

S

Student

E

Emotion

R

Regulation

A

Assessment

User Guide

Yale University

Background of SERA

Emotion regulation is any effort by which people manage their emotions to achieve a desired state or goal. It affects children and adolescents' ability to learn and retain information, initiate and complete tasks, get along with peers and adults, and handle demands and expectations. Adaptive emotion regulation is linked to positive school outcomes, like higher academic performance and self-efficacy, greater likeability and peer acceptance, and decreased rule-breaking and problem behaviors.

Emotion regulation evolves from co-regulation (with support from adults) to self-regulation (independently by oneself) of emotions over the course of childhood and adolescence in part via emotion socialization at school. Schools provide a unique platform to provide support and guidance to a wide range of children and adolescents as they learn how to better regulate their emotions. With the rapid growth of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs that have an explicit focus on emotion regulation, Yale University developed the Student Emotion Regulation Assessment (SERA) for use in schools. The overarching goal is to provide meaningful and actionable information for educators to better understand and support their students' emotion regulation development.

Introduction of SERA

The SERA is a digital vignette-based assessment that measures students' use of 8 different emotion regulation strategies at school. It consists of 16 brief vignettes that describe common emotional situations in or related to school. The vignettes depict distinct emotions (anger, sadness, anxiety, boredom) and contexts (academic, social). For each vignette, students are asked to imagine that the situation happened to them and to rate how likely they would engage in each of 4 possible emotion regulation responses on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = No, 1 = Probably Not, 2 = Probably Yes, and 3 = Yes). The SERA is further illustrated and narrated to enhance student engagement and accessibility. It takes 20–30 minutes to complete.

The SERA has two versions: SERA-Primary (SERA-P) for grades 1–5 and SERA-Secondary (SERA-S) for grades 6–12. The structure is the same, but the illustration style differs. About 70% of the vignettes are considered parallel across the two versions because the vignettes and associated items are highly similar with minimal wording modifications to make them age appropriate. This subset will be useful for assessing changes or differences in students' emotion regulation strategy use across grades 1–12. See pages 3 and 4 for a sample parallel vignette.

SERA-P Vignette and Items

SAMPLE



Khaleed has a spelling quiz tomorrow.



Khaleed can't remember how to spell the words, and he thinks he may not do well on the quiz.



Khaleed is feeling nervous.

Imagine this happened to you. What would you do?

	No	Probably Not	Probably Yes	Yes
Try using a different way to remember the words, like writing them out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tell a friend or an adult about what's happening and how nervous you feel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Think about something else to feel less nervous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keep thinking about how you may not do well on the quiz	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SERA-S Vignette and Items

SAMPLE



Khaleed has a test tomorrow.



Khaleed is having a hard time memorizing things, and he thinks he may not do well on the test.



Khaleed is feeling anxious.

Imagine this happened to you. What would you do?

	No	Probably Not	Probably Yes	Yes
Try using a different way to memorize things, like flashcards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tell a friend or an adult you trust about what's happening and how anxious you feel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Think about something else to feel less anxious	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keep thinking about how you may not do well on the test	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Introduction of SERA

The SERA assesses 8 emotion regulation strategies frequently used by children and adolescents and/or often taught in SEL curricula: (1) avoidance/escape, (2) distraction, (3) emotional support-seeking, (4) acceptance, (5) problem solving, (6) reappraisal/reframing, (7) rumination/repetitive thinking, and (8) somatic relaxation. The strategies were selected based on 3 criteria: (a) solid research base, (b) usability in school settings, and (c) relative cultural equivalence (i.e., similarity in its relevance and application to different cultural groups). Physical activity (e.g., walking, running) and creative outlet (e.g., journalling, painting), for example, are excluded as strategies because they may not be viable during instruction time. Emotional venting (e.g., wailing, cursing) is similarly omitted due to constraints by school rules and social norms. Expressive suppression is also excluded given empirical evidence of cultural differences in its use and adaptiveness. See pages 6 and 7 for brief descriptions and sample items of the emotion regulation strategies.

Emotion Regulation Strategies



Avoidance/Escape

Description: Avoiding or removing yourself from an emotional situation

Example: Going to the school nurse before a nerve-racking test

SERA item: Would you rather take a break from studying math?



Distraction

Description: Diverting your attention away from an emotional situation

Example: Thinking about a new toy or show while working on a boring task

SERA item: Would you think about something else to feel less angry?



