



Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

Getting to Know You – Virtually

**Beginning-of-the-Year
Activities to Create a Caring
Classroom in the Covid Era**



Introduction

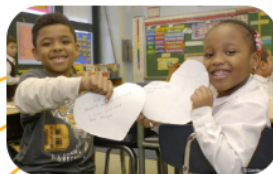
Creating a caring learning community with our students is critically important – especially at this time of hardship and anxiety.

We hope the activities in this collection will help you and your class get this challenging school year off to a good start. All are intended to help you and your students connect and create a community with each other – even if that community must be online. Most activities can be adapted for students from grades 3-12; some are designed specifically for younger grades.

Many thanks to Marieke van Woerkom, who authored many of these activities for our TeachableMoment teacher resource collection. Other lessons were created or adapted by staff including: Lili Arkin, Ava Daniel, Emily Feinstein, Javier Francisco Diaz, Sully E. Diaz, Jason Jacobs, Ife Lenard, Tala Jamal Manassah, Lauren Neidhardt, Nicole Lavonne Smith, and Laurine Towler.

Many more activities are available on [TeachableMoment](https://teachablemoment.org), Morningside Center's online teacher resource collection – including lessons that specifically address Covid-related issues, movements for racial justice, and much more. New activities are posted weekly.

Morningside Center works hand in hand with educators to strengthen the classroom and school community and build students' social and emotional skills. We work to make our schools more caring and equitable through restorative practices and a focus on promoting racial awareness and equity.



Social & Emotional Learning (SEL)

Young people and adults learn and practice skills to help them do well in school and in life.



Restorative Practices (RP)

Young people stay connected through processes that foster a caring and equitable school community.



Racial Equity

School staff increase their cultural competency and ensure that school systems and structures elevate every child.

Since 1982, Morningside Center has partnered with New York City schools to develop and implement research-based programs that reach hundreds of schools and tens of thousands of young people each year. Two major scientific studies found that Morningside Center's school-based programs have a positive impact on students' well-being and behavior, their academic performance, and the classroom climate.

For more information, please [contact us](#).

Stay Connected:

[Newsletter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Vimeo](#) | [TeachableMoment](#)

Contents

Introduction	1
Contents	3
Guidelines for Creating a Caring Learning Community Online	4
Getting to Know Each Other	7
Name Game	7
Home Artifacts and Animals	8
Songs to Connect Us	10
Pair-Share Gift Drawings	10
Intriguing Objects Show and Tell	12
Reflecting on School, Glows and Grows	13
Questions to Get to Know Your Students	14
Creating Community Agreements	16
Fun Activities to Keep Us Connected: Grades preK-5	18
Follow the Leader	18
If You're Happy and You Know It	19
Looking for My Friends	20
Fun Activities to Keep Us Connected: Grades 3 and up	21
Gesture Relay	21
Cooperative Counting	22
Connect Me	23
Move Together	24
Unfortunately/Fortunately	25
Teaching Self-Care	26
Taking Care of Yourself	27

Guidelines for Creating a Caring Learning Community Online

Below are ten tips for creating a supportive learning environment for students online.

A note: Many of our students and families do not have access to high-speed internet and the devices they need to connect online. [Here](#) are some pointers about reaching out to our students who are harder to connect with.

1. Be prepared and set a calming tone.

In this time of upheaval and anxiety, it is important that, as the teacher, facilitator, and host, we set a calming tone when students gather online. This means preparing ourselves socially and emotionally to be present and available as well as technologically. We need to think about how to best use virtual platforms in this time of physical social distancing, and plan accordingly. Ask yourself ahead of time how things might look different when using an online platform, video, or communication system. Consider what supports students will need accessing and using the new technology. If your school has tech support staff to draw on, that's great. If not, assess and pool your tech resources—remember to draw on student know-how.

2. Be transparent about challenges and ask for help.

Remember that change is hard for many of us. Don't pretend otherwise. Be transparent about the fact that you too are impacted, by letting students know, perhaps, that you're no expert in online facilitation. This gives us as well as our students permission to make mistakes, lessening all of our stress levels while opening us up to learning. Model asking for help, as you build this virtual new learning space together. Consider having a colleague or student help with the technology so that you can be present and focus on other needs the group may have.

3. Create a welcoming space where students feel seen and heard.

As students log on, welcome them by name. Show enthusiasm for them having joined the virtual space you've prepared for them. Check in with them and ask how they're doing. Allow time for students to greet each other and reconnect, while also opening space for thoughts and feelings connected to where students are at. Acknowledging what's going on for students can help them put some of their worries aside temporarily and focus on other things, like academics.

4. Provide norms and structures.

At times of upheaval and change it is especially important to provide structure. This is as true in a virtual space as it is in real life. Create a schedule, stick to it as best you can, and translate

your classroom norms to a virtual space. This can provide some comfort and reassurance for students to hold onto when they feel shaken.

5. Build your online space collaboratively.

If you don't already have a set of classroom norms (guidelines for how you and your students will work together and treat each other), engage students to develop such guidelines or tweak the ones you already have to be relevant in a virtual space. Post new norms, and/or share them with students via email. Refer to them on a regular basis as you come together in your virtual classroom, especially when first starting out. Recognize that while many of your students have likely spent much time in online communities, virtual education is new for many of us. Acknowledge the wisdom and resources everyone brings to the space. Bring what you can, as the adult, but also draw on them as young people, their knowledge and online wisdom, to structure how information, questions, thoughts, and feelings are shared in this space.

