

Supporting Student and Educator Mental and Emotional Well-Being in Distance Learning

We are living in unprecedented times where social distancing has become necessary, and students, families and school staff are called upon to facilitate distance learning for all students. For this reason, it is essential that educators and staff connect regularly in less “school traditional” ways with students, their families, and each other. Now more than ever, ongoing trusting relationships are key to creating safety and stability for students and staff, and supporting each others’ mental and emotional health and well-being.



Here are some suggestions to help educators and staff center distance learning around students’ mental and emotional health and learning needs.

Safety Comes First

Safety is essential to physical and emotional health. Make use of short personal check-ins as often as possible, and routinely ask students about how they are doing or feeling. In the event that a student or staff member reports circumstances in which they do not feel safe, immediately contact the appropriate administrative staff in your building and/or a mental health professional in your district or community and share your concerns.

Build and Maintain Trusting Relationships

If technology allows, use platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet for regular check-ins with students to continue to build and maintain trusting relationships. If technology is not available, regular voice contacts over the telephone are an important alternative. When possible, establish a regular and predictable communication routine with students. Once a routine is established, posted videos can help create flexibility for students and families.

Center on Simplicity and Quality

Remember that, like you, students are likely experiencing a range of emotions as they learn to cope with these unpredictable circumstances. This means that they may be overwhelmed more easily than usual. Introduce resources and new learning platforms slowly and incrementally, being mindful of each child’s capacity to tolerate and adapt to new information and procedures. Routines are important even in remote learning spaces. Get students acquainted with any new learning platform or routine early and remember to keep it simple. Begin with short check-ins, understanding that this type of connection with their peers and teachers will be new for many students. Consider that students will join from diverse settings that may not be private or feel safe to fully engage.

Kids Need to Move and Engage

Students’ minds **and** bodies need to be engaged for them to thrive and learn. Many students will be inside and using devices for distraction more often than usual during this time. As much as possible, include short periods of movement and/or live social engagement during distance learning to keep them active and engaged.

Online Citizenship

Predictable routines and procedures are key to establishing safety and trust during distance learning. Establish agreements regarding acceptable online behavior, and clearly communicate these expectations to students. Decide how to utilize online chat features, cameras, and “break-out rooms”, etc. Direct students toward appropriate and safe online resources, and teach them how to evaluate resources for safety and relevance.

Connect with Colleagues

Remember, you are not alone. Other teachers and staff are struggling with, and sorting through similar issues. Your professional community is vital! Stay in regular communication with your colleagues and set regular times to connect, problem-solve, support each other, and celebrate your accomplishments.

Try to Stay Positive

This is a new situation for everyone, and we are all in this together. Do your best to accept that lessons and learning will be different, and be kind to yourself and allow for your own learning curve.

Utilize a Wide Variety of Resources

Equity and access are guiding principles that drive quality education. All students have access to **some** resources, no matter how varied or seemingly limited. Rather than feeling limited by what students may not have, tap into the wide variety of resources that students do have in creative ways.

Care for Yourself and Ask for Help

During this time you are likely to experience added stress as you work toward learning a new way of teaching and interacting with students, families and colleagues. Do your best to build in short breaks between tasks, and connect with others when feeling overwhelmed. Our colleagues and communities provide vital sources of support and connection as we all learn to navigate this new reality.