



CENTER FOR SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

## **Connecting Through Conversation: *Short Activities for Mentors***

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# Connecting Through Conversation: *Short Activities for Mentors*

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# **Introduction:** ***Everyday Conversations Matter***

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# Introduction:

## Everyday Conversations Matter

In the course of all you do with your mentee, the most important parts of your sessions will be the conversations you have together. As described by Attendance Works in their publication *The Power of Positive Connections* (August 2014), the importance of getting connected to students via conversation is common sense. At the same time, the importance of getting connected to students is also research-based, with many studies supporting the conclusion that “students are more likely to attend school when they feel connected to caring adults or fellow students who notice whether they show up and can help them overcome challenges to attendance.”

Much of what you talk about in your conversations with mentees will be everyday happenings in your mentee’s life and school experience. Listening carefully and responding with skill can open doors, unlock information below the surface, and encourage deeper communication and connection.

### Four Listening Strategies that Create Connections

1. **Paraphrase**, or play back what you’ve just heard from your mentee:

*“So it sounds like you’re concerned that if you start to make new friends, your old friends won’t want to hang out with you anymore.”*

2. **Open a door** for the student to tell you more:

*“That’s interesting! Tell me more about how it happened!” or “How did you react when she said that?”*

3. **Ask open-ended questions that encourage students to give you more than a “yes” or “no” answer.**

Instead of *“Did you have a good weekend?”* ask *“What did you do this weekend?”*

Instead of *“Did it go okay with your teacher?”* ask *“What’s one thing you felt good about when you talked with your teacher?”*

Instead of *“Do you like that TV show?”* ask *“Who’s your favorite character on that TV show? What do you like about her?”*

4. **Show** that you are listening.

- Maintain eye contact, if appropriate
- Offer your full attention without doing anything else at the same time
- Nod in understanding

### A Little More Encouragement When It Comes to Open-Ended Questions

Asking open-ended questions is a listening skill, as described in #3, above – and they can have so much power that they’re worth spending a little more time on. A good open-ended question encourages a student to say more than he or she initially offered and can lead to sharing ideas or details that might help you to support the student in new ways. Examples of this style of questioning are found throughout these

activities, but the most important open-ended questions will come directly from you in response to something your student offers in the moment.

Use this list to check whether the questions you're asking are really open-ended:

- Your question is not easily answered with a “yes or no” response
- Your question invites the student to share his or her knowledge or experiences or feelings
- Your question leaves open the possibility for many different answers
- Your question leads to a conversation rather than a lecture or debate

## Conversation Traps that Can Lead to Disconnection

It's way too easy to tap into students' sensitivities, so it's important for mentors to *recognize and avoid* some of the conversational practices that can lead to disconnections between mentor and mentee:

**Directing** - “*You must ...*”

**Threatening** - “*If you don't, I will ...*”

**Preaching** - “*You should ...*”

**Criticizing** - “*You are lazy.*”

**Teasing** - “*You look like a wet rat.*”

**Diagnosing** - “*You're just trying to get attention.*”

**Interrogating** - “*Why did you do that?*”

**Minimizing** - “*Don't worry, you'll get over it.*”

## How Much to Talk About Yourself in Conversations with Mentees

*Mentor's Field Guide*, written by Gail Manza and Susan Patrick, addresses an important question: “Will talking about my own life or beliefs help my mentee open up to me? If so, how much should I share?” Their response is as follows:

The answer to this question depends on the stage of your mentoring relationship and whether your mentee has expressed an interest in knowing more about you ... Keep in mind, however, that the mentor should be more listener than talker. Talking about yourself just to get your mentee to open up may have the opposite effect—you are filling the silent spaces so she doesn't need to try. In general, wait for your mentee to initiate conversations in which you talk about yourself.

If your mentee initiates a conversation about your life or beliefs, a good first response is to ask why she is interested. Try to see whether the question is simply a way for your mentee to bring up a topic about her own life or beliefs. Remember, you want to keep the relationship focused on your mentee, so continue to encourage her to talk about her perspectives. Each mentor must decide how open he or she wants to be in sharing information with a mentee. You have as much of a right to privacy as your mentee, so you should not feel obligated to talk about any personal issues if it is not your style or makes you uncomfortable.

