



CHECK & CONNECT

INSTITUTE *on* COMMUNITY INTEGRATION | UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INTERVENTION

Online Mentoring Guide

As schools have shifted to remote learning, maintaining connections to students has been challenging. Check & Connect recognizes that relationships are paramount and that students need the mentor's support now more than ever. This resource provides mentors with strategies for fostering online relationships, planning conversations around school, and facilitating online interventions.

THREE FOCUS AREAS



Creative Relationship Building

Ideas on how to build and strengthen relationships creatively in an online world.



Structured Conversations

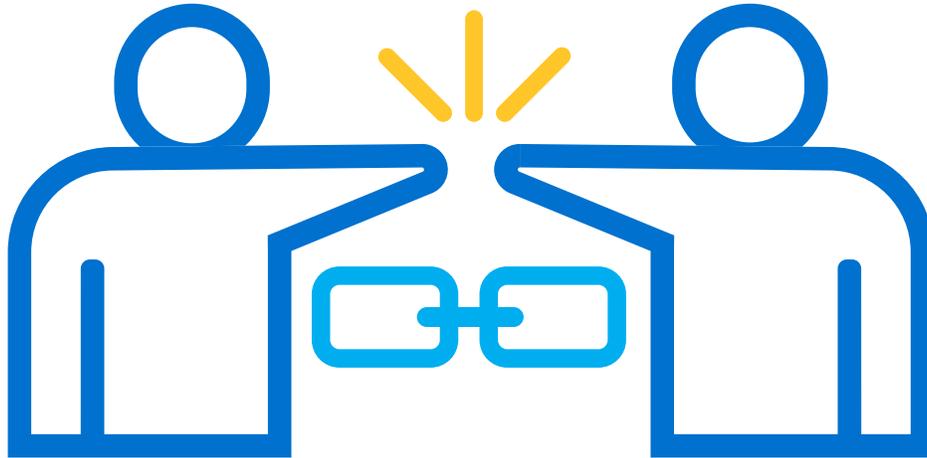
A framework for your virtual "connect" sessions with students and talking points to guide conversations with families.



Interactive Interventions

Tools and strategies that can be implemented in any setting.

Creative Relationship Building



WHAT IT IS...

Ideas on how to reach out to creatively build and strengthen your relationship with students in this new world of virtual education. Have fun and boost engagement with activities you can do online and safely in-person, if allowed.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT...

Relationships are the foundation of Check & Connect. Through a trusting, reciprocal relationship, Check & Connect mentors support students to re-engage in school by helping them discover solutions to problems that get in their way, build critical life skills, develop self-reliance, encourage personal self-efficacy and plan for their future.



Creative Relationship Building

VIRTUAL IDEAS



Go on a virtual scavenger hunt

Here are a few ideas. Do it as a pair or partner with other Check & Connect mentors & students.

(Re) Introduce yourself with video story

Center your video story on 3 main points about yourself that will resonate with your student(s).

Create personalized Check & Connect background for “Connect” meetings

Create together or have students take charge decorating with images representative of themselves. See example below.

Play “2 Truths & 1 Lie”

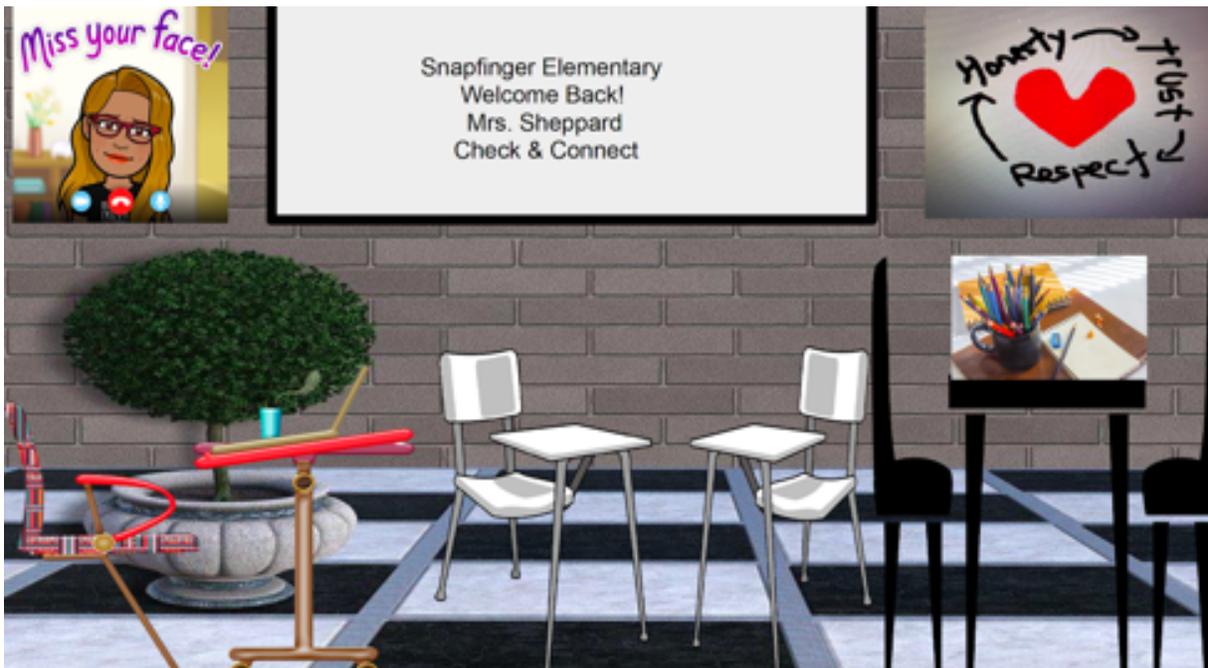
This classic game is fun whether in person or virtually! To be truly engaging, challenge each other to use a really creative lie!

