


## ACTIVITY 14

# Checking In on the Opening Days

**Purpose:** Learn about issues advisees are having and follow up as needed with one-on-one conversations. Get a pulse on how advisees are understanding school culture.

**APPROXIMATE TIME:**  
30 minutes

**MATERIALS:**  
 **HANDOUT**  
Peaks and Valleys

## ADVISOR NOTES:

### 1. Where to Place This Activity

Try to place this activity in the first two weeks of the year, if possible. This is a good activity to revisit throughout the year—for example, at the beginning or end of a marking period or midway between school vacations, when your advisees might be feeling tired.

### 2. Modify “School Basics” as Needed

Modify the first part of the activity, “School Basics,” if your advisees are not new to the school building. You might challenge older advisees to familiarize themselves with specific spaces in the school or to meet new faculty or staff members. For example, seniors can benefit from meeting the registrar, since they will need to request their transcripts for college and job applications. Freshmen should meet the nurse, the librarian, and the staff member who distributes tardy slips. Everyone in the building should know the names of custodial, maintenance, and kitchen staff members.

### 3. Create a Safe Environment that Encourages Sharing

At the beginning of the year, use pairs and triads to encourage sharing among the group and to provide space for quieter members who might not yet feel comfortable answering personal questions in a larger group. This “checking in” activity can become a routine in your advisory, and as the group becomes more comfortable with each other, you can shift from small- to whole-group circle share-outs.

### 4. Addressing the “Peaks” and the “Valleys” of the Opening Weeks

Some of the “peaks” (positive or exciting moments) advisees share might be worth applauding; some of the “valleys” (lows) might be scary, frustrating, or confusing moments and can provide opportunities to problem-solve and support each other. In most cases, ask the group to problem-solve before offering your own ideas.

- Who has had a similar experience (question, confusion, or frustration)?
- Who has an idea that might help . . . ?

## PROCEDURE:

### 1. Review School Basics as Needed

As a whole advisory, discuss the questions (or create additional ones) that apply to your group:

- Have you found all of your classes? The bathrooms?
- Does your locker work properly? Does your gym locker work properly?
- What's the most confusing thing about the cafeteria? What's the best/worst food?
- Where is the nurse's office and what are the names of the staff there?
- Where is your counselor's office and what is the counselor's name?
- What are some useful shortcuts to know?
- How can you access your homework online?
- Do your classes seem like the right fit for you? What should you do if they do not feel right?
- Have you figured out how to say all of your teachers' names correctly? Which ones seem challenging?
- Are teachers pronouncing your name correctly? What's a respectful way to explain to them the correct pronunciation of your name?

### 2. Discuss "Highs," "Lows," and School Culture

- Let advisees know that they will be sharing some highs and lows from the opening days/weeks of the school year.
- Divide the advisees into pairs or groups of three. Distribute the handout **Peaks and Valleys** and have advisees discuss the following questions:
  - What are some highs from your time at school so far (or in the last week)?
  - What are some lows from your time at school so far (or in the last week)?
  - What was surprising or interesting?
  - What was scary, frustrating, or confusing?
  - What does the school culture feel like so far to you? What excites you? What do you think needs to change?
- Move the group into a circle to share ideas from their discussions. Discuss strategies for how they might celebrate each other's highs and help problem-solve when there are lows.
- Collect their handouts so you can analyze them to assess if there are patterns, groups or individuals you may need to check in with one-on-one, or important ideas that they recorded but didn't share in the discussion.

### 3. Reflect on the First Weeks of the Year

- Depending on how comfortable your group seems to be with sharing with one another, you might ask advisees to close their eyes for this activity so they are not swayed by others' responses.
- Ask advisees for a "fist-to-five" reaction (showing zero to five fingers to indicate reactions: fist means "not at all," five fingers means "very") on whether school feels welcoming, whether they look forward to attending each day, and whether kids seem friendly.
- If you see fists or only a few fingers, talk with the whole group or with specific advisees who might need extra support in a mini-conference.



# Peaks and Valleys

**Directions:** Discuss the following questions and record the key ideas that you want to share with your advisory group and advisor. Your advisor will collect the handout, so if there are things you want your advisor to know but don't want to share out loud with the group, you should write them down.

Group Members' Names:

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1. What are some "peaks" from your time at school so far (or in the last few weeks)?
2. What are some "valleys" from your time at school so far (or in the last few weeks)?
3. What was surprising or interesting?
4. What was scary, frustrating, or confusing?
5. What does the school culture feel like so far to you? What excites you?  
What do you think needs to change?
6. Is there anything else about school culture or how you are feeling this year that we didn't talk about and you want to share?