



FEEL YOUR BEST SELF: A CONNECTICUT EXEMPLAR FOR MOVING BEYOND EMOTION KNOWLEDGE TO REGULATION ACROSS AGES AND CONTEXTS

A CSCH Brief by Sandra M. Chafouleas and Jessica B. Koslouski for the Connecticut *Moving Beyond Implications: Research into Policy Briefing Conference* on January 15, 2026

The Challenge

Connecticut's educators, families, and youth mentors are committed to supporting children's emotional development, yet many caregivers lack a shared vocabulary and access to evidence-based tools to do so effectively. Without flexible, credible solutions, critical opportunities are missed to help young people develop the essential life skills they need in emotional navigation—skills that are foundational to academic success, healthy relationships, and long-term well-being.

Educators, families and youth mentors need common language & credible solutions to make emotional navigation simpler so kids gain these important life skills.

[Research](#) consistently demonstrates that emotion regulation skills—developed starting in early childhood—have cascading effects resulting in improved social skills, friendships, peer acceptance, and greater emotion regulation through middle childhood. Throughout [childhood](#) and [adolescence](#), students with strong emotion regulation skills demonstrate increased academic achievement. **Despite the evidence, disconnect with practice can be found, highlighting space for state guidance to strengthen implementation in emotional development.**

A first challenge is the need for common language and credible solutions that can be embedded across caregiving settings. Confusion exists about defining features as well as roles and responsibilities for different caregiving settings (school, home, community). Controversy about social and emotional learning (SEL) has focused on the roles and responsibilities for different caregiving settings (school, home, community). Some feel that SEL should not be taught in schools, as it can infringe upon time for academic instruction and family authority. Others feel that SEL does not go far enough in teaching critical concepts. Across the perspectives, however, there are more similarities than differences; caregivers across the political spectrum acknowledging critical life skills include emotion regulation. **A solution can be found through shared responsibility to teach emotion-coping strategies and language that work everywhere children are: schools, homes, libraries, and pediatrician offices.**

A second challenge is the flexibility and accessibility with which simple tools can be put in place by caregivers across diverse settings. [School-based programs](#) that teach SEL skills to all students may be evidence-based but are often expensive and require extensive training. In addition, many overwhelmingly emphasize social skills while underrepresenting [critical skills](#) in emotion regulation, empathy, and perspective taking. Emotion regulation skills are critical for children to respond to everyday stressors (e.g., feeling overwhelmed in a situation) wherever they live and learn.

Despite the challenges, **Connecticut has opportunity to be a national leader through scalable solutions to enable caregivers across settings with the tools that they need to make emotional navigation simpler.** And that opportunity already exists in Connecticut.

Developed through partnership at the University of Connecticut, Feel Your Best Self (FYBS) has been highlighted as a breakthrough innovation fueled by collaborative persistence and creativity.

FYBS is an award-winning toolkit that brings credibility, accessibility, creativity, and joy to learning about emotions and emotion-coping strategies.

Since its release in 2022, FYBS has achieved wide use by over 4,000 adults and 32,000 children, with adoption from Connecticut to around the world along with national media recognition and kids' entertainment awards.

Engaging multi-media –

songs, strategy videos, visuals, puppet-making materials – are flexibly chosen and easily accessed to match the setting. FYBS teaches how to recognize when you aren't feeling your best self (think stormy, heavy feelings like stomach butterflies, head spinning, or short temper), reflect on the positive coping direction that might help, and then respond by using a FYBS strategy that fits best for the moment. Recent implementation studies in Connecticut schools demonstrate increases in student engagement and positive affect, with high teacher-reported usability. Most importantly, FYBS was designed for expanded use across settings, with resources that have wide appeal across educators, families, and youth mentors as they explore together right alongside kids. Originally created for elementary ages, FYBS has been well-received by all ages – with users across cultures and contexts finding FYBS to bring joyful learning in simple ways. The variety of materials – grounded by a freely-available web-based toolkit – means FYBS is accessible across price points and is a scalable solution.

