



BELONGINESS AND CAPABILITY ACTIVITIES

The Idaho Lives project is deeply interested in promoting factors for children that can improve their mental health and help protect them from suicidal thoughts and behaviors throughout their school careers, and often, throughout life. ***An abundance of research shows that two such critical factors are belongingness and capability. Students who feel a sense of belonging and capability are more likely to do well in school, possess a better sense of self-esteem, be better citizens both in school and in their community, and grow up with self-efficacy.***

Research can be reviewed at

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/school_connectedness.htm

Allowing classrooms to brainstorm a few rules that are needed for everyone to feel safe and included will go a long way to resolving discipline as the year goes on. Keep the rules brief and positive (Do's versus Don'ts) and offer students time to discuss why these are important. Get buy-in from everyone and post the rules in a clearly visible place.

In-Person or Virtual Learning

Example Activities and Strategies

Note: While activity grade levels are suggested, any activity can be modified for different grade levels.

Zoom Around the Room (all grades) virtual

The teacher/host holds up a subject matter and says what it is, such as 'something furry'. The teacher/host then counts backwards from 3 to 1. When they say Go!, all participants have to run and find the item. The first one back with the item wins. All participants then share the item they grabbed and explain why they chose it. Repeat the game with the host holding up the next subject card.

Rock, Paper, Scissors (RPS) (all grades) virtual

The leader physically has a rock, paper and scissors and explains the rules of for RPS as done in the physical game. The virtual difference is that as the leader states rock, paper, scissors. The participants hold up their hand with what they choose in front of the camera. The leader states what won — rock, paper, or scissors — and states which two are out. Participants are on the honor system to turn off their cameras if they are out. The last person still playing against the teacher wins. Explain this before they start the game and reiterate it after the practice round.

Everyone Plays a Part Mural (All Grades with adult support for younger grades) *in-person and virtual*

With the help of an art teacher or community artist, design a wall-sized mural for your school. This can be either inside or out. Divide the mural into as many parts as there are students. Draw the design out on the wall and create equal-sized grids. Each student is assigned a square/grid, the color of paint, markers or chalk that needs to be used to complete their square (think paint by numbers), and a timeline to complete their part. If in-person, volunteers are needed to keep students safe and monitor any equipment use to avoid any falls. The mural requires every student's participation to complete. When completed, take a photo of the mural and share with all members of the group. Social distancing would need to be monitored if in-person. If a section is not completed, leave it empty until the student assigned can be helped to complete their section.

Virtual option: Design a mural or use a photo to recreate. Or pick a theme and have students draw out a picture of that theme. Divide the mural into grids/squares to equal the number of participants. Send everyone their section of the grid to color. Each participant is responsible to create or color their section of the mural. Young students can use any medium available such as chalk, markers, colored crayons, acrylic paint, etc. Have a parent take a picture and send it to the teacher. Older students can use virtual media and send the files to the teacher. The teacher will put the sections together to replicate the original mural or to create a colorful wall. The teacher can take a photo of the completed mural to share with the class. If someone did not turn in their section, keep the section empty by putting a white paper in that space until that person can complete their section.

Elementary Graduation virtual

Schedule a date and time for graduation and set up a Google Meet or Zoom Room for participants. Ask students to design a hat to wear for their ceremony. For kindergarten graduations, adults will need to help with most of this. Alternatively, students can dress up as their profession of choice is at this time. After the teacher calls their name for graduation, the student can share the career choice out loud with the class before 'accepting' their diploma. Instead of walking across the stage, students can virtually high-five their classmates.

Middle School or High School Graduation virtual

Through a survey tool such as Survey Monkey or via email, ask students the following (this could be an English assignment): What is something I will remember from this year? From all the years in middle/high school? Who is a teacher/staff member I want to give a shout out to and why? Which student(s) did something kind for me that I want to remember? What is something that I learned from being home these last months? What I am looking forward to next fall? What is something I want to accomplish in the next year?

Team up with members of the media club or video broadcasting classes to put their ideas into a video collage to share at graduation. If possible, set up a virtual room so

that every student can personally share one of the statements from the survey or perhaps record and then play their voice stating what they wish to share as diplomas are being handed out.

