



SEL SUMMER INSTITUTE

Harvard University's Gutman Library, in-person and remote. Cambridge, MA. 8.3.23

The CARE Model: a practical tool for character development and social emotional learning

James Davis, EdM, MA
SEL Summer Institute Faculty

Citation:

Davis, J.D., (2023, August 3). *The CARE Model: a practical tool for character development and social emotional learning* [Conference presentation]. SEL Summer Institute 2023, Cambridge, MA, United States.



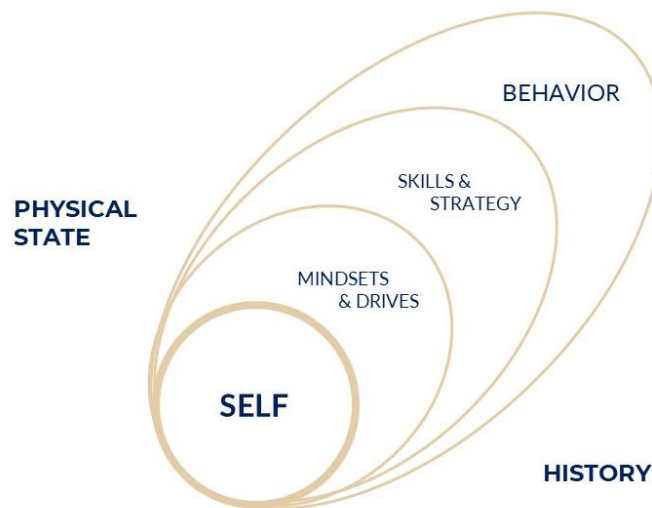
SEL SUMMER INSTITUTE

Harvard University's Gutman Library, in-person and remote. Cambridge, MA. 8.3.23

The CARE Model: a practical tool for character development and social emotional learning

James Davis, EdM, MA
SEL Summer Institute Faculty

**The following transcript has been edited for readability and reflects one section of a presentation titled Beyond Strength: Social Emotional Learning through Sport. It refers to the image below.*



This image, what we call the CARE Model, represents the human experience. At the center of the model is the Self. The border around Self is thicker than the rest because the Self is untouchable. Everyone, each one of you, is inherently valuable. You don't have to do anything to prove it. We should remind ourselves of that more often. You don't have to accomplish anything specific, don't have to win trophies or have the 'right' career, or make a certain amount of money... you are inherently valuable – an unfortunately easy thing to forget.

Just beyond that, we find Mindsets and Drives. Somewhat paradoxically, this is where our self-concept is developed. The way we see, understand, and appraise ourselves sits at the Mindset level, the psychological level. Self-concept, self-awareness, self-esteem all live here. The way we think of ourselves, the feelings we have of ourselves, sit here just beyond the true Self. We need the Mindset level to make sense of the Self, even if we are not always generous in our assessment. More on that in a moment.

Drives refer to innate, encoded natures within us all. One of the innate drives we share is a desire to survive. We want to avoid pain and get to the next day. Think thirst, hunger, the drive to sleep or move or seek community. It can also refer to the recoil experienced when we step on a tack – some of our Skills, Strategies, and Behaviors are programmed at a biological level. For our purposes today, we will refer mostly to the psychological components of Mindset and core schema.

Davis, J.D., (2023, August 3). *The CARE Model: a practical tool for character development and social emotional learning* [Conference presentation]. SEL Summer Institute 2023, Cambridge, MA, United States.

Skills and Strategies sit just beyond that and as you can see, Behaviors are the furthest reach from the true version of the Self. That does not mean that Behaviors are not important. They are.

Behavior is the most outward facing of these categories. Behavior is what we put out into the world. It's the most observable. It's the most measurable. When we behave in certain ways, we have an opportunity to collect feedback from our environment and the people around us. That feedback can cause us to take a step back, do a quick reflection on the Skills and Strategies we used, and allow us an opportunity to maintain or adjust.

Too often, many of us create a faulty link between Behavior and Self. So before we go any further with this model, let's recognize that Behavior cannot touch the inherent value of the Self.

This leads us to an important topic: the distinction between guilt and shame. I was recently on a coaching call with a professional for an hour... tears for the full hour. All we were trying to do was talk through (and ultimately break) the faulty connection between Behavior and Self.

This person happened to be in Real Estate. It became clear that their sense of value, their sense of self-worth, was directly influenced by sales numbers, yearly income, and other external measures of success. He believed that the Behavior was an indicator of the value of the Self. That connection is manufactured, and has to be broken. It is one of the primary drivers of shame, which is not something any of us should carry.

It is important to distinguish between shame and guilt. Guilt is not bad. If you put a Behavior into the world, you will get feedback on it. If you do something that harms someone else, if you came up here and kicked me in the leg and saw that it caused me pain, a certain degree of empathy might lead to a touch of guilt, you *should* feel guilty – in this case, it has potential to be a Behavior modifier. If you do something that makes you feel guilty, stop doing it. Pretty straightforward.

It changes flavor when it turns to shame. Shame occurs when we wear that guilt too heavily, for too long, or believe that it is somehow a reflection of the Self.

