

CENTER FOR SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

Introduction: *Everyday Conversations Matter*

Every school...safe, supportive, engaging, and inspiring.

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Everyday Conversations Matter

In the course of all you do with your mentee, the most important parts of your sessions will be the conversations you have together. As described by Attendance Works in their publication *The Power of Positive Connections* (August 2014), the importance of getting connected to students via conversation is common sense. At the same time, the importance of getting connected to students is also research-based, with many studies supporting the conclusion that “students are more likely to attend school when they feel connected to caring adults or fellow students who notice whether they show up and can help them overcome challenges to attendance.”

Much of what you talk about in your conversations with mentees will be everyday happenings in your mentee’s life and school experience. Listening carefully and responding with skill can open doors, unlock information below the surface, and encourage deeper communication and connection.

Four Listening Strategies that Create Connections

1. **Paraphrase**, or play back what you’ve just heard from your mentee:

“So it sounds like you’re concerned that if you start to make new friends, your old friends won’t want to hang out with you anymore.”

2. **Open a door** for the student to tell you more:

“That’s interesting! Tell me more about how it happened!” or *“How did you react when she said that?”*

3. **Ask open-ended questions** that encourage students to give you more than a “yes” or “no” answer.

Instead of *“Did you have a good weekend?”* ask *“What did you do this weekend?”*

Instead of *“Did it go okay with your teacher?”* ask *“What’s one thing you felt good about when you talked with your teacher?”*

Instead of *“Do you like that TV show?”* ask *“Who’s your favorite character on that TV show? What do you like about her?”*

4. **Show that you are listening.**

- Maintain eye contact, if appropriate
- Offer your full attention without doing anything else at the same time
- Nod in understanding

A Little More Encouragement When It Comes to Open-Ended Questions

Asking open-ended questions is a listening skill, as described in #3, above – and they can have so much power that they’re worth spending a little more time on. A good open-ended question encourages a student to say more than he or she initially offered and can lead to sharing ideas or details that might help you to support the student in new ways. Examples of this style of questioning are found throughout these

activities, but the most important open-ended questions will come directly from you in response to something your student offers in the moment.

Use this list to check whether the questions you're asking are really open-ended:

- Your question is not easily answered with a "yes or no" response
- Your question invites the student to share his or her knowledge or experiences or feelings
- Your question leaves open the possibility for many different answers
- Your question leads to a conversation rather than a lecture or debate

Conversation Traps that Can Lead to Disconnection

It's way too easy to tap into students' sensitivities, so it's important for mentors to *recognize and avoid* some of the conversational practices that can lead to disconnections between mentor and mentee:

Directing - "You must ..."

Teasing - "You look like a wet rat."

Threatening - "If you don't, I will ..."

Diagnosing - "You're just trying to get attention."

Preaching - "You should ..."

Interrogating - "Why did you do that?"

Criticizing - "You are lazy."

Minimizing - "Don't worry, you'll get over it."

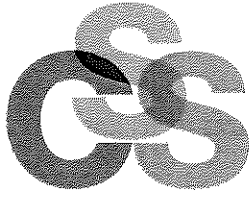
How Much to Talk About Yourself in Conversations with Mentees

Mentor's Field Guide, written by Gail Manza and Susan Patrick, addresses an important question: "Will talking about my own life or beliefs help my mentee open up to me? If so, how much should I share?" Their response is as follows:

The answer to this question depends on the stage of your mentoring relationship and whether your mentee has expressed an interest in knowing more about you ... Keep in mind, however, that the mentor should be more listener than talker. Talking about yourself just to get your mentee to open up may have the opposite effect—you are filling the silent spaces so she doesn't need to try. In general, wait for your mentee to initiate conversations in which you talk about yourself.

If your mentee initiates a conversation about your life or beliefs, a good first response is to ask why she is interested. Try to see whether the question is simply a way for your mentee to bring up a topic about her own life or beliefs. Remember, you want to keep the relationship focused on your mentee, so continue to encourage her to talk about her perspectives. Each mentor must decide how open he or she wants to be in sharing information with a mentee. You have as much of a right to privacy as your mentee, so you should not feel obligated to talk about any personal issues if it is not your style or makes you uncomfortable.

