

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.