



SILA Skills

SKILLS IN LIFE FOR ALL

Building Mental Health Resilience

Message from the President, Rosanna Ruppert

After two years of operation, I am pleased to report that we are expanding our offering to meet the continuing demand for the skills taught in our workshops.

The challenges of COVID-19 are revealing society's weaknesses and causing widespread suffering. Now more than ever, people working on the front lines in education, health care and social services need the skills we teach to support their own mental health as well as learning practical ways to respond effectively to their students' or clients' needs.

This past year we at SILA Skills were able to build on our pilot workshop with Children's Aid Society (CAS) staff in Parry Sound and delivered the same workshop to CAS staff in North Bay. Nancy Lafrance-Rich, Director of Service for the Children's Aid Society of the District of Nipissing and Parry Sound, said the staff "really felt that it helped them with clients."

Bonnie Bailey, a social worker with the CAS Parry Sound office, says that since taking the workshop she is

better able to "take a step back and absorb situations with clients more fully, allowing me to more readily reach common ground with them."

The SILA Skills workshop for CAS groups and others working on the front lines in our communities, is called Transforming Connections. It draws on the skills of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), an evidence-based practice that provides a structured way of learning emotional coping skills.

Over the past year our SILA Skills team has delivered the workshop to people working in a variety of settings including community living, public health and a women's shelter.

For the coming year we are planning to expand our offerings to groups working in these settings. Our workshop geared specially for educators, called Transforming Classrooms, is proving to be very effective and we are pleased to announce that our Classrooms' facilitator, Kelly Maxwell, will be volunteering full time for us in the coming year. (Check out the profile

The SILA Skills Group is a Canadian federally incorporated, not-for-profit corporation that believes in building mental health resilience by fostering supportive, validating, and respectful environments. We do this by providing emotional skills-building workshops targeted at educators, social service providers and first responders.

of Kelly in this newsletter.)

We are very encouraged by the feedback we have been getting from educators who have taken the workshop. **Kelly Dobko-Primus, an educational assistant from Alberta, wrote to us:**

I want to let you know how much I appreciate being able to attend your SILA course. It has given me a whole new perspective on how to deal with children, adults & myself. It has also validated, & named some of the things that I had been doing all along. I have started to use many of the skills taught to me & have noticed a positive reaction. I realize that I will stumble, and that is okay. I would highly recommend this course to anyone working with children.

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A new addition to our offerings in the past year is a real-time coaching workshop that we call Skills in Action. This is for people that have taken one of our workshops and want to continue their learning. These coaching sessions enable participants to talk about the challenges they are facing and how they are applying the skills while our SILA Skills team provides feedback and coaching. We will be continuing this program over the next year. I'm looking forward to our third year of operations as we continue to spread the power of these emotional skills to many people working in challenging environments.

Katie DeBoer, also a teacher from Alberta, had this to say:

I took the course last year and it was the best PD I've ever taken. I learned so much but it was also really cool to participate in recurring sessions with the same people. It allowed me to open up and become vulnerable, which is rare (but needed) in professional PD. I think sometimes we focus a lot on how to help our students, and I love that this PD teaches us on how to care for ourselves. I use the skills daily, both in the class, and out (mostly out right now as I'm on sabbatical). In fact, the other day was particularly overwhelming and I went back through my email to find my slide notes. I want to honour that this advocacy was born from a place of loss and I thank you for your vulnerability. I continue to tell my staff and friends about SILA and its impacts.



If you are an educator interested in taking one of our workshops you can register **HERE** for one of our fall workshops. If you want to speak to us about bringing our workshop to your workplace setting, Email us at info@silaskills.org



Teacher Kelly Maxwell will be leading our SILA Skills workshop, Transforming Classrooms, on a full-time basis.

Meet SILA Skills Facilitator Kelly Maxwell



In this issue, we profile Alberta teacher Kelly Maxwell who has been facilitating SILA Skills Transforming Classrooms workshops for the past two years. We are pleased to announce that now Kelly will be leading our SILA Skills workshop, Transforming Classrooms, on a full-time basis.

