

GUIDE

QUICK CHECK-IN, REAL CONNECTION

With insights gathered from educators across grade levels, this guide turns their feedback into ready-to-use ideas that help leaders support staff in just a few moments.

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SMALL MOMENTS, BIG IMPACT



This guide was created with the voices of educators at its heart. To understand what meaningful, quick check-ins look like in practice, Alpaca gathered insights from 50 educators across grade levels and communities. They shared what comes to mind when they hear "**quick support check-in**," what makes it feel genuine, what helps during stressful moments, and what an ideal two-minute check-in sounds like.

Their responses were thoughtful, honest, and strikingly aligned. A clear message surfaced: **small moments matter**. When leaders pause, notice, and connect, even briefly, it can lift an educator's day and help them feel **seen** and **supported**.

This guide brings those insights together and turns them into simple practices leaders can use to build strong relationships. Each idea is designed to fit naturally into the rhythm of the day and spark **meaningful connection**, one quick check-in at a time.

WHAT "QUICK CHECK-IN" MEANS TO EDUCATORS



Educators value authentic, personal, and caring interactions with their leaders. They want moments where they feel seen, heard, and appreciated as people, not just staff. Here are the key themes that emerged:

1. FEELING SEEN AND VALUED

- Teachers emphasized the importance of being noticed and recognized — not only for problems, but for effort and success.
- Words like "seen," "heard," "appreciated," "noticed," and "valued" appeared repeatedly.
- A positive acknowledgment ("I see you," "You're doing great") often matters more than a formal conversation.

"It starts with a positive acknowledgment: I see you, you're awesome."

"Knowing I'm seen and heard and appreciated."

2. GENUINE CARE — NOT A CHECKBOX

- Many educators said check-ins feel empty when they seem like an obligation rather than real care.
- They can tell when a leader truly wants to hear what they need versus checking a box.
- Authentic tone and follow-up are critical.

"Most importantly, making it clear that the leader actually wants to hear what I need, not checking a box."

"Something genuine and not rushed. Not just checking a box."



3. CONNECTION AND RELATIONSHIP

- Check-ins that feel like natural conversations build trust and belonging.
- Educators want leaders to know them personally (e.g., remembering life events, family, or personal goals).
- Being known “as a person before a teacher” was a recurring idea.

“It means they care about me as a person before me as a teacher.”

“Natural, caring, not forced.”

“A leader who takes the time to remember me personally and check in with that information.”



4. BRIEF BUT MEANINGFUL

- Ideal check-ins last only a few minutes but still feel intentional and focused.
- Educators don’t want added tasks or long meetings — they want short moments that have impact.

“2–3 minutes, a moment when I feel seen and heard.”

“Just a quick how are you doing and is there anything you need. Very casual and real!”

“Short friendly conversation about my work and how leadership can help.”



5. SUPPORT THAT'S SPECIFIC AND ACTIONABLE

- Teachers value when leaders follow up or offer concrete help — not just emotional support.
- Offering coverage, resources, or time to breathe are deeply appreciated.
- Follow-up on prior conversations signals reliability and care.

"Brief but specific. Following up on prior issues."

"Offer meaningful support that is specific and actionable."

"Needs to be genuine and solution-based."



6. AVOIDING EVALUATION OR ADDED PRESSURE

- Several educators mentioned that check-ins can feel evaluative or intrusive if not handled carefully.
- They stressed that check-ins should not add to their workload or feel like surveillance.

"It needs to be sure to not feel evaluative or punitive."

"It is nice to be noticed for hard work, time, and effort, and not just when something is awry."

"When it is unexpected and feels like a chat or visit rather than an observation."

KEY THEMES:

**WHAT MAKES
CHECK-INS MOST
MEANINGFUL**



KEY THEMES:

1. GENUINE, CARING, & UNRUSHED

- The most meaningful check-ins are authentic, natural, and not hurried.
- Leaders who listen without multitasking or rushing make staff feel valued.

"Something genuine and not rushed."

"Digging deeper beyond the job to emotionally check on and care for staff."