It is also particularly important to avoid sharing details that might unintentionally have a negative influence on your mentee, such as your former drug use or other illegal activities. While it may seem at first that sharing such information can be an opening to warn your mentee away from such behaviors, in reality the mentee can walk away with the sense that his mentor did it and is fine, so what can be so bad about it? The mentee's family also might not be comfortable with you sharing such information. If asked, try to redirect the conversation back to the mentee by saying, for example, “Why are you interested in knowing this?” Or, “What would you think of me if I did—or didn't?”



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# Check-Ins

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# What Are Check-Ins?

Check-ins are very short, structured conversations that give mentors a way of asking “How are you?” in different ways, and give mentees easy ways to say more than just “I’m fine” or “okay.” Check-ins are a ritual used for starting sessions, and they’re designed to lead the conversation into small discoveries or new insights about one another. Check-ins can also add a bit of shared laughter to stressful times.

## The Purpose of Check-Ins

Check-ins are a useful structure to help a mentor:

- **Reconnect** with a student after time apart
- **Learn** what is on a student’s mind
- **Talk** with a student about personal or school-based concerns and successes

## How Mentors Can Use Check-Ins

Check-ins are designed to take approximately 5 minutes and can be used to begin every meeting with a student.

However, a mentor can easily extend a check-in well beyond 5 minutes by:

- Asking additional reflection questions
- Focusing on a student’s specific concern or success
- Further developing a conversation that arises naturally from the check-in structure

Any check-in found in this section can be used:

- A single time in a school year as one of a variety of check-ins used with a student
- Repeatedly throughout a year as a familiar ritual

## Tips for Using Check-Ins Successfully

A few things for mentors to keep in mind:

- It may help a student feel more comfortable participating if you participate and answer first. This will also help model the directions and avoid confusion.
- Be mindful that if a mentor shares too much, a mentee can actually feel overwhelmed or up-staged. Share enough during an activity to show your willingness to be open, but not so much that the time together is spent focused on you.
- Always ask follow-up questions. Examples of questions to deepen the conversation are provided for you at the bottom of each check-in, but you can use any questions that are appropriate to what the student has shared.

- When you first begin using check-ins, student may not respond with long answers at first. You can encourage more engagement by using open-ended questions, but be careful not to push too hard. Trust that the more you meet and get to know each other, and the more familiar check-ins become, the more your student will open up.
- If the student discloses a problem, explore whether it was resolved, what steps have been taken to solve it, or how you might be able to help the student think through the concern. You may want to check in about this problem the next time you see this student, too.
- Celebrate! If the student shares an achievement or something he or she is proud of, take time to offer genuine, specific praise for the accomplishment.



# The Good, The Bad, and The Funny

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT** after some time apart
- LEARN** what is on a student's mind

## Materials

- None

## Directions

1. Ask the student to take a minute to think of an answer to the following question:
  - What is something *good*, something *bad* or *frustrating*, and something *funny* that has happened to you in the time since we last met?

If the student is helped by writing down thoughts before sharing, encourage him or her to write down a few short notes.

2. Share your own response to the first part of the question only – something *good* that has happened to you since the last time you met. Make sure to be descriptive.
3. Next, invite the student to respond to the question of something *good* that has happened since the last time you met.

Use active listening skills to show you are listening carefully; you may ask for some further detail to fill in the picture of what happened, but don't yet ask any deepening questions until after the student has shared all three experiences.

4. Repeat in 2 more rounds, with you first offering your *bad* before your student does, and you first offering your *funny* before your student does. Again, use active listening skills, but don't ask any real probing or deepening questions yet. **NOTE:** If your student really can't connect to one of the 3 categories of *good*, *bad*, *funny*, then just skip it and go where he or she is most comfortable.
5. Once the student is finished responding, both of you take turns asking questions about the details behind each of the *good*, *bad* and *funny* situations.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- What *good* things are you looking forward to in the next week?
- When you are *frustrated*, or experience a *bad* situation, who helps you get through it?
- What makes you *laugh* even when you are having a tough day?