It is also particularly important to avoid sharing details that might unintentionally have a negative influence on your mentee, such as your former drug use or other illegal activities. While it may seem at first that sharing such information can be an opening to warn your mentee away from such behaviors, in reality the mentee can walk away with the sense that his mentor did it and is fine, so what can be so bad about it? The mentee's family also might not be comfortable with you sharing such information. If asked, try to redirect the conversation back to the mentee by saying, for example, "Why are you interested in knowing this?" Or, "What would you think of me if I did—or didn't?"



CENTER FOR SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

Check-Ins

Every school...safe, supportive, engaging, and inspiring.

What Are Check-Ins?

Check-ins are very short, structured conversations that give mentors a way of asking “How are you?” in different ways, and give mentees easy ways to say more than just “I’m fine” or “okay.” Check-ins are a ritual used for starting sessions, and they’re designed to lead the conversation into small discoveries or new insights about one another. Check-ins can also add a bit of shared laughter to stressful times.

The Purpose of Check-Ins

Check-ins are a useful structure to help a mentor:

- Reconnect with a student after time apart
- Learn what is on a student’s mind
- Talk with a student about personal or school-based concerns and successes

How Mentors Can Use Check-Ins

Check-ins are designed to take approximately 5 minutes and can be used to begin every meeting with a student.

However, a mentor can easily extend a check-in well beyond 5 minutes by:

- Asking additional reflection questions
- Focusing on a student’s specific concern or success
- Further developing a conversation that arises naturally from the check-in structure

Any check-in found in this section can be used:

- A single time in a school year as one of a variety of check-ins used with a student
- Repeatedly throughout a year as a familiar ritual

Tips for Using Check-Ins Successfully

A few things for mentors to keep in mind:

- It may help a student feel more comfortable participating if you participate and answer first. This will also help model the directions and avoid confusion.
- Be mindful that if a mentor shares too much, a mentee can actually feel overwhelmed or up-staged. Share enough during an activity to show your willingness to be open, but not so much that the time together is spent focused on you.
- Always ask follow-up questions. Examples of questions to deepen the conversation are provided for you at the bottom of each check-in, but you can use any questions that are appropriate to what the student has shared.

- When you first begin using check-ins, student may not respond with long answers at first. You can encourage more engagement by using open-ended questions, but be careful not to push too hard. Trust that the more you meet and get to know each other, and the more familiar check-ins become, the more your student will open up.
- If the student discloses a problem, explore whether it was resolved, what steps have been taken to solve it, or how you might be able to help the student think through the concern. You may want to check in about this problem the next time you see this student, too.
- Celebrate! If the student shares an achievement or something he or she is proud of, take time to offer genuine, specific praise for the accomplishment.

The Good, The Bad, and The Funny

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT after some time apart
- LEARN what is on a student's mind

Materials

- None

Directions

1. Ask the student to take a minute to think of an answer to the following question:
 - What is something *good*, something *bad* or *frustrating*, and something *funny* that has happened to you in the time since we last met?

If the student is helped by writing down thoughts before sharing, encourage him or her to write down a few short notes.

2. Share your own response to the first part of the question only – something *good* that has happened to you since the last time you met. Make sure to be descriptive.
3. Next, invite the student to respond to the question of something *good* that has happened since the last time you met.

Use active listening skills to show you are listening carefully; you may ask for some further detail to fill in the picture of what happened, but don't yet ask any deepening questions until after the student has shared all three experiences.

4. Repeat in 2 more rounds, with you first offering your *bad* before your student does, and you first offering your *funny* before your student does. Again, use active listening skills, but don't ask any real probing or deepening questions yet. **NOTE:** If your student really can't connect to one of the 3 categories of *good*, *bad*, *funny*, then just skip it and go where he or she is most comfortable.
5. Once the student is finished responding, both of you take turns asking questions about the details behind each of the *good*, *bad* and *funny* situations.

Deepening the Conversation

Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:

- What *good* things are you looking forward to in the next week?
- When you are *frustrated*, or experience a *bad* situation, who helps you get through it?
- What makes you *laugh* even when you are having a tough day?

