

EQ @ Home or School

RETURNING TO LEARNING WITH TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Check-in Overview

Dear Educator,

Thank you for the important work you do to support your students. Your time and efforts matter. **Teaching and learning are all about relationships.** Stronger relationships help students feel connected, be motivated, self-manage, and recover from trauma and setbacks.

To prepare for your first check-in, please watch Keeth Matheny's (a.k.a. "Coach Rudy's") ["How to Host a Check-in"](#) video. This five-minute video includes the building blocks that will create a supportive, inviting check-in environment.

Don't let this process of instructions intimidate you; it's easy once you get the hang of it.

"The students with whom you may be having the greatest impact are the ones who may not actually respond well to your kindness—you just never know. This is a powerful reminder to seek out those students who isolate, disrupt, or have attendance issues."

- Sporleder & Forbes
The Trauma-Informed School (2016)

The check-in process can work equally well in class or online. If in class, try to arrange the desks in a circle so students can see each other's faces (or as much as possible with social distancing requirements). Consider hosting some check-ins outside in a quiet spot. It can be easier to social distance outside and great to get some fresh air.


If online, be sure students know how to use emojis and set their viewing option to see all their classmates. In the first lesson (DS1.1.), there is more information about how to use Zoom breakout rooms so students can work online in small groups or pairs. The check-ins also include opportunities to survey students with a thumbs-up 👍 or hand-raise 🙋 to reinforce students staying engaged online at home.




Each EQ @ Home or School lesson has collaborative **Check-in & Check-out** questions and activities. The **"Check-in"** is to prime students and pique their curiosity before they watch the video and do the handout. The **"Check Out"** follows after they've had time to watch the video and finish the handout. Some check-in questions are meant for all students to take turns responding (rotating around the circle or online) and other questions are for volunteer responses based on the lesson activities and personal opinions/experiences.

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Reinforce Check-in Norms

From your first check-in, work to introduce and reinforce four norms (discussed in the “How to Host a Check-in” video ).

Begin each check-in session with a quick review of the norms to help set the stage for a respectful, inclusive discussion. If students veer off from any of these, kindly redirect them and return to the lesson.

We recommend using a “talking piece” to reinforce that whoever has the talking piece has the full attention and support of the group. A talking piece can be a lightweight ball or something that has sentimental value to you. For videoconference conversations, the “talking piece” can be the person with their real or icon  hand up. ***During COVID-19 restrictions**, in class and online consider using an imaginary talking piece that students act out passing on and catching. Even in videoconferences, it can be fun to call out someone’s name and pretend to pass them the talking piece.

Check-in Norms

Norm 1: Speaker has full attention.

Norm 2: Speak your truth.

Norm 3: Safe space.

Norm 4: Common ground.

Check-in Opening Question


After Lesson DS1.2: Checking in with Ourselves and Others, the first question of a check-in is always the same and is for all students to respond:

- **On a scale of 1–10, how are you feeling and why?** Please give a “feeling word,” and then tell us a little about why you think you are feeling that way today.

Lesson DS1.2 will introduce students to a list of feeling words and help prepare them for this question in the future. Many students will be very brief at first, but as time goes on, you will be amazed how much students share and how powerful this practice can be. Especially as they return from months of social isolation/distancing, this check-in is essential to helping students feel connected, supported, and self-aware.

Part of the power of collaborative check-ins is the “shared experience.” As students share their emotions, you can tap into similar experiences among students, e.g.:

- **“Sounds like you’re really tired. Who else can relate to what it feels like when you don’t get enough sleep?”** [Notice the word choice. It is not specific to the night before, but in general. Use questions that are most likely to show commonality by being less time-specific.]

If in class together, follow up the question with, **“Knock on your desk if you can relate to this feeling.”** If videoconferencing together, students can post a thumbs-up  icon if they can relate. With this show of agreement, students realize they are not alone in their emotions and feel supported and understood.

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Creating a Safe Space

In addition to the check-in norms, be mindful of students' comfort levels with sharing their thoughts and feelings. For some, it will come easy, but others may be more guarded and/or just not feeling it that day. That's OK. Give them time and space to build trust with you and their classmates. If a student doesn't want to share in an "all share" activity, they can say, "pass." You can circle back to them later and/or check in one-on-one after class.

Check-in and Check-out Question Format

After the "How are you feeling and why?" question, the Check-in and Check-out questions will vary based on the lesson content. Stay creative about how to keep *all* students involved in the conversation. **Think-pair-share** in class or in Zoom breakout rooms is a good way to keep students engaged and applying the lesson to their own lives. Introduce the question then give students a minute to write down a response (*think*) and then talk with another student (*pair*) and then discuss with the group (*share*). As students' comfort levels increase, it is OK to call on students who participate less. This reinforces that their opinions matter and you care about their responses.