# Where I'm at Today

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT** after some time apart
- LEARN** what is on a student's mind
- TALK** about stress

## Materials

- A copy or drawing of the *Where I'm at Today ...* continuum
- Pens/pencils

## Directions

1. Place the *Where I'm At Today* continuum between you and your student. Explain that a little stress might help keep us on our game, but too much and we can feel overwhelmed. Stress can mess with our ability to concentrate or motivate us to work harder.
2. Ask the student to draw a star and write today's date anywhere on the continuum, even in between the markers, to indicate his or her stress level *today*.
3. Next, ask the student to think for a moment about how today's stress level feels. Ask the student to look at the words listed below the continuum and place a star next to the words that most accurately describe the feeling that stress brings up for him or her. If the student would like to add words to describe the feeling of stress that aren't on the list already, encourage him or her to write in the space provided.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- What do you think is causing your stress today?
- When you are stressed at school, what do you do? Who or what makes you less stressed?
- When is stress helpful?
- What are some ways a person in a mentor role can help you with the situation causing stress?
- What is one positive action step you can take immediately to change the situation that is causing your stress?



Consider using the continuum during several upcoming meetings. Keep the continuum for the student and, each time it is used, place a date next to the student's response. Discuss not only the immediate stressors, but also ask about how the student's stress changes over time.

*If using the continuum more than once with a student, you may ask the following questions:* According to the marks on this continuum, what has changed over time? What has remained the same? What factors do you think contribute to this?

# Where I'm At Today

Draw a *star* and put *today's date* anywhere along the continuum to show today's level of stress:



Today my stress/lack of stress level feels like (place a star next to all that apply):

Anger

Tension

Calm

Sadness

Nervousness

Happiness

Frustration

Anxiety

Relaxation

Fear

Excitement

Optimism

List any other words that describe your stress today:

# Three Words

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT** after some time apart
- LEARN** what is on a student's mind

## Materials

- None

## Directions

1. Explain that there is an art to conveying feelings or situations in a brief way – song lyrics and poems are a great example of this. During a few quiet minutes, each of you should decide on *just three words* that answer the question:

- What's going on in your life these days?

Encourage the student to think beyond “mad, sad, and glad” and be as creative as possible. You may want to give some examples such as:

- A single piece of news: *Big Test Tomorrow!* or *Need Some Sleep* or *Achieved My Goal*
- 3 separate descriptive words: *Busy, Stressed, Hopeful*
- A word picture: *Smooth, calm sailing* or *On a rollercoaster*



If it is helpful to the student, provide pen and paper to use for sketching, writing or brainstorming, but encourage the student to use what comes to mind first, if possible.

2. Offer your three words as a way of sharing and modeling the structure. Next, invite the student to share his or her three words.
3. Once you have both shared, take turns asking each other questions about the meaning you each hoped your words would send.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- How difficult or easy was it for you to come up with just three words about how you are doing? Why do you think it was tough/easy for you?
- What are you most looking forward to in the near future? What are you dreading?
- When someone asks you “What's going on these days?” what is your regular response? How do you decide what to say about your life and what to hold back?

# Lyrical Life: A Mashup

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT** after some time apart
- LEARN** what is on a student's mind

## Materials

- Sheet of paper
- Markers in 2 different colors

## Directions

1. Both you and your student take a few minutes to think of or jot down your responses to the following 2 questions:

*What's one lyric from a song that describes how this week going?*

*What's one lyric from a song that describes something that would make this week better?*

2. Next, choose a marker that will be your color throughout this activity and write your first lyric on the paper. Next, ask the student to choose a different color marker and write his or her first lyric on the same paper, right beneath yours.

Repeat this again, still using the color of markers you both initially chose, so that right underneath your first pair of lyrics, you and your student write the second lyric you each used to answer the second question.

3. Take turns reading your lyrics aloud.
4. Spend time asking the student why he or she chose those specific two lyrics to share and how those lyrics connect to current things he or she is experiencing. You may also share some information about why you chose your lyrics (as long as the focus stays on your student, overall).
5. *(Optional)* Explain that you both will do this check-in several times over the course of the year, adding to the same page with the same colors. This process will create a “mashup” of lyrics that will tell a story of your year.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- Is there an artist you like who always seems to be talking about you or your experiences through song?
- What music do you like to listen to when you are happy? When you are angry? When you need motivation?
- What is it about music that has the power to help us express our emotions?

*(Optional) When looking at the page of lyrics together after doing this check-in several times:*

- Looking at our mashup of lyrics, what story do they tell about us? What might be the title of this poem/song we have created?