6. Establish goals and expectations and invite student input.

You'll likely need to make decisions about what academic content to focus on and what to postpone or give up on, as you familiarize yourself with online teaching. Teaching will be different and likely more time-consuming than usual. Share with students your plan, goals, and expectations for the foreseeable future. The less uncertainty and stress we introduce to students' lives at an already uncertain and stressful time, the better. Make sure to ask for student input, as you're all getting used to new ways of being and learning together. Listen and respond to the input.

7. Use different modalities and invite student feedback.

Just like in the academic classroom, different modalities are key to engaging students in a virtual space. Recognize that different online platforms have different capabilities. Consider the role poetry, video, images, and social media can play. Is it possible to have break-out "rooms" for small-group work? Ask for student feedback so you can assess the quality of your online teaching. Is it clear? Is it engaging? What are their takeaways? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your lessons? We're all in this together and need to draw on each other to make the best of this challenging situation.

8. Provide additional support via email, text, individual chats and/or office hours.

Consider these the online alternative to the one-on-one conversations you might have with students in the physical classroom, to check-in, clarify, redirect, problem solve and/or encourage students to get (back) to work. At the same time, remind students to stay focused. Too many side-texts and individual chats between students can take away from being present with one another in the virtual classroom.

9. Encourage communication among students.

Ask open-ended questions. Encourage students to respond to each other (not just you the teacher) and make connections. Try not to be too heavy-handed in your facilitation, opening up space for students to use the online tools to engage with each other to deepen their thinking and responses. A pause in the virtual classroom can be as important as it is in the physical classroom. At the same time, you might also be the person needing to keep the conversation alive when there is a lull in the interaction. Acknowledgements like “that’s an interesting idea” or “that’s one example” with a follow up question for additional examples or connections can keep students engaged, as do follow-up questions to deepen student thoughts and interactions.

10. Agree what non-verbal communication tools to use.

Some platforms have the capacity to enable participants to virtually raise their hand, applaud, etc. Consider other signals that might be useful, such as to show agreement or disagreement, or to signal support and concern for another person.

Getting to Know Each Other

Name Game

This activity has students pair off to share their name and something they want the group to know about them.

Gathering

Gathering/Name Game: Explain that to get (re)acquainted with each other, we are going to share our preferred name using a dramatic gesture. Each person will say their name while making a gesture, then the whole group will in unison repeat the person's name while making their gesture. Model by saying your name and making a gesture, to show how it's done and to break the ice a bit.

If you are with a group you have not previously taught, or who don't know each other, you may wish to type an order in the chat box for the students to follow prior to beginning the activity. If you already know most of your students and they know each other, you can ask them to pass the mic by calling on the next person.

Next, thank students for sharing their names. Tell them we are now going to go deeper into getting to know one another by sharing and listening.

Share with the students that you will be breaking them up into pairs to:

- Say their name again and
- Share one thing they would like the group to know about them.

Explain that in the share out after the pair share, each person will be responsible for sharing **their partner's name and what their partner wants the group to know about them**. Let students know that they should only share what they feel comfortable with the whole group knowing and sharing silly or funny things is totally fine!

Give students each one minute to share (If using zoom send out a broadcast to remind students of when it is time to switch).

When students return to the group, ask them to type their partners name and share in the group chat or out loud. As they do, cut and paste the names and sharing into a document, or type it into the document.

When completed, share your screen and invite a couple of students to read the compiled document.

Closing

Have students share one word of how this activity felt for you, popcorn style until each student has shared.

Thank the students for their sharing, and let them know that we will continue to do activities like this to get to know one another more deeply, and to create a community environment to support them as they move through the school year.

Home Artifacts and Animals

This activity has students share an artifact from home, and tell classmates what animal they would be and why.

Gathering

Welcome the students warmly and by name as they each enter the space. (Names are important. Some names have meanings - whether in another language or another country. They are often significant parts of one's identity. If you do not know the pronunciation, kindly ask BEFORE an attempt that could really cause harm, embarrassment, resentment, or shame. Seek to build a relationship with your students - from the start.)

Ask students to retrieve an object from their home that has significance to them, when students come back, break them up into groups of 3 where each student will get 2 minutes to share in their triads. Prompts might include:

- What is the object?
- Why did you choose it?
- What does it mean to you?

Main Activity

My name is _____, and if I were an animal, I'd be a _____, because.

Model the activity. *For example:* my name is Tala (or Ms. M), and if I were an animal, I'd be a female elephant, because I love to be in community.

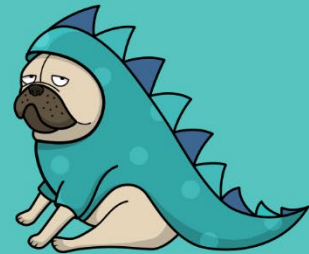
Invite the students to take a few minutes to research facts about their animal using their search engine, then ask them to write down their completed sentence on a sheet of paper that they will share with the group by holding it up to the camera. Inform students that the animal can be a mythological creature.

Invite them to add an illustration if they would like to, or find an image online of the animal.

Make sure to check that everyone understands the instructions, then tell them you will be setting the timer for five minutes and will give them a one-minute warning before it is time to come back. When you return to the group, ask everyone to hold up their sheet or send the image digitally.

