

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) During Virtual Learning

Recommendations and Resources

Recommendations

Whole Child Connection recognizes that district staff and teachers are overwhelmed by the volume of resources and tools being shared, and that after all the new challenges of converting to virtual learning, the bandwidth for anything more is limited. However, the realities of social distancing – and the isolation and confusion that accompanies it – mean that social and emotional learning is more important than ever. To address current SEL needs, while acknowledging the heavy lift teams are undertaking, we offer the following recommendations:

- Convey to teachers that SEL is as (or more) important than ever and an essential component of universal support at the “classroom” level, even though the physical classroom does not exist right now.
- Don’t forget to attend to adult SEL. Staff are dealing with just as many emotions and challenges as the families in your district. They too feel overwhelmed, scared, and uncertain about the future. Acknowledge their solutions, their innovations, and their ideas. Offer concrete, simple resources (see below for ideas to get you started).
- Explicit SEL Instruction is still important, but this is not the time to go heavy on a lot of activities. Parents are overwhelmed trying to keep up with academic content and meeting basic needs, let alone facilitating SEL lessons. Assign **one** SEL activity or lesson per week as part of students’ regular expected instruction (this document has a few free lessons and activities).
- Many teachers are using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and other means to connect with students. These are great opportunities for SEL as well as content delivery. They can be a time for students to check in with one another, discuss questions and concerns, share stories, and build relationships. Remember that SEL includes skill building such as leadership, self-awareness, considering solutions to challenges, and empathizing with others. Choose one way to connect with students per week (see classroom practices ideas on the next page).
- Offer a few opportunities for schoolwide SEL activities that promote relationships, help students feel connected to their school community, and provide ways to connect and empathize with others. Pick 2-3 activities or events over the course of the next few months (see schoolwide practices on the next page).

10 Classroom Practices to Try

1. Read a book aloud during a Zoom session, ask a family member to record you reading a book aloud, or assign one of [these books](#) on growth mindset read by their authors. Ask questions about the characters' emotions and actions. Zoom is great for seeing and reading faces. Encourage younger students to show each other their best "emotion" expressions e.g., "This is what I look like when I'm excited, angry, sad, happy."
2. Play a virtual game – Use one of [these](#) (designed for teens but could be adapted for younger children) or make up your own.
3. Hold a "morning meeting" that allows all students to check in, share something, and engage in a conversation with each other and the teacher. See this [teacher's suggestions](#) about how to hold morning meetings virtually.
4. Encourage voice and choice by offering/assigning students a chance to create a "kick off" of the day during your virtual class meeting time by posing a group question and allowing time for students to think and answer.
5. Hold small group meetings with 4-5 students to talk about something specific, discuss an article they read, or for a more detailed show and tell.
6. Give students small challenges each week – For example, text three people a message telling them what you like about them; write a letter or email to a grandparent, family member or friend; do one nice thing for a sibling and write about it, etc.
7. Encourage students to keep "Coronavirus journals" for the historical record using their writing, creative, and artistic skills. Encourage them to reflect on what they notice, are feeling, or have learned about themselves during this time.
8. Create activities – journaling prompts or essay topics, social studies research, etc. - in which students explore what they think others are experiencing during this time. Think about the elderly, workers in grocery stores, cleaning staff at hospitals, newscasters, scientists, and delivery people.
9. Show and Tell - encourage students to select an item within their home to share and explain its meaning. This can be done virtually, through pictures or in written form.
10. Moving to Music - encourage students and staff to move through music. Share a weekly or daily song encouraging all to get up and shake it! Increase schoolwide connection through playful, virtual dance-offs in which students and staff record their moves and TAG other teams/classrooms to show their moves.

10 Schoolwide Practices to Try

1. Have the principal send a personal email to every student at some point over the next 3 months.
2. Hold a school-wide essay or art contest with an SEL theme and post the winning entries on the school website.
3. Host a virtual event for the whole school – e.g. a virtual talent show, a school-wide pajama party with the librarian reading stories aloud, a school-wide art show, etc.
4. Find ways to support teachers and staff – send messages of encouragement; hold a virtual faculty meeting with the three signature SEL practices; set up a kindness chain with staff members responsible for connecting with, reaching out to or doing something nice for one other staff person.
5. Create a video message to send out to students from the principal with an SEL theme of the week.
6. Invite staff who are feeling up for it to submit photos, videos, posts, art, etc. to share with students about their experience. Introduce pets, share hidden skills, recommend good books, describe what is hard. Post them on the school website.
7. Plan a virtual spirit week and post photos of students' spirit efforts online. Encourage staff to participate. Consider something different from the usual categories – e.g., consider “a dress up for school” day rather than a PJ day since every day is PJ day right now!
8. Encourage coaches to have team Zoom calls even though spring sports are on hold so athletes can talk to one another, share ideas about how they are staying fit, and talk about using exercise as a coping strategy.
9. Keep up with your yearbook plans – include pages in the book that have photos from this home learning period. Have parents and students submit photos of home learning, Zoom calls, and other activities that reflect this when schools are closed.
10. Keep your buddy program going or start a new one – pair up two classes and have older students write letters or emails to younger students. Host a virtual buddy event.

Resources

There are a lot of virtual SEL resources out there right now – it is hard to sift through them all and determine what to use and what to toss. These are a few high-quality resources that our team has vetted and highly recommends.

Useful Articles on How to Think about SEL During this Time of Remote Learning

- [At This Time of School Closures and Remote Learning, How to Keep Students Engaged and Tend to Their Social-Emotional Health](#) by senior scientists at the RAND Center for Social and Emotional Learning Research
- [How to Teach Social-Emotional Learning When Students Aren't in School](#), article from Ed Week with some specific tips and suggestions
- [Social-Emotional Learning Should Be Priority During COVID-19 Crisis](#), article from the National Education Association on the importance of SEL.
- Teaching Tolerance has a number of good resources on how to address equity issues during this time including: [A Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus](#) and [How to Respond to Coronavirus Racism](#).

Each of the resources below could be used by teachers with students (i.e., during a Zoom call or as an assignment) or could be offered to parents as resource.

SEL Lessons and Activities

- [Newsela](#) is offering free access to its site for teachers and parents through the rest of the school year. They have a collection of news articles associated with SEL competencies. Each article can be adjusted for reading levels and has associated quizzes and activities.
- The PATHS curriculum is offering free weekly lessons for elementary students with a read aloud and associated activity on [their blog](#). They also have [free lessons](#) for middle school teachers.
- Second Step curriculum is offering [free lessons](#) online for grades K-5. They can be used by teachers or families.
- The Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility has a number of [free lessons](#) broken out by grade level that are specific to feelings and sense of loss related to COVID-19.
- Wings for Kids offers a [free activity ideas](#) related to each of the 5 CASEL competencies, including a read aloud, table conversation ideas, and an activity suggestion, broken about by K-2 and 3-5.
- Aperture Education offers 16 [free SEL lessons](#) designed to be integrated into core content for elementary aged students.

Resources for Physical and Emotional Well-Being

- Playworks is offering [free, live recess](#) Monday-Friday at 11 AM, 1 PM and 4 PM. Their website also has some additional materials and activities for download.
- Common Sense Media has created a [list of mindfulness apps](#) for kids that can be searched by age group and a set of [curated resources](#) on emotional well-being for families and educators.
- Headspace has created [a page specifically focused on New York](#) and has meditations and mindfulness activities available for kids and adults on sleep, stress relief, and well-being