You are always welcome to add your own fun check-in questions as well, e.g., "If you could have one superpower, what would you pick and why?" or "What's your favorite place to eat and why?" Look for ongoing ways to build rapport and have fun with your group. You can also open the conversation up to discuss anything else unique or relevant to your school community (e.g., changes in COVID-19 policies).

It's important to start a new lesson with you (as the educator) sharing why that lesson topic is meaningful to you—and even better, if you can share a personal example(s) of how/why you can relate to the lesson. This helps students get to know you in a more meaningful way (*they rarely forget a good story!*) and adds value to the lesson topic. It's best if you've watched the lesson video and read through the handouts before the check-in.

Check-in and Check-out Timing

Check-ins and check-outs usually take about 20–40 minutes based on the number of questions. The check-ins are typically briefer than the check-outs when you discuss the lesson content in more detail. Both are time well spent. You and your students will likely start looking forward to the next check-in. Over time, you will share successes, struggles, laughs, and breakthroughs.

Feel free to make the check-in procedure your own and adapt it to fit your personality and your class. SEL really connects when it is relational, relevant, and authentic.

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Check-in for DS1.1: Getting to Know You

Check-in Notes for Teacher (before the lesson):

For students' first intro to EQ @ Home or School check-ins and lessons, we'll be starting with easy get-to-know-you questions.

If in a classroom setting, arrange seats in a circle so students can see your and each other's faces (as best as you can with social distancing requirements). If videoconferencing, be sure everyone is online and familiar with how to use emojis and set their viewing option to see all their classmates. Later in the session, introduce how to use breakout rooms for small group discussions. (See box for Zoom breakout rooms guidance →)

Start by introducing why your school and you have decided to have EQ @ Home or School lessons. These lessons are full of helpful strategies for preparing for life and schoolwork, while also being a fun way to get to know each other better. Especially after COVID-19 social distancing, it's good to have a time and space to check-in with others.

Next, introduce the four Check-in Norms and why they are important to you and the class. They help ensure a supportive, inclusive discussion in which everyone feels heard and respected. Decide what you will use for a "talking piece" to indicate who is speaking and needs our full attention. During COVID-19 restrictions, in class *and* online you can use an **imaginary talking piece** and act out passing it around. If checking in online, introduce how students can use the hand 🖐️ emoji to indicate it's their turn to talk or just raise their hand.

Explain that for each check-in, you'll start with a question that everyone answers (including you, the teacher). In a classroom, you can start at one end of the circle. Online, you can start with the first person on the video screen and then call on the next person until everyone has participated. If someone chooses to "pass" that day, that's OK.

Check-in Questions for DS1.1 (all students participate):

To introduce the first check-in questions, ask each person to introduce themselves and then answer the first question:

- **What is your favorite movie, book, band or sports team? And why?**
[Try not to interrupt while students are speaking, but point out commonalities among students if they choose similar answers.]

Zoom Videoconference Breakout Rooms Setup

Zoom Rooms are a great way for students to talk and collaborate in smaller groups. [CLICK](#) for a Zoom support video about how to set up breakout rooms. *Be sure to check the account set up info below the video.

✓ Check-in Norms

- Norm 1:** Speaker has full attention.
- Norm 2:** Speak your truth.
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- Norm 4:** Common ground.

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Check-in for DS1.1: Getting to Know You (cont'd)

Check-in Questions for DS1.1 (cont'd):

After all students respond to the first question, ask them to introduce themselves again and answer the second question:

- **What is your favorite thing to do in your free time? And why?**
[If students choose something generic like “Play video games” or “Watch Netflix,” ask which video game or which show is one of their favorites.]

Introduce Lesson DS1.1:

When all students have responded, wrap up and introduce key points of DS1.1: Getting to Know You. In this lesson, students will be exploring “the secret to happiness.” To do so they will:

- ❑ Receive a link to access the lesson (*the student link is on the Teacher View of the iPortal*). If working in class or online, walk them through the Student View page for Lesson DS1.1.
- ❑ Watch the video with Coach Rudy, a long-time teacher and social emotional learning (SEL) expert.
- ❑ Watch the LOOM video with Ms. Oduwole. Coach Oduwole is also a long-time teacher and teaches School-Connect lessons full-time in Austin, TX.
- ❑ Complete all the DS1.1: Getting to Know You handout questions. In this lesson, students can internet search “emotional intelligence” for more info for the first question.
- ❑ Complete FRIENTERVIEWS. You will need to plan ahead for this one. Students need to interview at least three classmates. If in class, this is easy to do. If online, you will need a system for students to communicate with each other (e.g., Zoom breakout rooms or exchange numbers or email addresses). Be sure to have a system about how students will not get left out (e.g., assign groups or pairs).

