



Mentally Healthy Return to School Following Winter Break and Beyond

This has been a school year filled with both opportunities and challenges. Schools are welcoming students back to learning after the winter break, continuing to bolster and support student well-being, while facing the continued uncertainties. This document is designed to provide educators with some ideas to help ease this transition and to support the continued development of skills.

Reflect

Returning to school following a break is a transition that can be difficult for some students. In addition, the last two years have affected everyone in unique and varied ways. Even as society returns to more normal social interactions with fewer restrictions, we are aware that some students will be approaching this return to school following the winter break with mixed feelings. Some students may be excited, others may be nervous to transition back to learning, wearing a mask all day, and changing their routine. All these feelings are natural responses to this transition, and to what students have experienced over the past two years. As an educator, you can help to normalize these feelings, continue to build caring learning environments, and help students learn strategies to cope with feelings of stress.



Reflection Tool for Educators

Guiding Questions for Building
Healthy Class Community

If you are looking to dig deeper, check out this reflection tool. It is designed to prompt thinking about building a mentally healthy class community, to spark ideas for actions that enhance conditions for learning, and to provide strategies to support student mental health and well-being.

Remember

Whether your students are learning face to face or in a virtual environment, building and maintaining relationships continues to be key. The following strategies can help support students as they transition back to learning after the winter break or from remote to in-class learning:

- Anticipate significant fatigue and sleepiness, particularly among adolescents. Continue to include a focus and expectations on social and emotional well-being, self-efficacy, and adaptive skills.
- Re-teach expectations and routines and be patient and positive (and non-punitive) when reinforcing and reminding about physical distancing requirements.





- Use your professional judgement in introducing new academic content, considering time for transitions and re-establishing routines.
- Model [a range of coping strategies](#) you are hoping the students will follow.
- Consider opportunities for students to work cooperatively, feel empowered and assist others, which can prove restorative following significant disruption and collective stress.
- Provide students opportunities to voice concerns, challenges, and needs.

Resources

Teaching students a variety of stress management and coping strategies will provide them with a choice of tools to use when they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious. Each of us is unique and strategies that work for some might not work for others, and that is okay. By teaching, modeling, and practicing various kinds of strategies students can find the ones that work best for them. The following links will take you to six lesson plans (K-12) that contain a minds-on activity to prepare students for learning, a pre-recorded video that models the strategies, and suggestions for consolidating learning. Each lesson explores a different kind of stress management and coping strategy. They are designed to be easy for any educator to use from start to finish, or to take elements from and integrate into everyday routines.

