

How to Support SEL during Remote Learning



[Remote or distance learning](#) was something that was mentioned but not really thought out until we were thrown into it in the spring of 2020. While academics always play a role in the learning process, one area that was severely neglected was the social - emotional learning of our students. It is no wonder why as millions of schools worldwide closed down without any notice and with good reason, as we needed to protect the physical well-being of all human beings. However, now that we have time to look back and reflect on our practices, this is an area that needs to be addressed and nurtured as we look to the future of what distance learning might look like.

Across the United States, one of the biggest complaints I heard from fellow educators was the lack of engagement from the students and how it waned as the school year went on. This happened despite having time in the classroom to make connections and form relationships with our students. So if we start the fall of 2020 eLearning, how can we engage students with whom we have no relationship at all?

My passion for this area has had me to research and brainstorm several ways that I can hone in on the social emotional needs of my future students. The three areas I need to cover with my students to have the best outcome of participation and engagement are making connections, communication, and creativity. Covering these three areas will set a solid foundation in having invested learners.

Feeling connected:

The ability to make social connections with one another is an area that can sometimes be overlooked when the curriculum is always on our mind. Feeling connected has many positive effects including:

- improving your quality of life
- boost mental health
- live a longer life
- decrease suicide risk

Students need to feel connected to their classmates, teacher, and as an integral part of the classroom environment.



Communication:

Being able to communicate with one another is an important life skill to have. Much has been written on the importance of [parent - teacher communication](#) but communication between the student and teacher is just as, if not more, important. Communication is not limited to how an assignment should be completed. Communication should also include:

- [opportunities to share likes/dislikes and personal habits](#)
- discussions about classroom concepts or current events
- prompt feedback - including positive and constructive criticism
- scaffolding and supporting students to feel successful

The way you communicate with a student is just as important as the words you use. Students are attuned to know which teachers like them and which teachers may not be fond of them. Avoid letting them know. Be sure

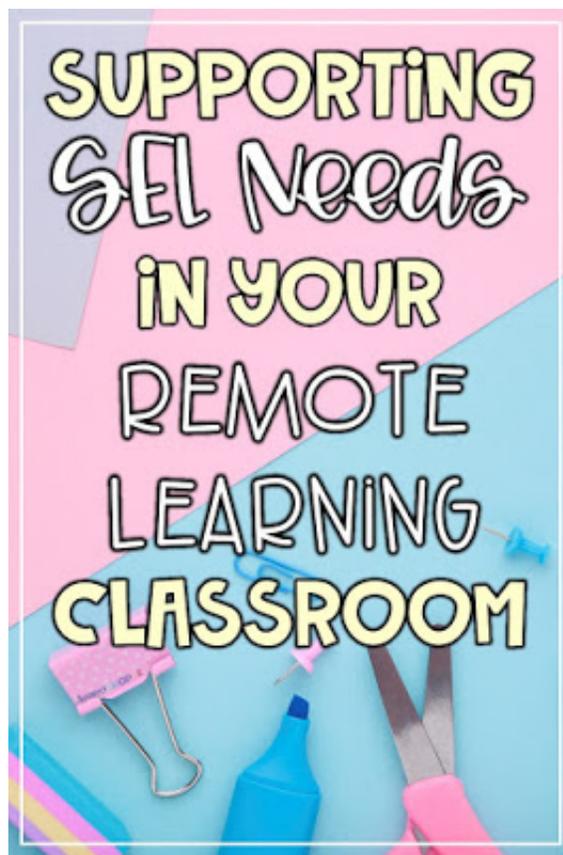
to make eye contact, engage in a few minutes of personal communication to build relationships, and avoid power struggles. Try to respectfully talk about negative behaviors 1:1 or without other classmates watching and listening.

Creativity:

It may not sound like it but being creative will also help build a relationship and engage your students. For a teacher new to the digital world, I can understand the feelings of overwhelm as you struggle to not only develop relationships with your new students but understand a new digital platform and then vary what you are using the increase student interest.

I get it!

