



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) FOR VIRTUAL AND HYBRID SETTINGS

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESOURCES

Recommendations

Whole Child Connection recognizes that district staff and teachers are overwhelmed by all the challenges associated with social distancing, hybrid learning, new cleaning protocols, and staggered schedules and that the bandwidth for anything more is limited. However, the realities of this pandemic, the simultaneous racial justice movement, and the isolation and confusion that accompany both mean that social and emotional learning is more important than ever. To address current SEL needs, 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 looks very different 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. Offer concrete, simple resources (see below for ideas to get you started).
- Explicit SEL Instruction is still important but may feel challenging with limited in-person time with students. To address this, we recommend the following:
 - At the elementary level, consider using morning meetings as a daily opportunity (whether virtual or in-person) to address an SEL lesson or concept, build connection and relationships, and practice new skills.
 - At the secondary level, don’t go heavy on explicit lessons, but consider assigning one SEL activity or lesson per week as part of students’ regular expected work (this document has a few free lessons and activities). These lessons can be done virtually or independently so as not to take time away from limited in-person instruction.
- Many teachers are using Zoom and Microsoft Teams to connect with students. We’ve discovered over the past several months that SEL activities work surprisingly well on these online platforms. Use virtual class gatherings as a time for students to check in with one another, discuss questions and concerns, share stories, and build relationships. Choose one way to connect with students per week (see classroom practices ideas on the next page).
- Offer a few opportunities (see ideas later in this document) for schoolwide SEL activities that promote relationships, help students feel connected to their school community, and provide ways to connect and empathize with others.

10 Virtual SEL 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 journals, either about the pandemic or the racial justice movement, 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. Read our recent article on [the power of storytelling](#) for inspiration.
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, hospital staff, 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 SEL Schoolwide Practices To Try

1. Have the principal send a personal email to every student/family at some point during the fall semester of the school year.
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. Although many school clubs will be cancelled this fall, consider virtual school clubs. If teacher advisors are willing, have students meet after school virtually. Many clubs can be converted to a virtual space. For example, art and writing groups can still meet and allow students to share their work and get ideas and feedback from one another. Gay Straight Alliance, Black student union, and other affinity groups can easily meet and maintain discussion, share ideas, and talk about key issues. Even cooking club can be held remotely with a creative teacher and a set of simple ingredients.
8. Encourage coaches to have team Zoom calls even though fall sports are uncertain right now 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 your buddy program going or start a new one – You may not be able to do in-person buddy events this year with careful social distancing in school buildings, but you can still do them virtually. Pair up two classes and have older students write letters or emails to younger students. Host a virtual buddy event.
10. With changes to the physical environment for students who are able to go into school buildings (e.g., fewer materials, toys, etc.), the environment you create as adults is more important than ever. Use morning announcements to create a warm and welcoming space. Choose an SEL theme of the week and read a story, share a quote, play some music or do something fun and silly.

Resources

There are a many resources out there right now – it is hard to sift through them all and determine what to use and what to toss. Whole Child Connection has reviewed and identified a few high-quality resources:

Useful Articles and Guides on SEL During the Pandemic

- CASEL's reopening guide - **Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap for Reopening School**
- Transforming Education's **Trauma Informed SEL Toolkit** contains the materials you need to facilitate a one-hour workshop for staff on trauma-informed SEL, a critical perspective in returning to schools this fall.
- **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

- The PATHS program has a variety of free printable activities and resources on **their blog**.
- Second Step curriculum is offering a variety of **free lessons online** for elementary and middle school as well as professional development for teachers. They also have a free guide for **middle school advisory**.
- The Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility has **a number of free lessons** broken out by grade level that are specific to feelings and self-care during COVID-19.
- Wings for Kids offers **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.
- Collaborative Classroom has a **Reconnecting and Rebuilding Toolkit for Grades K-6** available for free on its website. The kit contains lessons and activities for the start of school.

Resources for Physical and Emotional Well-Being

- Playworks has a wide variety of **resources** related to playing at home, including a play at home guidebook in 7 languages and video tutorials on a wide variety of activities to do at home with kids.
- 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.