



Rebuilding Our Communities

Resources for Supporting Students

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Many communities are coming back to their classrooms after a year disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic while navigating uncertainty and far-reaching social inequities as well as personal and community trauma. For some students this will be the first time in the school building in over a year, and for others it will be their first time ever in the building. This makes it incredibly important to refocus schools and learning environments not only on academic rigor but on the relationships and community that enhance learning and make it more relevant and purposeful for students.

Now is the time to understand what our students learned over the past year, leverage their resilience and their assets, and create new and authentic experiences that center on relationship-focused social and emotional development.

The **Student Support Toolkit** provides educators and out-of-school time staff access to SEL-informed lessons, activities, tools, and strategies selected to address key questions and support student development and educator professional learning. Within this toolkit, you will find answers and example lessons and activities that help you answer the following four questions. Click each resource title for access.

- How can we create a renewed sense of community in schools and out-of-school time organizations?
- How can we adapt to address new needs of students and help them adjust to being back at school after COVID-19 school closures?
- How do we help students leverage the skills they gained in the past year and develop further social and emotional skills in current learning environments?
- How can we foster diversity and inclusion in our communities and support the many students who have seen and experienced social unrest and inequity?



Access no-cost SEL solutions from Harmony SEL and Inspire Teaching & Learning in the Online Learning Portal to implement in your learning environment based on the following questions about reconnection and community building.

For more strategies to rebuild communities during the first weeks of school, access the [10-Day Easy Start Guide](#). This resource includes pre-planned practices, lessons, and activities to help you start using the Harmony program with confidence and ease.

How can we create a renewed sense of community in schools and out-of-school time organizations?

Renewing a sense of community involves developing understanding, inclusion, and empathy in our attitudes and actions. Students and adults need time to get to know each other, create class agreements, and co-develop norms that will allow them to create harmonious environments. It will be important to check in with your students individually and provide them opportunities to check in with each other. You can encourage students to get to know each other and practice empathy with the following Harmony Everyday Practices, lessons, and activities.

1. Start fostering community and harmonious relationships with **Harmony Everyday Practices**.

- Create and monitor **Harmony Goals** as a classroom community to establish how everyone wants to interact and be treated.
- Build a sense of community with **Meet Up** and foster peer relationships with **Buddy Up** using these **Quick Connection Cards**:

Community Builders

CLASSROOM BANNER

Students work together to create a banner that represents the classroom community.

Materials: paper, crayons, markers, stickers, stencils, glitter, fabrics

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Collaborations



BUDDY INTERVIEWS

Interview your buddy about their likes and dislikes.

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Conversations



"It is the things in common that make relationships enjoyable, but it is the little differences that make them interesting."
- Todd Ruthman

What is something you and your current buddy have in common? What is something that makes you different?

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How can we create a renewed sense of community in schools and out-of-school time organizations?

2. Help students gain a deeper understanding and acceptance of each other with lessons and activities that value differences and commonalities and empathize with the feelings and experiences of others.¹

- Create opportunities for students to share about themselves and learn about each other through the activity “Who We Are,” in which students get to share something important to them (see [Lesson 1.1, “Getting to Know One Another”](#) for instructions).
- Help students discover what they have in common through the “Commonalities Game” (see [Lesson 1.2, “Discovering Commonalities”](#) or the Harmony Game Room app, available for [Apple iOS](#) and [Android](#)).
- Learn from the diverse set of skills students bring to the classroom through the “Learn Something New” activity (see [Lesson 1.3, “Learning from Diversity”](#)).
- Provide opportunities for students to talk about what it means to belong and to be accepting of each other, creating a deeper sense of community (see [Lesson 1.4, “Building Community”](#)).

3. Focus on building relationships and leveraging diversity and student assets with these professional learning modules from Inspire:

Building Relationships with Students Module

Teacher-student relationships affect student motivation, behavior, academic achievement, and classroom culture. In this module, discover concrete steps you can take to form stronger bonds with your students.



Inspire Strategy:

Ask students to bring in an item that represents their identity or family in some way and share it with the class or in small groups. Teacher participates as well.

Affirming Difference and Valuing Background Knowledge Module

This module is designed to help you reflect on your own attitudes toward difference, take proactive steps to learn about (and from) students and families, and build students’ background knowledge into instruction.



Inspire Strategy: Ask as you plan:

How can I ground a lesson or unit in topics of interest or concern to my students? How can I use the exploration of these topics to foster the development of academic skills?

¹ Lesson titles vary by grade band level. Titles listed are for Early Childhood grades unless indicated.

