

# Integrating SEL into Remote Learning



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**Solution Tree**



## Key Points:

1. When students are learning remotely, they need to focus on self-care, social connection, and values discovery.
2. Protocols help teachers embed SEL into instruction, create learning routines, and build a sense of community—both in person and online.
3. Meaningful online learning includes written reflection, whole-group sharing, voluntary sharing, small-group discussion, and graphic organizers.

## Takeaways for Educators:

In this guide, you will find ways to integrate SEL into remote learning. The guide includes:

- ▶ Reasons to focus on self-care, social connection, and values discovery during remote learning
- ▶ Modifications to use when working with students in virtual spaces
- ▶ Three protocols that help students take care of themselves
- ▶ Three protocols that help students connect with each other
- ▶ Three protocols that help students discover sources of meaning and vitality





## When designing remote SEL, we need to consider students' needs.

During periods of time when they can't physically go to school, students might find it more difficult to (1) take care of themselves, (2) connect with each other, and (3) find sources of meaning and vitality—so these need to be the focus of online social-emotional learning.

### Taking Care of Themselves

Students might find it more difficult to take care of themselves when they've lost their daily routines. They might get less exercise when they're not walking or biking to school, or running around during PE. They might not be sleeping well due to altered schedules and added responsibilities at home. And they might not be eating as well, whether because of a parent's lost wages or because added stress might make them less attentive to their nutritional intake. Of course, some students

might be taking *better* care of themselves when they can sleep later, eat at home, and bike around their neighborhoods during breaks—but not all students have access to these options. Plus, if students are learning from home due to crisis-related building closures, they might feel understandably anxious, which makes self-care more important than ever.

### Connecting with One Another

Perhaps you've heard someone say that kids and teens are constantly on screens anyway, so maybe remote learning doesn't really impact their social lives. But the stereotype that kids and teens are always online is just that: a stereotype. And even if students ordinarily interact via texting or video-chatting, remote learning they miss out on casual connections throughout the school day. They can't glance at each other across the classroom or smile at each other on the bus or wave to each other in the hallways, much less hug. When students aren't in the building together, it becomes more challenging for them to develop relationships and a sense of community. Social connection therefore becomes an even bigger priority than it was before.



## Discovering Sources of Meaning and Vitality

If school is closed, then other places where students love to go are likely also closed. Activities that matter to them—from basketball practices to cooking clubs to church groups to everyday hangouts with friends—might be canceled, postponed, or moved online where the activity doesn't feel quite as satisfying. School itself might not be as satisfying online either. Because students have lost access to sources of meaning in their lives, it's especially important for them to discover new ones and to find satisfaction and vitality in the activities they *do* have access to—including their academic classes.

## About Online Modifications

Most of these protocols include written reflection, whole-group sharing, voluntary sharing, and small-group discussion. Many use graphic organizers. Online, you can adapt these elements as follows.

### ► Written Reflection

It might feel a little awkward to have students look down from their cameras in order to write, and of course there's always the risk that some students simply won't write at all without your surveillance. If you see students looking up or putting their pens down, remind the class that for these protocols, writing is a form of self-discovery, and there is never a right answer or even a right way. If you find that students are not writing, try leading a discussion about potential reasons to engage more fully. If certain students repeatedly resist, consider setting up an opportunity to speak with that student privately.







### ► Voluntary Sharing

Many protocols include an invitation, but not a requirement, for students to share thoughts or responses. Most online meeting platforms have a chat box feature, and this is an ideal place for volunteers to share. You can look for patterns and outliers among the responses and say these back to the group. Alternatively, if your online learning platform allows students to virtually raise their hands, you can have volunteers do that, and then unmute their microphones when you call on them. That will make discussions more orderly but also positions you as an authority and intermediary instead of encouraging students to dialogue with each other.

### ► Whole-Class Sharing

While most protocols include optional sharing, some include times when everyone is asked to share. At those times, establish an order in advance so that each student knows when it's their turn, and so that you don't have to keep inserting your voice to give permission to speak. Post the order, or even better, use the same order whenever everyone shares. You might find that some students still need reminders to take their turns without a physical cue like sitting in a circle. When a student takes their turn to speak, they unmute their microphone.

### ► Partner Discussion

Some protocols ask students to talk to a partner. These protocols only work if your school's online learning platform supports breakouts.

### ► Graphic Organizers

Many protocols use graphic organizers that can be found on the Solution Tree website. Students can fill these out on their computers, print copies, or make their own.

