

# Step – Developing group cohesion

## Task

**Read the article below where Helen writes about the challenges of teaching an online group.**

- What problem does she describe?
- What solutions does she suggest?

### **Helping to create a cohesive group**

Working with a group in a digital environment can bring new challenges to overcome. The learners are not in the same building or perhaps not even in the same country and the distance created by the technology can have an impact on group dynamics.

Learners don't automatically build the same relationship with each other that they might in a face-to-face environment, so it's important for the teacher to help them build that relationship. The first thing you can do is to model good communication and polite, respectful behaviour. Treat your students in the way that you expect them to behave with each other and show interest in their lives in the way that you hope they show interest in each other's lives.

Begin your course by giving students the opportunity to get to know each other, just as you would in a face-to-face lesson, such as sharing information about their jobs or where they live. Set easier tasks to complete at first to help learners build confidence and feel comfortable speaking in English with each other. Then, in future lessons, give learners the opportunity to personalise lesson content (e.g. topic or language) so they continue to learn about each other. Encourage them to show interest in what each other says by nominating a learner to ask a follow-up question.

If possible, use breakout rooms to allow for pair or small group work. This puts learners in control of the conversation and helps them get used to conversing online without you controlling the conversation as usually happens in the main classroom space.

If breakout rooms aren't available, put learners in control by asking one of them to ask another learner a question. That learner then asks another learner a question and so on. Make sure all learners ask and answer a question. These questions can be part of a lead-in to a topic, or they

could be practice of a particular grammar structure, e.g. questions with *How often*, or questions about the past.

Helping learners to establish a good rapport with each other and encouraging all learners to participate in the lessons will help learners to grow in confidence, be more productive and enjoy their lessons more fully.

## Answers

**Helen talks about the issue of learners being in different physical spaces and how that creates a distance and makes it harder for learners to build relationships with each other. She suggests these solutions:**

- Model good communication skills and good behaviour to show how you want the students to behave with each other.
- Start a course with *Get to know you* activities so learners feel comfortable with each other.
- Include tasks that allow learners to personalise the topic or language of a lesson so they continue to learn about each other.
- Use breakout rooms so that learners get used to conversing with each other in pairs or groups.
- In whole class situations, encourage learners to ask each other questions.