How can we adapt to address new needs of students and help them adjust to being back at school after COVID-19 school closures?

Helping students adjust to being back at school will require intentional efforts from all adults in the school and out-of-school time community. To do this, check in with your students to see how they are feeling, help them process what the last year was like, and ask them what they have learned about themselves, their families, and their communities – as well as their academic learning.

It will be important to let students process their emotions. You can help support your students after an uncertain and, for many, distressing year with trauma-informed Everyday Practices, lessons, and activities that deepen a sense of empathy, trust, and belonging among peers.

1. Provide opportunities for students to build listening skills and share their thoughts on community and acceptance with these **Quick Connection Cards** in your **Meet Up** and **Buddy Up** interactions:

Community Builders

IF YOU'RE LISTENING

To the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know It," sing "If You're Listening and You Know It". As the group thinks together, a leader chooses an action to see if the group is listening (e.g., "If you're listening and you know it take a bow.")

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Conversations



What is something you wish you could change in the world and why?

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Conversations



What is something you can do that would make someone else feel happy?

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How can we adapt to address new needs of students and help them adjust to being back at school after COVID-19 school closures?

2. Help students identify their emotions and use regulation strategies, helping them recognize that all emotions are OK and that they have agency in how they process their emotions.

- Discuss how varying emotions look, sound, and feel, and then illustrate and discuss the internal and external physical cues of different emotions using the “Feeling Faces” activity (see [Lesson 2.1, “Recognizing Feelings”](#)). These cues can include facial expressions, eye contact, posture, tone of voice, and other body language.
- Help students match emotions with different scenarios, recognizing that different individuals may have different emotions with scenarios using the activity “Emotion Matchup” (see [Lesson 2.2, “Explaining and Predicting Feelings”](#)).

3. Foster the qualities of healthy peer friendships and continue to build empathy in your student community so that they can help process their emotions.

- Provide students opportunities to understand how others may feel in different situations. They can identify if they would feel something similar or different in similar situations, recognizing that part of having empathy is understanding that others may feel differently using the “I Just Know How You Feel” activity (see [Lesson 2.4, “Having Empathy”](#)).
- Help students develop an understanding of how you can show that you care for others, show kindness, and express gratitude toward peers in a community. Practice showing care toward others with acts of kindness with the “Classroom Caring Project” activity (see [Lesson 5.1, “Caring for Others”](#)).

4. Develop your teaching practices that help students process emotions, encourage empathy, and implement trauma-informed practices through the following Inspire webinars and modules:

Teaching Students Empathy

In this module, you will learn what empathy is, why it’s important to foster in the classroom, and what specific actions you can take to develop a more empathic environment. This module includes a recommended reading list.

 **Inspire Strategy:** Use classroom meetings or circle time to provide students a space to share concerns they are having about school/life. Allow students time to share information about themselves with their peers. This information can be as simple as, “What is your favorite thing to wear to school?” or as complex as, “Describe the thing you’re most proud of.”

Support Trauma-Exposed Students Module

In this module, you will learn different strategies to provide academic and behavioral support to students who have experienced trauma. This module includes a [recommended reading list](#). Literacy and language skills can help students who have been traumatized make sense of their experiences and manage their emotions.

 **Inspire Strategy:** Provide or create opportunities for autobiographical writing. *Example:* a writing activity in which students must identify three or more key moments from their lives and describe their significance. An assignment like this creates space for, but does not force, students to share traumatic experiences.

How do we help students leverage the skills they gained in the past year and develop further social and emotional skills in current learning environments?

People of all ages learned new and unexpected skills during the last year, including how to interact in a virtual setting, building and maintaining relationships in new ways, and identifying strategies to stay motivated and engaged in ways that were meaningful to them. Help your students hone current skills and further develop their social and emotional competencies by fostering a growth mindset, being resilient, and developing a sense of agency over their success.

1. **Get your students talking about what they've learned** and what they can teach each other with these **Quick Connection Cards** in your **Meet Up** and **Buddy Up** interactions:

Community Builders

CATCH ON

Choose a topic (e.g., vegetables) and toss a ball, naming something from the category with each catch. When someone repeats an item or can't think of something, start over with a new category.

Materials: ball



Conversations



"The beautiful thing about learning is that nobody can take it away from you."
- B.B. King

What is something new that you have learned to do recently? How did you learn it?



Conversations



If you could ask anyone to teach you something, who would you ask and what would you want to learn?



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How do we help students leverage the skills they gained in the past year and develop further social and emotional skills in current learning environments?