Take a screenshot (on a Mac simultaneously hold down Shift+Command+3, on a PC simultaneously hold down Windows+PrtSc), of the images drawn out, then share your screen to show the photo with all the responses.

My name is _____,
and if I were an animal,
I'd be a _____,
because _____.



Closing

Popcorn style, invite students to shout out their animal.



Songs to Connect Us

This activity has students share a song that makes them happy or motivates them.

Gathering

Welcome the students warmly and by name as they each enter the space. (Names are important. They often represent a family's lineage, their story and/or special meaning.)

Grounding exercise: Ask students to share one thing you see, one thing you hear, one thing you can touch.

Model by beginning the go-round yourself. Ask students to pass the mic to a classmate after they share, to promote equity in voice.

Pass the Mic

Ask students to pull up links to songs that make them feel happy, optimistic, or motivated, then ask them to paste the links into the group chat.

One by one ask each student to share why they chose their song, and if there is a part or lyric that they love. After each student shares, play a minute or so of each song. Sincerely thank the students for participating and share with them that music is a great connector—every culture has it, it often tells us a story, and it gives us insight into others.

For a more intensive activity to get students connected through music, see this activity on [Storytelling Through Music](#).

Pair-Share Gift Drawings

This activity helps students get to know each other through art. They pair up, interview each other, and then create a drawing or collage based on what they heard that they can share with each other and the class.

Preparation

Before beginning the activity, ask students to assemble from around the house any materials that they can use to make a drawing or collage. This might include any kind of paper; pencils; colored pencils; markers; scissors; fabric; pictures or text from magazines, books or newspapers; string; glue sticks – or any other items that can be made into art.

You might also consider setting up yourself and your students to use free online applications for drawing or creating a collage, such as:

- ABCya, a paint program: https://www.abcya.com/games/abcya_paint
- Padlet, a program that allows users to post photos and add comments to a virtual bulletin board: <https://padlet.com/>

Make a Gift Drawing

1. Review guidelines for active listening. This might include:
 - One mic
 - Give the person who is speaking your full attention
 - Be aware of your body language and expression
 - Encourage the other person to speak
 - Respect confidentiality
2. Explain that students will pair up with someone and after talking with them, make a drawing, collage, or artwork based on what they heard and understood.
3. Post the questions below for students to read. Feel free to add questions appropriate for your group.
4. Ask students to decide in advance which five to seven questions they are going to ask their partner. Tell them that if their partner doesn't want to answer a particular question, they should move on to the next question.
 - What is something you are proud of?
 - Who is someone you care about?
 - Who is someone who made a difference to you and how?
 - Do you have any hobbies or things you love to do these days at home?
 - What's been challenging during these times?
 - What would you like to change in the next few months to a year in the world?
 - What's one thing you will do to help make that happen?
 - What's another goal you have in the next 5-10 years?
 - What help do you need?
5. Pair students up in breakout rooms and ask them to take turns asking one another the questions they have decided to ask. Remind them that if the other person doesn't want to answer a question, they should move on to the next one.
6. When each pair has finished answering the questions, bring them back to the main room and have them make a drawing or collage based on what they heard. Encourage them to include something that may help or make a difference to their partner.
7. When students have completed their artwork, have each student share what they made for their partner:

- If possible, ask students to show the drawing or collage on camera. If that is not possible, ask students to describe their artwork to the class.
- Ask them to appreciate their partner and their drawing gifts.
- If possible, students can take a picture of their drawing and email it to their partner or send it via snail mail.

Large Group Processing

Invite students to share:

1. What did you think about this activity?
 2. What did you like about it? What, if anything, was challenging about it?
 3. What was it like sharing with your partner?
 4. If you were going to do this again, what would you do differently? What questions might you ask?
-

Intriguing Objects Show and Tell

This activity has students share and tell the story of an intriguing object in their life, then write and share a poem about one or more of the objects or stories shared by their classmates.

Introduce the Activity

Ask everyone to bring an object that is important to them and has some kind of intriguing story. Ask them to be ready to tell the story in a way that will bring the object to life.

Before students choose an object, describe the activity for them. Explain that once someone has “given” their story/object to the group, it no longer “belongs” to them alone: Others may use whatever details they choose. They can change the details, mix them with other objects or stories, or fictionalize/personalize it any way they choose.

Present the Objects

In your virtual or in-person circle, ask each person to present their object. Group members should listen carefully as each person shows an object, describes the object, and tells a story about the object.

Suggest that other students take notes while the person talks to help them listen deeply and hold on to details. This becomes especially important in the next part of the exercise, when they are asked to use something from at least one other person’s presentation when writing their own poem.

When presenting, each person has given a gift to the others to use as each person sees fit.

Write About the Objects

Next, ask students to write a poem using at least one object or story from someone else in the group. They may use as many objects/stories as they want, but they must use at least one, and it must be someone else's object and story—this is where the connection comes in. If possible, give students till the next to day to think about what objects/stories they want to use.

In the next class, ask students to write the first draft of the poem. They can polish the poem on their own later, but writing together during class makes this a communal act. While they write, they are thinking about other people's stories and know that other people are thinking about theirs.

Share the Poems

When you're ready, ask each person to share. Typically, students are eager to share what they have written, and the poems they create are concrete and meaningful. Encourage all students to share their poem. If a student wants to pass and not read their poem, invite them to read a favorite line or stanza so it doesn't feel like an all-or-nothing proposition.