Another idea is to collect baby/childhood photos (ask parents to email a copy) and the current yearbook photo. Create a whole class video with students' photos and names. Encourage graduates to send out virtual invites to their family and friends so that everyone "can be at graduation." Be sure to invite the other students in your school to virtually attend.

Families might use some of the ideas from the following website to set up for the big day.

https://blog.newlywords.com/2020/04/08/how-to-truly-celebrate-your-graduate-and-still-social-distance/?source=googadbloggrad&gclid=CjwKCAjw1cX0BRBmEiwAy9tKHn08bAQuJNqAPQi8xgzwqiPxDXRjKjEKY2qSkW0-1Qsvv7px0k90ORoCNL4QAvD_BwE

This one is for higher education but can be modified for a high school graduation.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2020/03/31/tips-holding-your-institutions-commencement-ceremony-virtually-opinion>

Prom (high school) *virtual*

Send out a request for ideas about what students would like for their virtual prom. Some options are at <https://girlslife.com/fab/parties/36148/want-to-host-a-virtual-prom-heres-everything-you-need-to-know>.

Have students and staff promote a virtual prom. Set up a virtual room so that all students might join in for an hour or two. Consider choosing a theme and students can decorate their virtual room with the theme decorations. Everyone dresses up and wears corsages (optional), and dances to music. Ask a DJ to take student requests for music and play them during this virtual event. Coordinate with the media club or video broadcasting classes to create a live stream of the event and a recorded version to share back later.

Classroom Jobs (Elementary School) *in-person*

Rotate jobs so that all students have a chance to contribute and feel important. Jobs should be age and skill appropriate. Some ideas include taking messages to the office, flag assistant, recycler, PE or music helpers, classroom helpers (pass out supplies or pick up papers), and other small jobs. A note stating how helpful the students are at the end of the day will be appreciated by them and their parents.

Recess Buddies (Elementary School) *in-person and virtual*

Older students can be Recess Buddies to younger students who have a hard time making or keeping friends at recess. The older students help them with appropriate ways to interact with their peers, do special activities that help draw others to play with the child, and give positive attention. Both the older and younger students benefit.

Virtual option: Older students work with younger students virtually to help with an activity or learning task such as a reading buddy or math tutor, etc.

Everyone Shines (Elementary School) in-person and virtual

Everyone Shines is a way to let every student identify their strengths by drawing or writing their attributes on a tin foil star (made with cardboard and aluminum foil). Students use a school photo, or teachers can take a snapshot of the students and paste them along with the students' strengths on the stars which can be hung with strings from the ceiling or placed on a bulletin board.

Virtual option: On photos of their students, teachers write something kind or about a student's strength and post them on a virtual wall.

Generosity and Kindness Abound (all grades) in-person and virtual

Ask students to track all the little kindnesses they do each day, week, month, or school year. Remind them to include those things they do at home, in their community, with their social media, etc. Turn these lists in periodically and create a wall of kindness, either virtually or physically on a wall at school for everyone to see. Start a Gratitude Challenge where students write down or draw one thing they are grateful for daily for a period of time. Create a virtual wall of all gratitudes the students share on the district or school website (using only student initials). This way, students consider what they can do that makes a difference and to find good regardless of what is happening.

Caught You Doing Something Good (all grades) in-person and virtual

Students are encouraged to be "kind." When their teachers and staff notice a good deed or kind treatment that students give to others, staff write down and post what they saw on a dedicated wall.

Virtual option: Teacher creates a virtual wall of kindness recognizing students for good deeds and acts of generosity. This can be noticed in classroom behavior, emails, texts, help offered to each other, etc.

Friends Through Photos (all grades) in-person and virtual

Teachers choose a student(s) who is not connecting. The students are instructed to find and take pictures using digital cameras, IPADS, or phone of as many students in the school as they can find in a variety of activities. The students create a photo wall collage with pictures so that all students see themselves through someone else's lens. These are great collected and displayed over the school year and then sent with students to their next schools. Teachers should make sure that all students from class are represented.

Virtual option: Pictures of students may be taken during virtual class time and then a collage is created. Or the student doing this might ask every student for permission to take a screen shot during a class or activity or ask them to send a picture doing a healthy activity.