## Remote SEL for Self-Care, Social Connection, and Values Discovery

In this guide, you'll find summaries of protocols from the books *EMPOWER Your Students* and *Two-for-One Teaching* that promote self-care, social connection, and values discovery. Although we created these protocols for use in physical classrooms, we intentionally wrote them to be used flexibly, and in fact we explicitly encourage teachers not to use them exactly as written but rather adapt them so they work for your population,

subject, physical space, and delivery style. Not all of the activities in the books lend themselves to virtual spaces, but most do. After briefly explaining each protocol, we describe how to modify it for use online. You can find much more information about these protocols, along with step-by-step processes for using them, in the books.







## Self-Kindness Gift Cards

(*EMPOWER Your Students*, page 121)

Students distinguish between self-indulgence and self-kindness, brainstorm acts of self-kindness, and commit to self-kindness behaviors. Instead of gift cards, have students make self-kindness calendars, so they can give themselves kindness every day. Ask them to take out the calendars they ordinarily use, such as those on their phones or in their planners, or have them create calendars beginning with the day you do the protocol. Ask students to choose self-kindness actions for each day and then write them on their calendars. They might choose the same activity for every day, alternate between two activities, or pick a different activity for every day. A few days later, check in with students and ask them if they're doing the behaviors they wrote in their self-kindness calendars.

**Online modifications:** Rather than putting up virtual posters with the self-kindness categories, show a slide with the nine categories and have students make their own lists

of self-kindness behaviors. After a few minutes of making lists, have each student share one, two, or three items from their lists so their classmates can get ideas for more behaviors to add to their own lists. To do this share-out, establish an order in advance and have students unmute their microphones when it's their turn.

## On Your Plate

(*EMPOWER Your Students*, page 90)

The expression “a lot on my plate” is a metaphor for having many obligations or problems in our lives. This protocol helps students relate differently to those stressors by imagining them as actual foods on a plate and then linking their struggles to their values. Students can draw on actual paper plates if they have them at home, or they can just draw circles on paper and imagine them as plates.

Online modifications: Because this activity has a lot of steps, ask students to signal to you that they're ready to move on, such as by giving the thumbs up.





Volunteers can share in the chat box or by virtually raising their hands. Do not ask students to hold up their plates for their classmates to see, since doing so might expose struggles that are better kept private, and since their peers might not be equipped to support them—especially when they’re not physically together. However, you can invite students to take photos of their plates and send them to you, so that those who want to share their struggles can do so safely. You or the school counselor can follow up with anyone who needs it.

### **Emotions and Values Audit** **(Two-for-One Teaching, page 106)**

Students identify times when they felt different emotions, including happiness, sadness, and anger. As written, the activity is used to review academic content in terms of how students felt at different points during a unit. But it can also be used for students to review how they felt during a particular time period or event. Instead of reviewing their notes and materials from a unit, they simply recall moments when they felt the different emotions. Because they’re exploring their lives and not academic content, what they write on their charts might be more private. Therefore, consider leading a discussion about the implications of sharing. You can invite them to share privately with you or with a counselor.

**Online modifications:** Students will need copies of the [Noticing Emotions](#) chart. You can either post a copy for them to download and fill out, or project a copy and have them create their own. When volunteers share, they can do so in the chat box or by virtually raising their hands.



# Protocols that Encourage SOCIAL CONNECTION

## Unit Partner Meet

(Two-for-One Teaching, page 57)

Students form partnerships that work together throughout an academic unit. They share with each other when checking comprehension, asking questions, telling stories, making inferences, brainstorming ideas, solving problems, or seeking feedback. Before the unit starts, partners get to know each other as learners. They reflect on their different experiences and shared values. By working together throughout the unit, partners not only benefit from one another's thinking; they have someone check in with, learn about the other person, and learn about themselves as collaborators.

**Online modifications:** Instead of giving three questions for partners to answer, give a pair of questions that go together, such as, *When did you struggle to learn?* and *When did you have fun while learning?* Or, *What's something important you learned at home?* and *When did you learn from being out of your element?* Post the pair of questions for the whole class, and have students respond in writing. After they've had a minute or two to think on paper, send partners into breakout rooms to share. Bring them back into the full group so you can explain the collaborative reflection prompts, and then send them back into their breakout rooms.

## Track and Acknowledge

(Two-for-One Teaching, page 94)

Students write at length in response to a prompt about a topic they're studying. Then they take turns sharing, and while each student shares, every other student writes down some little nugget of what each person says. Finally, students respond to one another's ideas. Use this protocol whenever you want your students to think more deeply, critically, or creatively about any topic they're studying. The protocol gives every student an opportunity to share their thinking with their classmates, pay closer attention to their peers' ideas, and connect as a learning community.

**Online modifications:** You might be tempted to have students do the writing for this protocol asynchronously. However, students often think of any writing they do for school as an assignment they have to "get right." Here, writing is a means of discovering and deepening their thinking. If your students do it synchronously, you can reinforce the message that they are not creating a polished product. When it's time to share, establish an order in advance and have students write each other's names, leaving space to write the nugget of what their peers say.