Often, the group grows closer as people hear how their objects and stories have been used. Some people may use all the objects, while others use one and become deeply engaged in just that object.

Note: Sometimes not everyone's object/story is used by classmates. As the teacher, you may want to write a poem that uses all of students' objects to make sure that everyone's story is included.

Publish the Poems

Ask students to further edit their poems and send them back to you. Then, "publish" all the poems through a group email. It is another group product from the exercise.

Extension Activity

If there is interest and every student agrees, work with the group to publish or share their collective product more broadly.

Reflecting on School, Glows and Grows

This activity has students consider what they love about their school and what they would make it a better place for them.

Welcome the students warmly and by name as they each enter the space. (Names are important. They can be sacred to the person, especially if one is named after someone - known or unknown.)

In a 'Go Round', invite students to share an activity ending with "ing" that they enjoy participating in ("I like dancing" "I like cooking" "I like running"). Model the activity by starting yourself. Ask students to pass the mic to a classmate when they are finished.

In breakout groups of four, ask students to reflect on the questions:

- What's one thing that you would like to change about y/our school that would make it a better place for you?
- What's one thing that you love about y/our school that makes it a positive place for you?

Let students know that they should pick one member of the group who will share all responses in a 'Group Share Out' anonymously (meaning that the reporter will not share which student made each statement, only to share the statements themselves).

As each group shares, record the responses in a document with a 'Glow' column and a 'Grow' column. Once all the groups have shared, share your screen and ask the students what they notice. Are there any patterns or commonalities? Paraphrase what students notice as they share out.

Thank the students for sharing and let them know that you are going to be reflecting on their offerings as you move through the coming weeks as a group.

Closing

On the count of 3 each person in the group holds their hand up to their camera to form a group high-five.

Questions to Get to Know Your Students

Ask yourself: What is important for you to know about your students? What would you have liked your teachers to have known about you?

Below are some ideas for questions you might consider using early in the year. They can be used in morning meetings, advisory gatherings, or in writing assignments. Discussing questions such as these can provide you with useful information as you get to know your students early on, but also as the year continues.

Questions to consider exploring in the first days of school, and beyond:

Your name

- What is the name you'd like to go by?
- What should we know about your name?

Your passions and strengths

- What are you passionate about? Why is that?
- What do you see as your greatest strength?
- Talk about a time you were able to use it. What happened? How did it make you feel?
- How can we best use it in class?
- What else do you want us to know about you (so we can better understand you perhaps)?

Your heroes

- Who are your heroes and why?
- What about them appeals to you?
- How have they influenced your life?
- What is one characteristic you'd like to work on developing/strengthening this year?

What you need from us?

- What are the qualities you look for in a teacher?
- How can I best support/encourage you? How can I best challenge/push you?
- How do you like to be recognized for your efforts?
- What would success at the end of the year look like for you?
- What do you need from us to be successful?

And remember, relationship-building is a two-way street. It's as important for you to share as it is for your students to do so. In fact, sharing of yourself in meaningful ways, can break the ice, especially early in the year as you set the stage for students to do the same.

Creating Community Agreements

Early in the school year, work with students to come up with community agreements for your classroom. This is key in creating the caring and supportive classroom community that is so essential for young people and adults alike.

It's important that everybody has chance to contribute their ideas for creating these agreements. Once you've created your community agreement document, return to it often, not only to remind each other of what you've agreed to, but to add items and modify them as needed.

Explain to the class that to do our best work together we need to have certain agreements about how we will treat each other and work together. Today, we'll begin to create these agreements for the current school year.

Discussion

Begin the discussion in breakout groups of three or four. Ask each group to consider together:

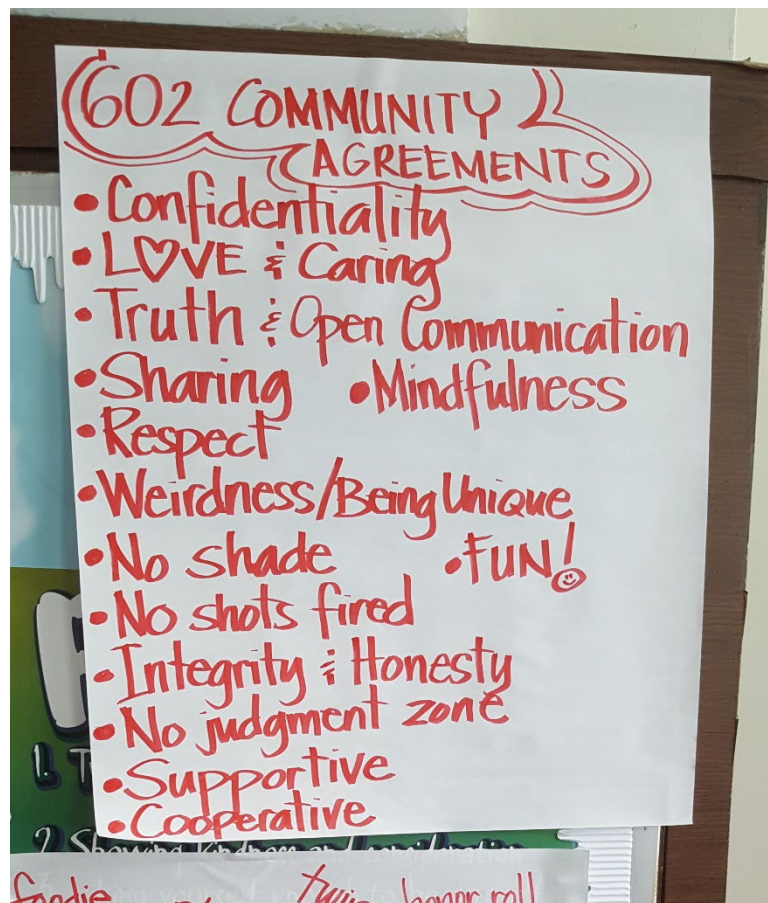
- What will make the classroom a place where they can do their best work?
- How would they like to show up, and how would they like others to show up in this class?