Create a music playlist

Explore what’s similar & different about your musical tastes. Ask questions: Where did you first hear the song? What do you like about it? What one or two songs would you recommend I listen to?

Volunteer together online

Make a difference together and help your student see that they matter. Find opportunities in your community or online through volunteer organizations like [All For Good](#) or [DoSomething](#).



Source: Ms. Yolunda Sheppard, DeKalb County Schools



Creative Relationship Building

VIRTUAL IDEAS



Explore a [TED Talk](#) together

Select a talk with your student related to their interests. Discuss afterwards – What sticks with you? How could you use these ideas in your own life?

Play online games

Play games like Kahoot, Pictionary, or personalized trivia games. Games provide a great opportunity to ask questions & get to know your student deeper while having fun!

Visually inspire conversation

Create a digital “Dream” board (Padlet or Google Jamboard are possibilities). Or have the student choose a different topic for their digital board such as a Happiness board or a board of images about themselves. See example below.

Go on a virtual “field trip”

Find out what interests your student and explore a virtual field trip on that topic together. Need ideas?

- [Galapagos Islands](#) from National Geographic Expeditions
- [Visit Mars](#) via Web VR Experiment from Google NASA collaboration
- [Google Arts & Culture](#) Expeditions

Spark conversations that foster relationship building

Be thoughtful in curating a conversation with your student. Take a look at Check & Connect’s [“Getting Started Relationship-Building”](#) resource for tips and conversation starters.



Source: Life Hack



Creative Relationship Building

IN-PERSON
IDEAS



IN-PERSON

Ideas for mentors and students to do together in-person if allowed, safe, and respecting school-directed safety protocol

Walk around student's neighborhood together

Go to student's favorite places that are important to them. Ask questions – Where do you spend the most time? What makes this fun? If you could redesign your neighborhood, what would you keep the same, do differently?

Get involved in student's sport

Attend their game & cheer them on. Or do something together (play a game of pick-up basketball or do yoga in the park).

"Give-back" to the community

Find a volunteer opportunity and make a difference together in the student's community.

Deliver food or homework packets for school

A great way to both engage your student in a meaningful activity while also creating a sense of belonging to school!

Create inspiring yard signs

Support your student to take leadership and plan this activity. Drop off the signs together. Another way to give back and make a difference for school.

"Capture" the community

Encourage your student to take photos or videos of things of interest to them in their neighborhood. Ask them to tell you about their pictures and why they're important via [Flipgrid](#).

Structured Conversations



WHAT IT IS...

Sample conversation guides for use in weekly “Connect” sessions as an adapted Basic Interventions for the virtual environment. This focus area includes conversations for different levels — Elementary, Middle School, High school — and with families.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT...

Mentors need to know what is happening with students in real time to make sure their support is timely and relevant. Understanding the needs of the student is crucial for aligning your intervention and includes reviewing data and providing feedback on the student's attendance, behavior, and course performance.

In the virtual environment, however, mentors may not have access to typical data on attendance, behavior, and course performance. Mentors must then get creative in gathering data directly from the student to use in the weekly “Connect” meeting.



Structured Conversations

Elementary School

● **Start with a virtual temperature check**

Incorporate a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practice, such as a temperature check, and ask student to share how they are feeling by selecting one of the four colors in the [Zones of Regulation](#).

● **Gather data**

Ask student to give a thumbs up, sideways, or down related to the following questions:

- How has school been for you?
- Are you getting the help you need at home?
- How are things going with your teacher?

● **Provide feedback**

Ask student to “Share more” or “Tell me more” about why they gave “x” thumbs-up and gave “y” thumbs down. Find something to celebrate with the student based on what they shared.

