



## **KEEPING YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY SAFE DURING DISTANCE LEARNING A PRACTICAL GUIDE**

As school leaders, your staff and your school community look to you for guidance and support. It's exactly what they need right now. We know that establishing school-wide distance learning programs, virtually overnight, is an incredible feat. You and your staff should be very proud. For many students and their families, your online learning initiatives are the most normal and the most calming part of their day.

The reality, however, is that distance learning creates circumstances that could impact student safety and the safety of the school community. Some teachers may find themselves in unfamiliar situations that test their judgment and sense of boundaries. Others may not be aware of how the conventions that traditionally govern their actions should be transposed from a physical setting to a virtual one. And while we may not want to consider it, less honorable teachers may take advantage of decreased oversight for inappropriate purposes.

We are experts in developing policy and risk management practices designed to keep students and school communities safer. We have worked with independent schools across the nation helping them with everything from hiring and personnel practices to fieldtrip safety and crisis response and communication.

At this challenging time, we are pleased to provide this guide as a service to schools. These suggested leadership strategies will help provide oversight and continue the highest level of education and professionalism within your school. It also includes respectful language addressing online safety you can use to communicate with your staff and your parent community. During this unprecedented time, transparency between your school families, teachers and the school will be one of the keys to success and safety.

Above all, we are here for you. To help you confront these challenging issues, we would be pleased to have a confidential, no-cost discussion. Please call (425.654.6088) or email: [info@sosthreesixty.com](mailto:info@sosthreesixty.com) to arrange a conversation.

We extend our best wishes for the well-being of your entire school community.

Nicole Mann & Avery Mann, Co-Founders, SOS ThreeSixty, Inc.



# Leadership Guide for School Administrators

## **Continue to “Walk the Halls” of Your School and Be Visible & Accessible to Your Community**

Just as you walk the halls of your school to be seen by your community and be available for an impromptu conversation, be visible online. Make an appearance on your social media channels, as if you would at a school concert or play. Monitor channels for any questionable content and address it immediately. Attend online events where students and families will be participating. Pop on and comment so your community knows you are engaged. Create the same feeling of availability and leadership online that your community is accustomed to experiencing within the school.

## **Observe Online Classes in the Same Way You Would Sit in on a Class**

Support teachers with classroom observations and create professional development opportunities to engage you online as you do within the school. Observing distance learning will provide teachers additional support during this time. You will also be able to gauge how your students are doing and adjust any programs as needed.

## **Include Safety Items in Regular Staff Meetings**

Reinforce your safety policies during all staff meetings. Remind teaching staff to address any student issues and vulnerabilities with you and the counseling team and that they are not expected to resolve their students' problems.





# For Your Teachers

## A Guide to Safer Online Teaching



### **Dear Colleague:**

These are challenging times for all of us. We recognize the tremendous effort that it has taken to bring your curriculum online, and the entire school community is so appreciative of you. The positive relationships that you have created with your students will help them succeed. We recognize that this new approach presents different challenges and risks. Relationships with families and students will continue to evolve and there's potential that our established boundaries will be tested. Many who enjoy interaction with others may also feel lonely or vulnerable, and some students may look to their teachers for additional support and reassurance during this time. As with instruction within our classrooms, teachers are not expected or encouraged to go beyond a "reasonable" amount of support. Professional staff continue to be available to any students. "Virtual Boundaries" continue to be as important as in-person boundaries.

During this time, it is particularly important for teachers engaged in one-on-one electronic communications with students to be aware of appropriate "virtual" boundaries. This helps protect staff, students and the entire school community. Here are some tips to help assist you in navigating this uncharted territory.

### **Your Meaningful Connections with Students will Provide Calm During this Uncertain Time**

Seeing teachers online and in videos provides students a sense of continuity and calm. It is important to demonstrate to your students that you're still available to them and providing them with the educational experience they are used to. It may be tempting to try and establish a deeper connection with your students by offering them comfort - especially if they appear to be experiencing anxiety. Connect with students and keep conversations with them casual and in the same way you would in the classroom. Don't reveal personal information like where you live, your feelings or about the personal situation you're experiencing - or anything you would not ordinarily share. During recorded or live videos, be mindful of anything in the background that could be distracting. Strive for a generic background and keep it consistent. Focus your interactions on the educational content because that's the best that you have to offer.

### **Do Not Meet Up with Students During this Time**

Be aware that parents may reach out to you with the suggestion of meeting their children somewhere. They may think that meeting in a public park or a place where social distancing is possible is an appropriate way for their children to interact with you. While we all miss seeing each other in person, it's imperative that you do not see your students outside of the virtual school environment for both health and healthy boundary reasons. This includes both public places or tutoring them in their homes. Just as we do not approve tutoring or babysitting during normal circumstances, these same boundaries continue to exist now.

### **Keep Open Lines of Communication with Our Staff about Student Vulnerabilities**

Teachers are oftentimes the closest adults to students, and your previous understanding of their mental health issues may increase your concern for them now. You may feel that you want to check in individually with a student and/or their family, and a student may wish to tell you a secret about a feeling or emotion they are experiencing. While we are speaking to our students from our homes, we expect that you maintain the same structures and support mechanisms that we have in our school buildings. Promises should not be made to keep secrets. Communicate to the counselling team about any student vulnerabilities that concern you.