When you bring the full group back together, ask a volunteer from each group to share out their top two or three items on their list.

Pull up the white board or shared document for all to see and chart what students share. If confidentiality (what is said here stays here), is not shared, add it to the list as your contribution. Other agreements might include things like listening to each other without interruption and no putdowns.

Add the heading "Community Agreements" and ask students if they agree with the various ways in which people would like us all to show up.

Ask for a thumbs up if students agree. If there is a thumbs down, or not everyone gives a thumbs up, that may require more discussion about something on the list. Mark it and tell students you'll spend time in the next session, exploring things further.



Explain that the Community Agreements List is a living document and can be updated and changed as we continue to be in this space together. Its purpose is to remind us of how we want to hold each other lovingly accountable in this, our shared virtual space.

Students Vote

Ask students to share their top three agreements by raising their hands as you read the list out loud. Have a student count while another student tallies.

Gather the top three agreements (most voted on) and explain that going forward this week you'll work on practicing those three agreements.

Closing

Invite students as a group, in unison (think unity!) to celebrate the hard work they did today, by throwing their hands in the air and calling out "YES!"

Fun Activities to Keep Us Connected:

Grades preK-5

Follow the Leader

In this activity, students copy your movements, follow a classmate's movements, and then reflect on the experience.

Begin by explaining to your students that you want them to copy/mirror the things that you'll be doing. Start with simple movements that you know your students can easily replicate, like clapping or shaking your hands, marching in place, etc. As your movements get gradually more complex, continue to check in with students asking them how they're doing and giving them directions as needed. You might slow down the movement and provide more detail. Continue to support your students as needed.

Consider the following movements and add your own more complex movements, especially for higher grades, recognizing your own and your students' needs and limitations:

- Clap your hands
- Shake your hands as if shaking off excess water
- Walk in place
- Now march in place, lifting your knees, start swinging your arms
- Slow things down: Continue swinging your arms, but in slow motion and slow down your marching too
- Now, imagine your feet now being firmly rooted into the ground, shoulder-width apart
- Sway from side to side like a tree
- Now twist slowly from side to side from your core
- Bend your body down to touch your toes, slowly, making sure to keep your knees bent
- Now loosen those roots, hop little hops, and gradually getting further off the ground
- Next jump from side to side
- Walk on your tippy toes
- Stomp your feet and ball your fists
- Pretend you're flying like a bird

At any point, you may turn things over to your students, so that students take the lead in showing a movement that they'd like the other students to reflect back at them.

Continue the activity while interest is high. And as you start wrapping up, slow down the actions, making them smaller and quieter.

End with actions like:

- Try to stand as still and quietly as you can for 10 seconds
- Take a slow, deep breath into your belly, and relax your belly as you breathe out
- Pretend to go to sleep/sleep like a baby
- Slowly sit back up and try to yawn, looking at all the other friends on our screen (This may help everyone to yawn together)
- Take some deep breaths, do some stretches, and see how you're feeling right now

At this point you may ask students:

- What did you like best about the activity?
 - What was easy about the activity? What was hard?
 - Which movements did you like best? Why?
 - How did it make you feel?
-

If You're Happy and You Know It

Students sing-along to the song, then talk about what makes them happy.

Consider playing the [If You're Happy and You Know It](#) video by Barefoot books. Have your students sing along and do the movements.

After the video is done, welcome students, by saying hello yourself and using different student names (following the students' lead at the end of the video).

Ask students if THEY know how to say "hello" in other languages besides English. How does it make them feel when they are hearing "hello" and being welcomed in different languages? Why?

And if students are open, engage them in a conversation asking them:

- What makes you happy? Why?

The kids in the video used different ways to show that they were happy. They clapped their hands, wiggled their hips, pointed their toes, stomped their feet, etc.

- Which did you prefer? Why?
 - How do YOU show you are happy? Show us if you'd like. (Have all other students mirror what they are shown.)
-

Looking for My Friends

This activity gets everyone singing and clapping together while we're welcoming each unique individual into our online gathering.

Explain that you'll all be singing a song and clapping together. It's very simple. Ask students to follow your lead, as you start singing and clapping your hands. The [I'm Looking for My Friends](#) video link provides you with the tune.

You might tell students that they don't have to stand up and dance – they can use a hand motion, a facial motion, or any other move they want to make (and are able to make) – or they can make a sound.

The language below is changed a bit from the video so that you can direct who gets to show off their moves or sounds. There are also a few added lines to give students time to gather themselves between each student getting "on stage."

