

5 MINUTE CHATS WITH STUDENTS

(This tool is built from a similar resource created by the Anchorage School District SEL Team)

Personal connection and relationships are critical in being a culturally responsive educator and as a gateway to engagement in learning. This will prove more difficult with distance learning or other modifications you may be making this year. This template includes a structure and sample questions for one-on-one chats to begin to build those connections.

Those who lead a single class should plan to connect with each student individually during the first weeks of school and periodically throughout the year. Those who lead multiple classes can work with a team of teachers who share students to divide responsibility and make sure each student is contacted. If possible, call upon other staff in the building to assign each person a smaller “advisory group” of students to contact. Other staff may include administrators, deans, counselors, specialist teachers, office staff, paraprofessionals, security staff, or out-of-school time leaders. If the assigned staff member will be someone other than a teacher that is in regular contact with the student and family, be sure to notify families that their child has been assigned to their advisory group and this is an organized, school-wide effort.

The primary purpose of the chat is to hear about your student’s experience and perspective so that you can know them as an individual, be responsive to their needs, learn from them for the benefit of the class and school, and build relational trust. If you feel the impulse to share your own story, pause and consider whether your sharing will advance this purpose or if it risks distracting from it.

Initiate – In a virtual or in-person group setting, let all students know you’ll be reaching out to them individually to connect and hear more about how things are going. Have students sign up for a time for a call or in-person chat or reach out to them with a school and parent-approved messaging app that allows for easy back and forth exchange. If possible, let them choose! Say something like:

“I’m working on connecting with everyone in this group to get a better sense of what everyone is feeling and thinking about, and how I can be supportive.”

Open – Show that they are significant to you and you care about them.

- “I’m glad to have the chance to chat 1 on 1 with you.”
- “I’m excited to have you in my class/group this year – I can tell you’re going to add a lot to our community.”
- If you already know something about their lives, bring it up as appropriate. For example, “Your sister is back from college now, right? How has it been having her home?” or “Normally you’d be into baseball season already. Have you found ways to keep practicing?”

Personalize – Ask a question that invites the student to share as much or as little as they are comfortable sharing. Be more specific than “how are you?” –often we are socialized to answer that question with little thought or detail.

- I know things have been unusual lately; how have you been keeping busy lately?
- What is new for you since last school year?
- Who or what has been on your mind a lot lately?
- What would you say is your biggest source of stress right now?

Invite Feedback – Show your student that you value their perspective and are open to making changes based on their input.

- What would you like to see happen this school year?
- What do you need most right now from me (and your other teachers)?
- What do you think our school/class is getting right so far this year?
- What do you think our school/class should be doing differently?

Close – End on an optimistic, forward-thinking note.

- What’s the best thing you’ve seen today?
- What’s keeping you going/giving you energy/making you happy right now?
- I’m making a class playlist – what song have you been listening to the most lately?



Here are some additional phrases to draw upon as needed:

- **Probe:** “Tell me more about that.” “What does that look like?” “I want to make sure I understand what you’re saying. Can you explain a little more?”
- **Communicate care and a calm emotional state:** “Your teachers care a lot about your success.” “Your teachers all want to make sure you’re getting your needs met.”
- **Validate emotions:** “That must be so difficult. I see you and I’m here for you.” “I can only imagine how much that impacts you.”
- **Stay solution-oriented:** “It sounds like a lot has been happening that is out of your control, and that sounds really frustrating. What are some things you do have control over – something small you can do to start to make things better?”
- **Wind down the conversation:** “You’ve given me some things to think about. I’m going to take some time to process what you shared, and we’ll make some time to talk again in a few days.”

