Strategies* to Engage Students Virtually

Genuine connection is not only **possible** using online platforms, it can be **powerful.** Creating spaces that invite authentic sharing,engagement, and fun are needed now more than ever.

Zoom Features for Engagement

Step-by-step instructions on the following Zoom features will be shared. We've found that having a good handle on these features can optimize how engaged your students are and can contribute to a more connected space.

- Rename (name, pronoun)
- Chat
- Video/Mute
- Gallery View/Side by Side
- Raise Hand/Reactions

Expect Connection

Don't apologize for the platform. Fundamentally shift your perspective about virtual platforms and give students an imagination for what is possible online. Let go of the idea of being perfect and instead invite students into a learning community together.

Look at the camera with kindness. For yourself and others.
- Know where your camera is and practice looking there. Position yourself so that both your head and shoulders are in frame. Show listening through non-verbal cues even virtually. Try turning off self-view.
- Set expectations about cameras on/off but assume good intent if the camera is off. Challenges with internet bandwidth are real, students may not want to show their background or they may be providing care for other household members.
- Remember that when a camera is off the Zoom box goes to the end of your view.

Welcome the unexpected. Honor and acknowledge interruptions and distractions.
- Be flexible and hospitable. Verbalize changes in your facilitation. "*This video is taking a long time to load, so I'm going to tell you the main point and drop the link in the chat for you to watch later.*"

Embody the Disembodied

Technology is disembodying. Remember there is a living, breathing body on the other end of the screen.

Create space for movement and grounding moments.
- Consistently invite people to bring awareness back to the body: roll your shoulders back, take a 3 deep breaths, stretch your arms up over head
- Include structured activities: awareness of breath exercises, active games

Tend to your needs and encourage others to do the same.
- Model having food/drinks and build breaks in as needed for the length of the meeting

Invite people to share artifacts from their life, story, and surroundings.
- Show and tell can be grounding and a way to create connection
- This is always led by an invitation. Avoiding commenting on items in the background that have not been explicitly shared. Not everyone one wants to share their room.

Create a Brave & Strong Space

Renaming & Pronouns. Invite participants to name themselves what they'd like to be called, and to include their pronouns. Calling people by their name and pronouns reduces their risk of suicide. This is always an invitation. We never want to force students to either out or misgender themselves on the spot.

Pace with Grace. Get comfortable with the sound of silence. Your audio may have frozen for a beat and internet speed can cause variations in audio timing.

Fill in the Body Language Gaps. We don't have access to many of our non-verbal cues we use in person. In Zoom, we have both a time delay and a lack of a clear "seating order." To smooth out those awkward edges:
- Blame accidental interruptions on the delay and quickly name an order for them to speak. "*Ha ha. It's easy to accidentally interrupt with the time delay. Let's go Juan and then Josie.*"
- If taking turns you can do one or more of the following:
    - Make a list of the order people will go in and post it in the chat
    - Call on the next person as the previous one finishes.
    - Ask participants to call on the next person once they finish.

Scaffold and Vary Engagement. Start with low buy-in engagement (raise hand, camera on/off, chat) and build to verbal shares. Invite engagement through chat, drawing, verbal, group sharing.
- Play games and do activities that involve using Zoom functions (mute, raise hand, etc).
- Check out other engaging online platforms for games and connection such as Kami, Jamboard, nearpod, Miro, Trello, Mentimeter and more.

* Concepts and strategies are drawn and adapted from Sources of Strength.