Case Study: Ethan’s Journey

# Navigating Social-Emotional Waves – Ethan's Journey

## Student Profile

* Name: Ethan S.
* Age: 9 years, 4 months
* Grade: 4th Grade
* School: Elmwood Elementary School
* Primary Language: English
* Relevant Background: Ethan is an only child living with both parents. He was diagnosed with Anxiety Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (NOS), in kindergarten, primarily manifesting as separation anxiety. Over the past year, his separation anxiety has significantly decreased, but new social-emotional challenges have emerged, particularly in unstructured and group settings. Ethan has above-average academic abilities in reading and math but struggles significantly with written expression and organization. He receives accommodations for extended time and reduced workload for written assignments, and preferential seating. He does not currently have an IEP, but this case study is part of an initial evaluation for Special Education services.

## Observed Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Needs:

Observations from multiple school staff (classroom teacher, recess monitor, school counselor, art teacher) over a 4-week period reveal several consistent patterns in Ethan's social-emotional functioning:

1. Difficulty with Peer Collaboration and Group Work:
* Observation: During group projects, Ethan frequently attempts to take over, dictating roles and tasks to peers. If his suggestions are not followed, he becomes visibly frustrated, sighs loudly, rolls his eyes, or withdraws from the group, refusing to participate. He struggles to compromise or integrate others' ideas.
* Impact: Leads to peer conflict, incomplete group tasks, and strained social relationships.
1. Challenges with Flexible Thinking and Managing Unexpected Changes:
* Observation: Ethan exhibits significant distress when routines are altered or unexpected events occur (e.g., fire drill, substitute teacher, change in lunch schedule, cancelled recess due to rain). He may become agitated, ask repetitive questions about the change, or struggle to transition to the new activity.
* Impact: Disrupts his learning, increases anxiety, and can impact his ability to follow instructions.
1. Limited Strategies for Managing Frustration and Disappointment:
* Observation: When faced with a challenge or a perceived failure (e.g., making a mistake on an assignment, losing a game, not being chosen for a role), Ethan often resorts to externalizing behaviors (e.g., throwing his pencil, kicking the leg of his chair, muttering negative self-talk like "I'm stupid," "I can't do anything right"). He struggles to self-regulate and bounce back.
* Impact: Interferes with task completion, creates a negative learning environment, and impacts his self-esteem.
1. Difficulty with Perspective-Taking and Empathy:
* Observation: Ethan struggles to understand how his actions or words might impact others. He often appears unaware of social cues (e.g., a peer's discomfort, frustration, or sadness) and may make comments that, while not intentionally malicious, are perceived as insensitive or bossy by peers.
* Impact: Hinders the development of reciprocal friendships and positive peer interactions.

## Educational Impact:

These SEL needs significantly impact Ethan's ability to:

* Successfully participate in cooperative learning activities.
* Form and maintain positive peer relationships, leading to social isolation at times.
* Independently manage academic challenges and setbacks.
* Adapt to typical classroom routines and transitions without undue stress.

Fully access the general education curriculum in areas requiring collaborative work, problem-solving, and self-advocacy.

## IEP Goals

Given the observed needs and their educational impact, the following are IEP goals focusing on Ethan's social-emotional learning. These goals would be supported by specific services, accommodations and/or modifications, and would inform individualized instructional design as needed.

Identify measurements that could be used for monitoring this goal and connect the goal to SEL standards from the resources provided.

### Goal 1: Peer Collaboration & Compromise

* Need Addressed: Difficulty with peer collaboration and integrating others' ideas.
* Goal: By the end of the school year, when participating in small group activities (2-4 peers), Ethan will actively contribute to the group task, demonstrate compromise by incorporating at least one peer's idea or suggestion, and maintain a positive demeanor (e.g., no eye-rolling, loud sighs, or withdrawal) in 4 out of 5 observed opportunities, as measured by teacher observation and group work rubrics.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

### Goal 2: Flexible Thinking & Managing Change

* Need Addressed: Challenges with flexible thinking and managing unexpected changes.
* Goal: By the end of the school year, when faced with unexpected changes in routine or schedule (e.g., substitute teacher, cancelled recess, fire drill), Ethan will independently demonstrate coping strategies (e.g., asking a clarifying question, using a pre-taught calming technique, transitioning to the new activity without prompting) with no more than one verbal prompt in 3 out of 4 observed instances, as measured by staff observation.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

### Goal 3: Frustration Tolerance & Self-Regulation

* Need Addressed: Limited strategies for managing frustration and disappointment.
* Goal: By the end of the school year, when presented with a challenging task or perceived setback (e.g., making a mistake on an assignment, losing a game), Ethan will independently utilize at least two pre-taught self-regulation strategies (e.g., deep breaths, requesting a break, positive self-talk) to manage his frustration, resulting in no externalizing behaviors (e.g., throwing objects, negative self-talk out loud, refusing to continue) in 70% of observed opportunities, as measured by staff data collection.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard:

### Goal 4: Perspective-Taking & Social Awareness

* Need Addressed: Difficulty with perspective-taking and empathy.
* Goal: By the end of the IEP period, Ethan will demonstrate an understanding of others' perspectives by identifying at least one feeling or thought of a peer in a given social scenario or classroom conflict, and will suggest a prosocial response (e.g., offering help, apologizing, asking a clarifying question), in 3 out of 5 observed opportunities, as measured by school counselor observation, social skills group participation, and teacher report.
* Measurement:
* SEL Standard: