory toward crime and violence are most in need of these lessons, the course is given to all those in a class, avoiding any stigmatizing of a more troubled subgroup.

Still, the lessons are useful for all children. These include, for example, learning in the earliest school years to control their impulses; lacking this ability, children have special trouble paying attention to what is being taught and so fall behind in their learning and grades. Another is recognizing their feelings; the PATHS curriculum has fifty lessons on different emotions, teaching the most basic, such as happiness and anger, to the youngest children, and later touching on more complicated feelings such as jealousy, pride, and guilt. The emotional-awareness lessons include how to monitor what they and those around them are feeling, and—most important for those prone to aggression—how to recognize when someone is actually hostile, as opposed to when the attribution of hostility comes from oneself.

One of the most important lessons, of course, is anger management. The basic premise children learn about anger (and all other emotions as well) is that “all feelings are okay to have,” but some reactions are okay and others not. Here one of the tools for teaching self-control is the same “stoplight” exercise used in the New Haven course. Other units help children with their friendships, a counter to the social rejections that can help propel a child toward delinquency.

RETHINKING SCHOOLS: TEACHING BY BEING, COMMUNITIES THAT CARE

As family life no longer offers growing numbers of children a sure footing in life, schools are left as the one place communities can turn to for correctives to children's deficiencies in emotional and social competence. That is not to say that schools alone can stand in for all the social institutions that too often are in or nearing collapse. But since virtually every child goes to school (at least at the outset), it offers a place to reach children with basic lessons for living that they may never get otherwise. Emotional literacy implies an expanded mandate for schools, taking up the slack for failing families in socializing children. This daunting task requires two major changes: that teachers go beyond their traditional mission and that people in the community become more involved with schools.

Whether or not there is a class explicitly devoted to emotional literacy may matter far less than *how* these lessons are taught. There is perhaps no subject where the quality of the teacher matters so much, since how a teacher handles her class is in itself a model, a de facto lesson in emotional competence—or the lack thereof. Whenever a teacher responds to one student, twenty or thirty others learn a lesson.

There is a self-selection in the kind of teacher who gravitates to courses such as these, because not everyone is suited by temperament. To begin with, teachers need to be comfortable talking about feelings; not every teacher is at ease doing so or wants to be. There is little or nothing in the standard education of teachers that prepares them for this kind of teaching. For these reasons, emotional literacy programs typically give prospective teachers several weeks of special training in the approach.

While many teachers may be reluctant at the outset to tackle a topic that seems so foreign to their training and routines, there is evidence that once they are willing to try it, most will be pleased rather than put off. In the New Haven schools, when teachers first learned that they would be trained to teach the new emotional literacy courses, 31 percent said they were reluctant to do so. After a year of teaching the courses, more than 90 percent said they were pleased by them, and wanted to teach them again the following year.

AN EXPANDED MISSION FOR SCHOOLS

Beyond teacher training, emotional literacy expands our vision of the task of schools themselves, making them more explicitly society's agent for seeing that children learn these essential lessons for life—a return to a classic role for education. This larger design requires, apart from any specifics of curriculum, using opportunities in and out of class to help students turn moments of personal crisis into lessons in emotional competence. It also works best when the lessons at school are coordinated with what goes on in children's homes. Many emotional literacy programs include special classes for parents to teach them about what their children are learning, not just to complement what is imparted at school, but to help parents who feel the need to deal more effectively with their children's emotional life.

That way, children get consistent messages about emotional competence in all parts of their lives. In the New Haven schools, says Tim Shriver, director of the Social Competence Program, "if kids get into a beef in the cafeteria, they'll be sent to a peer mediator, who sits down with them and works through their conflict with the same perspective-taking technique they learned in class. Coaches will use the technique to handle conflicts on the playing field. We hold classes for parents in using these methods with kids at home."

Such parallel lines of reinforcement of these emotional lessons—not just in the classroom, but also on the playground; not just in the school, but also in the home—is optimal. That means weaving the school, the parents, and the community together more tightly. It increases the likelihood that what children learned in emotional literacy classes will not stay behind at school, but will be tested, practiced, and sharpened in the actual challenges of life.