# High/Low

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT** after some time apart
- LEARN** what is on a student's mind
- TALK** about concerns and successes

## Materials

- None

## Directions

1. Ask the student to think of a high point and a low point in his or her life since you last saw each other. Suggest that he or she can choose to talk about:
  - School (classroom experiences, homework, cafeteria, phys ed)
  - Friends (plans, activities, rumors, arguments, supports, questions)
  - Family (parents/guardians, siblings, interactions)
2. Model this activity and begin the sharing by describing a *low* point in your week. Next, ask the student to share his or her *low*.
3. In order to end on a more affirming note, next share a *high* point from the time period since you last met. Next, ask the student to share his or her *high* point.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- *Lows:* What support would be helpful to you in dealing with your low point, and from whom? Is this a low point that is likely to repeat? Do you have any control in whether or not it repeats? What *do* you have control over, when it comes to how you handle this low point?
- *Highs:* Is there something we can celebrate as an ongoing high point? Are there other high points you're expecting or trying to make happen in the near future? What's an area of your life where you'd really like to have a high point, even if you haven't had one there lately (or ever)? Any steps you can take in creating such a high point?
- What is the benefit in sharing our lows with each other to start our meeting? What is the benefit of talking about what our best moments were? Who else in your life do you share your low points and high points with?

# Top of Mind

This check-in will help you to:

- LEARN** what is on a student's mind
- TALK** about distractions

## Materials

- None

## Directions

1. Ask the student to think of the *top three* things on his or her mind today and explain that you will both answer the following questions:
  - What are 2 things that are at the top of your mind today? They can be from any area of your life.
  - How did these things that are on your mind either (a) help you create your day in a positive way or (b) get in the way for you during the school day?

Give your student a moment to think of his or her answers.

2. Share your answer to the questions first, as a way of modeling the structure. You may choose to share just one of your answers to the question and then invite the student to give all of his or her answers in order to give the student more talking time.
3. Spend some time talking about any details of the top 2 things on the student's mental list that could be helpful in problem-solving or celebrating with the student.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- What are some things that tend to distract you during your school day? What do you find happens in school (with teachers or friends or just on your own) when you let yourself get really distracted?
- What are some things that help you to stay focused on school, during each school day? What do you find happens in school (with teachers or friends or just on your own) when you're able to stay focused?
- What are some new refocusing strategies that might help you when you're really distracted in school?

# Three Wishes

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT** after some time apart
- LEARN** what is on a student's mind

## Materials

- None

## Directions

1. Read the following question to the student and take a quiet minute to allow you both to think of a response.

*If a magical creature appeared and granted you three wishes that would change your day (not your LIFE, but just this day!), what would you wish for? The only rule is that you may not make a wish for more wishes.*

2. Next, repeat the question and decide together who will share their response first. After one person has shared his or her three wishes, the other person also shares. Each of you should also share how you think your day would change if your wishes were granted.
3. After both sets of wishes are shared, each person should ask follow-up questions to learn more about the details behind the other person's wishes.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- Do you make wishes? When are you most likely to make a wish?
- Since we don't really have a magical opportunity to make our wishes come true, what can you do, within *your* power, to improve your day?



# Finish My Sentence

This check-in will help you to:

- RECONNECT** after some time apart
- LEARN** what is on a student's mind

## Materials

- Sentence Starters* cut into strips
- Pen/pencil for each person

## Directions

1. Place the *Sentence Starter* strips face-up on the table so that both you and the student can read them.
2. Invite your student to choose a sentence starter he or she would like to complete. Explain that you will choose one of the other sentence starters and each of you will complete the chosen sentence by writing on the slip of paper.

Take a quiet minute to allow each of you to write your response.

3. Begin by reading your completed sentence aloud. Next, invite the student to read his or her full sentence aloud.
4. Use the student's response as a jumping off point to have a larger conversation about what is going on in his or her life:
  - *If your student's response to the sentence starter was positive, you might ask:*  
What is going to keep today moving in a good direction?
  - *If your student's response revealed frustration or a tough situation, you might ask:*  
Do you want to talk more about what's going on?  
What support would you like in taking action steps toward making a positive change?
5. If there's time, you can each select another set of sentence starters to complete and share, following the steps above.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- Where else in your life are you able to check in with someone and share, for real, how your day is going?
- How do you think your response today is connected to [a topic/issue previously discussed, or a goal this student set]?

# Sentence Starters

---

I'm looking forward to...

---

This morning I...

---

I don't feel great when I think about...

---

I really need to...

---

I really want to...

---

My day would be going much better if...

---

I can't stop thinking about...

---

I hope...

