OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME
VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING
BEST PRACTICES

Boston After School & Beyond

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF BOSTON

pear

BEFORE PROGRAMMING

- **TECHNOLOGY**
  - Determine the best virtual platform for your context (Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc.)
    - If applicable, assign one staff member to be the tech point-person
  - Familiarize yourself with your chosen virtual platform
    - Investigate its features (reactions, raise hand, breakout rooms, annotate, polls, etc.)
  - Consider using these interactive tools
  - Communicate any tech platform information (links, passwords) to key stakeholders
  - Communicate using multiple touch points (One Call, Talking Points, Email, Text, Remind app)
  - Always come to class with charged devices & test your technology before each class!

- **PREPARATION & PLANNING**

  Begin with the end in mind! Determine your year-long learning goals - what do you want students to be capable of doing/being as a result of your programming? Constantly ensure your activities aim to help students accomplish those learning goals- & more!

  - Use (or create your own) lesson plan template that includes the theme or skill for that day
  - Keep activity explanations short, digestible, & exciting
    - Script out your engaging activity instructions into a step-by-step list
    - Use visual cues & signage for visual learners
  - Make day-of communication to confirm attendees have all relevant info
  - Ensure all your learners are being engaged
  - Consider offering incentives for participation, logging in on time, etc. (check out page 23)
  - Consider developing supply kits that can be sent home to increase hands-on learning
  - If applicable, build a strong, consistent bridge with your school partner: maintain regular communication & expectations

- **SETTING THE TONE**
  - Create a welcoming online learning community (BPS)
  - Use gender-inclusive language, person-first language, & captions
  - Create, foster, & maintain community guidelines & consider involving student voice
  - Model skills, activities, & expectations for your students
    - Build time into your lesson plan to demonstrate
  - Provide opportunities to matter: create & assign roles (timekeeper, chat monitor, norms keeper, etc)

DURING PROGRAMMING (CASEL'S SEL 3 SIGNATURE PRACTICES STRUCTURE)

Safety first: students can't engage & learn if they don't feel safe!
Remember, consistent rituals & routines = foundation for safety

- **WELCOMING INCLUSION ACTIVITY**
  - Ritualize giving students a safe space to accurately describe a full range of emotions (use mood meters!)
  - Provide opportunity for all to be "heard" (exercise voice, utilize chat feature, use interactive tools) to create a sense of belonging & ground each other in the present
  - Celebrate lived experiences! Allow structured space for students to tell their stories (ex. dedication ritual)

- **ENGAGING STRATEGIES**
  - Make it culturally responsive ("Gamify" it, Make it Social, "Storify" it)
  - Make your time together *fun!*
    - Costumes, theme days, virtual field trips, cooking classes, storytelling
    - Host friendly competition
      - Online boardgames
  - Get moving!
    - Check out pages 14&15
    - Movement & theatre activities
  - Create opportunities for students to interact with each other
  - Allow students to tap into creativity (writing, drawing, songwriting, making video or social media content)
  - Use open-ended prompts
  - Embrace tangents or going off-topic rather than making students compartmentalize
  - Engage the community: inviting guest speakers broadens horizons & allows students to take charge of their learning

- **OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE [ACTIVITY]**
  - Leave the group on an optimistic note: feeling connected, productive & inclined to return!
  - Respect & elevate the diversity & varied lived experiences of the entire group
  - Ensure that everyone's voice is heard orally, in writing, or using other creative modalities

AFTER PROGRAMMING

- **ADULT REFLECTION**
  - Reflection tool: did programming today meet my students' social & emotional needs?
  - Ask: "Did I meet the learning objectives I stated in my lesson plan?"
  - Measure the vibe: what could have gone better? What went really well?

- **STUDENT FEEDBACK**
  - Consider making 1-on-1 wellness checks a part of your routine or community guidelines
  - Lean into *why* each student comes to your program - how does student motivation influence your culture & climate?
  - Engage in quick feedback-gathering to know if students enjoyed a particular activity (ex. Fist-to-5; Show me an Emoji; What's your Weather Pattern, or prompts like "do a dance move to describe how you feel after that activity?" etc.)
  - Incorporate longer surveys to understand what students want more of & what they think could be better

- **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**
  - Always lead with communication that is culturally-sensitive
  - Encourage & invite parents to attend virtual programming (ex. movie night, virtual field trips, career day, etc.)
  - Administer annual survey to families (parent/guardians) & incorporate feedback data into your continuous improvement plan