Emotional Support

Description: Reaching out to others for comfort and encouragement

Example: Asking for a hug or texting others after sad loss of pet

SERA item: Would you tell another friend or an adult about what happened and how nervous you feel?



Acceptance

Description: Letting yourself feel an emotion without trying to change or avoid it

Example: Thinking it is normal and ok to feel nervous about meeting new people

SERA item: Would you allow yourself to feel sad about your friend not wanting to play?

Emotion Regulation Strategies



Problem-Solving

Description: Taking action to change an emotional situation

Example: Asking teacher for extra help after getting a disheartening grade

SERA item: Would you try checking your bag and locker for the homework?



Reframing

Description: Changing the way you think about an emotional situation

Example: Thinking how fun or exciting the game was despite disappointing loss

SERA item: Would you tell yourself that you will do better next time?



Repetitive Thinking

Description: Keep thinking about an emotional situation

Example: Thinking all day about angry argument with peer

SERA item: Would you keep thinking about how you got in trouble?



Somatic Relaxation

Description: Releasing tension that occurs in reaction to an emotional situation

Example: Taking slow, deep breaths to calm down

SERA item: Would you do some stretches to relax your body?

Administration of SERA

School, district, and/or state policies may require educators to inform parents about the administration of SERA to students. See page 9 for a sample informational letter for schools to distribute to parents. The letter describes the purposes and uses of the SERA for educators at your school and for researchers at Yale University.

Please allocate adequate time (30 minutes) for students to complete SERA in one sitting. Each student should have a computer/tablet and a set of headphones/earphones. If students are using a shared computer/tablet, please tell them to clear their web browser history first. Please prepare an alternative activity for students who cannot (due to parental opt-out) or do not wish to participate in the SERA. Note that the SERA is not designed for use with students of limited English proficiency or low cognitive ability.

Parent Information Letter

SAMPLE

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are excited to inform you of a new assessment we will be using to better understand and support our students' emotion management skills. The Student Emotion Regulation Assessment (SERA) is an online assessment of emotion regulation strategies for students in grades 1–12. It measures students' use of 8 different strategies to manage their emotions in academic and/or social situations related to school. It is developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence.

Students in grades 6–12 who complete the SERA will receive an individual report on their emotion regulation strategy profile. It will also include information about the pros and cons of each strategy and things they can do to better use each strategy. Our school will receive a school report on students' aggregated emotion regulation strategy profile across the whole school and each grade level. We will use this information to better understand and support our students' emotion regulation development, and in turn enhance their emotional well-being and academic success.

This work will also contribute to research that seeks to advance children and adolescents' social and emotional skills in schools. Researchers at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence will receive your children's *anonymous* data for research purposes.

If you have any questions regarding this, please feel free to contact me, <school liaison name>, at <phone number> or <email>.



Administration of SERA



Please distribute the appropriate SERA link to students and ask them to open it. We recommend students to use Chrome or Safari for the best experience. The web browser should show the Welcome screen. Please tell your students to wear their headphones/earphones.

The SERA includes a brief tutorial (practice vignette) for students in grades 1–5 (SERA-P) to facilitate their completion of the online assessment with minimal support from educators. Some students, however, may still need help, such as troubleshooting (e.g., adjusting the volume of headphones/earphones). Note that the SERA is not a test. This means that teachers are free to support students with defining words or interpreting what a question is asking. See pages 11 and 12 for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Students can close the web browser tab after they are done with the SERA. Their responses will be saved automatically. If students complete the SERA before their peers, please direct them to alternative activities that would not disturb or distract others who are still working on the SERA.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: What if my student has difficulty reading the text?

A1: Students can press the play button to hear the text read aloud to them.

Q2: What if my student does not see the NEXT button on their screen?

A2: Students may need to scroll down to find it.

Q3: What if my student does not know the answer to some of the demographic questions, such as their racial/ethnic background?

A3: Students can select the I don't know response option. Please do not answer demographic questions on behalf of the students.

Q4: What should my student do when they see the prompt "Imagine this happened to you. What would you do?"?

A4: Students can select the NEXT button to see specific things they could do.

Q5: What if my student forgets or seems confused about the instructions?

A5: Please tell them "Imagine that the story you just saw happened to you. What would you do? Remember to say what you would actually do, NOT what you think you should do."

Q6: What if my student wants to change an answer?

