

CharacterStrong's Middle School Scope and Sequence and DESSA Crosswalk

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CharacterStrong's [Middle School Scope and Sequence](#), updated in 2024, offers lessons and activities to teach and integrate social skills, emotional regulation skills, and character development for 6th through 8th grade.

The DESSA suite of assessments measures key social and emotional competencies essential for student success now and into the future. The DESSA assessments span kindergarten through 12th grade and can be completed by educators, students, and parents or guardians. The assessments are nationally standardized, norm-referenced, strength-based behavior rating scales, measuring the positive skills, behaviors, and mindsets necessary for students to thrive. The six competencies measured by the DESSA, their abbreviations, and their definitions are listed here:

- Self-Awareness (SA): The ability to understand emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence one's behavior; recognize strengths and limitations; and develop healthy identities and a sense of purpose.
- Self-Management (SM): The ability to manage emotions and behaviors across different situations and environments and to demonstrate agency as one works to set and achieve personal and collective goals.
- Social Awareness (SO): The understanding of social norms for behavior; the ability to empathize with, respect, and take the perspectives of others; and the feeling of connection and belonging with family, peers, schools, and community groups.
- Relationship Skills (RS): The ability to establish and maintain healthy and positive relationships including effective communication, collaborative problem-solving, negotiating conflict, and demonstrating helpful and supportive behaviors.
- Responsible Decision Making (RDM): The ability to make careful, reliable, and constructive choices about personal and social behavior that are appropriate across diverse situations; to consider the personal, social, and collective impact of one's actions; and to demonstrate curiosity and an open-mindedness to learning.
- Optimistic Thinking (OT): The belief and demonstration of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking regarding oneself, others, and one's life situations in the past, present, and future.

This crosswalk highlights the alignment between CharacterStrong's Middle School Scope and Sequence and DESSA assessment items across six competencies. It demonstrates how the DESSA assessments can be used by districts and schools to help students develop their character and support life-readiness.

Grade 6 Belonging: How can we create a place where everyone feels like they belong?	
<i>Sessions</i>	<i>DESSA Items</i>
Foundation – Setting the Stage S00: Bullying 101 S1: Welcome S2: Building Connections S3: Middle School Mythbusting (Worries & Wonders) S4: Developing Community Agreements S5: Understanding the CharacterDare Process S6: From Bystander to Advocate S7: Middle School Mythbusting (Taking on Tests) S8: Meeting New People S9: Get to Know Your School	• Make positive contributions to their class, school, or community (SM) • Feel like they belong in their school (SO) • Agree to and follow expectations for their behavior (SO) • Stand up for a friend or classmate (RS) • Get along well with different types of people (RS) • Contribute to creating a positive learning environment (SO)
Values & Purpose S10: Values Exploration S11: Applying Values Online S12: Practicing Values (What's Important to Us?) S19: Using Values in Conflict Resolution S22: Strengthening Friendships S33: Choose Kindness	• Demonstrate a sense of who they are and what is important to them (SA) • List the personal traits that are most important to them (SA) • Make positive contributions to their class, school, or community (SM) • Adjust their behavior to match different settings (SO) • Show a willingness to examine their beliefs and opinions (SA) • Do nice things for people (RS)
Emotion Understanding & Regulation S17: Understanding Emotions S18: Regulating Emotions (Naming Emotions) S20: Practicing Conflict Resolution S27: Connecting Motivation & Emotions S28: Regulating Emotions (Calming Our Emotions) S29: Making New Friends S31: Resolving Conflicts with Friends S32: Helping Others Resolve Conflict (Saying I'm Sorry)	• Describe the emotion they were feeling (SA) • Know how their emotions influence their behavior (SA) • Can tell when their emotions make it hard to pay attention (SA) • Can calm down when they are upset (SM) • Resolve conflicts positively (RS) • Can recognize their emotions (SA) • Good at making and keeping friends (RS) • Accept responsibility for their actions (RDM)

