

CREATING POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE SPACES FOR ADULT LEARNING

Highly engaging, effective and purposeful meetings and professional learning experiences are created using three key social and emotional learning (SEL) practices:



Even if you are using these three SEL practices for the first time, they can be effective. When they are carefully chosen, effectively facilitated, and thoughtfully debriefed, SEL practices create a solid foundation of safety, consistency and joy in adult learning environments. These signature practices create conditions for growth and learning across all five SEL competencies while using culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Why are the three signature practices important?

- Adults who walk into our meetings after a day, a week or a lifetime of difficult situations need calming, centering and focusing routines in order to participate fully.
- Balancing routines and rituals allows us to move with confidence through our work days while navigating multiple competing demands on our time, energy and attention. These routines provide a solid foundation for our most overextended participants to be engaged as learners and contributors.
- In order for the learning to be purposeful and applicable, adults need direct, concrete opportunities to use what they have learned, and need structures that promote self-direction.
- Productivity and creative thinking result only when our basic human needs have been met and our minds are engaged and available.

WELCOMING RITUAL

Activities for Inclusion

Ritual openings establish safety and predictability, support contribution by all voices, set norms for respectful listening, and allow people to connect with one another creating a sense of belonging.

To be successful they should be:

- Carefully chosen
- Connected to the work of the day
- Engagingly facilitated
- Thoughtfully debriefed

Examples

Community Building

Using an open-ended question (e.g., from the Circle a Day cards), build community in a quick and lively way. Each participant shares their response with a partner. After sharing, ask for 2-3 comments from the whole group.

Begin with a sentence starter:

- “A success I recently had...”
- “One thing that’s new about...”
- “One norm I will hold today is...”

ENGAGING PRACTICES

Sense Making & “Brain Breaks”

Adults want to make their own meaning and have fun. Engaging practices are brain compatible strategies that can foster:

Relationships:

- cultural humility • responsiveness
- empowerment • collaboration

These practices can also be opportunities for brain breaks that provide a space for integrating new information into long-term memory.

Examples

Think Time:

30-90 seconds of silent think time before speaking, sharing.

Turn To Your Partner:

Sharing and listening to make sense of new input.

Think-Ink-Pair-Share:

Generating ideas and deepening understanding.

Brain Break/Stand and Stretch:

Refresh and reset the brain.

Opportunities for Interaction:

Cultivate practices that involve interactions in partnerships, triads, small groups and as a whole group.

OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE

Reflections and Looking Forward

Adult learning occurs when behavior changes. End each meeting or professional learning by having participants reflect on and then name something that helps them leave on an optimistic note. This provides positive closure, reinforces the topic, and creates momentum towards taking action.

Examples

“What are my next steps?”

“What’s the next conversation I’m going to have about this and with whom?”

“Who do I want to connect with about this topic?”

“A word or phrase that reflects how I feel about moving forward with this...”

“Offer an appreciation for someone in the room...”