A6: Students can select the BACK button to change their answer.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q7: What if my student selects an answer but it does not automatically advance?

A7: Students can select the NEXT button to move forward.

Q8: What if my student's preferred response is not one of the given options?

A8: Students should select from the response options provided.

Q9: What if my student isn't sure what they would do in the situation?

A9: Students can select the Probably Not or Probably Yes response option.

Q10: What if my student says their response depends on certain factors (e.g., their mood)?

A10: Students can select the Probably Not or Probably Yes response option.

Q11: What if an error message pops up?

A11: Students can close the error message by selecting the OK button. If that does not work, refresh the SERA tab. If possible, please report any error messages to the project team at Yale_SERA@yale.edu.

Q12: What if my student closes the web browser tab by mistake?

A12: Students can re-open the SERA with the original link. It will pick up where they left off.

Results from SERA

The SERA provides two types of data reports:

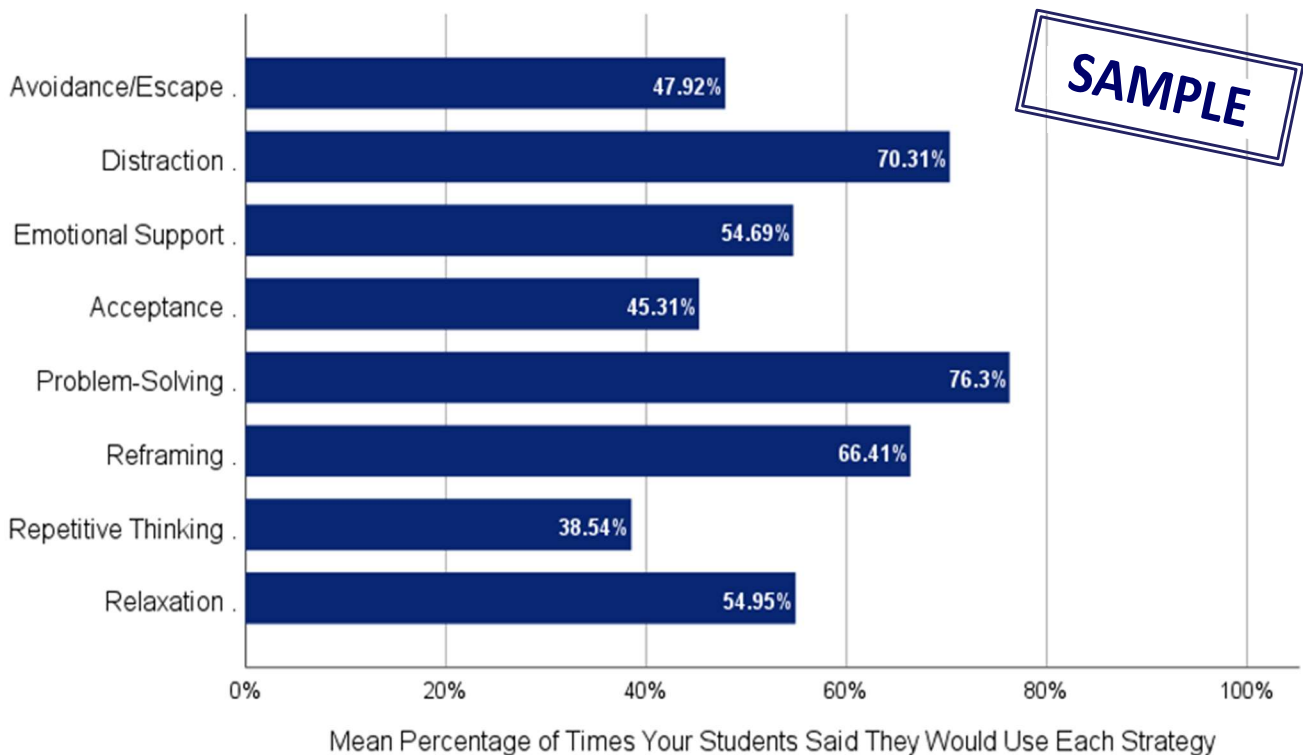
- (1) The SERA student report is for adolescents in grades 6–12 and provides students' individual emotion regulation strategy profile. Student reports are not provided for children in grades 1–5 given capacity limitations for self-reflection. The SERA student report comes with the SERA student companion guide, which provides information such as (a) pros and cons of each strategy, (b) things students can do to better use each strategy, and (c) mental health resources.
- (2) The SERA school report is for educators working with grades 1–12 and provides students' aggregated (a) emotion regulation strategy profile and (b) response distribution for each emotion regulation strategy. The SERA school report comes with the SERA school companion guide, which provides information such as (a) pros and cons of each strategy, (b) things educators can do to better support their students' strategy use, and (c) SEL resources.