# For Your Teachers

## A Guide to Safer Online Teaching

### **Mandatory Reporting**

Because you will be communicating with students in their homes, you may have the opportunity to see interactions with adult family members or others that you do not usually observe. Our responsibility as mandatory reporters is still in effect, even as we operate outside of our school walls. If you think a child is being abused, neglected or harmed, you have the legal duty to report it. If you witness an interaction that you have difficulty understanding, please reach out to our counseling team to discuss it further.

### **Keeping Records of Student Interactions**

As we navigate through this time, we encourage our teachers to keep records of their teaching time. This will provide us with an opportunity to learn from our experiences. Especially when there are challenging interactions with students and/or families, please document the details including the date, time and subjects discussed. If you need to meet with students to discuss their individual projects, set up virtual office hours and record the schedule so all one-on-one communications are documented. Communicate these office hours through an email to all of your class parents/families. Office hours should be scheduled and time-limited. Ensure your records include objective language that is respectful and professional. Accurate records allow us to help protect our staff and students.

### **Safe Social Media Interactions**

Some students and families may look for comfort by increasing their online interactions with you. Please do not connect with students and families on your personal social media accounts, nor should you text them from your personal phone. Additionally, do not communicate individually with a student. If there are direct questions, be sure to include their parent(s) in the response or answer questions to the whole class if it is appropriate. Please use only your school email address to interact with students. While it may be tempting to respond to student and family emails outside of approved times, it could create a difficult precedent if students and families become used to interacting with you online at off times. For this reason, only email students from 8am-6pm.

### **We Are Here for You**

If you have any questions regarding an interaction you've had with a student, or something you may have observed, please reach out to us so we can address it together. As teachers, your main objective is as an educator. We do not want you to have the burden of resolving or analyzing emotional dynamics or evaluating risky behavior.

Hopefully this global health crisis will soon pass. We are all in this together and we appreciate all your hard work and professionalism.

Thank you.





# For Parents

## A Guide to Safer Online Learning

### Dear School Families:

These are challenging times for all of us, and as you know, your child's teachers have been working quickly and diligently to establish an online learning platform to bridge us through this global health crisis. We are writing to you today to provide some important information that will help your child have the safest online learning experience possible.

With this in mind, there are some important considerations to help you move forward in keeping your students safer at home. Just as you might monitor your child's TV viewing, who they're connecting with via online gaming consoles - or who they spend their free time with - it's more important now than ever to be even more aware of who they're interacting with online. Please do not assume that all of your child's online time is being spent learning or interacting with teachers or peers. Parents still need to be vigilant in what their child is doing online, and this may be increasingly challenging as many parents have shifted to working from home as well, presenting them with new challenges too. At this time, the school will only be connecting with students online. If this changes, you will be notified officially by the school.

Please feel free to reach out to your child's teachers, or other administrators if you need more information about the work they're doing or being assigned. Please also expect to be copied on communication between your child and their teachers. This policy helps to keep parents, students, teachers and administrators all working together. Additionally, if you have any questions about the online learning or interactions between your child and any of their teachers, please do not hesitate to connect with us.

In addition, you may want to review the online safety material that is provided by [www.NetSmartz.org](http://www.NetSmartz.org) or [www.protectkidsonline.ca](http://www.protectkidsonline.ca). Both are highly respected educational safety websites for families and are recognized as the most effective resources to help prevent online harm to children.

Please know that our virtual door remains open for you to ask questions and share any and all concerns, especially as it relates to your child's safety.

Thank you.





## Distance Learning Safety Best Practices DO's & DON'T's for Teachers

**To protect the safety of your students and the school community, it's important that you govern yourself by these practices.**

### **DO – Please strive to do the following:**

- Establish a virtual connection with your students regularly to provide stability during this uncertain time. Keep conversations casual, in the same way you would in the classroom.
- During recorded or live videos, be mindful of anything in the background that could be distracting. Strive for a generic background.
- Focus your interactions with students on the educational content of your video calls.
- Communicate to the counselling team about any student vulnerabilities that concern you.
- If you think a child is being abused, neglected or harmed, remember that you have the legal duty to report it.
- If you witness an interaction that concerns you, reach out to the counselling team to discuss.
- Keep records of your teaching time. Document the details including the date, time and subjects discussed of any challenging interactions with students and/or families.
- If you need to meet with students to discuss their individual projects, set up virtual office hours.
- Only use your school email address to interact with students.
- Only email students between 8am and 6pm.

### **DON'T – Please be sure NOT to do the following:**

- Reveal personal information like your feelings about this uncertain time or about your individual situation - or anything you would not ordinarily share in the classroom.
- Provide private tutoring or babysitting to your students.
- Promise that you will keep students' secrets.
- Connect with them on your personal social media accounts.
- Text students and families from your personal phone.
- Respond to student and family emails outside of approved times.