2. PERSONAL TOUCHES MATTER

- Educators appreciate when leaders remember something personal or specific about their life or classroom.
- Even small gestures — remembering a wedding, writing a kind note, bringing a favorite snack — make a big difference.

"It relates directly to me, my work, or my life."

"A note of encouragement, stopping by at lunch or plan time, a text, or quick meeting."

3. POSITIVE RECOGNITION & ENCOURAGEMENT

- Acknowledging strengths and successes helps educators feel motivated and supported.
- Positive comments about teaching, effort, or relationships with students are powerful.

"When a leader comments specifically on something positive I have done."

"Mentioning something positive they noticed about me or my class."

"Positive and supportive... 'Let's get this figured out — I know you've already put so much time and heart into this.'"

4. FOLLOW-UP & CONSISTENCY

- Check-ins that connect to previous conversations or show follow-through build trust.
- Educators want to know leaders remember what was shared.

"Conversations where they bring up something from a previous check-in."

"When there's action to follow up our conversations."

5. MENTAL HEALTH & EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- Many responses mentioned emotional check-ins — just being asked “How are you really doing?” goes a long way.
- Feeling emotionally safe and cared for was repeatedly tied to the idea of a supportive workplace.

“Mental health/well-being check-ins and the positive ones where you hear that you’re doing well.”

“Listen and don’t judge, inclusiveness, caring tone of voice.”

“Taking the time to check in because they find it important to ensure their staff are genuinely doing okay.”



The most powerful check-ins are brief, specific, genuine, and human.

OVERALL INSIGHTS

Be real, not routine.

Authentic tone matters more than timing or formality.

Start with appreciation.

Recognition is often the best doorway to honest conversation.

Keep it brief, but meaningful.

A two-minute check-in can make a big impact if it feels genuine.

Know your people.

Remember names, details, life events — those connections build trust.

Follow up and follow through.

Even small actions or revisiting a previous chat build credibility.

Offer help, not more work.

True support means lightening the load, not adding to it.

Stay positive and human.

Kindness and presence matter more than polished words.

THE HEART OF IT



Quick check-ins don't have to be big or time-consuming to make a real difference. Educators shared that what matters most is **presence**, **genuine care**, and the **small moments** where someone feels seen.

Even a simple "How are you doing?" paired with a specific observation, a quick offer of support, or a follow-up from a past conversation can shift a whole day. These gestures help build a culture where people feel valued for who they are, not just what they do. As leaders put these ideas into practice, the **goal is consistency, humanity, and paying attention.**

When staff know their leader is in their corner, trust grows, burnout softens, and school feels more like a community. Let these insights be a reminder that meaningful support often begins with just two minutes and a **moment of connection.**

COLLABORATION

BUILT BY EDUCATORS, FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

This resource was created in collaboration with dedicated educators and school leaders who brought their experience, ideas, and insight to every step of the process. We're grateful for their partnership in building tools that truly make a difference in schools.



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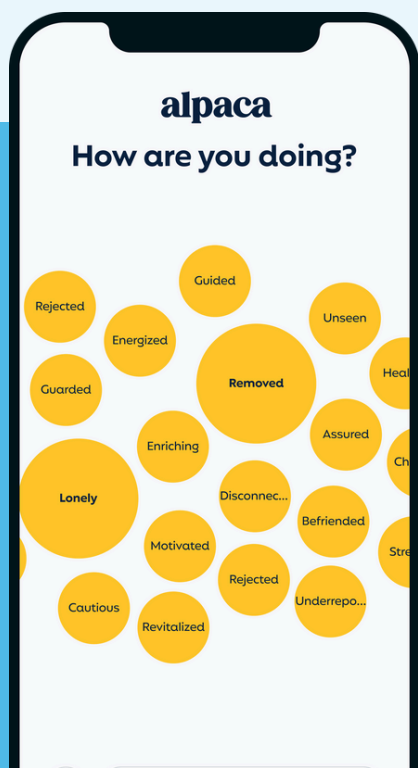
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