After 32 years as an elementary school teacher in Alberta, Kelly Maxwell has decided it's time to put her passion for teaching kids into teaching educators how to build their own emotional resilience and connect better with their students, colleagues and school community. Beginning this fall, Kelly, who lives in Devon, Alberta with her husband Stuart, will be volunteering full-time as a facilitator, leading SILA Skills workshops for teachers and education assistants. "As teachers we are constantly told to connect with our students but we struggle to know how to do this."

"The SILA Skills program teaches the HOW. That's why I'm so passionate about it."

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The skills taught in this workshop can have a transformative effect in the classroom. Teachers using these skills will be able to build better relationships with their students, improve coping skills and create a supportive, validating and respectful environment. We have seen the successful implementation of DBT skills in classrooms throughout the world and the SILA Group is at the helm of the new movement in using a more integrative and wholistic approach to education.

Blaise Aguirre, MD.

Medical Director, 3East DBT Continuum
Assistant Professor in Psychiatry,
Harvard Medical School Department
of Psychiatry

By helping us to be present to our own experience, the skills taught by SILA Skills enable us to recognize our emotions and teach us to manage them and to communicate in a way that facilitates effective and meaningful relationships with others.

I have found these skills to be helpful for all individuals and critical for those working in especially stressful environments, including first responders, frontline workers, and teachers, to help cope effectively with day to day challenges and when the stress of life threatens to become overwhelming.

Lynn Swanson Ph.D., C. Psych.

Psychologist - Swanson, Moss, Heimpel &
Associates, Psychologists
SILA Skills Board Member

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Called Transforming Classrooms, the workshop is an interactive on-line 12-hour program spread over several weeks. The workshop is a one-of-a-kind for participants. It is interactive and pulls from participants' struggles, which makes it immediately practical and effective. It draws on the skills of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), an evidence-based practice that provides a structured way of learning emotional coping skills.

These emotional coping skills completely transformed Kelly as a teacher, she says. *"Before, I was a perfectionist. I had to meet everyone's needs and in doing so I couldn't meet anyone's and always felt like I was failing,"* she says. *"And that's a terrible, terrible way to live. And yet so many people, especially in the caring professions, live like that. The skills have helped me to be less judgemental toward myself which then enables me to be a more caring person because I'm not always questioning myself."*

Kelly first learned about DBT skills when she and her husband, Stuart, were searching for something to help them with their son, Tom, who had been diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. *"Life with him was impossible at home,"* says Kelly. *"There were constant negative emotions, lots of fear and shame."*

Then, in 2018, they came across DBT skills through a course called Family Connections™. *"Within minutes I knew that these skills, which I was learning for our home, could be used in my classroom."* Kelly says the emotional needs in her classroom at the time were huge. *"I didn't know how to handle them, just like I didn't know how to handle my son's emotions and my own emotions. So as we learned the skills for home, I practiced them at school."* The impact on her classroom was immediate.

"The skills made a difference right away,"

she says. *"I stopped judging the kids and the parents and it changed my relationship with them."* Kelly tried to share the skills with other teachers, but it was not until she saw how The SILA Skills Group packaged and presented them that she had a clear and effective way of sharing them. Kelly joined SILA Skills Group in 2020 and began volunteering as a facilitator leading the Transforming Classrooms workshops. She also completed the DBT Skills program from Behavioural Tech, the organization founded by Dr. Marsha Linehan, the developer of DBT, which provides training for mental health care providers.

Kelly had dreamt of being a teacher ever since she was a young girl growing up in rural Alberta. She was inspired by the huge influence her Grades 1 and 2 teachers had on her ability to learn—one was positive, the other negative. It was the stark difference between the two that made an impact on nine-year-old Kelly. *"In Grade 1, learning was fun but in Grade 2, learning was horrible,"* she says. She decided then that she would be a teacher so that she could give other kids the same

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positive experience she had in Grade 1. Looking back Kelly says, *"I know there are days when I was like my Grade 1 teacher. But I know there are days that I've been like my Grade 2 teacher — harsh, unforgiving and impatient. But that was prior to learning these DBT skills."* Kelly says that while DBT skills help teachers to help themselves, they also have a huge impact on students.

