

## 5-Minute Chats with Students

*This tool is adapted from a similar resource created by the Anchorage School District SEL Team, and revised with input from students in the Civics 2.0 afterschool program in Cleveland Metropolitan School District.*

Personal connection and relationships are critical in being a culturally responsive educator and as a gateway to engagement in learning. This template includes a structure and sample questions for one-on-one chats to open dialogue with students and learn more about how they are experiencing school.

**How to use this template:** Those who lead a single class should plan to connect with each student individually during the first weeks of school and periodically throughout the year. Those who lead multiple classes can work with a team of teachers who share students to divide responsibility and make sure each student is contacted.

If possible, call upon other staff in the building to assign each person a smaller “advisory group” of students to contact. Other staff may include administrators, deans, counselors, specialist teachers, office staff, paraprofessionals, security staff, or out-of-school time leaders. Consider allowing students to indicate which staff members they prefer to have as an advisor. Be sure to notify families that their student has been assigned to an advisor and this is an organized, school-wide effort.

**Preparing to chat:** The primary purpose of the chat is to hear about your student’s experience and perspective so that you can know them as an individual, be responsive to their needs, learn from them for the benefit of the class and school, and build relational trust. Students shared that they feel more comfortable having discussions with staff who know them and have shared a little about their own lives, so be aware that trust is built over time and should not be assumed.

**Initiate** – In a group setting, let all students know you’ll be reaching out to them individually to connect and hear more about how things are going. Have students sign up for a time for a call or in-person chat or reach out to them with a school and parent-approved messaging app that allows for easy back and forth exchange. If possible, let them choose! Say something like:

“I’m working on connecting with everyone in this group to get a better sense of how everyone is feeling about school, how they’re doing in class, what they’re interested in, and how I can be supportive.”

**Open** – Show that they are significant to you and you care about them.

- “I’m glad to have the chance to chat 1 on 1 with you.”
- “I’m excited to have you in my class/group this year – I can tell you’re going to add a lot to the group.”
- If you already know something about their lives, bring it up as appropriate. For example, “Your sister is in college now, right? How have you been adjusting?” or “Isn’t it baseball season already? How has it been for you balancing practice with everything else you have going on?”

**Personalize** – Ask a question that invites the student to tell you about how they are experiencing school. Be more specific than “how’s it going?” – often we are socialized to answer that question with little thought or detail. Be attentive to body language that may indicate the student wants to keep talking or move on.

- “How have you been doing in your classes lately?”
- “What is new for you since last school year?”
- “What are you learning that’s most interesting to you?”
- “What would you say is your biggest source of joy at school right now? What about a source of stress?”

**Invite Feedback** – Show your student that you value their perspective and are open to making changes based on their input.

- “What would you like to see happen this school year?”
- “What’s something that you and your classmates are interested in, that we could explore more in class?”
- “What do you need most right now from me and your other teachers to do well in your classes?”
- “What do you think our school/class is getting right so far this year?”
- “What do you think our school/class should be doing differently?”

**Close** – End on an optimistic, forward-thinking note.

- “Next week we’re going to learn about \_\_\_\_\_. I’ll think about how to use some of the ideas you shared.”
- “Thanks for talking. Let’s check in again in a week or two to follow up about \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Students may choose to say a lot or a little in response to these questions.** If a student gives short responses and seems uncomfortable, thank them for their time and don't push them to share more. Continue to let them know you are interested in their input and care about their success. If they choose to go into more detail, here are some additional phrases you can draw upon:

**Probe:** "Tell me more about that." "What does that look like?" "I want to make sure I understand what you're saying. Can you explain a little more?"

**Validate emotions:** "That must be really difficult." "It sounds like that had a big impact on you."

**Stay solution-oriented:** "What do you think would make the situation better?" "What can we do to make things right?" "What might be a good first step?" "What do you think would happen if we tried \_\_\_?"

**Wind down the conversation:** "You've given me some things to think about. I'm going to take some time to think about what you shared, and we'll make some time to talk again in a few days."