TIPS FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS DURING REMOTE LEARNING

Building student relationships can be one of the most rewarding parts of teaching, and a key to addressing student trauma, but most teachers have little experience doing this when they or their students are working from home.

Start with OpportunityCulture.org’s Instructional Leadership and Excellence webpages for many resources for connecting with students regardless of location, including short videos, study guides and discussion questions, and other tools and resources.

Here are a few more tips for building relationships when students are learning remotely:

Socially connect with students: Create several fun, lighthearted videos that share more of your personality. Share personal tips on how you are coping, to connect and model healthy choices. You can create your own YouTube channel so that you can easily add and edit captions. (If you use the auto-generated subtitles, always preview them to ensure your words were correctly transcribed; if not, follow tips here to fix them.) Students and families can use the option to translate subtitles to a different language. This video can then be uploaded to any platform that you use. If you have an Apple device, the Clips app can be used to create videos and captions.

Create a learning pact with students: You and your students can agree on key elements for this formal pledge, to set a tone of warmth, respect, and clear expectations. Include columns for each of you: What you can expect from me (such as, “I will regularly communicate with you”; “I will provide a supportive and trustworthy environment for you to share and discuss your ideas with your peers”; “I will hold you to high standards for learning”; “I will treat you with dignity and respect”; “I will make mistakes, but I will apologize for them and learn from them”) and What I can expect from you (such as, “You will actively participate in this class and do your best to meet due dates”; “You will stay in touch with me and let me know when you start to struggle”; “You will treat your peers with dignity and respect”; “When you make a mistake, you will apologize for it and learn from it.”)

Survey students regularly or create assignments in which they can describe their current situation and mental health status: Allow students to use a word, photo, or picture to describe how they are feeling, what they are concerned about, what they need, and what they are proud of. Use Survey Monkey, Zoom chat polls, or a creative lesson plan to better understand how your students are doing and follow up to get students any help they need. Doing this routinely will give you context to know how to interpret responses better. Consider carefully sharing your feelings, as displaying your vulnerability can allow students to share more personal information.

Check in routinely with each student one-on-one: Check in with each student often and on a regular schedule, by videoconference (preferable for face-to-face interaction in some check-ins), phone, or email. Contact students more often if they seem less engaged than usual or if they may be more emotionally vulnerable.

Maintain communication with families: Routinely communicate with families as well, by videoconference, phone, or email. Use these communications to keep them informed about the class and the student’s progress, but also to let them know that you care and will offer what help and resources you can. Students are much more likely to participate in remote learning if they know that their teacher cares and is invested in their success.