## Nonjudgmental Peer Review

(*Two-for-One Teaching*, page 169)

Use this protocol whenever students create any kind of shareable work product, such as an essay or graph. Rather than giving judgment of any kind (including praise or suggestions), students offer their observations, questions, and interpretations. When prompted to share their experiences of their classmates' work, students connect differently to that work, and by extension, to each other. When they read their classmates' feedback, students not only get a chance to figure out how they want to revise their work; they also get a chance to be seen, heard, and honored.

**Online modifications:** In a physical classroom, students exchange Peer Review Direction Cards to choose and keep track of their reviewers. They still need the directions on the cards but cannot trade them online. Instead, have students tell you privately if there are any peers they would not want seeing their work. Then, make a chart to show students who their three reviewers will be. Have each student make their work accessible to their reviewers—such as by emailing it, sharing a document, or posting to a common site. Students can provide their feedback by replying to each other's emails, using the comment function on the shared document, or posting to a private site.







## Protocols that Encourage VALUES DISCOVERY

### Values-Activating Questions

(*Two-for-One Teaching*, page 54)

At the beginning of an academic unit, students read or hear about their upcoming learning. They then write responses to three questions that help them discover how that upcoming learning connects to sources of meaning in their lives. Finally, they have a chance to share their responses with each other, thus finding out about what's important to their classmates. If you use this protocol at the beginning of every academic unit, it becomes a routine that provides a sense of structure and helps build community within your classroom.

**Online modifications:** The simplest way to do this activity is to post a slide with the unit description, read it out loud, and then post each question, allowing time for students to write their responses before posting the next one. When it's time for volunteers to share, they can do so in the chat box or by virtually raising their hands. Alternatively, you can ask each student to identify something they're willing to read out loud. Then, you can establish an order and have students unmute their microphones when it's their turn.

### Exemplar Study

(*Two-for-One Teaching*, page 146)

Before starting a project, students often look at *exemplars*: excellent work of the type they're being asked to create. For example, if students are about to write persuasive essays, they might read several published ones, or if they're building cell models, they might look at pictures of models that you or your previous students created. During this protocol, students analyze several exemplars—not only so they can understand what's required and what's possible, but also so they can discover how these pieces of work express their creators' values, and how they might express their own values through their schoolwork. Thus, projects become opportunities for students not just to have choices, but to choose actions that matter to them.

**Online modifications:** To do this protocol remotely, give students links to several pieces of work they can read or view online. If they're looking at images, make sure the resolution is high enough that they can see smaller details. Give them time to open all the links and decide which exemplars they want to examine more thoroughly.



At that point, students will need access to the [Looking at Exemplars](#) chart, or you can have them create their own—which will give them more room to write. When students volunteer to share their responses, they can do so in the chat box or by virtually raising their hands.

## Regenerating Possibilities

(EMPOWER Your Students, page 113)

As written, this activity helps students overcome experiences of failure by having them identify the values they were trying to serve, brainstorm other ways to serve that same value, and finally brainstorm ways to succeed in the area in which they failed. Rather than having students

process *failure*, use this activity to help them process *loss*. Have them think of something they miss doing but cannot do because of pandemic restrictions. Then, have them notice the values they serve when they do the activity they miss, and brainstorm other possible ways of serving that value. Finally, have them think of ways they can prepare or train for the day when they can do the activity again.

**Online modifications:** Students will need copies of the [Four More Arms](#) graphic organizer. They can either download and print copies to fill out, or draw their own starfish with four full-length arms and one shorter arm. When volunteers share, they can do so by typing in the chat box or by virtually raising their hands.





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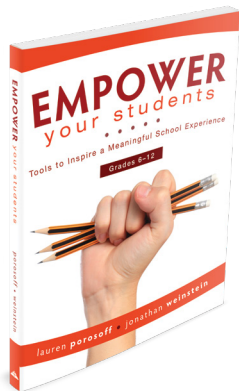
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 **LEARN MORE** [SolutionTree.com/Jonathan-Weinstein.html](http://SolutionTree.com/Jonathan-Weinstein.html)

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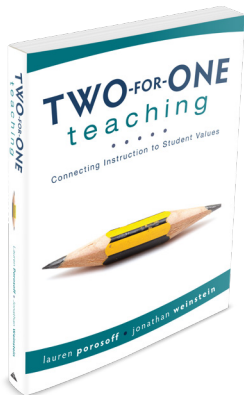


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### Values and Questions Card Deck and Instruction Booklet

Values and Questions invites students into conversations about values they can bring to their learning, their work, their relationships, and other aspects of their lives. The cards are designed for any adult who works with students in grades 6–12—including classroom teachers, administrators, counselors, psychologists, social workers, learning specialists, and support staff—and wants to start meaningful conversations with individual students or groups.

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