Face-to-Face (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Students create a class book by interviewing each other (not someone they know well) and ask things like: Where else have you lived? How many siblings do you have? What class(es) do you like? Dislike? What are your hobbies/pastimes? Where is your favorite place? What is your favorite music/band/group? Color? Food? Tell about a favorite vacation, pet, family member, tv show, movie. They must sit with each other to find the answers. The goal is to get as many other students' information as possible. This can be done with a hard copy print out or via a social media outlet or virtual classroom that is monitored by teachers.

Hands across the School (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Make a wall or a border around the school or down a hallway with every student's handprint. Let them choose a color, paint their hand, and "print" on this common wall. Students might sign their hand after the paint is dry or post digital pictures of the students on their handprint. As new students come into the school, invite them to "put their print" on the school.

Virtual option: Students put their name on the palm of their hand. Then, all students hold up their completed hand close to the computer camera, and the teacher takes a screen shot of all of the hands together, prints them off, physically makes a border of them around a school hallway, and shares the finished border in a video with the class.

Trusted Adults (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Younger students can draw a picture of someone who is a trusted adult to them (someone they would go to if they needed help for themselves or others). Make sure students put their own name in a corner of the front paper so others know who named that trusted adult and sees that that adult could possibly be a trusted adult for them too. Older students can take a picture of themselves with their trusted adult and send it to the teacher. The teacher will put them into a collage either on site or virtually.

School Year DVD or Shared Link (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

A group of students volunteer to catch ALL students on video. These videos are edited adding the year's popular music and comments from teachers and staff. They are produced by the end of the year in a shareable format. This can also be a fun addition to a year-end assembly. They can be used later at graduation. Schools need access to video-editing software or may need to enlist a community member to oversee the project.

Connection Groups (middle and high school) *in-person or virtual*

Assign students to groups of four to six students. Do some team building activities and let students know they are "backs" for each other as they have each other's back. If anyone from the group is absent, students take turns calling or texting to "check on" the absent student. They can offer to help the student catch up homework, to locate class

notes or just to let the person know that he or she was missed. Change group members periodically.

Newcomers Club (middle and high School) *in-person*

Pick students who usually do not receive much recognition but who are trustworthy and ask them to take a new student around the school. Have the student meet the newcomer, take them to the locker, cafeteria, and gym, and to each classroom right before the class starts. Ask the student to introduce the newcomer to the teacher, to take the newcomer to break and lunch and to introduce them to other students who might have similar interests. (You will need to get this approved and have hall passes ready to go.) This works by getting staff on board and by letting the student ambassador leave a couple of minutes early to meet the new student and to arrive a couple of minutes late to each class. Because students do this activity only once or twice, the classroom is not seriously impacted. In addition, hold a bi-monthly Newcomers' Meet to find out how new students are doing and to give them a chance to meet each other if they are not connecting.

Note: This can easily be adapted for elementary school students and have older youth shadow a younger newcomer as their Older Buddy or Peer Pal.

Very Important Person (VIP) of ... (middle and high School) *in-person*

Enlist the student council, club or team members, or cheerleaders. Ask them to choose a student who hasn't been to a game or school activity. They invite that student to be the VIP of an upcoming event. The person can be mascot for the activity, wear a crown of (school) colors, receive a free ticket to the activity or treats there, or any other means of being made to feel special.

Class Day (middle and high School) *in-person and virtual*

School staff or clubs sponsor sign up to "host" a school event or activity. At the event, class members receive free hotdogs or popcorn, have their picture taken as a group, maybe get free access to the event, and so on. Post the pictures with the names of the groups. Challenge each other to see who can get the most people in their group there, such as the sophomore class against the freshman class. This has the added advantage of boosting attendance at activities and getting students interested in what is happening at school.

Virtual option: Students can introduce a classmate from a younger grade to a favorite teacher or share an activity/class they enjoyed from their current grade or challenge the younger class to a generosity or thankfulness challenge.

