



Parkland School Division

Supporting Students in Wellness Back to School Tips for PSD Staff

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Returning to School: Understanding the Student Response

The COVID-19 Pandemic has resulted in a severe short-term disruption felt by families around the world resulting in a shock to families, children’s social life and learning (Burgess and Sievertsen April 2020). Students are coming back to class having experienced this pandemic in many different ways. For children and adolescents with mental health needs, school closures may mean a lack of access to the resources they usually have through schools; reduced access to mental health support; and a reduction in peer support (Lee, April 2020). For some, there will be considerable difficulties adjusting back to normal life when school resumes. While other students have thrived in the learning from home environment, enjoying the reduced stress that comes from the simplicity of life during the pandemic and building stronger bonds with family and guardians. We know that students will be returning with their unique experiences, both positive and negative. We also know that their responses to this crisis may be influenced by many factors including past experiences, the age of the child, availability of social support systems etc. The purpose of this document is to provide some tips when supporting your students who are returning to school in the coming weeks.

As teachers returning to our students in school, it is important is to listen, be present and communicate as a staff, so that we tackle overarching concerns together (like social distancing in school, sanitizing etc.). Responding to school-resumption challenges during this period is unique because everyone is affected by the pandemic but being responsive to kids' needs is not new to us. So really, you've got this!

If there are students struggling in your class, you are not alone, please feel free to consult with your school-based teams. We are all supporting our students together and we can move forward together with kindness and compassion. Thank you for taking the time to reflect!

Tuning into our Students and Providing Support

"Resilience can help us get through and overcome hardship. But resilience is not something we are born with—it's built over time as the experiences we have interact with our unique, individual genetic makeup. That is why we all respond to stress and adversity—like that from the COVID-19 pandemic—differently. Think of resilience as a seesaw or balance scale, where negative experiences tip the scale toward bad outcomes, and positive experiences tip it toward good outcomes." (Centre of the Developing Child, Harvard University)

What Helps Students?

- Listening and giving students the opportunity to express their feelings.
- Encouraging students to engage in physical activity (while social distancing) to release anger/frustration.
- Encouraging journaling, writing, talking etc.
- Assisting students to identify support systems.
- Listen, empathize and normalize. Make sure you hear what is said and not what you think.
- Creating Structure and Routine. Reducing unpredictability of outcomes. Maintaining this sense of continuity in your class will comfort students in their regular routines.
- Focusing on what gives hope.
- Allowing students to express emotions through art.
- Being prepared to answer some basic questions.
- Develop a warm and trusting environment in which students feel confident in asking questions and sharing their feelings.

Possible check-in questions: (teenmentalhealth.org)

- What have you been doing this past week?
- What has been enjoyable? What has been difficult?
- Is there anything you or your family need(s)?
- Do you have concerns that you would like to share?

More Specific Strategies by Theme:

<p>To foster a sense of physical and emotional safety, educators can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set and keep a predictable routine • Promote self-awareness through feeling charts • Use mindfulness and breathing exercises to support self-awareness and regulation • Encourage students to ask questions and self-advocate • Firm but fair boundaries - clear, consistent expectations • Increased physical literacy and movement opportunities • Be culturally responsive, fostering cultural pride and self-pride by weaving cultural knowledge into teaching and learning 	<p>To foster a sense of belonging, educators can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase focus on student voice and agency • Make time to ask about students' extracurricular interests • Greet students by name and create safe and upbeat connections – like air high fives • Help the students feel connected by encouraging circle time, show and tell, or storytelling • Embed a sense of responsibility by assigning class management roles • Personal 1-on-1 time to connect - getting to re-know the “student story” • Humor, personality, class events
<p>To foster a sense of hope, educators can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to get fresh air and move when possible • Explore individual students' talents and strengths • Give positive affirmation to all students • Encourage students to discuss things that bring them joy • Foster engagement in school and cultural communities • Make time for acknowledging gratitude and celebrating success 	<p>To foster a sense of mastery, educators can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage student ownership of their learning and physical literacy journey • Give students the chance to share what they have learned or to teach their classmates • Highlight each student's contribution to the learning • Academic differentiation • Support social emotional learning • High quality meaningful learning experiences

Be there for each other. Supporting each other as colleague will make us that much better when we have to offer this support for our students!