Both data reports (and companion guides) provide interpretive guidance, actionable recommendations, and reflection questions that facilitate a reflective process for adolescent students and school staff to review, contemplate, and act on what they learned from the assessment data.

Strategy Profile

The SERA provides your students' emotion regulation strategy profile aggregated at different levels (by district, school, grade, and/or classroom). The strategy profile shows the *average* percentage of times your students said they would use each of the eight strategies. *Note that only students who fully completed the SERA are included in strategy profiles.*

The SERA includes 8 examples of each strategy, so the tally for each strategy ranges from 0 to 8. We simply add up each time students said they would probably or definitely do something that is an example of that strategy.



Response Distribution

The SERA also provides your students' aggregated response to each emotion regulation strategy. The response distribution shows the *average* percentage of times your students said they would or would not use each of the 8 strategies. *Note that students who did not fully complete the SERA (i.e., have missing responses) are included in the response distributions.* We simply add up each time students said they would probably or definitely do or not do something that is an example of that strategy:

Percentage of 'Definitely Not' for each strategy =

Tally of 'No' across items for each strategy / 8 * 100

Percentage of 'Probably Not' for each strategy =

Tally of 'Probably Not' across items for each strategy / 8 * 100

Percentage of 'Probably Yes' for each strategy =

Tally of 'Probably Yes' across items for each strategy / 8 * 100

Percentage of 'Definitely Yes' for each strategy =

Tally of 'Yes' across items for each strategy / 8 * 100

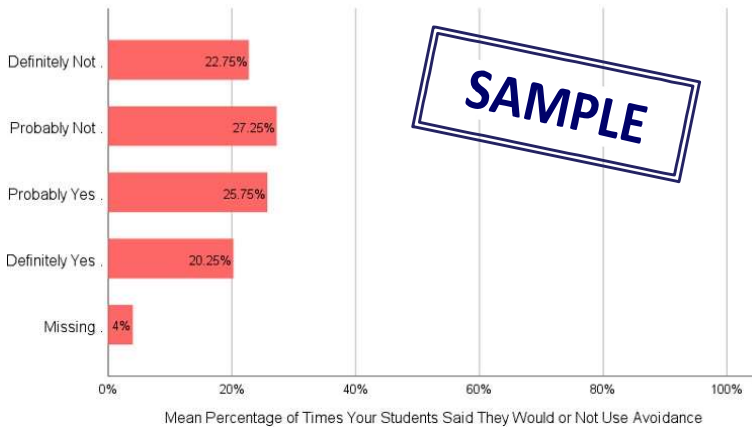
Percentage of 'Missing' for each strategy =