Empathy & Compassion S15: Understanding Others' Perspectives S16: Practicing Perspective-Taking S24: Listening With Empathy S25: Exercising Perspective-Taking S26: Connecting Through Perspective-Taking S30: Becoming A Better Friend	• Respect a person's right to have a different perspective (SO) • Listen to others (RS) • Ask questions when they did not understand something (SA) • Show a willingness to examine their beliefs and opinions (SA) • Good at making and keeping friends (RS)
Goals & Habits S13: Building Listening Skills S14: Listening Practice S21: Developing Friendships S23: Applying Listening Skills	• Listen to others (RS) • Make others feel welcome or included (SO) • Good at making and keeping friends (RS) • Feel like they belong in their school (SO)

Grade 7 Well-being: How do I develop personal well-being and how does it affect our relationships with others?	
<i>Sessions</i>	<i>DESSA Items</i>
Foundation – Setting the Stage S00: Bullying 101 S1: Welcome S2: Building Connections S3: Developing Community Agreements S4: From Bystander to Advocate S5: The CharacterDare	• Agree to and follow expectations for their behavior (SO) • Make positive contributions to their class, school, or community (SM) • Contribute to creating a positive learning environment (SO) • Stand up for a friend or classmate (RS)
Values & Purpose S6: Values in Action S7: Developing Character Habits S8: Values as Guides S12: Real Life Respect: Defining Respect S13: Real Life Respect: Creating Caring Environments S33: Promoting Honesty, pt 1 S34: Promoting Honesty, pt 2	• List the personal traits that are most important to them (SA) • Respect a person's right to have a different perspective (SO) • Show a willingness to examine their beliefs and opinions (SA) • Respond to others' feelings in kind and safe ways (SO) • Do the right thing in a difficult situation (RDM) • Accept responsibility for their actions (RDM)

Emotion Understanding & Regulation S9: Understanding Emotions S10: Expanding Emotion Vocabulary S11: Practicing Emotion Regulation S14: Understanding Stress S15: Stress Coping Strategies S31: Exploring Emotions S32: Identifying Emotions	• Can recognize their emotions (SA) • Know how their emotions influence their behavior (SA) • Describe the emotion they were feeling (SA) • Stay calm when faced with a challenge (SM) • Can calm down when they are upset (SM) • Can tell when their emotions make it hard to pay attention (SA)
Empathy & Compassion S16: Real Life Respect: The Power of Language S17: Building Social Awareness S18: Understanding Effective Empathy (Choosing to Care) S19: Acting with Empathy S20: Practicing Effective Empathy	• Encourage others (RS) • Interact positively with classmates (RS) • Compliment or congratulate others (RS) • Contribute to creating a positive learning environment (SO) • Recognize others' emotions (SO) • Respond to others' feelings in kind and safe ways (SO) • Stand up for a friend or classmate (RS) • Do nice things for people (RS)
Goals & Habits S21: Understanding Mental Health & Well-Being S22: Exercising Well-Being S23: Well-Being In Practice S24: Developing Well-Being Habits S30: Growth Mindset	• Can imagine a positive future for themselves (OT) • Expect that they will be successful (OT) • Set goals for themselves (SM) • Persist to achieve a goal (SM) • Accept that making mistakes is part of learning (OT) • View negative outcomes as a learning opportunity (OT) • Believe they can overcome setbacks (OT)
Leadership & Teamwork S25: Communicating with Assertiveness S26: Practicing Assertiveness S27: Learning to Compromise S28: Handling Conflict S29: Reflecting on Conflict	• Respond to others' feelings in kind and safe ways (SO) • Respect a person's right to have a different opinion (SO) • Contribute to creating a positive learning environment (SO) • Resolve conflicts positively (RS) • Compromise for the good of the group (RDM) • Cooperate with others to solve a problem (RS) • Ask for advice when needed (RDM)