FYBS is a Connecticut innovation that demonstrates what is possible when evidence-based research and practical accessibility converge.

By ensuring quality standards, leveraging state-developed exemplars, removing implementation barriers, supporting cross-sector professional learning, and extending common language across the contexts where children live and learn, we can transform how young people develop the emotional navigation skills that will serve them throughout their lives. These are foundational life skills that support academic achievement, reduce behavioral challenges, strengthen mental health, and prepare young people to thrive as adults. The return on investment extends across generations.



Paths Forward for Legislators

Connecticut has the research expertise, proven resources, and commitment to innovation needed to be a national leader by demonstrating how evidence-based research and innovation can converge to create scalable solutions that support children’s emotional health and well-being. Legislators can engage in shared responsibility through the following actions:

- 1. Prioritize Accessibility Through Low-Barrier, Evidence-Informed Resources.** Direct policy toward emotion-coping resources that are low-cost, user-friendly, and require minimal training. This reduces barriers for under-resourced settings while ensuring all Connecticut children have access to quality emotional wellness support wherever they learn and live.
- 2. Align Funding with Comprehensive Professional Learning.** Allocate resources for ongoing professional development that equips caregivers with knowledge and confidence to deliver comprehensive SEL programming that includes emotion-coping. Ensure training reaches teachers, support staff, administrators, families, and community partners to create common language across all settings.
- 3. Create Cross-Sector Coordination to Extend Common Language Across Settings.** Establish coordination mechanisms between schools, families, healthcare providers, and youth-serving organizations to reinforce shared emotional wellness language and strategies. When core concepts are consistent across settings, children gain mastery through meaningful practice.
- 4. Leverage Connecticut-Developed Exemplars to Maximize Impact.** Support adoption of Connecticut-created resources like Feel Your Best Self that demonstrate research credibility and practical usability. Investing in proven, homegrown solutions maximizes taxpayer return, showcases state innovation, and ensures resources are designed for Connecticut’s context.

To Learn More

Chafouleas, S. M., Wicks, E. & Koslouski, J. B. (2026, January). *Feel Your Best Self: Coping with Emotions at Any Age*. Available at <https://www.feelyourbestself.org/s/FYBS-Coping-with-Emotions-at-Any-Age.pdf>.

Chafouleas, S. M., Koslouski, J.B., Marcy, H.M., Stein, R., & Bracey, J. (2025, November). *A Simple Refresh: Simple Strategies Anyone Can Use to Foster an Emotionally Safe School Environment*. Storrs, Connecticut: University of Connecticut. Available at <https://csch.media.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2206/2025/11/CSCH-Brief-Simple-Strategies-Refresh-Final-Fall-2025.pdf>.

UConn Collaboratory on School and Child Health (n.d.). *Emotional Well-being: The Science and Practice of Feeling Well Learning Series*. <https://csch.uconn.edu/2025/09/02/emotional-well-being-learning-series/>.

Note. Full reference list available upon request.

To cite this brief: Chafouleas, S. M. & Koslouski, J. B. (2026, January). *Feel Your Best Self: A Connecticut Exemplar for Moving Beyond Emotion Knowledge to Regulation Across Ages and Contexts*. Storrs, CT: UConn Collaboratory on School and Child Health. Available from: <http://csch.uconn.edu/>.

Disclosures: Dr. Sandra Chafouleas and Emily Wicks are co-inventors of the Feel Your Best Self (FYBS) intellectual property owned by the University of Connecticut, and are co-Chief Executive Officers with FYBS & Co. Dr. Sandra Chafouleas and Emily Wicks also have an equity interest (stock) in FYBS & Co.

Copyright © 2026 by the University of Connecticut. All rights reserved. Permission granted to photocopy for personal and educational use as long as the names of the creators and the full copyright notice are included in all copies.