- I'm looking for my friends
- I'm looking for my friends
- I'm looking for you, you, you, you (point to the camera/webcam several times over)
- I'm looking for my friends
- I'm looking for my friends
- There is "Anna" (point to the camera as if you're inviting Anna, or whichever student you choose)
- Show us what you can do

This is Anna's cue to wiggle, groove, dance and/or make a sound – whatever works for her. When she's done or when you feel it's time to move on, start the song again:

- I'm looking for my friends
- I'm looking for my friends
- I'm looking for you, you, you, you (point to the camera several times over)
- Clap, clap, clap, clap ...
- I'm looking for my friends
- I'm looking for my friends
- There is "Jalen" (point to the camera as if you're inviting Jalen)
- Show us what you can do

This is Jalen's cue to wiggle, groove, dance and/or make a sound – whatever works for him. When he's done or when you feel it's time to move on, start the song again.

Fun Activities to Keep Us Connected:

Grades 3 and up

Gesture Relay

This activity aims to build group focus and cooperation by having students repeat patterned clapping.

Steps

1. Make sure everyone in the group can see each other. (Everyone should have camera ON, Microphone ON, and “Gallery View”).
2. Explain that you will establish a pattern by sending a CLAP to someone on your screen, and saying their name. They will then send the CLAP to someone else and say their name. Everyone should receive the CLAP one time only. The last person to receive the CLAP passes it back to the facilitator. If necessary, help participants identify who has not yet received the CLAP.
3. Tell participants to remember WHO they received and sent the CLAP to. Explain that our first goal is to establish a pattern that can be repeated.
4. Send the CLAP through the group again, SAYING THE NAME of the recipient, while following the same pattern.
5. When the group has successfully sent the CLAP through the same pattern twice, pause when you receive it. Tell the group you are now going to send through the same pattern, WITHOUT saying the name of the person you are sending it to.
6. Optional intermediate step: When/if the group masters sending the CLAP without saying the names for 2-3 rounds, announce that after sending the CLAP, you will start sending a second movement in the same order. (This can be a SNAP or something else you choose). Our goal is to keep both gestures moving through the established pattern.
7. Optional advanced step: When/if the group masters sending two gestures around consistently, announce that you will add a third gesture. (This can be a WAVE or something else). Try to keep all three gestures moving through the pattern consistently. This will probably take some practice and playing the game a few times.

Reflection

Invite students to share:

- What did we have to do, individually and as a group, to keep the gestures moving around?
- What is challenging about this game?
- What skills are we building with this game?

Tips

- It's best to make sure each gesture is different from the others, so they are clear to see.
 - You can invite students to suggest the three gestures.
 - Once participants know the game, you can call on a student to be the leader and start sending each of the gestures.
 - Conversation during the game can confuse things, so point out that if we're talking, we may lose track of the gesture.
 - Strategy tip: Always keep your focus on the person you are receiving gestures from. (Better to let participants discover this themselves)
 - Keep track to ensure that both gestures continue to move around the group in the pattern. When a gesture gets dropped, you can say "We lost our CLAP movement, I'm going to start it again."
-

Cooperative Counting

This activity has students cooperatively count up to 20.

Steps

1. This game can be played with cameras off/on, or a mix of both.
2. The goal is to count to 20 as a group. Someone will start with "1," then someone else will say "2" and so on. (NO assigned order)
3. Anyone can say a number. However, if two people speak at the same time, you go back to 1 and start again from the beginning.
4. If the group gets to 20 and wants to continue, the group can see how high they can count, or go backwards from 20 to 1.
5. Optional: Depending on the size of the group, you can require that every person contributes at least one of the numbers.

Reflection

Invite students to share:

- What was challenging about this?
- What did we have to do as a group to work together?
- How could our group take it to the next level the next time we play?

Tips

- If the group finds this challenging, ask, “What could we do as a group to do better?” Encourage suggestions that build teamwork such as listen closely, everyone only say one number, remember who has gone before, etc.
 - Discourage short-cuts such as establishing a pattern or using nonverbal signals.
-

Connect Me

This fun writing activity that can promote empathy and connection.

Steps

1. This game should ideally be played with all cameras ON, although adjustments can be made if necessary.
2. In the chat box, the facilitator will type in a word or a phrase, one at a time.
Examples: strawberry, New York, sky, ball ,one year.
3. Participants have 1-2 minutes to write something about themselves associated with the word or phrase - or something they associate with the word or phrase.
4. Facilitator types a speaking order in the chat box and sets a timer for 2 minutes.
5. Sentences are shared.
6. The facilitator enters the next word or phrase in the chat box.
7. After one round or more, there can be a brief reflection before going on to the next word.

Reflection

Invite students to share:

- What was this activity like for you?
- Did you discover anything?
- How did this activity make you feel?
- What did you learn about other people today?

Tips

- Depending upon the groups’ level of maturity, a participant could suggest a word and send it to the facilitator via the chat box.

- Depending on the group's median age, words (like justice, hope, safety, etc.) can be more evocative and challenging, and touch off deeper conversation.
-

Move Together

This embodied, team-building activity builds visual focus and concentration, and invites non-verbal connection.

Steps

1. This is a physical game that requires participants be on camera.
2. Explain that you will start a movement, and everyone should try to follow you and move together.
3. Keep the initial moment simple and slow, and encourage participants to work together nonverbally. Focus on the movement we all see on the screen, and remind the group your goal is for everyone to move together.
4. As the group gets more practice with moving on screen together, ask another participant to take over as the "Leader." You can rotate the "Leader" role so everyone has a chance to lead the group through movement.