---

What if...

---

I can't believe...

---

Someone I've really appreciated lately is... because ....

---

# If I Could ...

This check-in will help you to:

- ☑ **RECONNECT** after some time apart
- ☑ **LEARN** what is on a student's mind
- ☑ **TALK** about dreams and goals

## Materials

- ☐ *If I Could ...* statement starters cut into strips

## Directions

1. Place the statement starter strips face-down on the table, or folded in a bowl so the words cannot be read. Explain that *If I Could ...* is a way to help you both take some time to daydream together and get to know each other better.
2. Model the structure by picking up one of the statement starters, reading it aloud, and completing the sentence. To encourage the student to share more than just a few words, complete the statement in your own words and then give a brief explanation, or additional information, about the daydream you shared.
3. Next, invite the student to respond to the same sentence stem.



Both of you should use the follow-up questions on the strip of paper to learn more about each other's daydreams, or create your own follow-up questions.

4. After both of you have responded to the *If I Could ...* statement, ask the student to choose a different sentence stem and read it aloud. In this round, the student should respond first, and then invite you to share after he or she has answered any follow-up questions.
5. Continue in this way, taking turns being the first to respond, for as long as time permits.

## Deepening the Conversation

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- How can dreams help us figure out our goals and wishes?
- When do you notice yourself daydreaming? When you do, where does your mind wander off to?
- What is the benefit of sharing your dreams with others?

## ***If I Could ... Statement Starters***

---

**If I could wake up anywhere in the world, I would wake up in...**

*Follow-up questions:*

- *Why there?*
  - *What would you do while you were there?*
- 

**If I could spend an entire day any way I wanted, I would...**

*Follow-up questions:*

- *Who would you want to spend your day with, if anyone?*
  - *What would you do differently in morning, afternoon, or night?*
- 

**If I could have any super power, it would be....**

*Follow-up questions:*

- *How would you use this super power?*
  - *What is a skill in real life that a person can have that might be related to this super power? Who do you know that skill?*
- 

**If I could be famous for one talent, I'd be famous for....**

*Follow-up questions:*

- *Is this a talent that you currently have?*
  - *What are things about this talent that interest you?*
- 

**If I could change anything about myself, I'd change...**

*Follow-up questions:*

- *What is it that makes you want to change this aspect of yourself?*
  - *If this is something in your control to change, what series of steps might you be able to take toward this goal in the next few months? What support would you need in taking these steps?*
  - *If this is something that is not in your control to change, what is it, do you think, that makes this aspect of who you are hard to accept? What kind of support might help you to accept this aspect of who you are?*
- 

**If I could accomplish one thing this year, it would be...**

*Follow-up questions:*

- *What/who could help you to accomplish this goal? What gets in the way of you accomplishing this goal?*
  - *What are some action steps you could take during this year that would move you toward this goal?*
  - *How would you celebrate this accomplishment?*
-



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# Academic Check-Ins

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# What Are Academic Check-Ins?

The *Check-Ins* provided in the section before this one help you create conversation about your students' experiences, beliefs, and ideas. The *Academic Check-Ins* offered in this section help you create conversation during those moments when a student takes an important test, gets feedback on a project, or receives grades for the marking period. The idea is that mentors can support students' academic improvement by helping them learn how to take an honest look at their current strengths and challenges as students.

## The Purpose of Academic Check-Ins

The *Academic Check-Ins* in this section encourage a student to:

- ☑ **UNDERSTAND** the feedback that grades can provide
- ☑ **REFLECT** on the process the student used when completing a project or test
- ☑ **SET GOALS** for the immediate future
- ☑ **PLAN** for academic improvement

## How Mentors Can Use Academic Check-Ins

*Academic Check-Ins* can take anywhere from 15 minutes to 40 minutes, depending on how deep you go. They can be used after a short *Check-In* from the prior section. They can also be used on their own – but only if you and your student have a strong relationship already, because the quality of your conversation about academics depends on how comfortable your student is in sharing how he or she really feels about what's going on in various classes. *Academic Check-Ins* are not about compliance or

A mentor can easily extend an Academic Check-In over the course of numerous weeks by:

- Focusing on a student's specific concern or success or point of learning as new quizzes, tests, or projects occur in a student's schedule
- Following through in asking about specific academic goals a student might have set

The first 3 *Academic Check-Ins* in this section can be used at regular intervals (perhaps monthly) throughout a year as a familiar ritual.