Another way in which this focus reshapes schools is in building a campus culture that makes it a "caring community," a place where students feel respected, cared about, and bonded to classmates, teachers, and the school itself.[12] For example, schools in areas such as New Haven, where families are disintegrating at a high rate, offer a range of programs that recruit caring people in the community to get engaged with students whose home life is shaky at best. In the New Haven schools, responsible adults volunteer as mentors, regular companions for students who are foundering and who have few, if any, stable and nurturing adults in their home life.

In short, the optimal design of emotional literacy programs is to begin early, be age-appropriate, run throughout the school years, and intertwine efforts at school, at home, and in the community.

Even though much of this fits neatly into existing parts of the school day, these programs are a major change in any curriculum. It would be naive not to anticipate hurdles in getting such programs into schools. Many parents may feel that the topic itself is too personal a domain for the schools, that such things are best left to parents (an argument that gains credibility to the extent that parents actually *do* address these topics—and is less convincing when they fail to). Teachers may be reluctant to yield yet another part of the school day to topics that seem so unrelated to the academic basics; some teachers may be too uncomfortable with the topics to teach them, and all will need special training to do so. Some children, too, will resist, especially to the extent that these classes are out of synch with their actual concerns, or feel like intrusive impositions on their privacy. And then there is the dilemma of maintaining high quality, and ensuring that slick education marketers do not peddle ineptly designed emotional-competence programs that repeat the disasters of, say, ill-conceived courses on drugs or teen pregnancy.

Given all this, why should we bother to try?

DOES EMOTIONAL LITERACY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

It's every teacher's nightmare: one day Tim Shriver opened the local paper to read that Lamont, one of his favorite former students, had been shot nine times on a New Haven street, and was in critical condition. "Lamont had been one of the school leaders, a huge—six foot two—and hugely popular linebacker, always smiling," recalls Shriver. "Back then Lamont had enjoyed coming to a leadership club I led, where we would toss around ideas in a problem-solving model known as SOCS."

The acronym is for Situation, Options, Consequence, Solutions—a four-step method: say what the situation is and how it makes you feel; think about your options for solving the problem and what their consequences might be; pick a solution and execute it—a grown-up version of the stoplight method. Lamont, Shriver added, loved brainstorming imaginative but potentially effective ways to handle the pressing dilemmas of high-school life, such as problems with girlfriends and how to avoid fights.

But those few lessons seemed to have failed him after high school. Drifting on the streets in a sea of poverty, drugs, and guns, Lamont at

twenty-six lay in a hospital bed, shrouded in bandages, his body riddled with bullet holes. Rushing to the hospital, Shriver found Lamont barely able to talk, his mother and girlfriend huddled over him. Seeing his former teacher, Lamont motioned him to the bedside, and as Shriver leaned over to hear, whispered, “Shrive, when I get out of here, I’m gonna use the SOCS method.”

Lamont went through Hillhouse High in the years before the social-development course was given there. Would his life have turned out differently had he benefited from such an education throughout his school years, as children in New Haven public schools do now? The signs point to a possible yes, though no one can ever say for sure.

As Tim Shriver put it, “One thing is clear: the proving ground for social problem-solving is not just the classroom, but the cafeteria, the streets, home.” Consider testimony from teachers in the New Haven program. One recounts how a former student, still single, visited and said that she almost certainly would have been an unwed mother by now “if she hadn’t learned to stand up for her rights during our Social Development classes.”[13] Another teacher recalls how a student’s relationship with her mother was so poor that their talks continually ended up as screaming matches; after the girl learned about calming down and thinking before reacting, the mother told her teacher that they could now talk without going “off the deep end.” At the Troup school, a sixth grader passed a note to the teacher of her Social Development class; her best friend, the note said, was pregnant, had no one to talk to about what to do, and was planning suicide—but she knew the teacher would care.

A revealing moment came when I was observing a seventh-grade class in social development in the New Haven Schools, and the teacher asked for “someone to tell me about a disagreement they’ve had recently that ended in a good way.”

A plumpish twelve-year-old girl shot up her hand: “This girl was supposed to be my friend and someone said she wanted to fight me. They told me she was going to get me in a corner after school.”

But instead of confronting the other girl in anger, she applied an approach encouraged in the class—finding out what is going on before jumping to conclusions: “So I went to the girl and I asked why she said that stuff. And she said she never did. So we never had a fight.”

The story seems innocuous enough. Except that the girl who tells the tale had already been expelled from another school for fighting. In