Reflection

Invite students to share:

- How is moving together on-screen different than moving in real space?
- How is moving on-screen different than talking on-screen?
- What skills are we building as a team when we move together nonverbally?

Tips

- On Zoom video settings, there is a box called "Mirror My Video." For this game, it's recommended that everyone turn this feature off, so that everyone works with the same screen orientation.
 - Advanced challenge: If the group likes movement and finds this to be easy, challenge everyone to move together without any single leader.
-

Unfortunately/Fortunately

This activity encourages group focus and creative team-building through cooperative storytelling.

Steps

1. The facilitator explains that the group is going to create a story together with each person contributing one sentence.
2. The speaking order is assigned via the chat box. (If there are an odd number of participants the facilitator will start the story.)
3. The first speaker begins with a sentence beginning with the word “Unfortunately,” as in “Unfortunately, there was some turbulence on my flight.”
4. The next participant adds one sentence that begins with the word “Fortunately,…”

This pattern continues.

For example:

- “Unfortunately, my flight hit some turbulence.”
- “Fortunately, it didn’t last too long.”
- “Unfortunately, the turbulence caused an engine to fail.”
- “Fortunately, there were parachutes on board.”

Reflection

Invite students to share:

- What is challenging about this activity?
- What skills are we building with this activity?
- What does it require as a group to create a story together?

Tips

- You may want to propose a theme or character before beginning the story
- When you set the speaking order, you can ask participants to consider whether they are contributing to the BEGINNING, MIDDLE, or END of the story.

Teaching Self-Care

As schools and families continue to grapple with the continuing Covid pandemic, one thing we know for sure: This coming school year won't be business as usual. Nor should it be.

The changes and losses we've experienced during this pandemic have been hard to handle, overwhelming at times. And, as is too often the case, they've been disproportionately devastating for poor families and families of color. And now the uncertainty around when this will all be over, how we will transition out of it, is wearing on people. It's uncomfortable and brings with it further anxiety, stress, and exhaustion.

Young people are absorbing all this, both the deep losses and the changing moods of the adults in their lives. Some are also struggling with new responsibilities, uncertainty, isolation, and grief.

As we move into the new school year – whatever that might look like – self-care for us, the adults, is key so we can stay strong and healthy ourselves to support our children at this time (see the next section: Taking Care of Yourself). Self-care may also be one of the most important things we can teach young people at a time like this. On TeachableMoment you can find a series of activities that explores self-care practices for all of our K-12 students, from the youngest to the oldest. [Explore self-care lessons.](#)

About Self-Care With Students

In the process of engaging young people in social and emotional learning (SEL) and mindful awareness practice, we naturally begin to teach them about self-care.

With increased self-awareness (one of the core competencies of SEL), students can begin developing practices and skills that they can employ to take care of themselves.

Our goal should be to support students in cultivating the awareness, skills and practices, that *they* find useful. They need to be able to make their own choices in the moment about how to handle themselves and the situation at hand – whether we, as adults, are around or not.

Taking Care of Yourself

Finally, some suggestions for how YOU, the teacher, can make it through this challenging year, offered by Morningside senior trainer Marieke van Woerkom.

During the pandemic, we educators are being called on to radically adapt and adjust their practice. Principals and teachers are experimenting, in creative and ingenious ways, with ways to maintain their relationships with students, while creating remote learning communities for and with their students.

Self-care at a time like this is key. We can't be available for our children if we don't have the energy or bandwidth ourselves, worse still if we get sick. Here are 12 ways to best take care of yourself in the coming weeks and months.

1. Pay attention to how you're feeling. Check in and recognize what's going on for you. Whatever you're experiencing, whether anxiety, sadness, worry, or fear, remember it's okay not to be okay. This is a normal response to the abnormal stress-inducing reality created by the pandemic. Rather than trying to make yourself and others "feel better," it's often more helpful to tune in and actually experience your feelings—uncomfortable though that might be. Pushing feelings down and ignoring them doesn't serve anyone, least of all you. It may help to let go of the notion that when you're feeling pain, sadness, or fear of any kind, you're weak. Recognize feelings, instead, as a natural part of being human. Try to be present with your feelings. And if people sincerely ask how you are, let them know how you're feeling, for real. It could open up a new connection that can support you through these difficult times. See also Point 12, which describes "the Listening Exchange," a format to share how you're feeling with others, because as the saying goes, "shared grief is halved grief."

2. Limit your news intake. It's understandable that you want to stay informed, but consuming news all day long, especially at times like these, tends to increase stress and anxiety levels. Do stay abreast by tuning in to reputable news sources at set times, but don't get caught up in the endless devastating news cycle, especially not right before bed. Be intentional about the information you consume. As Mr. Rogers said: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" Paying attention to this kind of news may help you produce a different set of feelings.

3. Be kind and forgiving, embrace do-overs. Though continued high expectations, no matter the setting, are important for the sake of our children, we also need to recognize that we do not necessarily have the tools or supports needed to move into this new space of remote learning without glitches and delays. So remember to be gentle and kind with yourself. Forgive yourself when things aren't going the way you'd hoped or planned. Do-overs are part of learning for us as well as our students. Look at this time as an opportunity to model what do-overs look like—with grace, if you can! This is a great time to all be learners together, making mistakes and being patient with one another as we all adapt, adjust, and make mistakes.