The last *Academic Check-In* in this section, focused on report cards, can be used 4 times per year when grades come out.

# Stepping Toward the Future

This check-in supports a student in:

- SETTING GOALS** for the immediate future

## Materials

- 2 blank sheets of paper, folded into thirds to create 3 columns
- 2 pens/pencils

## Directions

1. Give the student the three-column paper and ask him or her to write “one week” at the top of the first column. At the top of the second column ask the student to write “one month,” and at the top of the third column write “graduation.” Do the same with your own paper, perhaps writing “one year” or “one decade” in the third column instead of “graduation.”

2. Ask the student to think about this question:

*What would you like to accomplish between now and each of these times?*

3. Invite the student to draw pictures, sketch some symbols, or write words that represent answers to the question. Allow the student plenty of time for creativity and thought. Fill in your own page, too.
  4. When the student has finished drawing or writing, use the questions below to guide a conversation about the goals represented by the students’ symbols or words. In this exercise, you might want to invite the student to speak first, each time, so that you don’t overshadow his or her goals. You can offer what you’ve written, but with a light touch, keeping the focus on your student.
    - Describe what you would like to accomplish in the next week.
      - In the next month
      - In the time before you graduate high school
    - Why are these goals important to you?
    - Do these goals seem like ones you can reach in these time frames? Why or why not?
      - If these goals feel realistic to you, what do you think your next step should be toward getting closer to accomplishing the goal?
      - If one or more of the goals feels less realistic to you, what can you do to make the goal more realistic?
- As you move through the conversation, invite the student to add drawings or words to the columns as new ideas and action steps come to mind.

5. Ask your student to:

- *In the first column:* Write one action you can take *today* to move toward your “one week” goal.
- *In the second column:* Write one action step you can take in the next *two weeks*, to move toward your “one month” goal.
- *In the third column:* Write one action step you can take in the *next month*, to move toward your “graduation” goal.

You, too, can write and share your action steps in the same way, so that you can be accountable during future sessions with your student, just as you are asking him or her to be accountable.

Use the following question to guide a conversation about working toward the listed goals:

- What support do you need or want from me, or others, to commit to taking the steps you just wrote?



Make a plan to check in with the student to support his or her action steps along the way and help create new action steps to continue progressing toward the goals.

### **Deepening the Conversation**

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- How often do you imagine what you would like to be doing a year from now? A decade from now? What are some of the things you hope you will be doing?
- What gets in the way of you working toward either long-term or short-term goals?
- What, or who, helps you to believe in yourself as someone who can both set and achieve goals? If no one, then imagine, for a moment, that you had someone in your life who always told you that they believed in you. What do you think would be different about your ability to believe in yourself, at this point in your life?
- What additional support would help you in taking steps toward both your short-term and long-term goals?
- How can you best deal with setbacks, given that reaching a goal is rarely an easy or linear process?
- How will you celebrate achieving each of your goals?



# How Did It Go?

## Looking at Tests & Quizzes

This check-in supports a student in:

- UNDERSTANDING** the feedback that grades can provide
- REFLECTING** on the process the student used when completing a project or test

### Materials

- A recent graded test or quiz

### Directions

Use the questions below to walk a student through a way of reflecting on his or her quiz or test, beginning by looking at the big picture of the outcome and moving toward making a plan for learning from this experience and applying those lessons to future tests.

1. Begin with **the big picture**:
  - How satisfied are you with how you did?
  - What are you most proud of?
  - What are you most concerned about?
  - Does this grade match up with how you thought you were doing in the class? With what you thought you understood about the subject?
2. Then take a **step back**:
  - How did you prepare for it?
  - How prepared did you feel going in to take the test?
3. Then look at the **test/quiz** itself:
  - What, if anything, confused you?
  - What came easiest to you?
  - What was the most difficult part of this?
4. Next, **look ahead**:

If the student did *well* and is *satisfied* with his/her performance:

  - What did you do on this test or quiz that you'll be sure to do next time?
  - How can we celebrate this success?

If the student could *improve* and/or is *not satisfied*:

  - What options might you have to bring up this grade (e.g., approach teacher to re-take the test; ask for extra credit work)?
  - What can you do differently next time? How can I help you with this?

