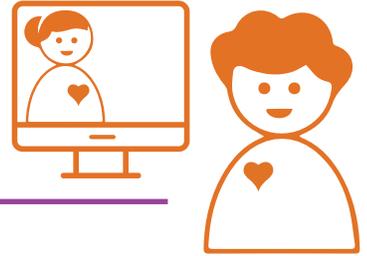


# GUIDANCE FOR PROVIDING

## Effective Teaching Strategies in Virtual Classrooms Pre-K & K-3



The spread of COVID-19 has led many schools to move to online or hybrid learning for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. The widespread adoption of virtual learning environments has led many teachers to ask how they can maintain effective interactions when they are not in the same physical space as their students. It's true that shortened class sessions, audio lags, and children's lack of familiarity with technology present challenges for the frequency, duration, and depth of teacher-child interactions. As an educator, you will be looking for new ways to connect with your learners, manage their time, and provide them with cognitive challenges, but effective teacher-child interactions remain essential for children's success, even in virtual learning environments. This document uses the lens of the CLASS tool to help teachers identify some effective teaching strategies to try when conducting classes online. What's most important to remember is that interactions still matter, maybe now more than ever. The skills you have already built around connecting with, supporting, and stimulating children will continue to serve you as you head into your virtual classrooms this fall.

### Positive Climate

In virtual learning environments, lack of physical interaction can make it more challenging to build and maintain warm, positive relationships with children. Additionally, children who have recently experienced loss, heightened stress, or trauma may require extra warmth and support in order to succeed. Think about new ways you might build connections and establish relationships with the children in your classroom, even while you are physically far apart.

- Greet children by name at the beginning of the video or as they appear online.
- Start sessions by focusing on your connection with children.
- Wave and give air high-fives, air hugs, air hearts, finger hearts, "I love you" signs and other affectionate gestures.
- Show a genuine interest in children by engaging in social conversations. Ask children about things outside of school.
- Share in activities together. For example, read a book aloud or put on a puppet show.
- Maintain an upbeat persona. Laugh, smile, and show enthusiasm.
- Thank children for participating in discussions and responding via online learning platforms.
- Take turns talking and listening to children's responses. Encourage them to do the same.
- Call children by their first names often.

### Teacher Sensitivity

Virtual learning is relatively new to children and it may take some time for them to get used to this new way of going to school. Younger children may not immediately recognize the person they see on screen as their teacher, while older children may have difficulty navigating online learning platforms. Online formats may also make some children uncomfortable and less likely to freely participate. Teachers can support children through these challenges by showing consistent sensitivity to their needs—both academic and emotional.

- Take time to check in with children, including checking on their social and emotional well-being.
- When children are visible, look for cues that they may be confused about an activity/lesson or about how to use technology (heads down, inattentive, disruptive, leaving the screen, not engaging with virtual materials/lessons) and provide support.
- Be aware of children who are "checking out" (eyes looking somewhere other than the screen, not responding verbally or in the chat box, not accessing online videos and materials) and pull them back in to the lesson/activity or provide a movement break.
- Verbally check in with children who are not on camera. Notice when children raise their hands or make comments in the chat box during a live session.
- Set up a way to speak privately to children (office hours, breakout rooms, individual meetings, emails, calls).
- Adjust assignment due dates in response to children's needs.

- Actively listen to children and acknowledge their frustrations and concerns in the moment (in a live session) or within a reasonable amount of time (if asynchronous). Follow up to ensure that concerns have been resolved.

## Regard For Student Perspectives

Make an effort to provide flexibility and space for expression within the structure imposed by the virtual setting. While the setting may limit children's access to specific roles, materials, and movement opportunities they would typically have in the classroom, you can still provide children with choices and focus on their interests and motivations. Having choices helps children who have experienced trauma feel a sense of control over their environment, which is crucial for their healing.

- Seek out children's ideas, interests, and perspectives to incorporate into lessons/activities. For instance, you could incorporate children's names into a story, or use themes children mention in your virtual presentations.
- Give children the option to go off screen and sit elsewhere to complete individual assignments.
- Provide children with choices about what activities they do.
- Enable children's independence by encouraging them to share their work with peers, help classmates, or lead lessons. Children could lead morning discussions or share their screens to demonstrate their work.
- Allow children to move freely or choose how they stand or sit during a live session. Provide stretch and movement breaks often.

## Behavior Management

Many children will be learning new rules and procedures as they transition to online learning. To ensure that your virtual classroom runs smoothly, provide clear, explicit behavior expectations for whole group sessions, breakout rooms, and recorded sessions. Additionally, children who have had stressful experiences during the pandemic may let teachers know through their behavior. You can support children with positive and proactive behavior management strategies.

- Anticipate when problem behavior could arise (likely distractions, waning attention, not following activity instructions) and provide clear expectations for how children should engage and behave on the virtual platform (logging in early, muting themselves when not talking, raising their hands, listening to one another, answering questions, making comments in the chat box, turning in homework).
- Review rules and expectations quickly at the beginning of each session.
- Give time reminders for breakout rooms or breaks.
- Monitor children in breakout rooms and small groups to prevent off-task behavior.
- Subtly and effectively redirect off-task behavior (call children by name in a calm voice, offer private chat reminders, remind children to raise hands or mute).
- Provide feedback that encourages children to continue behaving appropriately. State desired behavior and point out when children are doing well.