● **Promote School Success**

Say to student: I want you to feel like you can be successful in school. Even though it’s online, it is important that you are learning and enjoying school. Prompt with questions, if needed:

- If there was one thing that could make your day better, what would it be?
- What have you enjoyed about school in the past?

● **Problem solve with student**

Engage student in problem solving around a challenge or difficult situation that came up in the “connect” session. Consider working through this [problem solving graphic organizer](#) from Check & Connect.





Structured Conversations

Middle School

● **Start with a virtual temperature check**

Incorporate a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practice, such as a temperature check, and ask student to share how they are feeling by asking the student to share a High and Low from that week.

● **Gather data**

Ask student to respond with the emoji that best fits how things are going this week for the following:

- Understanding your schoolwork?
- Getting along with classmates?
- Relationship with your teachers?

● **Provide feedback**

Ask student to “Share more” or “Tell me more” about why they chose that emoji. Find something to celebrate with the student based on what they shared.

● **Promote School Success**

Say to student: I want you to feel like you can be successful in school. Even though it’s online, it is important that you are learning and enjoying school. Prompt with questions, if needed:

- If there was one thing that could make your day better, what would it be?
- What have you enjoyed about school in the past?

● **Problem solve with student**

Engage student in problem solving around a challenge or difficult situation that came up in the “connect” session. Consider working through this [problem solving graphic organizer](#) from Check & Connect.





Structured Conversations

High School

● **Start with a virtual temperature check**

Incorporate a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practice, such as a temperature check, and ask student to select a [Rose, Bud, and Thorn](#) with this helpful tool from Mindful Schools.

● **Gather data**

Ask student to rate their responses on a scale of 1-5, one being very unhappy and five being very happy with the following:

- Progress in class?
- Completion of assignments?
- Connection to friends?
- Connection to teachers?

● **Provide feedback**

Ask student to “Share more” or “Tell me more” about why they chose a “1” or a “4” for that question. Find something to celebrate with the student based on what they shared.

● **Promote School Success**

Say to student: I want you to feel like you can be successful in school. Even though it's online, it is important that you are learning and enjoying school. Prompt with questions, if needed:

- What could help move that “1” response to “2”? Or that “3” to a “4”?
- If there was one thing that could make your day better, what would it be?
- What have you enjoyed about school in the past?

● **Problem solve with student**

Engage student in problem solving around a challenge or difficult situation that came up in the “connect” session. Consider working through this [problem solving graphic organizer](#) from Check & Connect.





Structured Conversations

Families

Approach

Building a trusting relationship with a family takes time and effort, but it can be the key to connecting with your students during remote learning. Remember these three quick tips when working with families:

- Be reliable
- Be persistent
- Be you

Attitude

A mentor's values and perceptions about families in their school can affect the mentor's ability to create a partnership with a student's parent or caregiver.

Check & Connect asks mentors to start with the belief that parents are doing the best they can and to avoid judging or blaming families.

It can be helpful to reflect on your own assumptions about families. The Flamboyant Foundation provides a helpful reflection activity in Appendix E of their resource, ["Beginning of Year Relationship Building: A Strategy Guide for Educators."](#)

Atmosphere

Addressing concerns about Person-Environment Fit can look different in the remote setting. More effort may need to be put on accommodating the home environment to support the success of the student. Mentors may work on the following areas to support the student and family:

- Identify barriers with family
- Build on strengths of the family
- Share in problem-solving





Structured Conversations

Structured Family Conversation for Remote Learning

Greet

"How are you?"

"Is this an ok time to talk?"

Outline

Explain purpose for call.

"What else would you like to discuss?"

Reflect

Ask parent with an emoji or scale how it's going currently?

Validate their efforts.

"What do you need to help support learning at home?"

Share

"How do you think your child is doing in their classes? "

Highlight student success.

Be honest and be optimistic.

Discuss student's goal.

Plan

"Is there anything that might get in the way of your child completing this goal?"

Problem-solve around potential barriers.

Decide next steps and follow through.



Interactive Interventions



WHAT IT IS...

A “toolbox” of resources that mentors can use to facilitate Check & Connect interventions online or in-person.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT...

Check & Connect interventions are designed to enhance student engagement at school and with learning, and to keep them on the path to graduation. Mentors need a handy set of tools and resources to support the needs of their students — from goal-setting and self-monitoring, to problem-solving with teachers and families.



Interventions Done Virtually

Brainstorming consequences

Use online resources (whiteboard, Padlet, etc.) to brainstorm and document consequences to behaviors. Have student create 3 columns and label the columns:

- “reasons/excuses”
- “consequences for self” and
- “consequences for others”

Problem solving graphic organizer

Check & Connect created a [problem solving graphic organizer](#) for mentors and students to use together.