[***Consider having a prize for the best FRIENTERVIEW answer.** This is the only time in EQ @ Home or School that we suggest teachers have a prize, but it can be a good way to kick off the class with a candy treat or some kind of extra credit. You will need two prizes because the prize will go to the two students who have the most unique thing in common.]

To wrap up, share one thing you found interesting from Lesson DS1.1. Clarify when the handout is due and ask students if they have any questions. If working remotely, be sure students know when/how to contact you if they have questions.

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Check-in for DS1.1: Getting to Know You (cont'd)

Check-out Questions for DS1.1 *(after completing the lesson):*

In this lesson, students learn about the value of high-quality relationships. In studies over the decades and around the world, “meaningful relationships” are consistently a leading source of happiness and longevity.

To follow up on the handout questions, ask:

- **What did the video and article imply is the “secret to happiness”?**
- Give a “thumbs up 👍” if you agree relationships are essential to happiness or a “thumbs down 👎” if you disagree. **Does anyone want to share why they chose a thumbs up or thumbs down?**
- What did you write for the first question, **“What are some skills associated with EQ?”** [understanding emotions in oneself; understandings emotions in others; using emotional understanding to guide thoughts and actions; positive social skills; empathy for others; self-awareness and self-regulation, etc.]
- **How have COVID-19 restrictions affected your relationships (for better or worse) with your friends, family, and others?** [Start by sharing an answer to this question yourself, and then ask if anyone else can relate to what you shared.]
- **How can you connect with others while still being careful about COVID-19 social distancing?**

Introduce the FRIENTERVIEW discussion. If you have a prize, share what the prize will be and then ask students who they think came up with a unique thing in common. If it’s hard to decide who the prize should go to, have students vote who they think deserves the prize.

Have fun discussing what students found in common. You are setting the tone that this is the kind of discussion where students can take a break from academics and enjoy getting to know each other in a meaningful way.

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RETURNING TO LEARNING [Check-in for DS1.2: Checking in with Ourselves and Others](#)

Check-in Notes for Teacher *(before the lesson):*

Welcome students back to EQ @ Home or School, and remind them of the check-in norms and why they are important.

Introduce the new topic: Checking in with Ourselves and Others. In this lesson, we'll be checking in after a long time of social distancing. We'll talk some about how COVID-19 has impacted our lives and how we feel about that. For some, COVID-19 has been a mild disturbance; for others, it has been significant. For all of us, it has been a big adjustment from how things were a year ago.

Check-in Norms

Norm 1: Speaker has full attention.

Norm 2: Speak your truth.

Norm 3: Safe space.

Norm 4: Common ground.

Check-in Questions for DS1.2 *(all students participate):*

- **Do you use emojis often in your texts or social media?** Give a "thumbs up 👍" if you do use emojis often or a "thumbs down 👎" if you don't.
- **For those of you with a thumbs up, what's one of your favorite (appropriate) emojis?**
- **Why do you think emojis have gotten more popular over the years? What do you think their purpose is in communication?**

For this question and others, introduce "adding on" and "thinking differently." If students agree with what some else said, they can "add on" and say more. If they disagree, they can say they "think differently," and share why. This helps students pay more attention to the speakers before them and construct a shared understanding of the topic.

Introduce Lesson DS1.1:

Explain to students: In this lesson, you'll learn more about emotional intelligence and why it can be helpful to success in school and life. You'll also learn more about "emotional granularity"—the ability to better define and differentiate between different kinds and different levels of emotions. For instance, there's a difference between "frustrated" and "FURIOUS." Both indicate that you're unhappy but if you're trying to communicate to someone that you're upset and why, emotional granularity can help you and them understand the situation better.

As with the last lesson, you'll get a link to the Student View of Lesson DS1.2: Checking in with Ourselves and Others. You'll need to watch both videos and complete the handout.

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RETURNING TO LEARNING [Check-in for DS1.2: Checking in with Ourselves and Others](#)

Check-out Questions for DS1.2 (after completing the lesson):

After students have watched the videos and completed Handout DS1.2, ask:

- In the video, Coach Rudy introduced the concept “you have to name it to tame it.” What do you think he meant by this?
- In the handout, you needed to organize the emotions into categories based on the “seven basic emotions.” Which of those was hard for you to do? [Discuss what students chose for each category. Answer key below.]
- Does everyone know what “contempt” means? That can be a hard one to define. It means: the feeling with which a person regards anything as worthless. It’s a disdain, dislike, or scorn, which can be different from being angry.