If you were to kick me, saw that it caused pain, felt a little guilt, then apologized and decided not to do it again... great. That's how the experimental process of human existence works, to a degree.

But instead, if you went back to your seat and thought, "well of course I hurt him, that's the sort of thing that I do, I hurt people, I'm bad" – when it is interpreted as a reflection of the Self rather than feedback from a Behavior, we feel shame.

If you kick me, change the behavior. You made a bad decision. But there's nothing inherently wrong with You.

This approach has the potential to be radically empowering, since without breaking that loop, there is really nowhere to go. Using the model allows the feedback we get from Behavior to allow us to reflect on Skills and Strategies, and also on Mindsets and Drives.

Maybe this all happened because you were angry with me. Something occurred that triggered a reaction at the Mindset level, then you relied on the Skills and Strategies of acting out in an aggressive way, the Behavior then is an emergent property of Mindset, and a reflection of the Skills and Strategies you have at your immediate disposal. After all, you could not have enlisted a Skill that you've not yet developed.

If you can reflect on that, then you can adjust to change future outcomes. You can recognize that you were frustrated, but need to develop a different Skill to act on your frustration, so that in the future you can behave in a different way. Always keeping in mind that it was not You, the Self, in any absolute or concrete sense.

This is a dynamic process, it is not rigid or static, we are constantly moving up and down the model. Developing this understanding and referring to the model is an antidote to a fixed Mindset, since it always gives us something to reflect on, somewhere to go next.

Two additional pieces, “State” and “History”, should also be examined. State, referring to the physiological state, will influence all these other processes. For example, if you are on three hours of sleep, you might want to behave in a certain way, but your Skills would certainly be dulled. Behavior will almost always look different in a degraded physiological state. How many of us have been short or cranky with someone we loved, just because we were hungry? State absolutely influences the human experience.

History is more complex. You might think about trauma-informed coaching or trauma-informed leadership – which are heavy and true versions of the work – but history impacts the model even in lower stakes. All of our history influences our present and the way we interact with the world.

An easy example: if a dog were to walk through that door, some people might go to pet it while others moved away from it. Two distinct reactions, distinct Behaviors, in the presence of the same objective experience. The Behaviors are not good or bad, they are amoral, it’s just what happened. They will happen almost automatically, as reactions, as an emergent property of Skill, Strategies, Mindsets, and Drives... all influenced by History.

If someone was bitten by a dog as a child, that will install something at the Mindset level. Influenced by that experience, and in the interest of pain-avoidance, that person will develop adaptive Skills and Strategies – in this case, moving away from the dog, moving away from a potential threat that looks like something that hurt you in the past. You might not be conscious of what’s going on. That emergent property, that reaction, that default setting appears because of the throughline, as all these components come together.

However, if you grew up with dogs, you might move right in to pet it. Neither of these situations are good or bad. Once we gain understanding they are obvious, they are adaptive, and occurring relative to personal history.

That acknowledgement leads to an opportunity to rewrite History. This too can be empowering. Rewriting history does not mean pretending that what happened didn’t happen. Instead, it refers to one of the most studied and effective practices in all of psychotherapy: exposure therapy.

Exposure therapy. How do you get over a fear of spiders? A slow, gradually increasing degree of exposure to the thing you are afraid of, while grounding oneself, framing the experience, and working on self-talk – you never have to like spiders, but you will create an opportunity to more accurately appraise the thing you are afraid of.

We referenced it earlier [prior to transcription] with one of our coaches who is not great at public speaking. Whatever happened in her history has brought us to this place. Once she decided it was something she wanted to work on we slowly onboarded opportunities to speak in front of increasingly larger groups. We are giving her an opportunity to create what will become History as we move forward, so that she can subtly adjust and heal at the Mindset level, equip her with new Skills, and eventually a new set of Behavioral expectations.

How does all that sound? Doable? And hard? It is hard. And that’s the truth of the work. The human experience is unendingly complex.

There is no ‘easy’ way to do this work. As we discussed [earlier in the presentation, before transcription], I would be skeptical of anyone who said “the way to achieve success is to, ‘insert strategy here’”... no, they might be sharing something that worked for them – maybe put that in your toolbox of Skills for later use, or try it and see if it works for you. But there is no strict script for success. There is no magic bullet.

It’s not enough to just teach a growth mindset, though a growth mindset is good. Grit is not enough. Gratitude is not enough. Emotion regulation, resilience, empathy or any other capacity is only as effective as its relative position within the unique, complex human organism.

The only path to sustainable fulfillment, for anyone to stand a chance at achieving their personal version of success, is by using a dynamic and thoughtful approach.

Even this, our time together today, is installing something at the Mindset level for all of us. Hopefully it will implant something that will allow Skills, Strategies, and Behaviors to emerge from you in a way that serves both you and the people you lead.

If you are aiming for character development and want to teach social emotional skills, then you’d be wise to consider the human being in all its complexity. This is hard, but like anything it gets easier over time, with practice. And it is definitely worth it, if you CARE enough to try.

