

#SELChat: Keeping SEL Close During Distance Learning

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Given the rising trend in COVID-19 infections across the United States, schools are grappling with what the new school year will look like. Many are opting for distance learning. Since they have more time to prepare, educators can offer better quality instruction than they did in the Spring when making a hasty transition to the online world. Last week an SEL Coordinator for a charter school reached out to me and asked, "How do we do social-emotional learning when our students are not in the building?"

A host of articles have been released in the past few months outlining the traumatic effects of both the pandemic and the civil unrest due to racism. Time and again, SEL and mental health are offered as the remedy for the growing fear and anxiety in our students. Additionally, SEL that is centered on character development, cultivates a heart for justice and equity. It is imperative that our students' well-being is at the forefront of all we do in education, particularly during these uncertain times.

Here is some guidance for how to do SEL virtually.

1. Intentionality – Build at least 15-25 minutes per day into the schedule for SEL. Start with a morning meeting on your online platform with your group of students. This connection time works well for all grade levels.

2. Content – Choose meaningful content that is culturally relevant. Be sure to represent the diversity and interests of your students. It is not enough to have a one-word check-in each day or to ask students how their previous day was. Go deeper by using curated resources.

3. Relationships – All of us, youth and adults, are starving for human connection after being quarantined for months. Focus on getting to know one another personally. Remind students that this is a safe place. What they share is confidential, unless someone is in danger. Model vulnerability by sharing your personal story, as appropriate.

4. Real-Life Experiences – Supplement your online interaction with real-life activities that students can do independently, such as art projects or journaling.

5. Family Involvement – Families are in need of support too. Offer newsletters full of storybook suggestions and activities that families can do together. Have them share their at-home experiences online through pictures and

videos on your social channels.

In order to alleviate concerns from educators, select a point person for SEL, and provide training and ongoing coaching for your SEL initiatives. We are living in a rapidly changing world, so be ready to make course adjustments as needed. Keep dialogue open amongst your team, including students and families in the conversation.

Keep this in mind: effective SEL is integrated with every interaction with students, families, educators, and staff. Weave the community vocabulary for SEL across curricular areas and throughout events. Our goal is to help build resilient, healthy and happy people. Now more than ever, we need each other.

Author

Tamara Fyke is an educator and creative entrepreneur with a passion for kids, families, and urban communities. She is the creator, author, and brand manager for [Love In A Big World](#), which equips K-8 educators with a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum that is both research-based and practical, and also provides the supporting resources necessary to empower students to be socially competent, emotionally healthy problem-solvers who discover and maintain a sense of purpose and make a positive difference in the world.

Further Reading