

Empathetic Strategies for Virtual Learning

Remote learning has called for us, as tutors, to recenter what it means to support students as we navigate new circumstances and challenges together. Patience and flexibility are vital to hosting a welcoming, empowering, and comfortable environment for students in the midst of constant change; whether that be surviving a pandemic, applying to college, moving to a new country, learning a new language, or more! **This tip sheet includes a few tools that tutors can use to create safe and productive environments for students during remote learning.**

Tip #1:

Use icebreakers as a wellness check-in.

Students have been forced to stay home and away from the environment where they would regularly engage with their peers. They now have to share working space with family members, navigate their own physical and mental health, and adjust to ever-changing hybrid schedules.

Remember to meet students where they are and be present with their current needs! Icebreakers can help us check in with students and warm them up to the tutoring session. Be mindful of what students may be experiencing and allow them to share as much or as little as they need to feel comfortable.

Ideas for Grades K-5:

- How would you describe your weather today?
- Can you show me on the thumb scale where you are at today? (mime for the student between thumbs up and thumbs down)
- On a scale of 1-10, how is your day so far? (One being the lowest, ten being the highest)

Ideas for Grades 6-12:

- What is the most interesting thing you learned today?
- What is something you're looking forward to about this week?
- If you were an astronaut, and you can only bring 3 things to the space station, what would you bring and why?

Tip #2:

Prioritize progress over product.

We are all operating at different capacities in our day-to-day lives, and zoom fatigue is very real for students whose 8 hours of school and 2 hours of homework are done primarily through a screen. With that in mind, showing up and making progress is the ultimate goal of the tutoring session! Support students in identifying realistic goals, and let them go at their own pace in meeting them. Be sure to create a plan of action together where they feel confident enough to complete the assignment on their own. Know that a lack of progress or engagement is never personal, and is moreso reflective of the challenges we face in remote learning during a pandemic.

Tip #3:

Put your best presentation forward.

Share your name and pronouns and be sure to ask for theirs to create an affirming space. Have your camera on if you're able to, and remember to be authentic. It's ok to be honest about how you're feeling too, but emphasize that you're glad to be there with the student.

Tip #4:

Be flexible and creative with tutoring strategies.

A student doesn't have to be on-camera or speaking through a mic to be engaged! Remind students that they are welcome to communicate through chat, reactions, screen sharing, etc. Don't be afraid to utilize Google to make communication easier. The search engine, translation services, or even the "comment" feature on documents can go a long way. If you do make comments, try using a different font or color so that students know which suggestions are yours. Some students may also appreciate it if you play ambient music as they work independently. If you're having trouble, remember it is always okay to ask an 826 Boston staff or service member for help!

Do...

- **Over emote** with your face, speak with your hands, and use positive body language and tone of voice to show you're attentive and excited.
- **Use emojis** and engage in the Zoom chat during open discussions.
- **Narrate what you are doing:** Talk through the steps of pulling up a document, searching for information on math processes, or opening up the whiteboard.
- **Be comfortable with silence!** Allow for extra space to breathe or reflect, especially after asking questions.

Tip #5:

Let the student lead the session.

Students know their needs better than we do. Ask them what they need. Suggest taking breaks for water, snacks, or stretching when they need to! Listen patiently and quietly as students express themselves. If they're quiet, consider giving students specific options to choose from instead of leaving questions fully open-ended.

Ask:

- How can I best help you today?
- Do you want to read your work out loud, or should I?
- Do you want to work independently?
- Do you want your character to go to the moon or stay on earth?

Additional Resources:

- [Daily social-emotional learning prompts](#) LiberatED
- ["Meeting Needs in Virtual Spaces"](#) PEAR Institute
- ["A Trauma-Informed Approach to Teaching Through Coronavirus"](#) The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- ["The Boost Students Need to Overcome Obstacles"](#) Ted Talk.