## Productivity

Online learning calls for managing instructional time in new ways. Consider whether material is best delivered in a synchronous format or is better suited to asynchronous or offline learning. Develop strategies to engage children in the material and ensure that all children have access to supplemental materials in advance. You can support children in learning the new routines and procedures with frequent and clear instructions and intentional advance planning.

- Set up for lessons/activities in advance so that all physical and virtual materials are ready and accessible. This includes uploading or emailing electronic documents for children to complete, informing families/children ahead of time what materials are needed for the day's lesson, and having electronic documents clearly labeled and organized so that children can readily access them.
- Practice using the technology in advance to ensure that video camera, apps, and speakers are fully operational.
- Plan for children who cannot access sessions via computer and have to join by phone.
- Plan for additional activities in the event that children finish assigned tasks early.
- Know the content and logistics of your lessons/activities before conducting them.
- Provide families with clear instructions on how to use the online platform(s).
- Begin sessions or post videos at the time given to families/children.
- Refocus children's attention with quick reminders about what to do next.
- Post a consistent daily schedule to let children know what to expect.

- Clearly explain when assignments are due and how to submit them.
- Help children move quickly from activity to activity by providing short, simple instructions.

## Instructional Learning Formats

The virtual format may limit your usual strategies for drawing children into lessons and activities, such as moving around the room and sitting down with children to join directly in their play. Additionally, children who are experiencing high levels of stress may have difficulty concentrating. Think about other ways you can encourage children's engagement.

- Actively seek information about what children are working on and how it is going.
- Ask questions that are focused on the lesson or activity. This might be done in real time, or you might pre-record questions and embed them in the online learning platform.
- Share your screen so that children can see a virtual whiteboard or similar tool.
- Use visuals, virtual manipulatives, storyboards, videos, whiteboard, and auditory props to engage children.
- Give children ways of actively participating in the lesson, such as scavenger hunts, popsicle sticks, thumbs-ups, response cards, learning apps, or responding verbally.
- Share your excitement with children to engage them.
- Explicitly state the learning objectives at the beginning and summarize at the end to focus children's attention on the purpose of a lesson/activity.
- Navigate in and out of breakout rooms to talk to children about what they are doing or what they should be doing.

## Concept Development

Shortened class sessions, audio lags, and other technological challenges may make it feel more difficult to have instructional discussions with children throughout the day. You can promote children's higher-order thinking skills by asking questions and making connections aloud, even when there is not an immediate opportunity to develop the topic into a discussion, and by taking advantage of moments when you can work with small groups to have deeper conversations. Asking children to think about COVID-19 and its effects can be an important part of helping them make sense of what is going on in the world around them.

- Use instructional strategies that focus on critical thinking, such as sequencing activities, comparing and contrasting, problem solving, and predicting.
- Ask open-ended questions, in a live session or on the learning platform, that encourage children to think creatively.
- Ask questions that have many possible answers and encourage the expression of varied points of view.
- Encourage children to brainstorm ideas and generate their own products. This can include nonphysical products, such as making up a story.
- Link concepts across activities by choosing lessons/activities that have a similar conceptual focus.
- Present new information and ask children to think about how the new information relates to their prior knowledge.
- Explicitly discuss the real-world applications of content or connect it to children's lives.

## Quality Of Feedback

Shortened class sessions, audio lags, and other technological challenges may make it feel more difficult to engage in lengthy back-and-forth exchanges with children. You can promote children's learning and understanding by responding to their comments and actions with hints, assistance, questions, information, and encouragement, even when there is not an immediate opportunity to continue the exchange, and by taking advantage of moments when you can work with small groups to have deeper exchanges. Providing effective feedback can be an important part of instilling confidence in children who have experienced high levels of stress during the pandemic.

- Pay attention to children's level of understanding and build on it by offering hints and assistance.
- Ask follow-up questions to help children reach a deeper understanding of content.
- Provide opportunities for independent practice by giving children time to stop, think, process, and complete a task within or outside of the virtual session.
- Ask children to explain their thinking.
- Provide specific information about why a child's response is correct or incorrect.
- Expand on children's responses and actions to provide additional information or clarification.

- Recognize and reinforce children’s efforts, encouraging them to persist in their thinking or continue their participation. This can be done by verbally affirming children or by using emojis such as hand claps and thumbs-ups in live sessions.

## Language Modeling

Shortened class sessions, audio lags, and other technological challenges may make it feel more difficult to engage in genuine conversations with children. You can promote children’s language development by encouraging peer conversations within groups and using self- and parallel talk and advanced language, even when there is not an immediate opportunity to engage in a dialogue. You can also take advantage of moments when you can work with small groups to have more authentic conversations. Providing children with language and conversational opportunities related to COVID-19 can help them process and communicate their experience of the pandemic.

- Allot time for online discussions.
- Respond to what children say, and ask follow-up questions.
- Encourage children to take part in conversations and talk to one another during virtual sessions or on the online platform.
- Create a balance of child and teacher talk by waiting intentionally for children’s responses.
- Ask open-ended questions or otherwise invite children to use expressive language.
- Acknowledge children’s comments and repeat and extend their statements.
- Narrate what you are doing (“I am opening up the breakout rooms,” “I am pulling up the story on my screen”).
- Help children understand language by using words to describe actions as they are happening.
- Introduce new vocabulary and provide clear definitions.