



Social Emotional Learning in Virtual Learning Environments

As the world, country, and our local community respond to the new coronavirus (COVID-19), the **Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)** urges continued focus on the social and emotional needs of children and adults. Because children spend the majority of their time in schools, educators play a significant role in shaping how they understand and experience what’s going on in the world.

Both children and adults may feel a range of emotions -- fear, anxiety, stress, curiosity, uncertainty, etc. -- as they hear or read about new cases, school closures, and potential changes to their daily routines. Schools and districts can continue fostering supportive learning, even in virtual environments, and continue building positive adult-student relationships that help them reflect on and process these emotions, discuss and evaluate the news, and learn about and develop strategies for keeping themselves and their communities healthy.

Please use this guide as an opportunity to build connections with your students during virtual learning and to help them deal with and manage emotions that are likely to arise during these moments of uncertainty. It is not level-specific, so please make adjustments as needed. This guide is broken into three sections. Each section will serve a specific need:

- Brain Break:** A short “mental” break from a cognitive task, ongoing instruction, or continuous individual task. May be incorporated before, during and/or after a task or activity.
- Community Gathering:** A way to build connections, relationships, and trust in an environment. In classrooms, these typically occur in a circle. Online, it can be a group chat, Zoom or Google Meet.
- Emotion Regulation:** The conscious or unconscious control of emotion, mood, or affect. Can be an active commitment to control your emotion, like a coping mechanism, or automatic response.



Brain Breaks

1. **Move It:** Play a song and move your whole body to the music for five minutes. Try not to dance; just move.
2. **Move It Like A:** Play soft music and think of any animal. Visualize yourself as that animal and move around the room for five minutes.
3. **Let's Play Ball:** Use a soft ball to toss back and forth to another person in a small group that is around you. If you are alone, toss the ball up in the air and catch it a few times. Do this for a few minutes, silently. Focus only on the ball.
4. **Concentration:** If you have a deck of cards, create 12 sets of pairs/matches, mix them up, lay them face down in rows of 4 and play a game of concentration. Turn over 2 cards at a time and try to create a match. Focus and concentrate!
5. **Keep It Up:** Ball up a piece of paper into a tight ball. Using an open hand, hit the paper ball high into the air. Keep hitting it as it falls and prevent it from falling all the way to the ground. For more action or to build more focusing skills, add a second ball of paper, and a third.
6. **Take a Stretch:** Reach for the sky with both hands; touch your toes with both hands, stick arms out to the side and rotate in circular motion; rotate neck in circular motion; lay on floor and bring knees to chest.
7. **Chair Adventures:** Sit on the edge of a chair and keep the back straight. Pick an adventure for some fun chair action: Hiking – wing arms and reach left and right while tapping toes and lifting knees; Swimming – move arms as if swimming forward and then try backwards strokes – kick legs for a flutter movement; Cycling – hold on the seat or arms of chair and pedal legs as if riding a bike.
8. **The Other Hand:** Practice writing your name a few times with your non-dominant hand to help activate both sides of the brain.
9. **Go for a Walk:** Try different walking styles to regroup and focus: Tip Toe Walk, Heel Walks, Runway Walk, Muscle Man/Woman Walk, Bounce-n-Walk, etc.
10. **One-Minute-Dance-Party:** Play music and try a different style of dance movement for one minute. This link has examples of dances that can be explored for a minute:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgw4EgeR960>
11. **Stand up Comedy:** Allow one student to prepare a joke-of-the-day in advance. Have them send you the joke via text or chat beforehand for approval.

Community Gatherings

1. **Would You Rather:** In a group chat or virtual platform, play a game of “Would you rather ...” Pose thought-provoking questions and allow students to select one and share why.
2. **Stretch-a-Story:** Start a story by saying a sentence. Allow anyone to jump in for the next sentence. Invite them to be creative. Keep going until the story feels like it has come to an end. This can be a chat or virtual session.
3. **Call-a-Classmate:** We do almost everything through online communication and text messaging. Take a moment to connect with someone to have a conversation about a topic recommended by the teacher or a current event recommended by the teacher. Challenge students to connect with different classmates.
4. **Fact or Fiction:** Students may share something about themselves while others determine if it is fact or fiction.
5. **Social Stories:** Think about a social setting or place you have visited or one you would love to visit soon. Describe this setting. How do you behave here? What do you do here and how do you interact with others?
6. **Shout Outs:** A “shout out” is a way to acknowledge something about another person that is valued or appreciated. Think of anything that has occurred from the beginning of the school year through today. Give someone a shout out and try to pick different people. The teacher may also give shout outs!
7. **Goal Setting:** Virtual Learning is a new experience for many, especially for a prolonged time period. Students should set a virtual learning goal, write it down, and designate an accountability partner to help them

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- accomplish the goal. It can be a daily goal, weekly goal, or for the full virtual learning time away from school.
8. **Oh the Places We Will Go:** Prep students for this session the day before. Have them research a place they would like to visit. The next day, ask - "If you could travel anywhere for free, where would you go and why?"