Lock-In (middle and high School) *in-person*

Have a lock-in event at school by inviting students to stay overnight on a weekend. This is especially good for middle school when a new grade level is coming in or high school to welcome ninth graders. Have some team building activities to help everyone feel comfortable. Then use classrooms to offer different types of events, including an arts and crafts room, food rooms, different types of movies, such as a comedy movie room

and an action movie room, and so on. Ask parents and teachers to volunteer to run the events and be sure to have much supervision, especially during the “sleeping time.” Make rules clear ahead so that everyone is clear about acceptable behavior. Ask local merchants to donate food, drinks, craft supplies, etc. for the students. Have a pickup time scheduled for the next morning. Be sure to take plenty of pictures to post on the bulletin board on Monday or create a video to share at the end of the year.

Thank You To...For...From... (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Thank you to...for... from...is a bulletin board on which students post a “thank you” to another student or school person who did something “nice” for them. This can be left up for a quarter or a semester so that parents have a chance to see the thank you’s.

Virtual option: Thank you’s are shared by email and collected to post on a virtual format such as the school’s webpage or class page.

Mix-it-up-Lunch (all grades) *in-person*

Once a month (or week) students eat with other students whom they have not sat with before. Students each receive a questionnaire and ask each other questions. In English or reading, they can write a brief biography of their new friend and post for all to read. Biographies can be collected into “books” to share at the end of the year. Pictures can be added to each biography. Students can also write up their appraisal of the project and include as afterword in the book. These must be screened and edited.

Movie Club (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Select age-appropriate, well-liked movies that are district approved. Enlist teachers to stay in their rooms at lunch and invite students to bring their lunch and watch a movie over a couple of weeks during the lunch period. Ask teachers to give invitations to students, especially those who need connection or something to do during lunch. This needs to be done in a discreet way, such as, “Today the Movie Club is showing, which you might like.” Students may choose appropriate movies after the club is established. Perhaps, a follow up activity might be to have students write reviews of the movies to post in the library or school newspaper. Post the picture of the reviewer and a brief biography of them.

Virtual option: Set up a movie night or lunch time viewing party online. See follow up activities above.

Congratulation Gauntlet (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

When students reach a milestone or achieve something to be proud of, staff — with hands extended — stand on both sides of the hall as students leave for the day, and students slap their hands or give high fives. All students feel part of the celebration.

Virtual option: Plan a virtual celebration time or drive-by parade where students are recognized with music, applause, confetti, etc.

Game Club (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Game Club meets two or three lunch hours a week with a teacher or parent volunteer. Students can join in playing a game (ask parents or PTA to donate these). This is a way for students to be part of something at lunch to get to know other students. In good weather, these can be games outside, such as kick ball, softball, or soccer. Just have vests to differentiate one team from another. Players do not choose up teams.

Virtual option: Create game rooms through virtual classrooms. Students can each have a game table set up such as checkers, chess, Monopoly, etc. and play each other virtually. See online ideas for team board games.

Discussion Group (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Invite students to listen to community speakers a couple of times per month. Students bring their lunch and hear experts on a variety of topics. The next day students meet to discuss their ideas related to the topic. This can be connected to academic classes like English, social studies, history, etc.

Virtual option: Invite a community speaker to virtually share their area of expertise with the class. Students can raise hands and use chat to ask questions. These can be local experts or from national organizations. Students may write questions in advance.

Hobby/Skill Share (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Staff and students share a hobby or two with students once a week at lunch or feature a teacher each week. Some hobbies might include fly fishing, quilting, knitting, painting, etc. Students bring their lunches and sit around and learn a new skill while meeting new people who are interested in learning the same skill.

Virtual option: Staff or students demonstrate a hobby or skill virtually to students who are prepared to follow steps and practice the new skill.

Walking Club (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Meet with students two or three times per week to walk outside (or in the gym if it is cold). Students set a goal of walking so many steps or miles. Students can track steps using phone apps. This activity can be tied to a fund-raiser or to break some type of record or to set a challenge against a neighboring school. As it is easy to walk and talk, students should be able to make friends while becoming physically fit. **Ensure no student walks alone.**

Virtual option: Have students start a walking journal where they log their daily walking time. Younger students might have fun by taking a Flat Stanley version of themselves on their walks and they can send photos of places they have walked to the teacher and class. Older students can take a video of their walk or take selfies at different locations on their walks and then share with the teacher or classmates. They can also have a walk app to keep track of progress.