Tally of missing responses across items for each strategy / 8 * 100

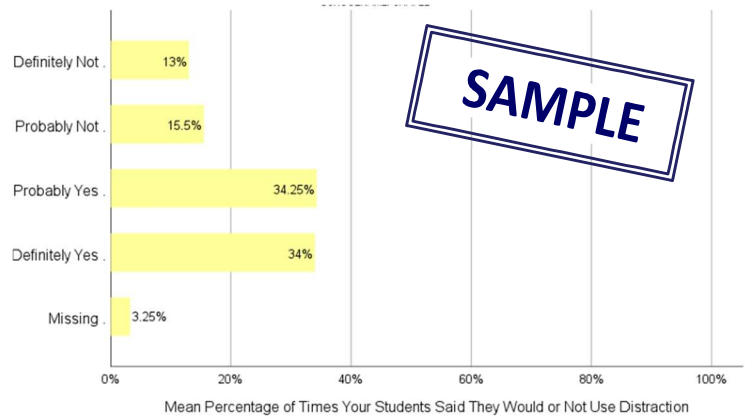
Response Distribution



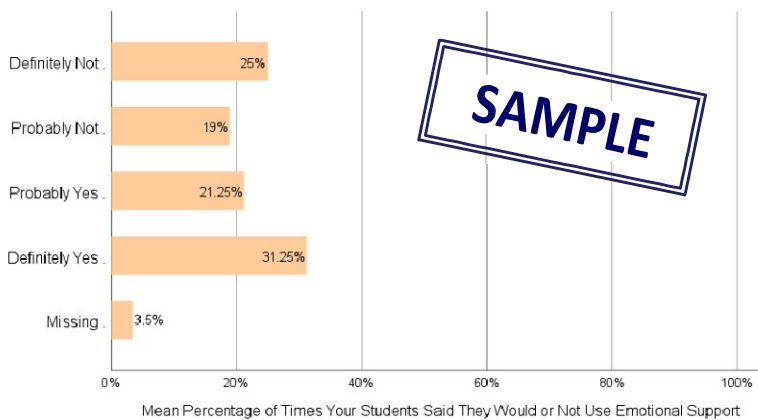
Avoidance



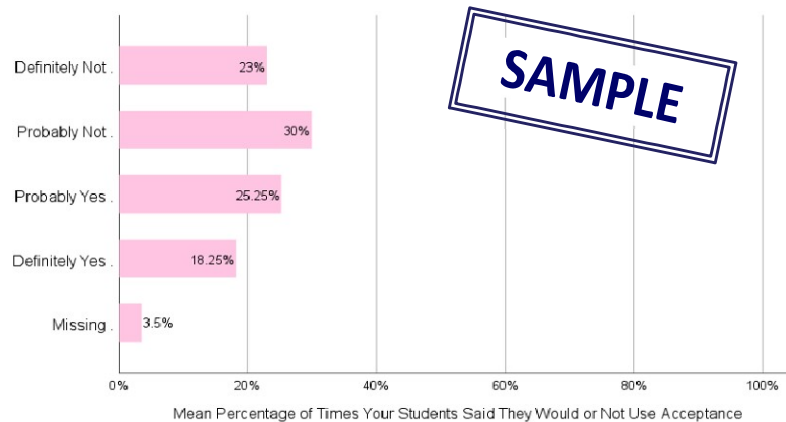
Distraction



Emotional Support



Acceptance



Important Considerations

(1) The SERA is under validation.

Information from the SERA should not be used to make high-stakes decisions, such as student grading or teacher evaluation. We hope the SERA will help you better understand your students' use of different emotion regulation strategies and identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth in their social and emotional development. Upon validation, the SERA can be useful for planning individual or group SEL lessons, measuring progress following SEL programs, and supporting your students' use of different strategies in the classroom.

(2) The SERA does not encompass all strategies.

The SERA covers some ways students manage their emotions in some situations. Students may have other ways of regulating their emotions, such as listening to music, taking a walk, or writing in a journal. So, remember to give your students credit for the unique ways they manage their emotions that may not be reflected in the SERA.

(3) There is no one right way to manage emotions.

Each emotion regulation strategy has its own strengths and weaknesses. Keep in mind that no one strategy is helpful for every person or in every situation. We suggest teaching and encouraging students to consider their emotional experiences and use different strategies, individually or in combination, to enhance their mental health and academic success.

Debriefing of SERA School Report

Schools may facilitate discussions about the SERA school report during staff meetings. Here are sample discussion questions:

- (a) What are 3 things you found interesting?
- (b) What are 2 things you want to know more about?
- (c) What is 1 thing you want to do right now?



Debriefing of SERA Student Report

Many adolescent students in grades 6–12 feel uncomfortable talking about their emotions and emotion regulation. The majority also express discomfort with educators seeing their individual SERA student reports. The general preference of students is to have the opportunity to choose 1–2 teachers (they trust and have a relationship with) to share and talk about their individual reports. Schools may facilitate such conversations with students, but the comfort level of students should be assessed and respected. Here are sample reflection questions provided in the SERA student report that can be used as starting points for conversations:

- (a) Does your emotion regulation strategy profile seem accurate to you? That is, does it match how you think you manage your emotions in school? If so, in what ways does your profile seem accurate? If not, in what ways does it seem inaccurate?
- (b) Do the emotion regulation strategies that you use help you to (1) meet your needs in the short term (e.g., feel better, avoid conflict) or (2) achieve your goals in the long term (e.g., complete tasks, strengthen relationships)?
- (c) How helpful are the emotion regulation strategies that you use frequently? If so, in what ways are they helpful to you? If not, how can you use them differently? Are there other strategies that might be helpful that you would like to try out?

Acknowledgments

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