

**SKILLS
FOR LIFE**
S E R I E S

SELF-AWARENESS

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What is Self-Awareness?

Self-awareness, or self-consciousness, refers to the capacity of people to monitor their internal states and their interactions or relationships with others (Sutton, 2016). Self-awareness can be internal or private, when the focus is on how well an individual perceives themselves, or it can be external or public, when it focuses on how well a person knows how others see them (Eurich, 2018; Scheier & Carver, 1985). It is considered part of what we know as socioemotional skills.

There are multiple ways of characterizing self-awareness. The most common descriptors include the following:

- ▶ External
- ▶ Internal



Source: Morin, 2011; Eurich, 2018.

External

- ▶ Being aware of how others perceive your values, passions, aspirations, fit with the environment, and reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses).
- ▶ Recognizing yourself as a social being.
- ▶ Distinguishing yourself from your surroundings.
- ▶ Seeking feedback from others (peers, boss, family, friends, etc.) to understand how they perceive you and identify what you need to improve.
- ▶ Making inferences about the mental states of others (theory of mind).

Internal

- ▶ Being able to see yourself clearly and not overestimate your abilities and skills.
- ▶ Recognizing your own values, passions, and aspirations, as well as your fit with the environment, reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses), and impact on others.
- ▶ Evaluating your own strengths and weaknesses.
- ▶ Having curiosity about yourself, a desire to learn more about your emotions, values, thought processes, attitudes, and so on.
- ▶ Examining your thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors to understand what you should do to improve or change something.
- ▶ Evaluating what you learned from your most recent experience.
- ▶ Differentiating between rumination and reflective processing of negative situations.
- ▶ Boosting self-esteem and self-efficacy by truly understanding yourself.
- ▶ Reflecting on your psychological processes and inner experiences.
- ▶ Practicing self-knowledge, self-recognition and self-description, and self-evaluation.

As a 21st century citizen with self-awareness skills, you should be able to do the following:

- ▶ Self-observe with clarity, know and understand yourself, be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses.
- ▶ Consider what you think and feel and how you behave, your personality, your character, your past, your prospects, and your position in your social environment.
- ▶ Determine what actions, thoughts, and emotions are approaching or moving away from your standards, and how.
- ▶ Inquire about your level of expertise, skills, abilities, and competencies, as well as how much you truly know about yourself.
- ▶ Ask yourself how you feel about situations or events, so you can take action.
- ▶ Be aware of your inner self (thoughts, feelings, and behavior), monitor and understand how you interact with your environment.
- ▶ Recognize your worth as a person, love and appreciate yourself (self-esteem).
- ▶ Understand the difference between how you see yourself and how others see you.
- ▶ Understand what others think of you and who others think you are.
- ▶ Find constant feedback at work, at home, and in other settings.
- ▶ Strike a balance between who you are, who you want to be, and how others perceive you.
- ▶ Identify the reasons and the physiological correlates underlying each emotion.

Why Self-Awareness?

Self-awareness is positively linked to other 21st century skills such as empathy, communication, and creativity, as well as job and relationship satisfaction and happiness. Internal self-awareness is associated with higher job and relationship satisfaction; similarly, external self-awareness is related to empathy (Eurich, 2018). In contrast, when people are unaware of their own emotional states, they tend to show a limited capacity for empathy (Bagby & Taylor, 1997). In other words, self-awareness enables perspective-taking and the ability to distinguish between one's own and other people's feelings (Trentini et al., 2022).

Self-awareness also facilitates self-regulation. It does so by helping us evaluate aspects of ourselves that need to be modified in certain social contexts (Morin, 2011). In addition, self-awareness has been associated with well-being, mental health, and daily performance (Sutton, 2016). When people are self-aware, they are more confident and creative, make better decisions, forge stronger bonds with one another, and communicate more effectively (Eurich, 2018).

How to Develop Self-Awareness?