Where I'm at Today

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT after some time apart
- LEARN what is on a student's mind
- TALK about stress

Materials

- A copy or drawing of the *Where I'm at Today ...* continuum
- Pens/pencils

Directions

1. Place the *Where I'm At Today* continuum between you and your student. Explain that a little stress might help keep us on our game, but too much and we can feel overwhelmed. Stress can mess with our ability to concentrate or motivate us to work harder.
2. Ask the student to draw a star and write today's date anywhere on the continuum, even in between the markers, to indicate his or her stress level *today*.
3. Next, ask the student to think for a moment about how today's stress level feels. Ask the student to look at the words listed below the continuum and place a star next to the words that most accurately describe the feeling that stress brings up for him or her. If the student would like to add words to describe the feeling of stress that aren't on the list already, encourage him or her to write in the space provided.

Deepening the Conversation

Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:

- What do you think is causing your stress today?
- When you are stressed at school, what do you do? Who or what makes you less stressed?
- When is stress helpful?
- What are some ways a person in a mentor role can help you with the situation causing stress?
- What is one positive action step you can take immediately to change the situation that is causing your stress?

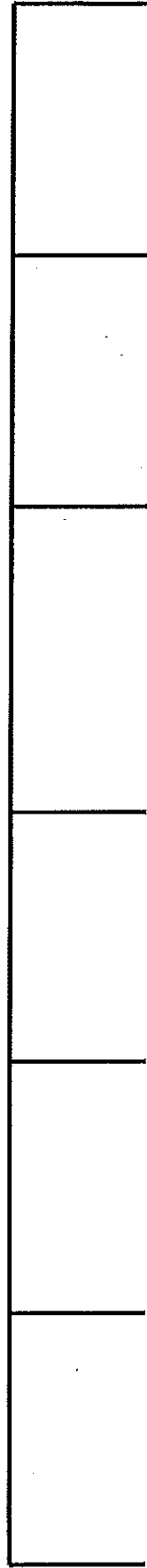


Consider using the continuum during several upcoming meetings. Keep the continuum for the student and, each time it is used, place a date next to the student's response. Discuss not only the immediate stressors, but also ask about how the student's stress changes over time.

If using the continuum more than once with a student, you may ask the following questions: According to the marks on this continuum, what has changed over time? What has remained the same? What factors do you think contribute to this?

Where I'm At Today

Draw a *star* and put *today's date* anywhere along the continuum to show today's level of stress:



Very Stressed

Somewhat Stressed,
But Not Too Bad

No Stress
At All

Today my stress/lack of stress level feels like (place a star next to all that apply):

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Anger | Tension | Calm |
| Sadness | Nervousness | Happiness |
| Frustration | Anxiety | Relaxation |
| Fear | Excitement | Optimism |

List any other words that describe your stress today:



**Department of
Education**

Chancellor Richard A. Carranza

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Weekly Student Success Team Meeting Agenda

Meeting Facilitator

List Name

Attendees:

Name attendees (Assistant Principal/s, Guidance Staff, Parent Coordinator, Success Mentors, CBO Partners, Social Worker, Attendance Teacher)

11:15 – 11:20 a.m.

Review next steps and action items from previous meeting

11:15 – 11:25 a.m.

Schoolwide Attendance Trends

Goal: Review school-wide attendance, monitor for troubling trends

Suggested Data Source:

- Heat Map, Attendance Dashboard (tab)

Discussion Topics:

- YTD Attendance and Monthly trends
- Specific Subgroups, Grade Level, Days of the Week
- Chronic Absence by grade cohort and classroom
- Review record keeping processes

11:25 – 11:45 p.m.

Individual Student Case Management and Emerging Needs

Goal: Progress monitor CA students and assign interventions, monitor for impact

Suggested Data Source:

- Heat Map, filter absences in last 20 days for ≥ 2 days missed
- Heat Map, supports and interventions (tab) and interventions (column)
- Data Portal, individual student profiles

Discussion Topics:

- Assign Success Mentors to all CA Kinder, 6th and 9th graders (and other grades too if resources permit)
- What does participation in supports and interventions look like? Is it working?
- Review students who have missed multiple and/or consecutive days of school in the past week

11:45 – 11:55 p.m.

Programmatic Implementation

Goal: Monitor progress of program implementation including Success Mentoring, lunch clubs, academic tutoring, one-on-one counseling

Suggested Data Source:

- Heat Map, supports and interventions (tab) and interventions (column)
- Data Portal, student supports

Discussion Topics:

- Referrals by category – are all at-risk students enrolled in appropriate interventions?

11:55 – 12:00 p.m.

Record Next Steps and Action Items (who, what, by when)