

Tips to Connect with Students

Depending on what grade you're teaching, connecting with the kids could look different.

What to expect:



Kindergarten

Students are eager to participate and can easily get off topic. They learn well through stories and cooperative games.

I love you!
When are you coming back?

Did you know that I have a dog?

I'll raise my hand to answer your question even if I have no idea what you asked.

Third Grade
Students value responsibility and independence, but they need plenty of time to process. Students need clear, specific instructions before working on independent or small group activities.



Wait, what are we doing again?

Can I pass that out?



Fifth Grade

Social structures become increasingly important to students at this age, and they learn to appreciate humor and sarcasm. They become self-conscious and may be unwilling to take risks in the classroom.

Please don't make me share with the whole class.

Can I work with a partner?

Middle School
This age group (11–14 yrs old) can vary widely in emotional and physical maturity, and students may exhibit a wide range of behaviors. Students make connections based on personal interests and one-on-one conversations. Students respond well to authenticity and real world examples.



I know more than you think I might about this—ask me about it!

Don't single me out; I embarrass easily.

Have me explain my reasoning before you tell me I'm wrong.



High School

This age group (15–18) can feel pressure to make big choices about their future. They can flip between confident and concerned as they sort through all of the scenarios they might face. Many high school students are forming their work and consumer experience and can draw from these examples when they engage with Junior Achievement. They respond well to respect and coaching.

I have a job. I have a plan. How does my experience fit with this?

I wonder what I'll be doing in the future?

How do I find my way?

1 Introduce yourself.

Plan an introduction or ice-breaker game to introduce yourself. It helps build a connection and makes students want to engage.

Virtual Alternative: Look into the camera and smile, or have a fun virtual background that introduces you.

2 Set a positive tone.

Say, “I’m excited that I get to spend the day with you.”

Share a story about your time in middle school. Be quirky!

Virtual Alternative: Give a tour of your home office.

3 State learning objectives.

Remember: Students need to know why the content is relevant and how they will use it in real life. Relating the content to your own life makes it more relatable for students.

Virtual Alternative: Put objectives on the screen and refer back to them throughout your session.

4 Determine prior knowledge.

Say, “We are going to talk about entrepreneurship. What do you already know?”

Virtual Alternative: Open a shared document where everyone can post ideas or create a poll.

5 Use students’ names.

Try your best to learn as many names as quickly as possible.

Virtual Alternative: Ask students to share their name before speaking, make extra-large name tags, or type their names.

6 Geek out!

Do not be afraid to go down the rabbit trail with a kid by discussing a topic that interests them.

Virtual Alternative: Share a photo or an object that brings your point to life.

7 Use positive reinforcement.

Say, “Wow, team 3 is working really hard together, and they have a great plan in place for their presentation.” You have praised the high-performing group and reminded the less engaged teams what you expect.

Virtual Alternative: Use emojis, like thumbs-up, in the chat to give positive validation.

8 Try fun attention-getters.

- “If you can hear me, clap once.” Students clap once
- “Marco!”
Students say “Polo!”
- “I need your voices off and your eyes on me in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1”

1

Preparation is key.

Make sure that you know the content inside and out before you begin presenting.

Virtual Alternative: Do you have the correct meeting link? Have you downloaded the remote video software? Are your slides ready?

2

Expect respect.

Try not to talk over students, and students should not interrupt you. If things are off: stop, wait, and reset.

Virtual Alternative: Educators can send a private message in the chat to you or a student.

3

When giving directions, remind students how the activity pertains to the learning objective.

Say, “Next, we will explore some jobs so that you can see how they play an important role in supporting the community.”

4

Give immediate and clear feedback.

Encourage positive behavior through clear and direct feedback. This helps to keep students on task and can also highlight negative behavior.

Virtual Alternative: Use a computer sound effect (like clapping or trumpets) for fun.

5

Group your instructions into three steps.

Say, “First, do A. Then, do B. Finally, do C. Then, look to me for the next instructions.”

Virtual Alternative: Type step-by-step instructions on a slide or in the chat. Use a timer to regroup.

6

Ask a student to repeat the instructions.

Say, “OK, now who can remind everyone what the three steps are?”

7

If students seem unsure, try rephrasing your instructions.

Virtual Alternative: If students struggle with instructions, type them into a slide and share your screen.

8

Use modeling to ensure instructions are understood.

Give instructions, and follow them up with a demonstration to the class.

Virtual Alternative: You can speak, type, or show.

9

Press reset.

If things do not quite go as planned, it is OK to stop and start over. Reset groups and games so that everyone is clear on what needs to be done.