SEVEN BASIC EMOTIONS ANSWER KEY: _____

Anger	<u> furious </u>	<u> frustrated </u>	<u> heated </u>
Fear	<u> afraid </u>	<u> terrified </u>	<u> worried </u>
Sadness	<u> disappointed </u>	<u> grief </u>	<u> melancholy </u>
Happiness	<u> content </u>	<u> grateful </u>	<u> joyous </u>
Contempt	<u> disrespect </u>	<u> disliking </u>	<u> hateful </u>
Surprise	<u> amazed </u>	<u> astounded </u>	<u> bewildered </u>
Disgust	<u> repulsed </u>	<u> sickened </u>	<u> squeamish </u>

- Why do you think it’s helpful to have a wider vocabulary for emotions? What would happen if we only had words like “mad,” “sad,” or “happy”?

This next question is for all students to participate. Go around the room (or around Zoom) for all students to share an answer about which emotion they are feeling and why.

- **What one emotion are you feeling most today and why?** It can be from the emotions vocabulary list or you add another one.

We will keep revisiting this question in future check-ins. As you know, emotions fluctuate. We all have good days, bad days, sad day, and mad days. Being aware of what we are feeling and why helps give us more mastery over our emotions and how we interact with the world.

- **What do you think Coach Rudy meant by “You have to feel to heal”? And why is this relevant, especially after a time like COVID-19?**

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Check-in for DS1.3: Moving from Surviving to Thriving

Check-in Notes for Teacher (before the lesson):

Review the check-in norms and why they are important.

Introduce the new topic: Moving from Surviving to Thriving. In this lesson, we'll talk about how to get this school year off to a good, strong start. We'll focus especially on "proactive self-advocacy," the process of planning ahead and speaking up for yourself to get what you need to be successful in school and life.

Check-in Norms

Norm 1: Speaker has full attention.

Norm 2: Speak your truth.

Norm 3: Safe space.

Norm 4: Common ground.

Check-in Questions for DS1.3 (all students participate):

For this check-in and most check-ins going forward, we are going to start with where we left off in the last lesson—defining our current emotion and why. Our check-in time is a time to take a break from schoolwork and assess how we're doing. This question is an important and ongoing first step to developing greater emotional intelligence (EQ).

- **On a scale of 1–10, how are you feeling and why?** On the scale, "1" means a negative, feeling awful, and "10" means very positive, feeling great. Please give a "feeling word," and then tell us a little about why you think you are feeling that way today.

Introduce Lesson DS1.3:

Explain to students: In this lesson, you'll think more about what you need to be successful this school year. It can be related to school work but can also be related to your overall health and well-being as well as other things that may be meaningful to you, such as sports, extracurricular activities, family, and friendships. As with the last lesson, you'll watch the two videos and complete the handout.

Before wrapping up the check-in, ask:

- **What are some things that you or another student might need to be successful this school year?** Give some examples of things you wish you had last spring that you think would be helpful this year.

[Write down what students think they need to be successful next school year. You will brainstorm in the next lesson about ways to proactively advocate for these resources.]

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RETURNING TO LEARNING **Check-in for DS1.3: Moving from Surviving to Thriving** (cont'd)

Check Out Questions for DS1.2 (after completing the lesson):

After students watch the videos and complete Handout DS1.3., start by reviewing what you discussed in the close of the check-in:

- **What are some things that you or another student might need to be successful this school year?** [Repeat what they listed during the check-in and ask if they would like to add anything to the list.]

- **How would you define “proactive self-advocacy”? What does that look like?** [planning ahead, intervening, trying to take control of an unexpected occurrence then speaking up for, supporting, or making recommendations for oneself]

- **Let’s brainstorm. How would you “proactively self-advocate” if...**
 - You were having technology problems?
 - You were feeling a lot of anxiety?
 - You were worried about someone’s mental or physical health?
 - You were having trouble in a math class?
 - You were having trouble in an English class?

- **What are other things that could require proactive self-advocacy? And what are possible solutions?**

The last handout question asks students to name at least one adult at school and one adult outside of school who can help them problem-solve their needs.

- Please give me a “thumbs up 👍” if you wrote down at least two adults – one on campus and one off campus. [Circulate the room or Zoom to be sure students have at least two adults listed.]

- **Why do you think it is important to have adults in your life you can go to for help? Or said another way, what happens if you don’t have an adult in your life you can go to if you need help?**

Wrap up this lesson by discussing/reviewing which adults on your campus students can go to if they need help.