



Extension and College of Medicine team up to teach Social Emotional and Ethical Learning for local youth-serving staff

Over the past two years, University of Illinois Extension 4-H and SNAP-Ed educators have partnered with University of Illinois College of Medicine faculty and Dr. Tiffany Abrego, Licensed Psychologist and Executive Director of Behavioral Health at Boys and Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan to provide vital training on Social Emotional and Ethical (SEE) Learning. Since August 2023, 66 afterschool and youth programming professionals have participated in this targeted professional development series. To date, the series has included 6 multi-day sessions and monthly virtual check-in sessions.

SEE Learning is designed to strengthen adult capacity in key areas impacting well-being of youth. Core topics include trauma-informed de-escalation, emotion regulation, connecting with youth, building resilience, and ensuring youth safety. These sessions equip staff with practical tools to foster safe, inclusive, and emotionally responsive environments for the young people they serve.

Participants have found the training highly relevant and applicable. One program participant shared an example they witnessed thanks to the implementation of techniques learned. “If a child can see that another child is mad, they will put their hand on their shoulder and be like, ‘Okay, we’ll help them through that.’” This action reflects the kind of compassionate peer support that becomes possible when young people are taught to understand and regulate emotions.

Program feedback indicates meaningful outcomes both for youth and adults. Staff note that youth are now more self-aware, better able to express their feelings, and more empathetic toward their peers. Youth are communicating more effectively and showing signs of increased self-sufficiency. As a result, staff report fewer “big outbursts” and feel more confident helping youth get to the root of their problems.

The training has also positively impacted adult morale and job satisfaction. Many staff say they are more excited to come to work, knowing they have tools that help them build stronger relationships and support youth in meaningful ways. Participants appreciate that the training sessions come with easy-to-implement materials and strategies they can take directly back to their programs.

By investing in the adults who work closest with youth, the SEE Learning initiative is creating ripple effects that foster safer, more nurturing, and emotionally intelligent program environments across Peoria and the surrounding area.



Dr. Tiffany Abrego (pictured center), Executive Director of Behavioral Health and Licensed Psychologist at Boys and Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan, taught the Social Emotional and Ethical Learning series that was in partnership with U of I Extension and College of Medicine. The group pictured above took part in the May 2025 session as part of the series that began in August 2023.

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