Relationship-Building Activities

# Why incorporate routine relationship-building activities into tutoring?

Strong relationships are fundamental to students' success with tutoring. The more students feel safe, supported, and that they have a personal connection with their tutor, the more impactful the sessions will be. At the outset, relationship-building activities help tutors **get to know their students** and **create a safe, positive learning environment.** Building them into routine tutoring sessions helps tutors **keep their knowledge of students alive and current.**

## Creating a Safe, Positive Learning Environment

Social activities like talking, sharing, laughing, and listening help us bond with others. These bonds create a feeling of safety in a relationship. [When students feel](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oBLNJ_0-A8yp8g0jqL2BbxJmPF4o98VdyTuB4-vICmA/view) connected with their tutor, they are more likely to participate, ask questions, and attempt new skills.

* Praise effort, *not* outcomes.
	+ **For example:** “When you complete all the practice problems, I noticed you got a 100% on your exit ticket. All that practice you did really helped you master new skills — great work!”
* Model the behaviors and social skills you want to see from your students.
	+ Explain the behaviors you are modeling; if you are feeling frustrated, tell students how you are feeling in a productive way as a model for them when they encounter frustrations in their own work.
	+ **For example:** “I want to be honest with you right now. I’m feeling a little bit frustrated because I asked the group to work on these questions independently but I’m hearing a lot of chatter. Maybe I wasn’t clear, so I’m going to ask that we pause so I can explain these directions again. Feel free to let me know if you have questions about what we’re doing when I’m finished explaining.”
* Remain calm and de-escalate when students emotionally overreact.
	+ Provide the space and time needed for students to settle down.
	+ Set an example for students; demonstrate in your own actions how they can productively express themselves.
	+ Build trust that you value and care about them no matter what, and overreactions will decrease over time.
	+ **For example:** “I’m getting the sense that you’re feeling overwhelmed right now. Why don’t you take a few minutes to grab a drink and then maybe we can talk about how you’re feeling.”

## Keeping Knowledge of Students Alive and Current

By continuing to ask students about their lives and interests, tutors can [make relevant connections in content planning](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gclCmWmQCF_uRT-bNF8B5gPmFcpJmR9E4Gb3bzV8Auk/view).

* Devote the beginning of *every* tutoring session to relationship-building games, icebreakers, and check-ins. These do not have to be more than a couple of minutes, but make it clear you are invested in getting to know each student as an individual.
* Use knowledge of student interests to individualize instruction by connecting their interests to new material.
* Ask students to share what they know about a topic to build confidence and explore new concepts.



# Example Relationship-Building Activities

## “Getting to Know You” Conversation Question Bank[[1]](#footnote-0)

Tutors can use the list of sample questions below to guide their own questions during one-on-one chats with students.

### Students’ Social Lives

* + What do you do for fun outside of school?
	+ What are your favorite things to do with friends?
	+ Do you prefer working together, or competing?
	+ When you and your friends are chatting, what languages do you speak together?
	+ What do you think you’re best at?
	+ Are you part of any teams, clubs, or groups?
	+ What hobbies are you most interested in?
	+ What do you spend a lot of time thinking about?
	+ Who do you look up to and ask for advice?

### Students’ Family Lives

* + Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
	+ What kinds of responsibilities do you have to your family?
	+ What kinds of activities do you and your family do together?
	+ What do your folks want you to be when you grow up?
	+ What do your folks think is important to know and be able to do?
	+ What do your folks do for work?
	+ What was school like for your folks when they were growing up?
	+ Did your folks grow up here? If not, where did they grow up, and when did they move here?
	+ Did you and your family move recently? Where did you live before here?
	+ What languages do you and your family speak at home?

### Language & Literacy

* + What language do your folks use to text you? What about for texting with extended family?
	+ Do you have books, newspapers, magazines, or religious texts at home? Who usually reads them?
	+ Does anyone in your family write lists for organizing and remembering things?

### Math & Science

* + Do you deal with money day-to-day? What are some situations where you do math with money?
	+ Does anyone in your family build or repair things? How did they learn those skills?
	+ Does anyone in your family do sewing or cooking that requires measuring things with precision?

### Art & Culture

* + Do you (or another family member) play a musical instrument? What instrument?
	+ What are your favorite musical artists and genres?
	+ What genres of music do you hear a lot around your community?
	+ Do you have any favorite local artists (any kind, not just music)? What kind of art do they make?
	+ What interesting places have you visited around the city?

## “Who Am I?” Activity

This activity is one example of a creative way for students to define and represent aspects of themselves through presentations, drawings, poems, etc.

* Tutors can use an activity like this during one of their first sessions with students. Tutors should be encouraged to complete the activity as well.
* See example [template](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-yX4B-u2l3eoGW9TN4-sMg4i7OAEjPOlmG2FkPHFQlA/edit)
	+ Be mindful of what you are expecting students to share. Consider suggesting a norm where students may opt out of sharing personal information, or may choose amongst several options.

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1. *Adapted and updated from: Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach. Albany: State University of New York Press.* [↑](#footnote-ref-0)