Manage missing assignments

Online learning adds more complexities that make it hard for students to stay on track with assignments. Make sure your students have skills and know how to:

- Use digital learning platform(s) and tools
- Organize and manage their time and work
- Simplify their work as much as possible
- Address technology needs
- Find online tutoring
- Ask for help

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PROBLEM SOLVING GRAPHIC ORGANIZER 1

Problem:

Can I solve it?

Yes

No

Revise the problem so that it's one I can solve

What are 4-5 possible solutions?
Include pro's & con's

Which solution is best for me?
Circle the best

What steps will I take to put this into action?

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PROBLEM SOLVING GRAPHIC ORGANIZER 2

What I did:

How did it go?

It worked

I'm not sure

It didn't work

Why did it work?
What was the result?

What can I do to find out what else I can do?

What didn't work?
What else can I do?



Interventions Done Virtually

Make SMART goal setting easier

The process for setting a SMART goal can be too abstract for some students. Sometimes simple, more user-friendly questions can make this process more concrete. Access the [SMART Goal Setting Sheet](#) from Check & Connect here.

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SMART GOAL SETTING SHEET

S Specific **WHAT** do you want to accomplish?

M Measurable How will you **KNOW** that you've met your goal?

A Achievable Is it in your **POWER** to accomplish your goal?

R Realistic Is this goal **WORTH** working hard to accomplish?

T Timely **WHEN** do you want to accomplish your goal?

Make goal setting fun!

Help students brainstorm and track goals with digital vision boards. Create a visual collage of images and quotes to make abstract goals real and personal for your student.

Long-term goal setting

Help students keep their future “real” by visualizing where they want to go and what they want to achieve. Have them plot a timeline of their past, present and future, and define their dreams with text and images.

Interactive future planning

Help your student plan for their future (and keep them motivated to stay engaged in school) by exploring their interests online. Check out TRG EDU’s free, [interactive resources](#) such as [Career Path](#), [College Blueprint](#), and [Find Your Passion](#) as a start.

Provide families with design challenge activities

Help the family have fun together with their student. Introduce them to TGR EDU’s [design challenges](#) such as [Move the Ping Pong Balls](#), [Go the Distance](#), or [Basketball Shooter](#).

Seek ideas from other educators online

Learn from other educators about tips that might be helpful to support your students. Gain ideas and inspiration from [We Are Teachers](#). If you are on Facebook, look into the group, *Online Teaching Tips for Plague-Adverse*, which provides a place to exchange and learn about brief, helpful suggestions about remote instruction.



Interventions Done Virtually

Explore personal values

Play an online version of the [“Personal Values Card”](#) activity from the Urban Indian Health Institute. Students sort & categorize cards printed with a value to assess its importance to them. Check & Connect has created a [Jamboard template](#) for this activity.

Teach social emotional skills

Want a great tip from [Education Week](#)? Encourage students to think about someone else! Instead of asking, “What type of support do you need?” ask “What could you do to support a friend who’s really worried about...? What would you say to them?” These questions help students think creatively about strategies they might not have thought about for themselves.

Make it easy for families to stay connected

In times of high mobility, families might have changes in how to contact them. Make it easy for them to let you know. Send a postcard, text, or mail with a link to a simple online survey. EveryDay Labs suggests using a simple message like the one: “ **Contact Info:** Do we have the correct phone number, email, and mailing address on file for you? Update your contact info at [contact-info-update-link].”

Make it easy for families to understand your communications

Communicate with families in ways that make it easy for them to read and comprehend. Try using tips from [EveryDay Lab’s Family Insights Toolkit](#) checklist:

- **Simple?** Write concisely at 4th-grade level in the family’s home language.
- **Skimmable?** Use headings and bullets so it is easily skimmed. Make it easy to see if this information is FYI, update, request for action, etc.
- **Multi-channel?** Use mail, email, phone calls, and text messages depending on family preference and goal of communication.
- **Routine?** Communicate on a regular schedule to establish a routine as families come to expect and count on your communication.
- **Automatic?** If your school has routine communications to families, advocate that school staff automatically enroll families with the option for them to opt out. This makes it easier for families to stay informed.



Interventions Done Virtually

Learn more ideas for connecting with families

Sign up for the free [online family engagement course](#) at Harvard taught by Karen Mapp, Ed.D. Or check out Flamboyant Foundation's "[Academic Partnering Toolkit for Teachers](#)" and "[Guide for Beginning of Year Relationship Building](#)".

Slack Check & Connect Network

Connect with other Check & Connect implementers online via the Check & Connect Slack page. Ask questions, learn about others' strategies, and search resources. Join at z.umn.edu/cncslack.



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