**Deepening the Conversation**

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- In what ways was this process of talking about your quiz/test useful? How might we make the process better?
- How do you feel about taking tests or quizzes? What do you do to cope with any test stress you experience?
- What did we talk about this time that you might be able to apply to the next quiz or test you take, in any of your classes?

# How Did It Go?

## Looking at School Projects

This check-in supports a student in:

- UNDERSTANDING** the feedback that grades can provide
- REFLECTING** on the process the student used when completing a project or test
- PLANNING** for academic improvement

### Materials

- A product from a recent school project (e.g. report, poster, diorama, model, etc.)

### Directions

Use the questions below to walk a student through a way of reflecting on his or her project.

1. Begin with **the big picture**:
  - What are you learning in this class? What was the assignment? Describe the project you created.
  - What were you trying to achieve?
  - How well do you think this project met your goal? How close do you think this came to the assignment guidelines?
2. **Take a step back**:
  - How did you come up with this idea?
  - What was interesting to you about the project? Was it the idea, or the way you turned your idea into something special?
  - What did you learn in the process about the topic? What did you learn about doing this kind of work?
  - Which skills that you already have did you use in this project? What new skills did you learn?
3. Use **self-evaluation**:
  - In what ways do you agree with your teacher's grading or comments on the project? In what ways do you disagree?
  - What do you think you did well?
  - What could you have done differently?
4. Next, **look ahead**:
 

If the student did *well* and is *satisfied* with his/her performance:

  - What did you do on this project that you will definitely do next time?
  - How can we celebrate this success?

If the student could *improve* the project and/or is *not satisfied*:

  - What can you do to bring this grade up (e.g., approach teacher to submit a revision; ask for extra credit work)?
  - What can you do differently next time? How can I help you with this?

**Deepening the Conversation**

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- In what ways was this process of talking about your project useful? How might we make the process better?
- How do you feel about working on projects like this one? What do you do to cope with any stress you experience?
- What did we talk about this time that you might be able to apply to the next project you have to do, in any of your classes?

# How Did It Go?

## Looking at Report Cards

*Adapted from the Institute for Research and Reform in Education's "Guide to Family Advisor System"*

This check-in supports a student in:

- UNDERSTANDING** the feedback that grades can provide
- REFLECTING** on the process the student used when completing a project or test
- SETTING GOALS** for the immediate future
- PLANNING** for academic improvement

### Materials

- Most recent report card
- A piece of paper with 3 columns
- Pen/pencil

### Directions

Use the questions below to walk a student through a way of reflecting on his or her report card.

#### 1. Begin with **the big picture**:

- What is one success you see represented by your report card, or one thing you are particularly proud of that you did during this marking period?
- What is one challenge you see for yourself when you look at this report card?
- Which of these grades did you expect to receive? Which grades are a surprise to you?
- Overall, how are you feeling about this report card and your grade point average?

#### 2. **Take a step back**:

Give the student a piece of paper with lines drawn to make three columns and ask him or her to follow these instructions:

- Write each class name on a sheet of paper in the left column of the paper.
- Next to all of the classes in this list in which you are doing well, and/or meeting your personal expectations, draw a star.
- Circle all of the classes in which you feel you need to improve your grade.

#### 3. Use **self-evaluation**:

- Look at the classes labeled with a star. In the middle column next to each starred class, write one thing that helped you to do well in each class. (This can be something you did on your own, or a way someone helped you.)
- Look at the classes you circled. In the middle column next to each circled class, write one thing that got in the way of you getting a higher grade.

#### 4. **Look ahead**:

Use the following questions to help the student learn more from the information he or she wrote in each column:

- What did you write next to the *starred* classes that you might be able to use to help improve your grades in your *circled* classes?
- What other tips, strategies, actions, or supports can we think of together that might help you to work toward a different grade next time? (Brainstorm as many ideas together as possible.)
- In the right-hand column, write one action or strategy you will commit to trying in each of the circled classes in the coming weeks.

### **Deepening the Conversation**

*Following are examples of questions that help you move from brief check-in to a deeper conversation with your student:*

- It can feel overwhelming to try to improve grades in multiple classes in a single marking period. What are the one or two classes that will be a top priority for you to improve your work? Why those classes?
- What expectations do you set for yourself in your classes? How is what *you* want different or similar to what your *teachers* want for you?
- Are you meeting your own expectations? What helps you to meet your own expectations? What gets in the way of you meeting your own expectations in some classes?
- How can I help you in working toward your academic goals?