Grade 8 Engagement: How do we practice engaging meaningfully in our lives, our friendships, and in our school?	
<i>Sessions</i>	<i>DESSA Items</i>
Foundation - Setting the Stage S00: Bullying 101 S1: Welcome S2: Building Community S3: Developing Community Agreements S4: From Bystander to Advocate S5: The CharacterDare	• Agree to and follow expectations for their behavior (SO) • Make positive contributions to their class, school, or community (SM) • Contribute to creating a positive learning environment (SO) • Stand up for a friend or classmate (RS)
Values & Purpose S7: Connecting Values & Your Future (Values & Dreams) S8: Connecting Values to Your Future in High School (The Story of Values) S10: Developing Values as Guides Online S31: Strengthening Commitment, pt 1 S32: Strengthening Commitment, pt 2	• List the personal traits that are most important to them (SA) • Set goals for themselves (SM) • Can imagine a positive future for themselves (OT) • Adjust their behavior to match different settings (SO) • Believe they can achieve their goals (OT) • Persist to achieve a goal (SM) • Agree to and follow expectations for their behavior (SO)
Emotion Understanding & Regulation S13: Happiness Mythbusting S14: Happiness Self-Acceptance S15: Understanding How Emotions Work, pt 1 S16: Understanding How Emotions Work, pt 2 S17: Dealing with Emotions S18: Practicing Self-Regulation S19: Building an Emotions Toolbox S21: Practicing Emotion Regulation	• Know how their emotions influence their behavior (SA) • Explain what caused their emotions (SA) • Calm down when they are upset (SM) • Stay calm when faced with a challenge (SM) • Stay focused despite a distraction (SM)
Empathy & Compassion S28: Listening and Empathy on a Team (Team Listening) S33: Understanding Selflessness, pt 1 S34: Understanding Selflessness, pt 2	• Make others feel welcome or included (SO) • Respond to others' feelings in kind and safe ways (SO) • Listen to others (RS) • Respect a person's right to have a different opinion (SO) • Do nice things for people (RS)

Goals & Habits S6: Values & Your Future S9: Connecting Your Future & This Year (Planning Ahead) S11: Creating Goals S12: Making Positive Habits S20: Connecting Emotion Regulation and Values S22: Regulating Emotions in Academics S30: Grit and Willpower	• List the personal traits that are most important to them (SA) • Express high expectations for themselves (OT) • Expect that they will be successful (OT) • Believe they can overcome setbacks (OT) • Demonstrate a sense of who they are and what is important to them (SA) • Set goals for themselves (SM) • Know how their emotions influence their behavior (SA) • Persist to achieve a goal (SM) • Can motivate themselves when they don't want to do something (SM) • View negative outcomes as a learning opportunity (OT) • Accept that making mistakes is part of learning (OT)
Leadership & Teamwork S23: Using Values to Increase Belonging (Overcoming Obstacles) S24: Understanding the Value of Teamwork S25: Practicing Effective Teamwork for Impact S26: Regulating Emotions on a Team (The Team in Teamwork) S27: Developing Strategies for Teamwork Challenges S29: Exercising Listening on a Team (Team Creativity)	• Contribute to group or team goals (SM) • Believe they can overcome setbacks (OT) • Believe their contributions to a group or team matter (OT) • Show an awareness of their personal strengths (SA) • Contribute to creating a positive learning environment (SO) • Make others feel welcome or included (SO) • Respond to others' feelings in kind and safe ways (SO) • Listen to others (RS) • Demonstrate openness to new situations, experiences, and people (RDM)



The DESSA System from Aperture Education: A Riverside Insights Company is a student resilience system that helps educators measure and strengthen social, emotional, and behavioral skills to reduce challenges that interfere with learning. The DESSA universal screening and supplemental assessments are widely used, practical, evidence-based measures of social and emotional competence of students in grades K-12. These powerful data analytic tools enable educators to identify trends, validate curriculum effectiveness, and drive positive academic and well-being outcomes for students. Robust reporting in the DESSA System provides insights for educators and staff to proactively differentiate instruction using DESSA-provided instructional strategies and tiered intervention resources. The DESSA System's strength-based approach is grounded in resilience theory and designed to bring the whole child into focus. To learn more, visit www.ApertureEd.com.