Emotion Regulation Activities

1. **Strike a Pose:** To increase mind and body balance, while decreasing stress and anxiety, practice a few yoga poses. Use this link to choose the pose to display to students or, if you are capable, model it yourself!
<https://www.sheknows.com/health-and-wellness/articles/1020135/12-basic-yoga-poses-for-beginners/>
2. **Pressure Point:** Gently massage the pressure point between your thumb and pointer finger for one minute. Switch hands and do it again. This will calm anxiety and relieve pain, especially headache pain.
3. **Just Breathe:** Practice deep breathing for six full breaths. Model for students by breathing in slowly for 4-counts, hold for 4-seconds, and breathe out slowly for 4-counts. Repeat. May also be used for a Brain Break activity.
4. Use these links for other deep breathing techniques for students. They can practice a technique as a brain break or to learn emotion regulation. Try a new technique each day.
 - Elementary Techniques: <https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/calming-breathing-techniques-kids/>
 - Secondary Techniques: <https://www.healthline.com/health/breathing-exercise#sitali-breath>
5. **Lyrical Genius:** Create a song or poem to express how you are feeling about the current state of affairs. It can be related to COVID-19, virtual learning or other topics.
6. **Just Journal It:** Keep a journal (personal or virtual) of your adventures during your time away from school. You may also use your journal to track your emotions. Record how you feel, why you feel this way, and any needs that you may have as a result of these feelings. Encourage students to share their needs with you (the teacher), a parent, or an accountability buddy. Use these links to explore different types of feelings: Elementary – <https://twitter.com/socialworktools/status/734971793694466048/photo/1> and Secondary - <https://becomempowered.wordpress.com/2015/09/06/feelings-and-intensity/> or <https://thechalkboardmag.com/the-feelings-circle-chart-emotional-communication#sl=2>
7. **Visualization (breathe it out):** Imagine what stress looks like and feels like. Do not imagine the situation that creates stress for you, but imagine the stress itself. Locate it in your body. Once you have it, release it. Keep breathing slowly and deeply until you feel you have released all of it.
8. **Visualization (breathe it in):** Imagine a place, person, or activity that makes you calm and will create a sense of relaxation. Picture this relaxing scene to calm the mind and body. Use this link for additional visualization scripts. Scroll to the middle to select a visualization. Please preview it before you lead a guided visualization practice with students. Use a soft, calming voice: <https://www.greenchildmagazine.com/guided-relaxation/>
9. **Noise Isolation:** Use the link to play sounds from nature: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNcHDDFmHhE> There will be a variety of sounds. Have students focus on one sound and describe it to themselves. Ask them to think about if they have ever heard the sound before and if so, when and where were they? Remind them to isolate just that sound and focus only on that one sound (3-minutes). Later, they can share out.
10. **Let it Go:** What is something you are dealing with right now that could be causing intense feelings or stress? Without sharing it out, write it down. Once it is on paper, rip it up, and throw it away. Let it go. Maybe they are dealing with something that is causing feelings of joy or elation. Once they write it down, share it, and post it either online or in their home.
11. **Virtual Adventures:** Visit a relaxing environment and become a part of the calm or interact with the adventure. This link has virtual spaces that will create relaxation and calm. These spaces may also be used for brain breaks. Click the link and choose an environment. Once you enter the virtual space, follow the directions on how to interact with the selected environment. Listen and notice what happens in this virtual

space, and notice how you feel afterwards. Teacher may navigate for students or send the link for students to choose a space to explore on their own: <https://www.free-training-tutorial.com/mindfulness.html>

Additional Topics for Community Gatherings, Morning Meetings, or Virtual Connections:

- Google “best quotes ever” and find a quote that speaks to you. Share it and tell why.
 - Find one lyric from a song you really like. Make sure the lyric is appropriate to share and does not have words that might be offensive to others. What is the lyric? Why did you choose it? What does it mean to you?
 - Our school district is looking for a new Superintendent. If you could be the Superintendent for Atlanta Public Schools, what is one thing you would do in your first year?
 - Two Truths and a Lie - very similar to Fact versus Fiction from above. Students have to guess which statement is not true about each other.
 - Your Voice, Your Choice: Help students understand there is power in their voice, and they can harness this power in a positive way. Think of something that matters to them in the local or global community. How can you use your voice and your actions to support this matter or to initiate change?
 - A Message to COVID-19: “Dear Coronavirus ...”
 - What would the world be like without sports? (all sports are currently on hold; this may spark emotions)
 - What would the world be like if schools were only online and never face-to-face? (a virtual reality)
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