Self-awareness develops gradually from the first years of life. Body self-awareness develops first, in infancy. In the second year, children show clear signs of reflective self-awareness. That is, they represent and reflect on themselves as independent and objective entities. Self-awareness continues to develop throughout the preschool years and beyond (Brownell et al., 2007). Self-awareness can also be developed at older ages and in various settings. For example, the literature describes the importance of reflective thought processes to improve self-awareness in adults (London et al., 2023).

Still, most of the interventions on socioemotional learning (SEL) consider self-awareness as an important part of the socioemotional skills they work with. For instance, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) views it as one of the first socioemotional skills to work on. Although self-awareness is embedded in most SEL programs, certain activities are especially identified as enhancing self-awareness, such as reflective writing (in a journal), asking for feedback, or getting a coach (London et al., 2023).



Reflective Practices in Teacher Education

A 14-week program to promote reflective practices was piloted with Turkish undergraduate education students (Korucu Kis & Kartal, 2019). In this program, each student created two 15-minute microlessons, which they then taught to their peers. These brief lectures were captured on camera. After every performance, students who performed as instructors separated into groups and used self-monitoring, peer observation, and journal writing to reflect on these experiences. Self-monitoring was done by watching their own recordings and evaluating themselves.

Also after every performance, each student had meetings with teachers and peers to get feedback. In addition, students were asked to keep weekly journals that guided them with prompts to explain, consider, and evaluate their own and their peers' microlessons. All participants were expected to submit a comprehensive, overall reflection paper at the end of the program, outlining the experiences they had and the difficulties and opportunities presented by these self-reflection teaching-learning experiences.

At the end of the program, almost all of the students considered the reflective practices to have increased their self-awareness. These findings were in line with those of previous studies indicating that self-monitoring and journal writing enhance self-awareness and lead to self-regulation of both cognition and behavior (e.g., Farrel, 2013; Mercado & Baecher, 2014).

A background image showing a smiling teacher with dark hair tied back, looking down at a student. Another student is visible in the background, also smiling. The image is slightly blurred and has a soft, warm tone.

Personalized Learning Method

Personalized learning (PL) was found to positively impact Vermont middle school students' self-awareness (DeMink-Carthew et al., 2020). This method emphasizes the power of students to make decisions about their learning process. PL is characterized by four attributes: voice, co-creation, social construction, and self-discovery. Voice refers to giving students the chance to be involved in setting the curriculum agenda, designing assessments, and defining learning goals. Co-creation emphasizes the collaboration between learners and teachers that necessarily results from allowing students a voice. Social construction means that students form concepts specifically through their interactions with others, and self-discovery is the process in which students self-reflect on their development of skills and knowledge (Kallick & Zmuda, 2017).

In this project, teachers and learners co-designed projects of personal interest, connected to a shared classroom theme. Throughout the project's various phases, the teachers gave the students plenty of chances to make decisions about their learning process, such as selecting whether to work alone or in groups, where to work, and how often to check in with the teacher.

Students reported that the freedom they were given in how they approached their project helped them gain knowledge of the circumstances and tactics that best supported their learning. They also said they became better at recognizing the challenges they faced when trying to pursue their task, as well as the emotions and feelings the activities generated.



How to assess and measure Self-Awareness?

A variety of self-awareness measures have been developed, each focusing on a different aspect (Ashley & Reiter-Palmon, 2012). However, as for other 21st century skills, most of the instruments for measuring self-awareness are self-reported and use Likert-type items (i.e., grading the level of agreement with a sentence). Examples are the Self-Consciousness Scale-revised (Scheier & Carver, 1985), the Emotion Awareness Questionnaire-revised (Rieffe et al., 2008), the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (Grant et al., 2002), and the Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire (Sutton, 2016).

There is also a multi-rater assessment of self-awareness, again using Likert-type items. It captures a participant's ratings of their own self-awareness as well as ratings given to them by another person who knows them well. These two ratings are contrasted to define the participant's degree of self-awareness (Eurich, 2018).

RESOURCES:

 Website. [CASEL Framework](#)

 Video. [What is self-awareness](#)

 Video. [The power of self-awareness](#)

 Video. [Conocerse a uno mismo](#)

 Video. [Ayudemos a los jóvenes a mejorar su autoconcepto](#)

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