Life Gets Better Project (all grades) *In-person or virtual*

Teachers/staff share with their students about times they were treated unfairly or had a tough time. They tell students how they managed to deal with their situations (resiliency) and encourage students to reach out if they are having troubles of their own or are concerned for someone else. This can be a writing project in which students share a tough time and share what helped them to get through, but be sure to read **all** of the students' papers and report any concerns to the school counselor or administrator or the Department of Health and Welfare. The final message is life does get better.

Take a Kid On (all grades) - For Staff Only *In-person or virtual*

Staff members each pick a student or two whom they feel has difficulty fitting in. Discuss which student(s) will be selected so that many students might receive some extra attention. During the year, without the students' knowledge, staff members do nice things for the student each school day. They might be sure the student is given some special errand, like taking a note to the office, or let the students know that they are proud of them for turning in all their work or not being tardy. They might drop a treat into their locker or arrange for the office to give them a ticket to a school activity.

Virtual option: Teachers can Take a Kid On virtually by asking students for technical assistance during virtual lessons by managing the chat, picking and running the music, etc. They can send encouraging cards or have them choose some funny YouTube videos to share with the class.

Guinness Book of Records (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Find a record that could be broken or ask students to think of a project that no one has done. Check www.guinnessworldrecords.com to find a feasible project. Enlist parents and community members to work with students on the project. When going for a record, media — including Guinness — will probably be involved. Some ideas: the biggest number of people to jump at the same time, the most people to hold hands, the longest chain of Lifesaver candies, the most balloons (blown up by students) in a gym, etc. This might turn into a fund-raiser or a corporation might like to provide the balloons or to be a sponsor. The key is that all students must help to achieve record status. This might even be directed toward a goal of the school —no tardies, most students with perfect attendance, most students working on a painting project, etc.

Virtual option: Find an activity through Guinness World Records that can be done virtually. Students can record themselves doing the challenge. They can collectively combine videos, or all do the activity at the same time. Guinness will advise how to best document this. If feasible, students can meet in-person at a large area such as an Optimist Field or park and participate in the challenge while still being safely, physically distanced during the pandemic.

Deeds Club (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Ask students to meet once a week at lunch to work on a project that will make the school or the community better. Students commit to carrying out a part of the project. School projects might include making sure everyone has a friend at lunch, planting

flowers in the fall for spring, volunteering to show people around, creating a community garden, sending thank you cards to staff, or crocheting/knitting baby blankets/caps for the local hospital. For some community ideas consider what activities the community is doing and enlist the support of the organizations involved. Some ideas include Valentines for Vets, Paint the Town, Rake Up for Elders, etc.

Virtual option: Brainstorm activities students can do while still being safe and have them log their activity and time or share photos of themselves doing the act of service. Perhaps become pen pals with or make cards for elderly in nursing homes, retirement facilities, or veterans. Some other activities may be to collect reading materials for those who are homebound; create a video/Zoom of up-beat music to share with those who are alone; play music outside a care facility on the front lawn where residents can open a window to hear; offer to mow lawns; take out and put back trash cans of neighbors; help someone with technology virtually; do chores at home for family members; leave baked goods on porches, etc.

Community Service Club (all grades) *in-person and virtual*

Ask a group like Kiwanis Club to come in once a month and set up community activities students can do (parent permission and volunteers needed). This might include writing cards to veterans, planting flowers around the school or a retirement facility, helping to raise money for an animal shelter, or working on a food drive. Have students keep logs of the hours they put in volunteering. Honor these students at the end of year assembly and offer letters for their college.

Virtual option: Invite speakers or a club to talk to the class virtually and set up safe activities to support the community needs. Decide how to distance safely while carrying out activities.

From Sources of Strength for educators to help their students:

https://sourcesofstrength.org/wp-content/uploads/Teacher_Online-Classroom-Focus.pdf

20 Tips for Teens From Beyond Differences <https://www.beyonddifferences.org/>

What Helps Us document from Idaho Lives Project.

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