Student Monitoring

If you see these signs in a student and things do not appear to be improving, ensure that you reach out to the mental health practitioner (counsellor, school-based social worker) or principal.

- a. Inability to focus
- b. Inability to attend to tasks
- c. An observed change in their personality
- d. They speak about sleeping way more, sleeping way less, they have greater impatience
- e. Irritability
- f. Hypervigilance
- g. Fearfulness
- h. Easily startled
- i. Avoidance or withdrawal
- j. Intrusive or bothersome thoughts
- k. Worries/anxiety/fear
- l. Behavior dysregulation
- m. Substance or alcohol use

Considerations as student return to class:

- It's important for you to be aware of how you are doing? If you are feeling anxious, scared or worried – your students will feel anxious, scared or worried. We need to ensure that our learning environments are safe, welcoming and caring.
- Think about developing a student survey. (Upon return and possibly weekly after that)
- What does your daily check in look like?
- What does social emotion learning look like in your classroom?
- How are you teaching social distancing, teaching personal hygiene and mask usage...kindly?
- What are the new rules and expectations in your classes? In your school?

WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER: Implementing our Continuum of Supports and Services Model

The Parkland School Division's Continuum of Supports and Services Model is based on the following principles:

- Supports and services are as close to the classroom as possible, providing at elbow support for teachers
- Influencing and supporting successful planning and delivery of programming that is responsive in identifying and meeting the needs of all of our students
- Creating the infrastructure within our division that supports ease of access to a continuum of supports and services
- Ensuring that all staff fully understands the pathways to access supports and services
- Developing processes that simplify accessing supports and services

- Fostering the ability for teachers to access the supports they need (for themselves or their students) when they need them, for the duration that they need them and for the intensity that they need them

Great Universal work that our staff is already doing:

- Every teacher has a Toolkit
- Health curriculum/lessons
- Wellness, GO TO Educator and MH resources
- Champions
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Lean on other school and district supports.

- Communicate with parents. Share your observations.
- Consult with and refer to school-based team members and Student Services.
- Consult with Principal
- Consult with teacher resources and community supports and services contacts (Appendix 1)

Appendix 1- Teacher Resources and Community Contact Information

Check out these links if you would like to incorporate wellness activities into your class and curriculum.

<https://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Tipsheet7-1024x1024.png>

<https://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/tipsheet2-833x1024.jpg>

<https://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Tipsheet3-1024x1024.png>

<https://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Screen-Shot-2020-04-16-at-10.30.33-AM-1024x1024.png>

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/how-to-help-families-and-staff-build-resilience-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=june_2020

Talking Tips:

<https://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Screen-Shot-2020-04-16-at-10.30.10-AM-1024x1024.png>

Free Resources:

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Useful-Resources-During-COVID-19.pdf>

A. Community Supports Contact Information

Community Compass <https://parklandcc.ca/help/>

Canadian Mental Health Association www.cmha.ab.ca 780- 482-HELP (available 24/7)	• Distress Center www.distresscentre.com main crisis: 403-266-4357
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<p>Live Chat</p> <p>https://edmonton.cmha.ca/online-crisis-chat</p> <p>Available M-F (6pm – 10 pm & Sat to Sun 12pm-4pm)</p>	<p>Crisis Response Team</p> <p>780-342-7777 (Avalable 24/7)</p>
<p>Hope for Wellness</p> <p>780-482-4357 (HELP) available 24/7</p>	<p>Children’s Mental Health Crisis Response Team:</p> <p>780-427-4491</p> <p>Everyday 8:30am – 10:45pm</p>

Students can contact any of the community resources on this list and to seek help. We want students to know that there is always support available to them and that they are not alone.

References

Burgess, S & Sievertsen, H.H (2020, April 1). *Schools, skills, and learning: The Impact of COVID-19 on Education*. <https://voxeu.org/article/impact-covid-19-education>

Centre of the Developing Child, Harvard University
https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/how-to-help-families-and-staff-build-resilience-during-the-covid-19-outbreak/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=june_2020

Lee, Joyce (2020, April 14). *Mental Health Effects of School Closures During COVID-19*. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(20\)30109-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(20)30109-7/fulltext)

[Teenmentalhealth.org](https://teenmentalhealth.org)