



THE OJAI FOUNDATION'S
Council In Schools

Inspiring engaged, compassionate school communities

Check-In Councils Grades K – 12

Summary

A “check-in” is an important and frequently used type of council that gives students an opportunity to pause, “check in” with themselves and the group, and express what they are feeling or experiencing in the present moment or recent past. It offers teachers and students a quick way to connect to the realities and priorities of their lives, and can help settle the group so members are more able to listen deeply to one another.

A check-in can be done as a “stand-alone” council any time and can be completed in 5 to 10 minutes. A check-in can also be used as a lead-in to a full story round based either on a pre-determined prompt or a prompt the facilitator creates in the moment by listening for “hot” or “common” topics that arise in the check-in (this is often referred to as the facilitator “reading the field”) and offer an opportunity for deeper exploration.

Note: At the beginning stages of council practice, the facilitator should be the first to check in so as to model, and then invite students to go around the circle. Some of these may take a little practice! All of them can be repeated and used as often as desired. Have fun. Check-ins can be done with or without a talking piece. Even though check-in's are brief, the talking piece is a concrete reminder about listening and speaking from the heart.

Objectives

- Bring students into the present by giving them an opportunity to share current feelings and experiences
- Validate students' feelings and enhance self-esteem by being listened to about what matters personally to them
- Help the teacher identify and assess issues that may be current for students and that require further attention in or out of class

There are many ways of checking in. The following are three examples:

1. Weather Report

Ask students to respond briefly. “How are you doing today? What’s your weather report at this moment...right now?”

If this is the first time, you could begin by asking students to name different types of weather they’ve heard on the news. For example:

- Sunny skies, 85 degrees
- Scattered clouds with a chance of rain
- Overcast with temperature falling
- Tornado warning
- Clear skies with temperatures reaching 100 or more
- Giant hailstorm
- Hurricane

This is also a fun way to teach weather conditions to students. Use visuals!

2. Roses and Thorns (or High-Low or Celebration-Challenge)

A rose is a beautiful flower with a heavenly scent...and every rose bush is covered in mean and nasty thorns. Let’s take a few minutes to share one rose and one thorn from the past week (or past 24 hours or weekend or school break).

When starting a check-in, explain that we are asking for brief reports. You might suggest they offer one or two sentences for each one. It is important for students to understand this is not intended to be a recap of the week with lots of details, rather an invitation to reflect and offer a thoughtful response. Explain and then model that we’re inviting responses that reflect a feeling, an important event, something exciting/boring, easy/hard, things that are going well or not going well. For example: “My rose was seeing my new puppy actually return the ball to me for the first timer after I tossed it to her. My thorn was that my neighbor whose porch light shines into my bedroom window put in an even brighter bulb.”

3. Gesture Check-In

- **Pose or Movement**
Strike a pose or make a movement that reflects how you’re feeling at the moment. For example, a yawn with the stretch of the arms.

- **Pose or Movement with Sound**
Strike a pose or make a movement and add a sound that reflects how you're feeling at this moment. For example a shout with leap into the air.
- **Pose or Movement and Mirroring (Sound or no Sound)**
Strike a pose or make a movement and add a sound if you wish that reflects how you're feeling at this moment. Watch carefully because we are going to mirror back what we see (and hear).

When teaching mirroring to students, instruct them to watch (and listen) carefully to exactly how the person is making their gesture (and sound). After the gesture is complete, all students in the circle will, at the same time, repeat the gesture (and sound) as closely as possible.

We encourage you to feel free to amend this lesson in any ways that feel more natural to you!

These are council classics contributed by many facilitators; edited by Chris Elder.