"Teachers talk about barometer kids, the kids that affect the weather in the classroom. But learning DBT skills made me realize that I can be the barometer and the way that I interact with the kids is what really affects the classroom."

Often teachers have warned her about kids scheduled to be in her classes. "But by using DBT skills such as validating kids' feelings and being conscious of my own feelings, I was able to create a classroom that was more caring, where kids were less judgemental with each other. I even had a parent say she was so thankful that her child was in my class. He was happy to go to school for the first time in years."

Leaving her teaching career to volunteer full-time with SILA Skills was a difficult decision.

"My life was consumed with my classroom. Everything I did, even holidays, were spent taking courses and preparing lessons because I wanted to improve my teaching skills." One of the bright spots easing her transition is that the young teacher who is taking over her classroom was a friend of her son, Tom. Tragically, Tom died by suicide at 23 on March 30, 2018.

Kelly says the DBT skills she and her husband learned gave them the best two months as a family. *"We were finally able to connect with Tom and communicate without everything going sideways,"* says Kelly. Kelly describes Tom as a person who had a special ability to look past the outward appearance and see the person inside. He enjoyed music, theatre, and art. He was a singer and songwriter but was also drawn to the rough and tumble of the oilfield, the adventure and solitude of the jungles of Thailand, and the peaceful power of the Rockies. *"But in the shadows lurked the illness that*

would eventually take his life," she says. Since Tom's death, Kelly and Stuart, have organized Tom's Walk every year to raise money for mental health—with proceeds going to SILA Skills this year. The walk follows a route parallel to Tom's final walk in Devon. *"Both walks end at the North Saskatchewan River, one ended in tragedy and the other is a journey of hope."*

Kelly is committed to ensuring that good things come out of the agony of losing Tom. *"I don't want to get lost in the pain although there are many moments where I feel lost in the pain,"* she says. One of those good things she wants is that DBT skills become a part of every teachers' toolkit both for themselves and their classroom.

"I feel that teachers, especially now, are in a desert, they are desperate for some hope, for some clarity, on how to survive in a chaotic, all-consuming, profession. I feel like I'm the one with a cup of water."

SILA Directors:

Karen Black

Kelly Maxwell

Catherine Needham

Heather Rider

Rosanna Ruppert

Dr. Lynn Swanson,
Ph.D., C. Psych.



SKILLS are transformational

useful **IN** everyday situations

for any relationship in your **LIFE**

ALL can realize the benefits

Transforming Classrooms Fall Workshops



SILA

2 Part

Saturday Oct 1
Saturday Oct 22

SILA

Saturday
8:30 am - 3:30 pm MST
10:30 am - 5:30 pm EST

SILA

4 Part

Saturday Oct 1
Monday Oct 17
Monday Oct 24
Monday Nov 7

SILA

Saturday
8:30 am - 3:30 pm MST
10:30 am - 5:30 pm EST

Monday
4:30 - 6:30 pm MST
6:30-8:30 pm EST

Starting in October and November 2022

SILA

2 Part

Saturday Nov 5
Saturday Dec 3

SILA

Saturday
8:30 am - 3:30 pm MST
10:30 am - 5:30 pm EST

SILA

4 Part

Saturday Nov 5
Tuesday Nov 22
Tuesday Nov 29
Tuesday Dec 6

SILA

Saturday
8:30 am - 3:30 pm MST
10:30 am - 5:30 pm EST

Tuesdays
4:30 - 6:30 pm MST
6:30-8:30 pm EST

SILA

6 Part

Thursday Oct 6
Thursday Oct 13
Thursday Oct 20
Thursday Oct 27
Thursday Nov 3
Thursday Nov 10

SILA

Thursday
4:30 - 6:30 pm MST
6:30-8:30 pm EST

Register [HERE](#) for one of these workshops

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