



36 QUESTIONS TO INCREASE CONNECTEDNESS AT SCHOOL

"If you understand each other, you will be kind to each other."

—John Steinbeck

OVERVIEW

Ask and respond to two questions with a colleague to build a sense of connection at school.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the year
- Before class, during prep time, during lunch, at the end of a school day
- When you are feeling isolated from your colleagues
- Before or during a staff meeting

TIME REQUIRED

- 10-15 minutes

LEVEL

- Adult

MATERIALS

- Selected questions from the list of 36 questions
- A conversation partner

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

You will:

- Cultivate a sense of connection with a colleague by asking, listening, and responding to two or more questions together

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a few deep breaths.

Prepare yourself to listen carefully to your partner without anticipating your own response to a question or questions.

If you are leading this practice with a group, consider how the participants might respond. How can you prepare yourself to model and experience a sense of connectedness to your colleagues?

INSTRUCTIONS

Identify someone with whom you'd like to connect at school. It could be someone you know well or someone you're just getting to know. (Although this exercise has a reputation for making people [fall in love](#), it is actually [useful for anyone](#) you want to get to know better, including family members, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues.) Before answering these questions, make sure both you and your partner are comfortable with sharing personal thoughts and feelings with each other.

- Choose two questions from Set I below.
- If you are leading a group in this exercise, you might choose the questions ahead of time.
- If you have more time (and for the exercise to be more effective), choose more questions.
- Take turns asking one another the questions. Each person should answer each question, but in an alternating order, so that a different person goes first each time.
- If time permits, choose more questions to ask each other from Set I, Set II, or Set III. (Note: Each set of questions is designed to be more probing than the previous one.)

SET 1

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?
3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?
4. What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?
5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
6. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
11. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

SET 2

13. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?
14. Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?
15. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
16. What do you value most in a friendship?
17. What is your most treasured memory?
18. What is your most terrible memory?
19. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
20. What does friendship mean to you?
21. What roles do love and affection play in your life?
22. Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.
23. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?
24. How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?

SET 3

25. Make three true "we" statements each. For instance, "We are both in this room feeling..."
26. Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share..."
27. If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.
28. Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.
29. Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.
30. When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
31. Tell your partner something that you like about them (already).
32. What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
33. If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?

34. Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
35. Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
36. Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

EXTENSIONS

You can try this practice with different colleagues you want to develop a connection with—but if your answers start to feel routine, consider making up your own list of questions that become increasingly more personal.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

What was it like to reveal personal information about yourself to your colleagues? Do you feel more connected to your colleagues now?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Building relationships with colleagues at school can be challenging—especially when there is little time to move beyond day-to-day small talk. One way to overcome these barriers is by engaging in “reciprocal self-disclosure”—to reveal increasingly personal information about yourself to another person, as they do the same with you. [Research](#) suggests that spending just 45 minutes engaging in self-disclosure with someone can dramatically increase feelings of connection between you.

Pairs of [study participants](#) who asked one another the “36 Questions” reported a greater increase in feelings of interpersonal closeness or connection than pairs instructed to ask one another 36 superficial questions instead. In fact, pairs who answered the “36 Questions,” felt more connected regardless of whether they shared certain core beliefs and attitudes, or whether they expected the exercise to work in the first place.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Feeling connected to others is considered to be a fundamental psychological need, so it's important for teachers to experience a sense of connectedness at school—just as much as students. In fact, [studies](#) indicate that teachers' view of their school climate can be linked to their job satisfaction and self-efficacy in the classroom. When teachers feel connected to their colleagues and good about their work, they are more likely to reach out to their students.

In other words, creating a sense of connectedness among staff may have a school-wide ripple effect. Research tells us that a school's [organizational structure and practices](#) can influence adult connections with students (and their sense of school belonging). When students feel connected to their teachers, they report a greater sense of emotional well-being, which can ultimately affect their engagement with others as well as their [academic achievement](#).

SOURCE

Source: [Arthur Aron, Ph.D.](#), Stony Brook University