4. Be generous with others and yourself. These might be trying times for people living in close quarters with others. Try to see the best in others and the situation you find yourself in. Practice kindness, compassion, and generosity with others as best you can, while having realistic expectations of who they are and what they're capable of. And if you live by yourself, practice that same kindness, compassion, and generosity with yourself. Consciously choose to see the best in yourself and others.

5. **Remember to breathe**. Throughout it all, remember to breathe. Simple though it may sound, breathing deeply from your stomach is not something that comes naturally to many of us. Natural, deep breathing involves the large muscle in your abdomen known as the diaphragm. It causes your stomach to expand on the in-breath and fall on the out-breath. Try it by placing your hand on your stomach as you slow down and deepen your breath. By breathing this way from your stomach, you signal your nervous system to calm down, which can help to combat your stress and anxiety.

6. **Focus on gratitude**. Practicing gratitude on a regular basis has been associated with lower levels anxiety, stress, and depression. First thing in the morning (or at any point in the day), think of some things you're grateful for. It could be anything, large or small, like feeling gratitude for waking up in a warm bed, having hot water for your morning shower, or having a good cup of coffee to start your day. You might feel gratitude for your family, supportive colleagues, your children, or your health. Whatever it is, direct your mind to go there. Then check into how it makes you feel. Take a few minutes to sit with that feeling before moving on to the rest of your day. And where practicing gratitude can brighten our day, take a minute to spread some of that joy during these dark times -- who in your life are you grateful for? Reach out to let them know.

7. Keep a journal. Some people prefer to keep a gratitude journal, or use journaling in general to help them slow down, daily. Morningside Center Senior Program Manager Daniel Coles shares a variation on journaling called [morning pages](#), a free-write journaling practice for right after you wake up. It is about committing to paper (yes this is about old fashioned long hand!) whatever it is that crosses your mind first thing in the morning. This can help us clarify for ourselves what is happening and how we are feeling, and can sometimes lead to helpful problem-solving.

8. Maintain a regular contemplative practice. There is a range of contemplative practices that you may already be using to be more intentionally present, in the moment, full of curiosity, and without judgment. These are important to keep us grounded and connected. Research shows that a regular mindful practice can trigger hormones that relieve stress and anxiety, while improving our mood, self-awareness, mental concentration and emotional self-regulation. They can also help us regulate psychological and emotional swings. A few minutes of mindful breathing or practices such as yoga or tai chi, several times a week, can make a noticeable difference. Below, you'll find some resources Morningside Center staff have shared around contemplative practices.

9. Move and exercise daily, if you are able. As much research has established, staying active helps us to stay fit not only physically, but mentally. It can help lift our mood, improve our cholesterol, lower our blood pressure, improve the quality of our sleep at night and manage our stress—all useful in combating the challenges both of loneliness and living on top of each other in small apartments (or larger living spaces for that matter). So build some movement into your daily schedule, with or without your children, indoors, in the yard, or in uncrowded outdoor spaces that you have access to.

10. Seek out nature, fresh air, and sunlight. Studies indicate that it's good for us to spend time in nature. Being in nature lowers stress, combats depression, and promotes positivity. It is good self-care practice to spend time in the outdoors. Of course, this is easier for some of us than others, depending on where we live. But whether you're able to go for a hike outdoors, head into the yard, or simply open your windows to hear the birds, seek out your own slice of nature. And if you're looking for things to do with kids, you might want to do some planting, in the yard or on your windowsill.

11. Nourish your body and soul. While cooped up at home, remember to eat as healthily as you can. If cooking is something you enjoy, consider cooking as a contemplative practice—fully present and with intentionality, you can chop, sauté, stir, taste, season, cook, bake, etc. It's a great way to slow down. And if you do not have that association with food or its preparation, think about what does bring a smile to your face. Is it music, poetry, scented baths, hot showers, petting a dog or cat, listening to birds outside your window, online gatherings with friends or family, virtual dance parties? Then build that into your daily schedule.

12. Distance yes, but only physically. Connection is a core human need, so reach out to friends, family, and neighbors through text, social media, phone calls, online gaming, video chats, virtual happy hours, and dance parties. Also, turn to trusted friends and family members to process your fears, concerns, and anxiety. Consider a process called “the listening exchange.” In this process, two people who might be life partners, close friends, or trusted colleagues, take turns listening mindfully to each other for equal amounts of time. No interrupting. What's shared in the listening exchange is confidential. After a listening exchange, people often comment about how wonderful, and rare, it is for someone to give them their full attention without interrupting, even for five minutes.



Self-care for Educators & Caregivers

Self-care at a time like this is key. We can't be available for our children if we don't have the energy or bandwidth ourselves.

- 1 Pay attention to how you're feeling.
- 2 Limit your news intake.
- 3 Be forgiving, embrace do-overs.
- 4 Be generous with yourself and others.
- 5 Remember to breathe.
- 6 Focus on gratitude.
- 7 Keep a journal.
- 8 Maintain a regular contemplative practice.
- 9 Move & exercise daily, if you are able.
- 10 Seek out nature, fresh air, and sunlight.
- 11 Nourish your body and soul.
- 12 Distance yes, but only physically.

morningsidecenter.org