2. Implement lessons that encourage students to learn from their experiences, from each other, and from people they will encounter beyond your learning environment. Help students recognize that with continued effort, they will continue to grow, develop, and build healthy relationships throughout the year.

- Allow students to determine a unique skill they have and verbally explain it to each other, helping students learn the value of difference and the value of learning from others in the activity, “What Makes Me Awesome” (see [Lesson 1.3, “Learning from Diversity”](#)).
- Foster thoughts and attitudes that help students recognize the importance of learning and continued growth through the activity “Think Like a Caterpillar,” helping students recognize that people can change and grow (see [Lesson 2.7, “Understanding that People Can Change”](#) or the **Harmony Game Room app**, available for [Apple iOS](#) and [Android](#)).

3. Become a strong advocate for your students and inspire them to make meaningful choices in their learning with these Inspire modules:

Teachers as Agents of Change

Teachers can challenge inequity by making their instruction responsive to students with content that is relevant to them, methods that involve them in constructing knowledge, and relationships that demonstrate empathy and understanding.



Inspire Strategy:

Engage students in problem-posing and critical inquiry. Ask yourself these and other key questions throughout the learning experience:

- *How can I have students use the academic skills of my content area to study problems in their social world and propose solutions?*
- *How can I position students to question assumptions and examine topics from multiple perspectives?*

Be The Spark: Nurturing Student Inspiration

When a student is motivated to work toward a goal, it’s usually because somewhere along the line, they were inspired. Use this module to help you foster the spark of student inspiration that leads to motivation.



Inspire Strategy:

Learn about students’ interests and connect them to content in class. Present content and learning experiences that are novel or that challenge assumptions. Express your belief in students

Provide encouragement:

Highlight successful past efforts or performances or discuss the value of the task/endeavor.

How can we foster diversity and inclusion in our communities and support the many students who have seen and experienced social unrest and inequity?

Truly supporting and advocating for our students involves understanding and challenging inequities that can lead to injustice. This includes examining biases in education, creating culturally responsive learning opportunities, and modeling critical consciousness for students and our communities. Providing inclusive environments supports the development of critical skills that students need and allows them to leverage their personal and cultural assets.

1. **Help students recognize commonalities**, understand differences as assets, and be critical of assumptions with these **Quick Connection Cards**:

Community Builders

ARE YOU WITH ME?

Sit in a circle with one person standing in the center. The person in the center states one thing about him or herself. Anyone who shares that commonality has to quickly get up and change seats. The last person standing is the next to share in the center of the circle.

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Collaborations



WHO AM I?

Write the name of someone famous on a sticky note and place it on your buddy's forehead (so he or she cannot read it). The buddy with a note on his or her forehead asks yes or no questions until he or she can correctly guess the name on the paper.

Materials: sticky notes and pencils

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Conversations



If you could have a superpower, what would it be?

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How can we foster diversity and inclusion in our communities and support the many students who have seen and experienced social unrest and inequity?

2. Support students in developing their critical thinking skills and forming inclusive attitudes by providing students the tools to identify and reject stereotypes and seek friendships with a diverse group of peers. These skills help them be advocates for themselves and their families, peers, and community members now and in the future.

- Explore developmentally appropriate critical thinking skills about stereotypes and developing empathy for other points of view in the “Pop that Stereotype” activity (see [Lesson 2.4, “Pop That Stereotype”](#) in Grades 3-6).
- Engage in conversations about the qualities of a good friend and how to be an inclusive community. For example, students can learn strategies to avoid cliques and pursue friendships with more diverse peers in the activity “Being Welcoming and Inclusive” (see [Lesson 5.2, “Being Inclusive”](#)).

3. Develop critical consciousness and foster culturally responsive learning environments with this Inspire module and on-demand webinar:

Working Against Racial Bias Module

Develop a sociocultural consciousness recognizing that worldviews are shaped by experiences and identity to help you combat racial bias in the classroom.



Inspire Strategy:

Engage with self and colleagues about one’s own worldview and how one can recognize implicit biases and potential ways they may unintentionally show up.

Culturally Responsive Learning Environments Webinar

Dr. Mary Conage shares tools to facilitate authentic reflection, intentional planning, and focused action for more equitable academic experiences and achievement outcomes for diverse learners.



Inspire Strategy:

Help students engage in authentic problem-solving tasks by co-constructing relevant tasks that give meaning to their learning. This could include solving a problem in their own community or through an activity that is important to them.



Explore continuing education options in SEL to support your community on the [National University SEL Resource Hub](#).



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