When I talk about varying your teaching style and the tools that you use, just know that because you are distance teaching does not mean everything HAS to be digital. Sometimes a minor switch like that can reinspire a student. Even though we are on a digital platform, it is still vital to try to incorporate the different learning styles of our students. Simple modifications to assignments like [having a student draw their response](#) or make something to take on a kinesthetic/ [STEM-like approach](#) can reel in students who may otherwise be disengaged. It can inspire curiosity and keep them wanting more from your classroom.



Ways to develop a social - emotional relationship while distance teaching:

It can be a struggle to develop a relationship with your students in the classroom, nevermind over the internet but the following ways are some ideas that I plan to implement to make my students feel comfortable and connected to my classroom, improve and open the lines of communication as well as demonstrate a level of creativity that will engage and motivate my students.

Live sessions:

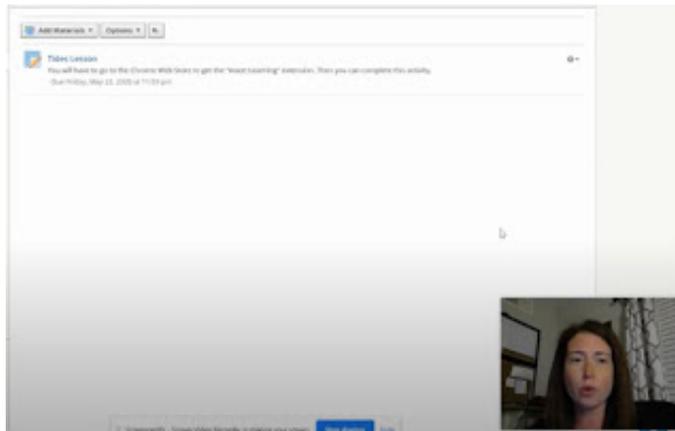
This is not voluntary, but was a requirement for my school district however, [holding the live meetings with my students](#) was a way for me to connect with them face to face. While not entirely ideal, I did like the fact that the live meetings allowed me into my students' homes. During

the meetings, we were able to connect in a different way than in school. Students were able to have an eye into my personal life, seeing my home, my pets, the mugs that I drink my tea in. It also gave me a lens into their homes. These connections helped to strengthen our bond and gave me ideas on what to talk to my students about in future sessions. During the live meetings, you can vary what you do:

- Before tackling the curriculum, spend a few minutes checking in with the students. Instead, start with questions about the weekend or have a random poll to spark the interest of your students.
- Think of different SEL activities that you can do with your students.
 - [Start a quote of the day and ask students to respond to it.](#)
 - Ask students to show a baby picture of themselves and have everyone share.
 - Play a game together. [You can easily assign a fun Kahoot or Quizizz](#) for the students to play at the beginning of class. Don't tie the game to the curriculum, instead, it can be a simple trivia game, identify the emotion, or constructive ways to solve a conflict. Tie in some of the SEL skills to give students a chance to improve them.
- Group mindfulness activity: Mindfulness is linked to self - regulation and self - awareness, two areas I think most people I know can improve, especially young adults. [Check out these ideas here.](#)

Recorded sessions: Live sessions are so much fun but another way to build upon the social emotional health of your students is to make recorded videos. Quick recorded video clips help to better communicate with your students. Students would love to have a video of their teacher saying happy birthday to them for the whole class to

see. Another idea is to make a recording for any important class announcements. The more the students see you, the better connected they will feel to learning.



Updates: This is especially important if you are not allowed to hold live sessions through your district. Including updates weekly or daily is a good option to help stay better connected with the students. Many learning management systems like Google Classroom or Schoology include an area for announcements or discussion threads. To keep it manageable, you can use these features to quickly communicate with your classes.

Learning Management System: Many schools will hold a requirement of which LMS you need to use. You can still spice it up to make it fun. Bitmoji classrooms are all the rage right now. Think about spending the time to create one, it doesn't have to be anything crazy but getting creative and having your digital avatar in your digital classroom is something that kids enjoy seeing.



This is a lot of information to take in and digest. Think about the different ways that you can open up your digital classroom to make students feel connected, open the lines of communication, and be creative. Next week I will give explicit ideas on fun ways to improve the social - emotional health of your classroom.

